

# FROM BUCHAREST TO PRESPA

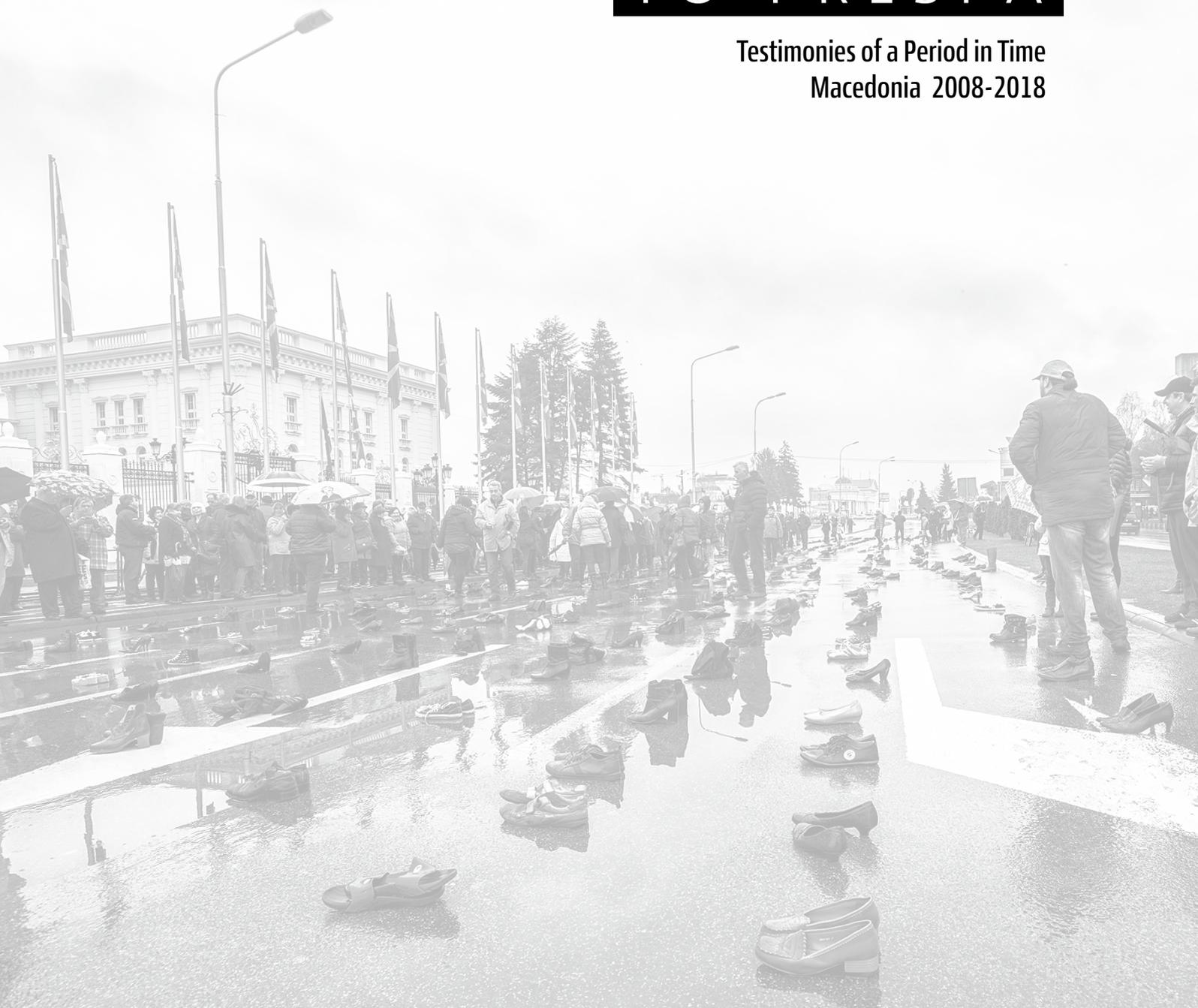
Testimonies of a Period in Time  
Macedonia 2008 - 2018





# FROM BUCHAREST TO PRESPA

Testimonies of a Period in Time  
Macedonia 2008-2018



From Bucharest to Prespa  
Testimonies of a Period in Time  
Macedonia 2008 - 2018

**Publisher:** Foundation Open Society – Macedonia

**For the publisher:** Fani Karanfilova-Panovska, executive director

**Editors:** Santa Argirova, Gordan Georgiev, Fani Karanfilova-Panovska, Adrijana Lavchiska

**Photo credits:**

Vancho Djambaski (cover page and pp. 45, 74, 80, 94, 102, 144, 153, 173, 180, 187, 192, 203, 215, 216, 224, 228, 237, 241, 262, 270, 289, 299, 319, 336, 356, 372, 380, 393, 404, 418, 427, 456, 504)

Robert Atanasovski (pp. 11, 41, 65, 71, 133, 143, 160, 247, 277, 360, 399, 435, 476, 479, 493, 497, 501, 517, 529, 538, 544)

Tomislav Georgiev (pp. 85, 87)

Mirsad Bekiri (pg. 6)

Radovan Vujovikj (pg. 22)

Archive of the U.S. Government (pp. 109, 119)

**Translation into English:** Abakus

**Design & Layout:** Koma

**Print:** DataPons

**Circulation:** 150 copies

**FREE-OF-CHARGE CIRCULATION**



CIP - Каталогизација во публикација  
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

304.4(497.7)"2008/2018"

FROM Bucharest to Prespa : testimonies of a period in time : macedonia 2008-2018 / [editors Santa Argirova ... [и др.] ; photo credits Vancho Djambaski ... и др.]. - Skopje : Foundation Open Society - Macedonia, 2020. - 555 стр. : фотографии ; 30 см

Фусноти кон текстот. - Други уредници: Gordan Georgiev, Fani Karanfilova-Panovska, Adrijana Lavchiska. - Други фотографии: Robert Atanasovski, Tomislav Georgiev, Mirsad Bekiri

ISBN 978-608-218-284-1

а) Македонија - Општествено-политички прилики - 2008-2018 COBISS.MK-ID 112045578

## Table of Contents

	4	FOREWARD
Vasko Magleshev	6	CHRONOLOGY 2008 - 2019
Katerina Blazhevskva	74	A DECADE ERODED BY DIVISIONS AND PYRRHIC REBIRTHS
Ljupcho Popovski	102	FROM BUCHAREST TO PRESIPA: WHEN AMERICA RENOUNCED GRUJEVSKI
Milka Smilevska	144	SKOPJE 2014: THE FALSE GLOW OF POLYSTYRENE
Vladimir Milchin	180	CAPTURED CULTURE IN STATE CAPTURE
Biljana Bejkova	216	FROM CIVIL DEFIANCE TO COLOURFUL REVOLUTION
Sefer Tahiri	270	JOURNALISM BECAME PROPAGANDA
Meri Jordanovska and Sashka Cvetkovska	336	CORRUPTION AND WRONGDOINGS IN THE ELECTION CYCLES
Menche Atanasova-Tochi	380	HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION AS CHARITY
Dejan Azeski	418	TEN YEARS OF HEAVILY PAID ECONOMY
Gordana Duvnjak	456	THE LAW IN SERVITUDE TO POLITICS
Iskra Novakovska and Nazim Rashidi	504	FROM "BOMBS" TO BUDAPEST

# FOREWORD

## FROM BUCHAREST TO PRESIPA:

## IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME?

"Macedonia: From Bucharest to Prespa" is a publication based on testimonies; testimonies of a period in time/nontime that would be remembered in the collective memory of our citizens as the era of bleakness. Those were the years when Europe assigned us the label "state capture" and those were the years which, from this exceptionally short historical distance, would be remembered as "lost time". Intention of this publication, however, is not to venture Proustian search of lost time. The state, society and people who live in these years are dynamic categories, not a bureau of lost things. They live, go forward and backward, in search of better conditions for themselves and for others, all the while striving not to recall the past. With this publication, we wanted to inscribe memories of that decade in the collective memory of our citizens, and to leave a mark, trace - written account of an endurance we wish would never return.

That is why texts incorporated in this publication are testimonies, and the authors are witnesses of that period in time. Testimonies are personal, intimate category, utterly subjective and nonresistant to time and space. Just like those that bring them to light. Hence, the tomorrow should show whether these records have acquired lasting and memoir value, or they amount to yet another hardship endured.

The selection of authors who accepted to write texts for this publication is utterly arbitrary and the editorial board assumes full responsibility thereof. Great care was invested in securing relevant writers, in professional, but also in testimonial and ethical terms; people that, by the agency of their word and, in the case of some, of their activist work, deeply invested themselves in explaining the nature of the previous regime, but also in its dismantling.

Why this historical segment Bucharest 2008 - Prespa 2018 holds significance to us? Well, because Bucharest and policies thereafter marked the definite start of undemocratic governance in Macedonia, riding on the wave of nationalism, populism and continuous

vilification of the other, the different-minded. In parallel with internal tensions, we had faced radical aggravation of relationships with the neighbours, and the international community. On the other hand, the Prespa Agreement marked, or should have marked, the emergence of realistic hopes rooted in the need for better, more democratic, more prosperous and EU-integrated Macedonia.

Today, in December 2019, the equation is not unequivocal. The scars from Prespa, and betrayed expectations that were perhaps based on excessive and unrealistic hopes, are collecting their societal price, while our path to the EU - in spite of sacrifices and hardships - still seems uncertain or, at least, serpentine-like.

After a greater historical distance, future generations, our children and grandchildren, will be able to recollect and to value what had been or had not been accomplished in this period. And, most certainly, to infer lessons, far-reaching and comprehensive. We, members of the editorial board, are convinced that the contents of this publication, its authors as individuals, and the texts incorporated therein, will serve as sufficient motive and incentive for lessons to be ascertained even after many years have passed. Which lessons? Well, only the found time will show...

**The editors**  
**December 2019**



Vasko Magleshov

## CHRONOLOGY 2008 - 2019

2008: START OF  
ANTIQUIZATION AFTER  
THE NATO BLOCKADE

April 3: At the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania, Greece vetoed Macedonia's invitation due to the unresolved dispute about the state's constitutional name. Croatia and Albania are invited to join the Alliance. On May 7, Macedonia signed the Declaration for Strategic Partnership and Cooperation with the United States.

---

April 3: At the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania, Greece vetoed Macedonia's invitation due to the unresolved dispute about the state's constitutional name.

---

May 29: Lazar Elenovski, defence minister from NSDP who attended the NATO Summit as part of the government coalition, filed a lawsuit against SDSM-led coalition "Sun" for having abused his statement that Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski had forsworn the state's constitutional name. Radmila Shekerinska and Goran Minchev from SDSM, and Goran Misovski from NSDP, were found guilty by the court and were issued court warnings.

June 1: The first early parliamentary elections from Macedonia's independence are held on initiative from VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. The Coalition "For Better Macedonia", led by VMRO-DPMNE, won the elections with 63 seats in parliament. The opposition block, led by Radmila Shekerinska, boycotted the parliamentary session on government formation. Instead of DPA, DUI joined the government coalition with VMRO-DPMNE after the informal May Agreement between Nikola Gruevski and Ali Ahmeti, according to which the government coalition should be formed by victorious parties from the Macedonian and

Albanian block. In 2009, the government cabinet underwent reconstruction.

June 3: TV Alfa started to broadcast programme under satellite broadcasting license. In 2012, this television was sold, for the second time, to a company founded in Skopje but registered as offshore company in the Netherlands Antilles. After its sales, the television changed its editorial policy from critically-oriented to pro-government outlet, including overhaul of its editorial and journalist team.

June 23: Vlado Tanevski, journalist from Kichevo who was suspected of having murdered two women, is found dead in his detention cell at the Tetovo Prison, after he had taken his own life by drowning in plastic bucket. The Tetovo Prosecution Office closed this investigation as accident.

June 27: Acting upon initiative from the Public Enterprise for Management of Residential and Business Property, the government took decision to rename the City Stadium "Skopje" into National Arena "Philip II of Macedonia".

July 10: The Hague Tribunal found the former Minister of Interior Ljube Boshkoski not guilty for the events in village Ljuboten, Skopje, from August 2001. The next day, Boshkoski is pompously welcomed at the Skopje Airport.

July 17: The police arrested Mayor of Strumica and SDSM Vice President Zoran Zaev, together with his collaborators, on the grounds of having abused public office and duties in relation to construction of the Trade Centre "Global". This court case was closed with blanket pardon granted by then-incumbent President Branko Crvenkovski. Both, the Administrative Court and the Supreme Court took verdicts confirming lawfulness of the procedure for construction of this trade centre. In the years that followed, VMRO-DPMNE greatly exploited the case called "Global" for political purposes, equating it to synonym for criminal activity. According to Zaev, the case against him was a political construct of the ruling authorities to discredit him politically.

July 25: Under vote count of 75, MPs enacted the Law on Use of Languages Spoken by at Least 20 Percent of Citizens in Macedonia and in Local Self-Government Units. Opposition MPs did not attend the parliamentary session for fast-tracked adoption of this law. President Branko Crvenkovski vetoed the law and did not sign the proclamation act. The law, however, was adopted for the second time in parliament, with one additional vote.

September 10: Mol conducted an action codenamed "Panhandling" to suppress begging on the streets in Skopje. Initially, the police apprehended 11 adults and 13 underage children. Criminal and misdemeanour charges were filed against the parents. Human rights CSOs assessed Mol's action as discriminatory and unconstitutional.

October 9: In a coordinated effort with Montenegro, Macedonia recognized Kosovo's independence. Under vote count of 85 "for", 1 "against" and abstained votes by MPs from SDSM, the parliament adopted the resolution on recognition of the new neighbouring state.

October 21: Mol's police action codenamed "Ashes" resulted in apprehension of businessman Bajrush Sejdiu from Kumanovo and 12 of his collaborators. The court found them guilty of having abused public office and duties, criminal association and violation of the Law on Excise Duties, while the Skopje Court of Appeals confirmed their verdict.

The court process "Ashes 2", related to illegal privatization of companies, resulted in 12-year imprisonment sentence for Sejdiu on the grounds of money laundering and violence.

November 24: Employees in education, science and culture went on strike. The government threatened to sanction the strikers. Several weeks later, the Union of Education, Science and Culture (SONK) reached agreement with the government for salary raise and registration of those under temporary contracts as full-time employees. After the negotiations, the strike was ceased.

December 15: Institute "Pavel Shatev" is promoted in the public and became controversial for its regular publication of pre-election rating polls showing convincing advantage of VMRO-DPMNE before SDSM on the elections. In addition to rating polls, the Institute organized public debates and workshops, with regular appearances by Prime Minister Gruevski and an array of line ministers and directors of state institutions from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE. Media reported stories that the Institute is registered on the same residence address with the association's president. In 2017, the Institute was closed and replaced by a citizens association of the same name. In 2010, the Institute "Dimitrije Chupovski" was formed in similar manner and pursued a similar goal - telephone polls for the benefit of VMRO-DPMNE.

December 19: The Skopje Criminal Court sentenced Kiril Todorovski, Mayor of Aerodrom from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE, together with two other persons, on the grounds of having taken bribe in the amount of 100.000 euros for construction of a church. By the end of this court process, the Skopje Prosecution Office forsworn portion of its indictment related to counts on his criminal association. For the media, Todorovski stated that his indictment is constructed in order to politically discredit him, because he had rejected to pay off racketeers. The Supreme Court revoked his verdict twice.

December 22: The court decided in favour of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and against law professor Ljubomir Frchkoski, who was found guilty and ordered to pay redress in the amount of 30,000 euros. Notably, in his column for newspaper *Dnevnik*, Frchkoski had indicated that, at the time when OKTA Refinery was sold in 2000, Gruevski had signed an annex to the agreement and had thereby damaged the state.

December 29: The government took decision to rename motorway E-75 into "Alexander the Macedon". In 2006, the government renamed the Skopje Airport in Petrovec into "Alexander the Great".

December 29: VMRO-DPMNE withdrew all ten defamation lawsuits motioned by party officials against journalists.

## 2009: SCULPTURES, PROTESTS AGAINST CHURCH ON THE SQUARE

January 9: Amendment 31 to the Constitution is declared in the parliament and implied lowered census for election of the president of state from 50 to 40 percent in the second round of balloting.

January 18: Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Minister of Culture Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska promoted the first four sculptures in Skopje's centre under the names "Cat", "Vanity Girl", "Girl" and "Enamoured". Ministry of Culture's project for placement of 35 artistic sculptures in the central area was intended to beautify the City of Skopje. In the course of years, the sculptures were reallocated across the city from different reasons and to make space for the project "Skopje 2014". Some of them had since been vandalized.

10

February 25: At a press-conference, MP from VMRO-DPMNE Oliver Shambovski indicated that actor Petar Arsovski, holder of SDSM councillors list in the City of Skopje, had snitched on his colleague Risto Shishkov. Several years later, the Skopje Court of Appeals confirmed that Shambovski had defamed Arsovski to damage his reputation and honour.

March 18: The Constitutional Court revoked legal provisions on monetary allowance to unemployed women who will give birth to more than two children in municipalities where the natality rate does not ensure population maintenance.

March 22: First round of the presidential and local elections is held. At the second round, organized on April 5, 2009, citizens had to elect the president of state between professors Gjorge Ivanov and Ljubomir Frckovski. Gjorge Ivanov won the elections with 63.14 percent of votes. The voter turnout in the second round of balloting stood at 42.61 percent. At the local elections, VMRO-DPMNE won 56 mayor offices, DUI won 15 and SDSM won 7.

March 28: The first architectonic uprising is organized on the Macedonia Square under the motto "Don't Rape Skopje" against the government's decision from February 17, 2009, for building church in the central area of Skopje, by means of which the Ministry of Culture was awarded land titles on the Macedonia Square to build an orthodox temple.





This protest was interrupted by counter-protesters bearing religious iconography and chanting support for building the church. An incident happened when the group of students was attacked and injured, with the police standing by. On the account of announcements that the church would be financed from the budget, DUI demanded construction of mosque in the city centre. The constitutional judges rejected the petition submitted by the citizens association "Wake Up" on the grounds that, on June 26, the government adopted a decision to annul validity of its previous decision.

April 6: Former Director of the Agency for Reconstruction and Development Vasil Tupurkovski is sentenced to 3-year imprisonment in the court process "Taiwan Credits". The Skopje Court of Appeals revoked the verdict. Tupurkovski and defendant Jovan Andonov were later convicted only on the grounds of having abused public office and duties. In first instance, the court took acquittal verdict, which the Court of Appeals confirmed.

April 12: Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and other ministers in his government promoted 27 books subsidized under the government's project for translation of 500 scholar books as textbooks used at renowned universities in Europe and the United States. The government's project was announced as capital investment and continued in the following years. Many university professors reacted that the project had been rushed and that translations abound in errors, rendering the textbooks useless.

April 17: The school subject on religious education went into history. The Constitutional Court revoked Article 26 from 2008 Law on Primary Education, which allowed organization of religious education at primary schools. VMRO-DPMNE called this decision of the Constitutional Court political. The Macedonian Orthodox Church called for "persecution of the faith" to be stopped.

May 23: The Bitola Basic Court ruled that MP from SDSM Vesna Bendevska had defamed Minister of Defence Zoran Konjanovski. Redress awarded for non-pecuniary damages was set in the amount of 10,500 euros.

June 10: The milk factory Swedmilk went into receivership. The Skopje Sector on Internal Affairs motioned criminal charges before the Prosecution Office against Moshe Baum, factory owner, and in April, subcontracted farmers staged protests outside the factory due to default payment for their milk. The opposition demanded the government to assume responsibility for this case.

July 1: Macedonia issued its second Eurobond in the amount of 175 million euros, with maturity period of three and a half years.

July 6: In Poland, the Interpol arrested Vlado Dimov, former health minister and surgeon, but the state decided not to seek his extradition to Macedonia. Dimov was suspected of having abused public office and for unlawful employment of 17 people at the General Hospital in Strumica. In 2012, Macedonia withdrew its arrest warrant for Dimov. In 2013, indictment was filed against him. In first instance, the court took acquittal verdict, but the Shtip Court of Appeals returned the case for repeated trial. Back in 2007, the Public Revenue Office adopted decision establishing that Dimov had failed to report income and requested payment of 700,000 euros. Dimov had his property seized and auctioned. Later, the Supreme Court annulled the decision on property confiscation.

August 18: Vlado Buchkovski waged allegations against Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski for having benefited from salary and pension payments over a period of four months, in the case that was politically exploited and dubbed "Salary and Pension". Manevski claimed he is actually owed money by the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund.

August 25: The police conducted an action called "Boomerang". Around 60 policemen and custom officers stationed on border-crossing points Tabanovce, Kjafasan and Blace were arrested in several actions and accused of having taken bribe from foreign tourists. The Criminal Court convicted them, but the Supreme Court revoked some of their verdicts and returned others for repeated trial. Finally, defendants were issued probation sentences.

September 5: Tourist Ship "Ilinden" sunk in the Ohrid Lake, resulting in deaths of 15 tourists from Bulgaria and many injured. Minister of Transport and Communications Mile Janakieski offered to resign from office in an act of moral responsibility, but Prime Minister Gruevski did not accept his resignation.

September 16: Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts promoted the first ever Macedonian Encyclopaedia, with circulation of around 2,000 copies and financially supported by the government. Publication of this encyclopaedia caused a storm of reactions in the public on the account of its content. The citizens association "Wake Up", supported by the political parties of ethnic Albanians, demanded the encyclopaedia to be withdrawn and the entire editorial team to be held accountable for having insulted and undermined the Albanians. In the aftermath of public reactions, MASA held extraordinary session to dismiss the editorial team and appointed new editorial team, but the new encyclopaedia was never published.

September 25: The resident parliamentary committee rejected proposal for civil initiative to change the state's coat of arms, motioned by VMRO National Party, on the grounds of procedural omissions. According to this initiative, the state's coat of arms should feature a yellow-gold lion on red background.

October 14: The European Commission recommended the start of accession negotiations between Macedonia and the European Union.

October 21: The court found Vlado Buchkovski, former prime minister and former leader of SDSM, guilty of having defamed MP Silvana Boneva by stating she holds Bulgarian passport.

November 2: The police arrested Gjorgji Trenkovski, then-current Director of the Health Insurance Fund, and the general manager of PHI City Pharmacies. Trenkovski was accused of unprofessional performance of his public office, while the general manager was accused of having abused public office and of having levied double fees for same medicines. The Criminal Court acquitted them of guilt, but the Court of Appeals returned the case for repeated trial.

14

November 8: Spaska Mitrova is released from the Idrizovo Prison, where she served 3-month imprisonment sentence because she had not allowed her former husband to visit their two-year old daughter. This case caused a series of political and diplomatic exchanges between Macedonia and Bulgaria because Mitrova is Bulgarian. In 2016, the European Court of Human Rights adopted its judgement in this case and confirmed that Macedonia had not violated her human rights.

November 16: The new coat of arms is approved in the parliament, implying removal of the red five-pointed star. In its rationale, the government elaborated that the state's coat of arms is one of two in Europe featuring socialist style and landscape, instead of historical motives.

November 23: The media released video footage of Ljube Boshkoski's testimony before The Hague Tribunal about the events from 2001. The Association for Support to Johan Tarchulovski assessed that the video confirms Boshkoski's treason, and that he refused to testify to the benefit of Tarchulovski in attempt to save himself. MRT's show programme "Open Debate with the People" aired the caption "New videos of Ljube's treason emerge on YouTube". AJM's Council of Honour issued a reaction.

November 29: After several years of court trials, around 60 defendants in the case "Snake Eye" are issued imprisonment sentences. A follow-up action, "Snake Eye 2", brought the total number of defendants at more than 70. For the second time, the Court of Appeals annulled the verdict in this case taken by the Skopje Criminal Court. The European Court of Human Rights established that defendants had been unjustifiably kept in detention for long period of time. The Supreme Court was presented with motions for protection of the right to trial within reasonable time. In the meantime, several defendants have died.

November 30: EU Council decided to revoke the EU's visa regime for the Republic of Macedonia. This decision entered into effect on December 19, 2009.

## **2010: "SKOPJE 2014", THE LUSTRATION PROCESS, RAID AT AL TELEVISION...**

January 6: The media reported results from OSCE's anonymous survey conducted in 2009 with more than 600 judges in Macedonia. Judges that completed survey questionnaires have reported being exposed to continuous pressures from the government, political parties, other judges, and the police. Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski stated for the media that the survey had been informal, that it was not signed and is therefore irrelevant.

January 25: Start of the lustration process. Over a period of seven years, the Commission for Verification of Facts has lustrated more than a hundred persons, including theatre directors, actors, judges, writers... This process was accompanied by a series of controversies and dissenting opinions from some lustration commissioners, and was ultimately turned into political persecution against current and former officials not included in the governing authorities. The lustrated persons have initiated disputes before administrative courts. The Court in Strasbourg took judgements in favour of lustrated applicants. The law's effect was terminated on September 1, 2015, after Reinhard Priebe's report on state-of-play in the country.

January 26: The government started intensive activity for erection of 30-meter high poles to hoist national flags across the country, 50 in total.

February 4: Municipality of Centar, City of Skopje and Ministry of Culture officially launched the video presentation for the project "Skopje 2014". By means of this video, the authorities

announced placement of bronze and marble monuments with historical figures, mainly pertaining to the antique, but also fountains, sculptures and new administration buildings, in the central area of Skopje. By 2017, the total cost for all 137 documented buildings amounted to more than 680 million euros, annex contracts included. Hence, "Skopje 2014" became a synonym for the government led by VMRO-DPMNE, which introduced the notion "antiquization" and landed on strict criticism in Greece and ridicule in the international arena. Authorities claimed that the project increased tourism, while boosting construction industry and economy in the country. However, it was criticized for its construction, architectural, legal and political dimensions.

April 19: The police conducted an action called "Metastasis". In particular, around 30 medical doctors and administrative officers were arrested and accused of illegal actions in peddling approval of disability pension benefits. The Skopje Court of Appeals confirmed the guilty verdict taken in first instance and increased duration of their imprisonment sentences.

May 15: For the first time, a flag ceremony is organized in front of the parliament building.

April 29: The police opened fire against uniformed group on the Macedonia-Kosovo border during their raid in village Blace. On May 11, another gunfight between the police and a criminal group took place near Radusha and resulted in four casualties.

June 16: Acting upon criminal report, the police arrested Dushko Ilievski from Bitola, known under the moniker "milkman", his brother and his father, for growing marihuana. The court approved detention for Dushko Ilievski. He claimed this was politically orchestrated case. Nikola Gruevski said in public that, for months, marihuana had been grown on lands owned by Ilievski. The Bitola Court acquitted Ilievski of criminal charges twice. Several charges were motioned against him on the grounds of defamation and libel against the Prime Minister, possession of firearms, etc. All this took place in the aftermath of protests against the milk factory Swedmilk, when Ilievski gained prominence by making vociferous demands.

June 24: The police action "Phalanx" is conducted against smuggling of archaeological artefacts. Director of the Administration for Cultural Heritage Protection Pasko Kuzman was arrested as part of a follow-up action called "Phalanx 2". The Court of Appeals confirmed the verdicts for all defendants. They claimed the case is politically orchestrated and motioned for repeated trial.

June 27: Official ceremony is held to launch the city beach, an investment by the City of Skopje under the project "Skopje 2014". Several years later, this investment of almost 380.000 euros fell through.

July 20: Director of the Administration for Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Vane Cvetanov resigned from this office, which he held since 2006. In his letter of resignation, Cvetanov wrote: "[reasons include] hypocritical politics and lack of interest by the government to actually combat crime". The Anticorruption Commission requested Cvetanov to be dismissed from office on the grounds of omissions in this institution's performance, as established by the State Audit Office. Later, Cvetanov was arrested and convicted as part of Mol's action dubbed "Spy".

August 13: The Minister of Education withdrew from use the disputable textbook for fifth-grade school subject on society after media reports that entertainment personalities had been presented therein as important cultural authors.

September 29: The Lustration Commission declared President of the Constitutional Court Trendafil Ivanovski to have collaborated with the secret services. The Administrative Court rejected Ivanovski's lawsuit motion. Several years later, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg took a judgment in his favour.

October 3: VMRO-DPMNE submitted proposal to change the Constitution under the Chapter on the Judicial Council. This proposal anticipated increased number of council members directly elected by judges, in order to ensure greater independence of this body. Political parties from the Albanian block demanded the Constitution to be expanded with inclusion of so-called Badinter vote in several other areas. A leadership meeting was convened for that purpose.

November 3: SDSM disclosed in public the case called "Patriotic Broom", indicating that portion of tender documents for the project "Skopje 2014" had been destroyed or had been stolen from the Ministry of Culture.

November 9: In its 2010 Progress Report, the European Commission renewed the recommendation for opening accession negotiations with Macedonia.

November 11: The Anticorruption Commission motioned initiative before the Public Prosecution Office for establishment of criminal responsibility with former President Branko Crvenkovski, in relation to the affair dubbed "Hope". Crvenkovski was called in

public of having spent 340,000 euros, in unlawful and wasteful manner, for consultation services provided by three experts from Slovenia, who had been commissioned to design project on improving his cabinet's communications capacity. VMRO-DPMNE greatly exploited the case "Hope" for political purposes.

December 5: SDSM and its coalition staged a protest march in Skopje under the motto "Enough! Fight for the Future", fronted by party leader Branko Crvenkovski.

December 15: In the parliament, opposition MPs motioned interpellation against Minister of Culture Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska. Carrying brooms in symbolical allusion to the case "Patriotic Broom", opposition MPs presented arguments in support of the need to have the minister dismissed from office. Ultimately, the interpellation was unsuccessful.

December 17: President of the Skopje Court of Appeals Jordan Mitrinovski resigned from office. This happened after Mitrinovski and appellate judge Ismail Limani had replaced detention with home detention for businessman Bajrush Sejdiu. In 2011, the Judicial Council took expedite decision to dismiss Mitrinovski. The Court in Strasbourg confirmed that his dismissal had been unlawful. Previously, the media reported Mitrinovski had visited the government for meeting. Several years later, he elaborated that Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski had personally requested his resignation on the account of house detention for Bajrush Sejdiu.

December 25: Police raid is conducted at companies owned by businessman Velija Ramkovski, including at A1 television. A day later, owner Velija Ramkovski and other persons, managers of businesses and employees, were arrested on the basis of suspicions for tax evasion over a period of several years. A female defendant in the case called "Cobweb" lost her unborn child while in detention. Late in the night, Mol Spokesperson Ivo Kotevski and PRO Director Goran Trajkovski appeared in pro-government media to justify the action by the Public Revenue Office and the police. The Criminal Court sentenced defendants in this case with imprisonment in total duration of 109 years. In protest, the television aired live programme outdoors, located before the government building, which featured citizens endorsing the campaign "I'm A1". On August 31, 2011, A1 television stopped broadcasting programme after entering receivership and after its license was suspended by the Agency for Electronic Communications. Newspapers *Vreme*, *Shpic* and *Koha e re*, owned by Ramkovski, also stopped print. The government led by VMRO-DPMNE continuously claimed that the television is not the target of raids performed at com-

panies located on Pero Nakov St. Management and employees spoke in public that the police action was aimed to close this media outlet.

December 28: SDSM presented the Public Prosecution Office with criminal charges against Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska and Director of the Public Revenue Office Goran Trajkovski. The criminal charges concerned the scandal with 750.000 euros hidden in bottle and found with MPM's driver, as well as accusations that budget funds had been used for party advertisements of VMRO-DPMNE.

## **2011: BOYCOTT OF THE PARLIAMENT, PROTESTS AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY**

January 28: Opposition parties SDSM, NSDP and New Democracy left the parliament. Decision of the entire opposition block to boycott the parliament was made after bank accounts of A1 television were blocked, including bank accounts of companies owned by businessman Velija Ramkovski, under Mol's action "Cobweb". Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski called for coordination, but the meeting was unsuccessful. DUI maintained its position of abstained vote.

February 2: Aleksandra Zafirovska is appointed new President of the Judicial Council. In the "bombs" disclosed by the opposition, the public learned that she had informed then-current secretary to Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski about the announcement of open call for selection of judges, and heard her conversation with Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska for selection of presidents of the courts. In its special report, SPO directly named Zafirovska for having allowed politics to penetrate the judiciary.

February 11: Late in the night, a group of activists, ethnic Albanians, demolished parts of the church museum under construction at the Skopje Fortress. Two days later, mass interethnic fight took place on the same location. Eight people were injured, two of which policemen. After these incidents, the Administration for Cultural Heritage Protection stopped all construction works at the Fortress. Dzevad Buchi, Deputy Minister of Interior from the ranks of DUI, was filmed removing cuffs from one person arrested. For the media, Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska stated that Buchi's action had been a tactical decision.

February 22: Prime Minister and other ministers in his government took promotional ride on the first 15 low-floor buses purchased from Ukraine. Nikola Gruevski announced that PTE Skopje's carpark will be renewed with 303 new buses, including red double-deckers, already commissioned from the Chinese company Jutong. In 2018, based on indications from the "bombs", SPO launched an investigation called "Design" into the disputable procurement of double-deckers.

February 23: SEC President Aleksandar Novakovski presented the parliament with his letter of resignation on the grounds of threats to his impartiality and trust. His resignation came after, as part of his public appearances, Novakovski had assured that the voter register is updated, but corrections are needed to the Electoral Code according to suggestions from OSCE.

March 9: Mass interethnic fist-fight erupted among students at the High School "St. Naum of Ohrid" in Makedonski Brod. Around fifty students took part in this fight.

April 7: The European Parliament adopted resolution on EC' 2010 Progress Report for Macedonia, reaffirming the need for immediate start of accession negotiations.

April 11: Works started for installation of "baroque-styled" fence on the Bridge "Goce Delchev". New "baroque" fence bars and illumination were also placed on the Bridges "Freedom" and "Mother Theresa", respectively, as part of the project "Skopje 2014".

May 10: Acting upon publicly learned information, Chief State Prosecutor Ljupco Shvrgovski formed a docket against unknown perpetrator based on the report "Party Lists" aired in prime-time news at A1 television. The news report featured telephone conversations with several dozen people, majority of which employed in the public administration, where journalists presented themselves as calling from the communication centre at VMRO-DPMNE. Citizens openly spoke that they guarantee 10 to 15 votes in favour of the ruling party on the upcoming elections. Some of them, as revealed at that time, had been blackmailed to secure voters with keeping their jobs or being employed. According to statements, some of them were offered free-of-charge in-vitro fertilization. The Public Prosecution Office expressly closed this case with justification that all persons called for interviews had vehemently denied being pressured to secure votes.

May 26: The Anticorruption Commission announced inquiry into undeclared property of the spouse to SDSM leader Branko Crvenkovski. Newspaper *Dnevnik* reported that Crvenkovski's spouse, Jasna, possesses real estate on Korcula Island in Croatia and the capital of Serbia, Belgrade, which is not reported in the asset declaration. As part of evidentiary court proceedings in the case "Titanic", SPO presented unpublished "bombs" that feature conversations between then-incumbent Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska in which she commissions the Anticorruption Commission to open inquiry into this matter.

May 31: SDSM revealed in public that the Prime Minister and his close family members own six apartments which Nikola Gruevski did not report in his asset declaration. This affair was first disclosed in 2006 when SCPC declared itself non-competent to establish how Gruevski's mother had managed to acquire three apartments in Skopje. In 2016, President of the Anticorruption Commission Goran Milenkov said he is puzzled with journalists' interest for Gruevski's property, having in mind that he no longer holds the office as head of the government. Milenkov showed a document representing Gruevski's asset declaration, but did not provide journalists with copies thereof.

June 3: One of the two spring fountains in the River Vardar, as part of the project "Skopje 2014", is put into probe operation. This investment costed more than 830,000 euros.

21

June 5: The second early parliamentary elections are held. For the first time, these elections allowed Macedonian nationals in the diaspora to elect separate MPs (in electoral districts 7, 8 and 9), after this possibility was introduced by means of changes to the Electoral Code from October 2008. This legal solution was criticized on the account of disproportionate number of constituency votes for election of MPs from the country and the diaspora. VMRO-DPMNE lost seven MP seats compared to the previous parliamentary elections (56), with SDSM having won additional 15 seats (42) and DUI having lost 3 seats (15).

June 6: Leader of the United for Macedonia Ljube Boshkoski is spectacularly arrested in Mol's case called "Campaign" by members of the police unit "Alpha" in front of television cameras, under suspicions for illegal campaign financing. Boshkoski stated his arrest is political case orchestrated by Mijalkov. The Supreme Court confirmed his 5-year imprisonment sentence, which Boshkoski served in full duration. SPO filed an indictment about Boshkoski's arrest on the grounds of torture and inhumane treatment by police



officers in an effort for political retaliation by Sasho Mijalkov, former chief of the secret police.

June 6: A young man, Martin Neshkoski is murdered at the hands of Igor Spasov, member of the special police unit "Tiger", amidst celebration of VMRO-DPMNE's electoral victory. Information emerged on social media that a young man had been battered into death in the city centre. The next day, spontaneous protests against the police brutality started in Skopje, and were expanded across the country. The protests were organized in reaction to the fact that the police's newsletter did not report the murder that had happened on the city square. Protest participants demanded political and moral responsibility from Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska and MoI Spokesperson Ivo Kotevski. In his statement for the media, he indicated that such event had not been reported to the police. Spasov was convicted to 14-year imprisonment.

June 21: Monument of Alexander the Macedon officially named "Warrior on Horse" is placed in Skopje's centre, an artwork by sculptor Valentina Stevanovska. Greece interpreted placement of this monument as provocation. A small monument of Alexander the Macedon was also placed in the reconstructed building of the Skopje Airport, as token by general manager of TAV, which was awarded concession to operate the airport. In March 2018, after the Prespa Agreement, the small "Alexander" was removed.

23

June 22: Municipality of Bitola erected the monument of Philip II on the Magnolia Square.

July 3: At the Bitola Congress, SDSM re-elected Branko Crvenkovski as party president.

July 20: Approving the proposed authentic interpretation of the Amnesty Law, MPs from VMRO-DPMNE and DUI decided to discontinue criminal prosecution of defendants in The Hague Cases: "Mavrovo Workers", "NLA Leadership", "Neproshteno" and "Lipkovo Dam". A day earlier, Johan Tarchulovski, who is the only person convicted of war crimes during the 2001 armed conflict, addressed Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski with an open letter and called him to put The Hague Cases to history.

August 1: Teams from the Municipality of Gazi Baba used dynamite to demolish portion of residential and business complex "Kosmos" in Skopje, an investment by businessman Fijat Canoski, due to alleged irregularities in construction thereof. Canoski publicly stated he is targeted with political retaliation by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. The "bombs" revealed by SDSM featured voices of Gruevski and Mile Janakieski arranging demolition of "Kosmos". SPO filed an indictment, on the grounds of wiretapped conversations, as

evidence that this complex was demolished in an act of Gruevski's political retaliation against Fijat Canoski's political party PEI leaving the governing coalition.

August 4: The Commission for Verification of Facts declared dramatist Vladimir Milchin of having collaborated with the secret services. The Higher Administrative Court confirmed this decision. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg admitted Milchin's application against his lustration.

September 8: The government organized a series of events to celebrate the twentieth anniversary from Macedonia's independence, including musical spectacle and unveiling of the monument with fountain "Warrior on Horse". SDSM boycotted this celebration.

October 1: Start of the population census. On October 10, all members of the Census Commission handed in their resignations. The census was stopped before its completion by means of decision taken in the parliament. SPO opened investigation into the failed census against leaders of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, indicating that they had discontinued census activities after becoming aware that results thereof would harm their respective parties, and led by personal interests and desire to stay in power, thereby causing damages to the state budget in the amount of more than 175 million MKD.

24

November 11: An initiative is launched for popular endorsement of the Manifesto for Protection of the Macedonian Identity, which should be presented to the European Union on the account of omitted use of the adjective "Macedonian" in the European Commission's Report. In 2015, MPs that voted in favour of the Law on Use of Languages were declared traitors.

November 16: The Constitutional Court adopted decision to revoke the Law on Setting Type and Scope of Criminal Sanctions. The constitutional judges established that this law is constitutionally problematic.

December 1: MoI conducted an action called "Cobblestone", which resulted in apprehension and conviction of 86 persons for illegal appropriation of funds by issuing falsified pay-tolls. The court process ended with verdict, according to which defendants were sentenced to imprisonment in duration of almost three and a half centuries. MoI's action was a follow-up to cases known as "Snake Eye 1" and "Snake Eye 2".

December 5: Macedonia won its court case against Greece in The Hague. The International Court of Justice established that Greece had acted in breach of the Interim Accord by lodging veto at the NATO Summit in Bucharest.

December 12: Disavowed bishop of MOC-OA Jovan Vranishkovski is arrested on the border-crossing Medjtitlija during his attempt to enter the country. He was convicted by the Veles Court, but the Court of Appeals ordered repeated trial. In the court process "Dissenter", Vranishkovski was sentenced to 3-year imprisonment, with his 18 followers issued probation sentences for embezzling money at MOC-OA. In 2017, Vranishkovski was sentenced for another criminal offence.

December 14: The police conducted an action called "Wiper". 50 people were arrested, including policemen, for false traffic accidents. The court issued probation sentences for 27 of them.

## **2012: BLACK MONDAY**

January 6: Official launch is organized for the Macedonia Arch in the centre of Skopje. In his address, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski revealed himself as the creative mind behind the project "Skopje 2014".

January 9: Orka Holding became owner of Media Print Macedonia which publishes the first daily newspapers *Dnevnik*, *Utrinski vesnik* and *Vest*. Afterwards, some newspapers printed by this media group changed their editorial policy into pro-government. Several years later, this holding sold its shares in MPM. Changes to media ownership took place immediately before announcements for strike on the part of employees in three daily newspapers due to unpaid salaries and royalties.

January 17: Ceremony is held for placement of construction foundations on the Skanderbeg Square. Construction works on this square started after public criticism that DUI, coalition partner in the government, had been tacit about the project "Skopje 2014". The Skanderbeg Square was officially unveiled in 2017.

January 27: Protests are staged against masks ridiculing Islam at the Vevchani Carnival in Struga.

January 27: In internet-based poll, the citizens voted for the government's new "baroque-style" look among 5 façade designs offered. In March, Zlatko Chaushevski's Arhitektonika was awarded the contract to develop the façade project. Popular resistance to this intervention was showcased at the protests organized in May 2015, when protesters chanted "Your government is ugly!" and threw eggs and paint at the government façade.

February 3: SDSM issued a press-release indicating that SCPC is protecting VMRO-DPMNE. This political party raised the question about motives behind anticorruption commissioners' failure to react and take action in regard to the deficit in the amount of 3 million euros on VMRO-DPMNE's bank account designed for its election campaign.

February 13: Opposition NSDP filed for interpellation of Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska on the grounds of the cases related to Neshkoski, Boshkoski, "Snake Eye"... This marked the third failed interpellation against Jankuloska.

March 14: In its resolution on 2011 Progress Report for Macedonia, the European Parliament noted concerns about the "antiquization" phenomenon that seems to have heightened tensions with neighbouring states and has created fresh internal divisions.

March 15: EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule visited Skopje to officially launch the High Level Accession Dialogue between Macedonia and the European Union. HLAD was focused on five priority areas, those being: freedom of speech, the rule of law, public administration reform, electoral reforms, and economic criteria.

March 31: Carlos Slim, businessman from Mexico and one of the richest persons in the world, visited Macedonia. Announcements were made that Slim had come to discuss details about investment in information and communication technologies, but such investment never came to fruition.

March 31: The police conducted a grand action in eastern Macedonia dubbed "Detonator", starting in Kochani. Fifteen defendants were issued sentences in the range from one year and three months to life imprisonment on the grounds of criminal association, attempted murder, fraud, money lending... The Court of Appeals confirmed a number of verdicts, but changed others.

April 12: Five people are murdered near village Smilkovci, Skopje. Young men were killed by shots fired from automatic guns while they were fishing on the nearby lake. On May 1, Mol reported it had identified perpetrators of this massacre. A series of protests ensued in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Gostivar and Kichevo, against apprehension of suspects and against the police action called "Monster". Defendants were issued life imprisonment sentences by the Skopje Criminal Court, confirmed by the Court of Appeals, but returned for repeated trial by the Supreme Court. This indictment is now represented by SPO.

April 22: Three willow trees are planted in the River Vardar, in the section between the Stone Bridge and the Macedonian Opera and Ballet. This sculpture had a price tag of around 250,000 euros and was part of the project "Skopje 2014".

April 25: MPs adopted the declaration on reaffirmation and realization of Macedonia's strategic goal for NATO membership. All parliamentary groups supported the document, proposed by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, except for DPA, which considered it to pedal "pointless demagogism".

May 12: In act of revolt against plans of city authorities for new "baroque" fence on the Bridge "Freedom" with a price tag of nearly 2 million euros, a group of citizens covered the old fence with fake euro notes.

May 29: Another failed interpellation for Minister of Finance Zoran Stavreski, motioned by SDSM on the account of poor economic policies. A similar motion against Stavreski was organized in 2010.

June 13: The Broadcasting Council suspended license for A2 television because of failure to adjust programme pursuant to the terms and conditions from its broadcasting license. People from this television claimed this was another attempt by the ruling authorities to silence a critically-oriented outlet, after the closure of A1 television.

June 13: The Association of Journalists of Macedonia and the government agreed on decriminalization of defamation and libel.

June 15: Subrata Roy, businessman from India, visited Macedonia with ruling authorities announcing him as future investor. At his meetings with state leadership, Roy announced investments in agriculture holding Djumajlija, cattle feed facility and milk factory with farm, as well as construction of tourist complex on the Ohrid Lake. These investments were criticized in the public on the account of his affairs in India, where Subrata Roy was ordered by court to reimburse several billion dollars. Ministry of Agriculture activated the bank guarantees deposited by his company, Sahara Group, on the grounds of failure to fulfil responsibilities assumed under the agreement signed for purchase of agriculture holding. Roy promised to gift the City of Skopje with a monument of Mother Theresa, but instead of him, the government assumed financial responsibility for construction of such monument. Later, Roy was imprisoned under criminal charges of failure to reimburse investors from India he had embezzled.

June 24: Skopje's City Council adopted decision to change names of streets, boulevards and bridges across the city. New names include persons from the antique, such as: Aminta the Third, Philip the Second of Macedonia... street "Bihakjska" became "Pavel Shatev", "Salvador Allende" became "Todor Aleksandrov"... This effort resulted in changed names of more than 32 streets and boulevards. SDSM accused city authorities of attempting to delete the National Liberation Fight and its cultural and historical heritage from the memory of city residents.

June 26: Branko Crvenkovski and Ljubcho Georgievski announced cooperation and formation of election coalition. On July 18, Crvenkovski and DPA leader Menduh Tachi also reached agreement for cooperation and mutual support.

August 1: Electricity price is raised by nearly 10 percent, while cheap in-day tariff is cancelled. In 2017, SDSM restored the cheap in-day tariffs.

August 13: For the first time, officers from the Army of the Republic of Macedonia paid respect to fallen fighters from NLA. The Army's General Headquarters distanced itself from such action.

August 14: The civil initiative AMAN organized the first protest against increased prices of petrol fuels, electricity, and district heating. They submitted petition, endorsed by citizens, demanding changes to the Energy Law. On February 13, 2013, the parliament did not approve the proposal for restoration of cheap in-day electricity tariffs.

September 1: Promissory note is launched and promoted as the government's new instrument for debt settlement, intended for private companies to collect receivables in their fiduciary relations. The Chambers of Commerce indicated promissory notes should also be introduced in terms of collecting receivables from state institutions. Two years later, the government accepted this demand from the businessmen. Hence, the parliament adopted decision whereby promissory notes could be used on voluntary basis.

September 5: Discussion is opened in the parliament about the Law on Defenders. DUI obstructed parliamentary debate. Previously, Minister of Defence Fatmir Besimi and several army officers had paid their respect before the monument of fallen NLA fighters in village Slupchane, Kumanovo.

September 8: Official unveiling of the monument of Fallen Heroes, located in the Women Fighters Park and constructed as part of "Skopje 2014". Later, this memorial complex was completed with the monument of Prometheus, a mythical figure whose genitalia were covered in agreement with the sculptor.

November 16: Dragi Bileski, judge from Kichevo, is lustrated one year before his retirement. Later, SPO formed the docket "Power Player", indicating that the judge's lustration had been commissioned by MP Antonio Miloshoski. The Court in Strasbourg took a judgement in favour of Bileski.

December 8: Medical doctors from the public healthcare sector staged strike before the government building against the salary model based on their performance. MDs who did not support the strike urged their colleagues to return to their jobs.

December 11: Start of the court process "Rover", where defendants included former Minister of Interior Ljube Boshkoski, accused of assisting a murder back in 2001. They were found guilty by the Criminal Court. The Court of Appeals revoked court verdicts on two separate occasions and the case was returned for repeated trial for the third time.

December 12: The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg took a judgement in favour of Khaled El Masri against Macedonia for violation of several articles from the European Convention of Human Rights, i.e. inhumane and degrading treatment, violation of the rights to freedom and security, right to private and family life, freedom of expression and the right to fair trial. In 2018, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Dimitrov issued a public apology to El Masri for his extrajudicial apprehension in Macedonia.

December 15: The police arrested dozen persons as part of its action called "Kerosene", conducted in Skopje, Veles and Negotino, on suspicions for having illegally procured heating fuel for schools, kindergartens, and healthcare facilities. Sixteen people were found guilty by the court and were issued imprisonment sentences in total duration of 32 years. The Court of Appeals reduced their sentences in part.

---

December 24: On the occasion of adoption of 2013 state budget, MPs and journalists are forcefully evicted from the parliamentary hall.

---

December 24: On the occasion of adoption of 2013 state budget, opposition MPs and journalists are forcefully evicted from the parliamentary hall. The day before and on the day of MPs' eviction, protests were organized outside the parliament building in support of MPs, and counter-protest, both under heavy police protection. This day was symbolically dubbed "Black Monday" due to forceful eviction of MPs and stomping on the democracy. Buses and vans with SDSM members and supporters were prevented to arrive to the protests in Skopje. Previously, on December 21, actors, musicians, opera singers and employees from cultural institutions protested against the blocked vote in parliament and failure to adopt the budget. Evicted journalists petitioned the Constitutional Court to contest their removal from the parliament gallery, but this motion was rejected.

The Court in Strasbourg took a judgment in favour of journalists. SDSM motioned criminal charges, but the Public Prosecution Office never processed these charges and did not launch an investigation.

## **2013: POLICE ACTIONS, PROTESTS, VIOLENCE OUTSIDE THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING IN GENTAR**

January/March: Resistance, daily protests across Macedonia against the events from Black Monday

January 11: Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence Sasho Mijalkov claimed 27,000 euros from newspaper *Fokus* on the grounds of having defamed his honour and reputation.

January 16: Freedom House's Report assessed Macedonia as partly free country.

January 21: In fast-tracked procedure and without opposition MPs, amendments to the Law on the Government are adopted in the parliament, and stipulated that, after leaving office, Prime Ministers are entitled to six Mol bodyguards as personal security, including a driver and official vehicle for a period equal to the duration of the term in office they had served.

January 30: Macedonia is ranked 116<sup>th</sup> in the Reporters without Borders' Press Freedom Index.

February 15: The City of Skopje prohibited NLF fighters to organize a march on the Macedonia Square, under auspices that the time period for their march had already been reserved for other activities, announced much earlier.

February 16: Stevcho Jakimovski, mayor of Skopje-based municipality Karposh and SDSM member, submitted his candidacy for the local elections on March 24 just minutes before deadline expiration, but as nominee of the Party of Serbs, led by MP Dragisha Miletikj. Jakimovski was the only mayor from the ranks of SDSM to have defied the party's decision to boycott the local elections.

February 20: The first from total of six multilevel parking garages, all part of the project "Skopje 2014", is officially opened and named "Judicial Palace". The remaining five parking garages, some of which bear patriotic names like "Todor Aleksandrov", "Macedonian

Phalanx", "Razlovec Uprising", "Thessaloniki Congress", were opened in stages over the next several years.

February 24: At the Kumanovo Convention, the opposition coalition led by SDSM adopted a declaration with five points, labelling upcoming local elections as unlawful and calling for boycott of the elections.

March 1: EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule, MEP Rapporteur for Macedonia Richard Howitt, and Jerzy Burzek visited Skopje. They assisted in brokering an agreement which, inter alia, included formation of expert inquiry committee to investigate incidents from December 24. The opposition announced its return to the parliament and participation in the local elections.

March 13: MRT security officers stormed the music radio station Kanal 103, located in the same building, to prevent an interview with Stojanche Angelov, leader of the political party Dignity.

March 22: SDSM-led coalition "Alliance for the Future" reported more than 13,000 phantom voters to the State Election Commission before the first round of local elections scheduled for March 24.

March 26: Nikola Mladenov, journalist and executive editor at newspaper *Fokus*, died in a car accident. Skopje Chief Prosecutor Gordana Geshkovska, Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska, and Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski held a joint press-conference and reported that the prosecution has closed its investigation as traffic accident. The investigation into this event was marked by many controversies. The media reported on fiscal bills from Mladenov's journey which the investigative judge had failed to collect from the scene. Afterwards, the judge returned to the scene to perform additional insight.

April 8: The second round of local elections in held. Ruling parties VMRO-DPMNE and DUI won the highest number of mayor offices. SDSM insisted the local elections to be organized together with the early parliamentary elections, but VMRO-DPMNE rejected this request. Previously, SDSM boycotted the parliament due to the events from December 24, 2012. In early March, the EU delegation tasked to facilitate the political crisis arrived in Macedonia. After several hours of discussions with political leadership, EU Commissioner Stefan Fule, MEP rapporteur for Macedonia Richard Howitt and former President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek, SDSM leader Branko Crvenkovski agreed to participation in the local elections. VMRO-DPMNE won 56 mayor offices, DUI

– 14, and SDSM won only 4. These elections would be remembered for the emergence of voters from Pustec, Albania, registered on several addresses in the Municipality of Centar and issued personal identification cards. Residents from Pustec massively voted in Centar. SPO filed an indictment for election irregularities in the case codenamed "Titanic". Residents from the Municipality of Centar complained that, on the Election Day, elevators were out of order and that their car tires had been purposefully deflated to prevent them to vote at the polling stations.

April 8: Association of Journalists of Macedonia, Macedonian Institute for Media, Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers and Media Development Centre boycotted the debate with the government about the Media Law due to non-transparency.

April 15: The first of two carousels is placed in Skopje downtown, priced at nearly 160,000 euros and constructed as part of "Skopje 2014". PE Parks and Greenery is indicated as investor of this entertainment facility. In 2017, the second carousel was placed near the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After coming into power, the new government reallocated both carousels.

April 16: EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule presented the special report on Macedonia before the European Parliament in Strasbourg, drafted by the European Commission and based on the European Council's Conclusions from the December Summit. Previously, Fule visited Macedonia and met with political leaders.

April 18: The police action dubbed "Agent" for apprehension of four people on suspicions that they have abused public office and duties, money laundering and other illegal proceeds, falsifying documents and use of documents with falsified contents, to sell the land near the Sports Centre "Boris Trajkovski" in Skopje. Former intelligence officer Slobodan Bogoevski was among defendants. The Court of Appeals confirmed the verdict taken in first instance.

May 27: Ljubomir Danailov Frchkoski, professor at the Faculty of Law, is lustrated. He announced a lawsuit against his lustration before the Court in Strasbourg.

May 29: CSOs stage protest outside the parliament against the new Law on Pregnancy Termination that imposed restrictive regulations for abortion. The Constitutional Court found that the law is not in breach of the constitution.

May 31: Blowing whistles and holding posters with "Freedom for Kezho", around hundred journalists organize a protest outside the Skopje Basic Court to demand release from

detention of their colleague, Tomislav Kezharovski. The pre-trial judge had ordered detention for him and seven other defendants arrested in the police action called "Liquidation" and related to 2005 murder in village Oreshe, Veles. Later, Kezharovski was convicted by enforceable court verdict for having disclosed identity of protected witness in the court process "Oreshe" as part of two articles published in 2008 by newspaper *Reporter 92*, whereby he committed unauthorized release of witness information. Both, newspaper and journalist indicated that news reports published actually reveal the police had planted a false witness. The international community issued strong reactions and asked Kezharovski to be released. Ultimately, his service of imprisonment sentence was terminated due to poor health. On January 20, 2015, a protest march was organized from the Skopje Court of Appeals to the government. The Supreme Court revoked his verdict, while in the case of other four defendants an absolute statute of limitations came into effect.

May 31: Former public official Petar Karajanov is lustrated. He accused the Commission of lustrating him under a different identity. The European Court of Human Rights took a judgment in favour of Karajanov.

June 5: Official unveiling of the Bridge "Eye", constructed as part of "Skopje 2014". Previously, construction works were completed on the Bridge of Arts, also part of "Skopje 2014".

June 7: Violent protests are staged outside the municipal building in Centar, organized against alleged intentions on the part of municipal council members to adopt a detailed urban plan that implies demolition of the Church "St. Constantine and Elena", which was under construction on Macedonia Street, although this matter was not included on the council's agenda. In order to prevent incident escalation, the council's session was terminated and rescheduled for June 6, 2013, when several hundred people again gathered outside the municipal building and attempted to violently storm the building where this session was in progress. For this case, SPO filed an indictment against 14 people on the grounds of having committed violence, including an indictment against Nikola Gruevski for having instigated violence. In the course of court proceedings, two persons admitted guilt and were issued probation sentences.

June 14: Under the motto "I Love GTC", group of citizens formed a circle around the City Trade Centre (GTC) in Skopje, holding hands in protest against announced change of the building's look into "baroque". In 2015, the Municipality of Centar organized a local referendum on this matter, which ended unsuccessfully due to failure to achieve the turnout census of 51 percent.

June 22: A group of masked persons attacked LGBTI Support Centre in the Skopje Old Bazaar during film projection organized as part of the Pride Week. In July, this centre was attacked again and this time included arson attempt. The investigation opened into these events never identified the perpetrators.

June 28: The Commission for Verification of Facts lustrated writer Slavko Janevski. This triggered visceral reactions in the public.

July 11: The police conducted an action codenamed "Milka" against livestock smuggling and transportation from Macedonia to Albania. In 2014, the court found 31 persons guilty of these charges. Later, a similar action called "Milka 2" was organized.

July 15: NSDP leader Tito Petkovski is fined with 10,000 euros for having defamed the Prime Minister in his statement that Gruevski had agreed to change of the state's constitutional name.

July 15: Tome Serafimovski, sculptor and academic, is lustrated. Two days later, writer Bozhin Pavlovski is lustrated.

August 12: Municipality of Centar presented the first of the two audit reports on the project "Skopje 2014", which showed wrongdoings and abuse of budget funds. The reports were presented to the Public Prosecution Office, but no investigation was launched.

August 13: Minister of Defence Talat Dzaferi bowed in front of the NLA monument in Slupchane without army officers accompanying him.

August 26: The ad-hoc commission endorsed the final report on the events in the parliament from December 24, 2012. MP Ilija Dimovski stated the weight of legal qualifications in this report is equal to paper tissue.

September 11: At 1:00 a.m. police officers arrested a dozen activists from the civil initiative "Park Defenders" in the park across the hotel Bristol in Centar, who camped there in revolt against cutting of trees and in attempt to prevent construction of new building intended to house the Media Agency. Activists were apprehended on the grounds of having disturbed public peace and order, but were later released from police custody.

September 16: The police action dubbed “Spy” resulted in arrest of 17 persons under suspicions of espionage, criminal association, fraud and blackmail. Those arrested include Marjan Madjovski, chief of cabinet to parliament speaker Trajko Veljanovski, former general Goran Stojkov and film director Boris Damovski. Eighteen people were found guilty by the Criminal Court and were issued imprisonment sentences in total duration of 73 years. The Court of Appeal confirmed verdicts taken in first-instance, but under reduced imprisonment sentences for all but one defendant. This case is represented in court by SPO.

October 9: The police action “Chairman” resulted in apprehension of dozen persons on suspicions of wrongdoings and damages to company Mashinopromet and the state. On October 15, Miroslav Shipovikj, chair of the municipal council in Centar, was arrested in Vienna as part of the same action. In 2018, the Public Prosecution Office withdrew its indictment. Eight people had spent eight months in detention.

October 10: The Agency for Electronic Communications started construction works on its 155-meter high telecommunications tower on Vodno, estimated in the value of 18 million euros. The new government led by SDSM announced revision of this project.

October 22: The Basic Court Skopje 1 issued a press-release in response to views presented by journalist associations that Kezharovski’s verdict is contrary to the freedom of speech and freedom of press. It read: “who has given this journalist the right, by engaging in subjective assessment, to defend the public interest in a matter for which state authorities, [competent to] protect the public interest and enforce the laws, have already initiated proceedings?”

October 23: A large number of special police members prevented journalists to protest outside the Museum of Macedonian Struggle where they had announced their public protest against the imprisonment sentence for Tomislav Kezharovski, journalist for newspaper Nova Makedonija. The protest ended with candles lit and placed before the police cordon.

October 31: In the parliament, MP Radmila Shekerinska asked Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski whether he knows how Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence Sasho Mijalkov had managed to increment his personal assets by 1.6 million euros. The Anticorruption Commission announced revision of Mijalkov’s property

and assets. He requested the Anticorruption Commission to upload his updated assets declaration, explaining to the public that an omission had occurred.

December 5: President Gjorge Ivanov awarded Victor Orban with the Medal of Honour "8 September".

December 6: Late in the night, an organized group of citizens attempted to demolish the monument of Tsar Dushan, located on the recently constructed Bridge of Civilizations. Their efforts failed. This event was followed by exchange of press-releases from political parties and new demolition attempt, duly prevented by the police. For several weeks, the monument was guarded by policemen.

December 7: The newly constructed building of the Macedonian National Theatre, which was part of the project "Skopje 2014", is opened with the debut performance of the play "Eternal House".

December 27: SDSM presented the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption with criminal charges relating to wrongdoings under the project "Skopje 2014". Persons covered by these charges included then-incumbent Minister of Culture Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska and former Mayor of Centar Vladimir Todorovikj.

36

## **2014: AFFAIRS, BOYCOTT OF THE PARLIAMENT AND STUDENT PROTESTS**

January 14: SDSM revealed that family-run business of journalist Ivona Talevska had been awarded procurement contract by the Ministry of Health. Talevska served as editor at two pro-government media outlets: TV Sitel and newspaper *Vecer*. SDSM Spokesperson Petre Shilegov stated this revelation unmask links between the government and the media. Minister of Health Nikola Todorov underlined that the procurement contract is lawful, but the situation is unethical.

February 27: U.S. Department of State issued its 2013 Report on Human Rights Practices wherein it qualified cases of Tomislav Kezharovski and Miroslav Shipovikj as political prisoners and detainees. Furthermore, this report noted that the government does not fully respect the rule of law and there is no separation between the state and party.

March 1: DU's parliamentary group motioned initiative for parliament dissolution and announcement of early parliamentary elections due to the proposal for consensual president being rejected by their coalition partner VMRO-DPMNE.

March 6: At a press-conference, SDSM released documents according to which, in 2013 and 2014, more than 3.5 million euros in cash had been illegally withdrawn from bank accounts in Macedonian banks held by Greek company AKTOR, contractor for construction of the motorway section Demir Kapija – Smokvica. As elaborated by party spokesperson, every month large groups of Greek citizens had been brought with buses to Negotino and asked to withdraw cash from a local bank branch, previously paid to their accounts as royalties by the construction company. Accusations implied that actually these individuals are engaged in motorway works and that money were not taken out of Macedonia, but rather exchanged hands immediately after withdrawal. The authorities in Greece opened investigation into this matter, but the Macedonian Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption did not close its investigation. In March 2018, SPO launched investigation into this case after the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) had previously requested sanctions for the Greek company AKTOR on the grounds of embezzlement and money laundering in construction works on the motorway Demir Kapija – Smokvica.

April 16: At a press-conference, SDSM leader Zoran Zaev released audio recording featuring telephone conversation between Nikola Gruevski, Den Donchev and businessman Jovica Stefanovikj, and inferred that the Prime Minister had personally sold the Makedonska Banka JSC Skopje to the controversial businessman from Serbia through 4 offshore companies and 2 domestic companies, for which he had received 2.4 million euros in cash. Gruevski motioned defamation lawsuit against Zaev. Initially he claimed half million euros as redress, but later reduced the amount to 50,000 euros. The Supreme Court returned this case for repeated trial, but in the meantime Gruevski had withdrawn the lawsuit.

April 27: Gjorge Ivanov was given second term of office as president of state, having won 51.65 percent of votes on the second round of balloting, while his opponent Stevo Pendarovski won 41.14 percent of votes. DUI demanded consensual candidate for president of state, did not recognize Ivanov as chef of the state throughout his entire term of office, and boycotted his annual address in the parliament.

April 27: The parliamentary elections were held, but SDSM disputed their outcome. The coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE won 61 seats in parliament, with SDSM having won only 34. On June 19, 2014, the parliament elected the new government, composed as coalition between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. The opposition led by SDSM did not recognize the election

results and started extra-institutional activities by organizing protests, street marches and other gatherings. Their parliamentary boycott was extended until implementation of the Przhino Agreement, reached one year later. After 15 months of boycott, on September 1, 2015, the opposition returned to the parliament.

May 26: Ophthalmologist Dejan Stavrikj is sentenced to 1-year imprisonment by the Criminal Court for having taken bribe. Stavrikj served as president of the independent trade union at the Clinical Centre at the time when medical doctors went on strike. The Court of Appeals reversed his verdict to probation sentence.

May 28: Three MPs from SDSM handed over letters of resignation. Their decision was made after SDSM qualified the parliamentary elections as systemic theft and refused to recognize the election outcome. A total of 119 candidates for MP seats had signed notary-certified statements indicating their resignation from parliament. Ljubica Buralieva and Solza Grcheva from SDSM, and Roza Topuzova-Karevska from LDP, remained the only opposition MPs in the parliament. On the grounds of defying official party positions, SDSM expelled both female MPs from its ranks, while LDP dismissed Topuzova-Karevska from official functions in the political party. The parliamentary majority did not secure sufficient votes to revoke mandates of opposition MPs. Immediately after the elections, the opposition put forward five demands that should be delivered in order to find a way out from the political impasse, those being: formation of caretaker government, separation of the state and party, adoption of media regulations, changes to the electoral legislation, and organization of the population census. Under strong international pressure, a leadership meeting was scheduled for the second half of June, but it failed to reconcile views upheld by VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM.

June 24: Head of MOC-OA Archbishop Stefan blessed the 51-meter high cross covered with lights in the Municipality of Aerodrom at the ceremony attended by city and municipal mayors. This cross was donation from the World Macedonian Congress and group of businessmen. Decision for placement of this cross came after information had surfaced in the public and on social media that an investor from Turkey plans to build 4 skyscrapers which might trigger purchase of home apartments by Muslims. The cross benefactors stated its construction is not intended as anti-Albanian and anti-Muslim, and that it represents a symbol of peace and love.

June 27: The Public Prosecution Office announced launch of proceedings in the case "Makedonska Banka" which involved Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. According to the

prosecution, information was insufficient to form a docket for this case, as some aspects thereof fell under the statute of limitations due to the fact that 10 years had passed since alleged criminal acts were committed.

June 28: During the opposition's parliament boycott, the government proposed eight constitutional amendments, including an amendment that defines marriage as community between man and woman, precise definition of fiscal rules for budget deficit and public debt, change of the name of the National Bank, introduction of constitutional appeal as legal instrument, change of the Judiciary Council's composition...

June 30: Verdict in the court process "Monster" is published. Thereby, the court issued six lifetime imprisonment sentences for defendants on the grounds of having committed acts of terrorism.

July 4: Protests and clashes with the police due to court verdicts in the case "Monster". After the Friday Prayer, hundreds of Albanians took to the streets of Skopje in protest against court verdicts, organized by mobilization calls on the social media. Demonstrators firmly believed that those accused of five murders are not guilty. The protests culminated in violence and clashes with the police, which had to use water cannons, teargas and shock bombs to disburse the crowd. Similar protests continued in the future.

July 17: Macedonia issued the third Eurobond, whereby the state borrowed additional 500 million euros on the international capital market.

July 21: Official launch of the first restaurant boat Royal Macedonia on the River Vardar, constructed as part of "Skopje 2014" and anchored in vicinity of MEPSO's building. A total of three anchored boats were constructed in the River Vardar.

August 4: The first pair of lions is mounted on the Bridge "Goce Delchev", part of "Skopje 2014". Not much later, another set of lion sculptures is placed on the same bridge.

September 7: Five new monuments are revealed, donation by the controversial Association for Spiritual Unification of Setinci, Popadnci and Krushoradi in Macedonia. In the period 2012-2015, this association received regular donations from the government.

October 8: As part of large-scale raid codenamed "Justitia", the police arrested 25 suspects from the department on misdemeanours at the Basic Court Skopje 1. In that, 24 judges and 11 court clerks were apprehended and suspected by the prosecution to have engaged in unconscious performance of their duties, thereby inflicting damage on the state budget in the amount of more than 1.3 million euros. Later, the Public Prosecution

Office entered plea-bargains with seven judges and court clerks who had admitted guilt and were issued probation sentences. Relevant criminal proceedings were stopped for five defendants. Finally, the court process was concluded with acquittal verdicts.

October 15: The Lustration Commission declared academic Ivan Katardjiev as collaborator to the secret services.

December 5: The government approved proposal for the state's new coat of arms (red angry lion on yellow-gold shield, with a mural crown in the form of fortress).

December 9: Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski attended the donor conference for the Church "St. Constantine and Elena", organized by the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric and the Foundation "St. Tsar Constantine".

December 10: The biggest ever student protests are held against pending reforms in higher education, external assessment and endangered autonomy of the universities. Professors and citizens alike all endorsed the demands put forward by students. In 2014, the Student Plenum is formed at a student meeting to fight against changes to the Law on Higher Education. Autonomous student zones were established at the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, followed by similar zones being formed at other faculties and other towns. On December 26, tenure and assistant professors formed the Professor Plenum. Around hundred professors stood against changes to the Law on Higher Education. In response, two hundred university professors established so-called Counter Professor Plenum under auspices that legislative changes are aimed to improve quality of higher education to the benefit of both, students and professors. The contested law was passed in parliament, but its enforcement was postponed for a period of one year due to visceral reactions by professors, students and the public.

December 22: CSOs, trade unions, journalists, actors, painters, musicians and translators organized protests to demand withdrawal of legislative changes that introduce mandatory payment of social contributions for royalties earned. On the government's proposal, the parliament revoked the disputable law and its effect was cancelled on August 1, 2015.

December 23: A total of 123 citizens staged a performance in front of the parliament to promote the Platform for Citizen-Oriented Politics AJDE! Sitting on chairs opposite the parliament, members of this platform sent messages to MPs and ruling authorities that citizens are the source of state sovereignty and that democracy cannot be exercised without active, free and associated people. After its promotion, the platform organized



symbolic protests outside MRT (public service broadcaster) and the Ministry of Health, including actions against precariat laws ...

## 2015: FIRST POLITICAL BOMBS ARE DETONATED, PRZHINO AGREEMENT IS SIGNED

January 23: Former UBK Chief Zoran Verushevski is arrested in the police action dubbed "Coup". Initially he was suspected of illegal possession of weapons and child pornography. Later, his detention was extended on the grounds of suspicions for espionage and violence waged at the highest state bodies. His spouse and a local official from the Municipality of Strumica were also arrested in the action "Coup", suspected of having assisted criminal activity. Zoran Zaev, leader of the opposition, was also suspected. On April 30, indictments were filed against five people. Zvonko Kostovski, in the capacity of first defendant and the person who had extracted wiretapped materials from UBK, entered plea-bargain and admitted his guilt, followed by conviction for 3-year imprisonment. Gjorgji Lazarevski, engineer at UBK who assisted the public release of wiretapped materials, spent a total of 11 months in detention. This case was duly noted in the U.S. Department of State's Report on Human Rights Practices. Later, the Special Prosecution Office established jurisdiction over this case and renounced filing indictment in 2017. As regards the wiretapping affair, SPO filed the indictment called "Target - Fortress" against former UBK Chief Sasho Mijalkov, former Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska, commander of the fifth division Goran Grujevski, Nikola Boshkoski, Toni Jakimovski, and six other officers from UBK. According to SPO, it was UBK that intercepted communications and engaged in illegal surveillance of 5,827 phone numbers, thus wiretapping conversations of more than 20,000 citizens. Later, a female defendant in this case admitted guilt and was issued probation sentence.

January 31: At a press-conference held in the government, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski accused opposition leader Zoran Zaev of attempted coup d'état. In his address, Gruevski revealed he had four meetings with Zoran Zaev between September and November 2014, at which the latter had informed him of being in possession of recorded telephone conversations among top-ranked state officials, provided by unnamed foreign intelligence service, and had blackmailed him with formation of caretaker government. For this case, the Ministry of Interior motioned criminal charges before the Public Prosecution Office.

February 3: A video recording emerged on *YouTube*. It had been filmed in the Prime Minister's Cabinet as part of court-approved special investigation measures. The short videos had been uploaded by an anonymous user and featured a secret meeting held between Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and opposition leader Zoran Zaev. Gruevski publicly stated that Zaev had blackmailed him with compromising materials in his possession, which included wiretapped conversations he had obtained from foreign services. The Public Prosecution Office never launched investigation into the manner in which such footage had surfaced in the public. Media outlets inclined to the government reported communication exchange via skype between Zoran Verushevski and Gjorgji Lazarevski from UBK, as the fifth defendant, and communications among members of the Verushevski family...

February 5: The Civil Movement for Defence of Macedonia (GDOM) is formed by 20 public figures. They expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that thousands of citizens had their communications intercepted by foreign services and with use of such materials to sow discord and dissatisfaction in the country. GDOM indicated they would not allow the state to be renamed and dissolved.

February 9: At SDSM headquarters, Zoran Zaev released the first set of wiretapped conversations calling them "Truth about Macedonia". In his address, Zaev accused Gruevski's government of illegally intercepting communications of more than 20,000 citizens. By June 2015, the opposition released 36 sets of "bombs", each comprised of dozen conversations. Revelations from wiretapped materials implied a multitude of indications related to politicisation of state institutions, electoral irregularities and fraud, brutal political confrontation against different-minded individuals, pre-arranged arrests, kickbacks and racketeering, reckless spending of budget funds... The public service broadcaster, MRT, decided not to play audio recordings disclosed by the opposition and instead broadcasted news that included paraphrased sections from materials released. This practice was replicated by pro-government television outlets and online portals. Under the motto "Resistance against lies of the regime", SDSM staged protests outside TV Sitel and MRT, among others, on the account of their resistance to broadcast the "bombs". On March 21, Stojanche Angelov, leader of political party Dignity, played "bombs" on speaker in sign of protest to MRT's decision to ignore the contents of wiretapped conversations.

February 10: SDSM motioned criminal charged against UBK Director Sasho Mijalkov and commander of the fifth division Goran Grujevski, including against unknown perpetrators, for illegal interception of more than 20,000 citizens. A month later, this party motioned expanded criminal charges for the same docket.

February 11: Students declare autonomous zone at the university.

February 19: The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights motioned criminal charges against Minister of Health Nikola Todorov and both Directors of the Health Insurance Funds, on the grounds of unconscious performance of duties in the case that involves young Tamara Dimovska from Veles, who had died.

February 26: SDSM motioned criminal charges before the Skopje Prosecution Office against Nikola Gruevski and against unknown perpetrators, on the grounds of having disclosed state secret at a press-conference, i.e. disclosing information pertaining to special investigation measures that targeted opposition leader Zoran Zaev.

March 3: SDSM motioned criminal charges against Nikola Gruevski, Sasho Mijalkov, Gordana Jankuloska, Mile Janakieski, Martin Protoger, and against Toni Trajkovski, Mayor of Gazi Baba, for criminal wrongdoings arising from the contents of revealed "bombs". This political party continued to present the Public Prosecution Office with criminal charges against officials from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE, but no investigations were launched on the basis of these motions.

4 4

March 6: Zoran Zaev released wiretapped conversations that feature allegations for manipulations related to the voter register, buying electoral votes, intimidations and threats waged at civil servants and for preventing citizens to cast their votes at the polling stations.

March 10: MoI and the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption revealed the investigation called "Bribe", wherein opposition leader Zoran Zaev, in the capacity of Mayor of Strumica, was suspected of taking bribe in the amount of 160,000 euros from a local businessman. This case was revealed in public less than an hour before SDSM released the eight set of "bombs" at press-conference organized at the Universal Hall and related to election irregularities. On May 13, an anonymous user uploaded a video on *YouTube* which had been recorded as part of special investigation measures. This video featured Mayor of Strumica Zoran Zaev engaged in conversation with a local businessman for alleged taking of bribe. VMRO-DPMNE presented this case as "One euro for Vice", alluding that Zaev has instructed the businessman to make a payment of one euro for purchase of construction land, one euro for construction of local church and one euro for political party SDSM, on the bank account of his brother Vice Zaev. This case was closed with requalification of criminal charges and acquittal verdict for Zaev taken by the Skopje Criminal Court in 2018. In his public statements, Zaev insisted this case had

Students declare an  
autonomous zone



been orchestrated by the authorities. The Public Prosecution Office did not establish how video footage from special investigation measures had leaked in the public.

March 13: Opposition leader Zoran Zaev presented the Strumica Prosecution Office with criminal charges against local businessman Ivo Nikolov-Sachevaliev, on the grounds of making false claims and offering bribe.

March 19: The High-School Plenum organized a protest march outside the Ministry of Education. At this event, high-school students expressed dissatisfaction with secondary education reforms, i.e. external assessment and matriculation exams. On April 6, students from secondary schools boycotted school classes due to non-fulfilment of their demands. On April 27, high-school students erected protest camp in the Park of Journalists, opposite the Ministry of Education and Science. After several weeks of boycotting and camping in front of the Ministry of Education, they returned to school classes.

March 20: SDSM motioned 21 criminal charges against more than 17 perpetrators on the grounds of criminal wrongdoings in relation to the election process.

March 20: SDSM motioned criminal charges against Minister of Transport Mile Janakieski and Director of the Idrizovo Prison Zhivko Pejkovski on the grounds of having instructed inmates to vote in favour of ruling parties. The Public Prosecution Office did not launch investigation into this matter.

March 22: Start of activities on assembling sandwich shop-boots in baroque and antique style, on several locations in Skopje.

April 7: SDSM presented the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption with criminal charges against UBK Chief Sasho Mijalkov, judge Svetlana Kostova from the Higher Administrative Court, and foreign national Haim Hakini, all involved in the affair related to procurement of wiretapping equipment from Israel.

April 30: In the wake of VMRO-DPMNE 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, the so-called Amsterdam Trio, i.e. Vladimir Lazarevikj, Nikola Dimitrov and Pero Dimshoski, announced formation of civil movement called "There is Future".

May 5: Mass anti-government protests took place immediately after release of the "bomb" related to murder of Martin Neshkoski, which featured conversations between former Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska and Mol Spokesperson Ivo Kotevski, and they served as prelude for the protests of the Colourful Revolution. The protesters

chanted "Murderers" and "Justice for Martin". Some of them, including Martin's mother and brother, breached the police cordon and approached the government building. Later, a group of demonstrators started throwing tomatoes, eggs, stones and torches at the government. The police pushed back protesters from the building's entrance and disbursed them into several groups, which resulted in people being battered and injured, as well as arrested. The protesters were chased on the streets of Skopje, many of which battered and apprehended. In their search, members of the special police unit stormed the City Library "Brothers Miladinovci" looking for protesters. The Basic Court Skopje 1 issued eight probation and one imprisonment sentence in duration of 10 months for nine protesters accused of incidents and attacks on policemen at the riot.

May 8: Political party Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (DOM) decided to leave the government coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE.

May 9 and 10: The gunfight in village "Divo Naselje", Kumanovo, resulted in deaths of eight policemen. The police raid had started at the break of dawn, at 4:30 a.m., and lasted for almost 28 uninterrupted hours. In his live television address to the nation, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski stated the police prevented a terrorist group that had breached the state borders and had planned massive killings. In November 2017, the Skopje Criminal Court convicted 33 people to imprisonment in total duration of 745 years on terrorism charges. Seven of them were sentenced to life imprisonment, while others were issued imprisonment sentences in duration of 12 to 40 years. SDSM leader Zoran Zaev said there are strong indications that this case has been staged by people in the government. The media raised a dilemma whether the intelligence agency, together with the secret police, had orchestrated such deadly shootings in attempt to distract the public.

May 12: Mile Janakieski and Gordana Jankuloska resigned from their office as ministers. Reasons indicated in their letters of resignation, inter alia, refer to the fact that this is done in order to resolve the political crisis. Sasho Mijalkov also resigned from his office as Chief of UBK.

May 17: The opposition and civil society organization organized a massive protest in front of the government. It was followed by formation of the so-called Freedom Camp, with erection of tents. Already on May 18, VMRO-DPMNE organized a counter-protest and political rally in front of the parliament building, which ended with setup of a counter-camp

May 19: Meeting of Nikola Gruevski and Zoran Zaev with several Members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Negotiation talks stretched beyond 10 hours, but were unsuccessful.

May 22: Placement of monuments to commemorate Albanian authors Pjeter Bogadi and Josif Bageri

May 28: The Association of Journalists published an analysis according to which, over a period of three months, the government had spent 6 million euros in broadcasting and printed media, thereby becoming the biggest media advertiser.

June 2: The Przhino Agreement is brokered, followed by Protocol to the Agreement signed on June 15, 2015, according to which, the early parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place on April 24, 2016. This agreement resulted in the opposition's return in the parliament, formation of the Special Prosecution Office to investigate indications arising from the "bombs" and appointment of two ministers from the ranks of opposition parties. Furthermore, it anticipated resignation by Nikola Gruevski from the office of Prime Minister 100 days before the elections and selection of new Prime Minister from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE. In the parliament, special inquiry committee was formed and tasked to investigate allegations from wiretapped conversations. Then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was scheduled to appear at hearing organized by this inquiry committee, as well as former ministers Zoran Stavreski and Gordana Jankuloska, opposition leader Zoran Zaev and defendants from the case dubbed "Coup". In the public, Gruevski refused to testify before this committee, prompting the committee chair Petre Shilegov to declare recess before the appearance of Stavreski, who also announced in public that he would not testify about the interception affair.

---

June 2: The Przhino Agreement is brokered.

---

June 8: The senior experts group published its recommendations on systemic rule of law issues relating to the communications interception, also known as the first Priebe Report, named after Reihard Priebe, retired director from the European Commission who led this group. The group of senior experts visited Macedonia several times to scan state-of-play and hold meetings with members of all three branches of government and civil society organizations. In particular, the report found that the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK) has been operating outside its legal mandate, the interception scandal demonstrated gross disrespect for human rights, and family ties between high ranking officials at UBK and the public prosecution create a risk environment for conflict of interests.

June 11: A failed round of negotiations to find way out of the political crisis took place at the European Commission in Brussels, between EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn, EU and US Ambassadors to Skopje, Aivo Orav and Jess Baily, and party leaders from Macedonia.

June 15: 2.5 million euro waterjet fountain is put into operation in Skopje's central area, constructed as part of "Skopje 2014".

June 29: Start of works on the fence around the government building, in approximate value of 700,000 euros. In 2019, wrought iron fencing was removed, as promised by opposition leader Zoran Zaev.

July 1: The government took a decision on temporary moratorium for commercial promotion in the media. This action was announced as signal of good will.

July 8: A total of six parliamentary committees started discussions about the list of urgent reform priorities and recommendations from the report of the senior experts group led by Reinhard Priebe.

July 16: Civil activists staged an artistic installation called "Sharks in the River Vardar", as satirical commentary to "Skopje 2014". Earlier, on June 26, guerrilla actions resulted in attaching eyes to trees on several locations across Skopje, thus sending a message to city authorities against timbering trees in urban areas across the capital. Other guerrilla actions followed.

August 5: The first hearing in the case "Coup" is held at the Skopje Criminal Court. In public, Zoran Zaev stated he does not acknowledge the court's jurisdiction and requested his case to be assigned to the Special Prosecution Office.

August 20: A protest is organized in the capital under the motto "Skopje is not Disneyland", to showcase opposition to construction of the Ferris Wheel. In order to accommodate its construction, changes were made to Municipality of Centar's Detailed Urban Plan. In 2013, the Public Transport Enterprise Skopje assumed responsibility to finance this project from the City of Skopje. In 2014, the Agency for Electronic Communications donated 1 million euros to PTE Skopje for construction of the Ferris Wheel.

August 21: Tear gas was used by the police to disburse migrants attempting to enter the border zone in Macedonia. A state of emergency was declared by the government, followed by closure of the south border for migrants.

September 14: The EU Delegation engaged Belgium-born diplomat Peter Vanhoutte to facilitate talks for resolution of the political crisis. Together with EU Ambassador Aivo

Orav, he moderated negotiation meetings held at the Club of Parliamentarians for selection of the chief special prosecutor. Vanhoutte stated in the public that one party is obstructing this selection.

September 15: In fast-tracked procedure and with 111 votes, the parliament enacted the Law on the Prosecution Office against Criminal Offences Arising from and Related to Illegal Interception of Communications, popularly known as SPO. Katica Janeva, public prosecutor from Gevgelija, was selected to serve as the chief special prosecutor. Initially, the Council of Public Prosecutors approved appointment of half public prosecutors proposed by Janeva, to which SDSM reacted.

October 7: MP Krsto Mukovski from VMRO-DPMNE presented the parliament with a letter on withdrawing the proposed law that prohibits possession, processing and public release of the "bombs", liable to imprisonment sanctions. Earlier, Krsto Mukovski and Talat Dzaferi co-sponsored adoption of this law. Announcement of the proposed law landed on fierce condemnation in the public, and it was withdrawn after meetings with mediator Peter Vanhoutte.

October 15: UBK Chief Sasho Mijalkov is arrested at the Belgrade Airport for carrying firearm. In Serbia, the media reported that Mijalkov had been released after urgencies from the Government of Macedonia.

October 21: President of the World Macedonian Congress Todor Petrov motioned a petition for constitutional review of the Law on Special Prosecution Office, after an identical petition had already been motioned by attorney-at-law from Sveti Nikole. The Constitutional Court never held a session to reconsider any of these petitions.

October 27: The Skopje Court of Appeals declared itself non-competent to decide on the matter whether the opposition's wiretapped materials should not be allowed as evidence in 27 cases led by SPO.

October 27: Late in the night, Ambassadors from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and the European Union, read their joint statement outside the government in relation to the political crisis in the country and the Przhino Agreement, urging VMRO-DPMNE to respect obligations it had agreed to in Przhino and requesting SDSM to continue with their obligations, including to cease all and any release of wiretapped materials.

November 10: At a press-conference, EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn stated that, at that point in time, Macedonia would not be granted recommendation to start accession negotiations. In particular, the recommendation could be renewed pending delivery of the Przhino Agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities until the elections in April 2016.

November 16: The parliament approved decision for announcement of open call for selection of new members to the State Election Commission. Pursuant to amendments to the Electoral Code, adopted as a result of negotiations for the Przhino Agreement, SEC will be comprised of nine members, as follows: three members nominated by the government and the opposition, each, and three members selected from the list of candidates from the open call as non-partisan members.

November 24: The state issued its fourth Eurobond and borrowed 270 million euros on the international capital market.

December 30: SDSM leader Zoran Zaev handed over materials from the illegal interception of communications to the Special Prosecution Office.

## **2016: BLANKET PARDONS GRANTED BY GJORGE IVANOV AND THE COLOURFUL REVOLUTION**

51

January 7: In its judgement, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg tasked the state with payment of redress in the amount of 4,000 euros to five judges each, including payment of court fees. These were: Snezhana Gerovska-Popchevska, Goce Jaksovski, Miroslav Trifunovski, Ivo Popovski and Violeta Duma. All of them applied to the Court on the grounds that their dismissal from office had not allowed them fair hearing, resulting in violation of their human rights, and that their dismissal implied interference of the executive government in the work of the judiciary. According to this judgement, the case related to dismissal of judges implied conflicting competences with then-incumbent Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski who motioned the contested dismissal requests.

January 14: In a public address, Nikola Gruevski announced his resignation from the office President of the Government.

February 1: During his visit to Macedonia, Minister of State for Europe at the German Federal Foreign Office Michael Roth assessed that state-of-play in the country is worrying and that the government had not delivered two key conditions: revision of the voter register and improved media landscape.

February 1: TV Nova, new pro-government television channel owned by businessman Sead Kochan, started to broadcast programme. Later, this television broadcasted live the parliament's storming from April 27. This media opened receivership after the change of government and the court verdict in SPO's court process "Trust", whereby Kochan was convicted to imprisonment on the grounds of illegal tender award from ELEM (Power Plants of Macedonia) to his company Transmet.

February 12: SPO announced launch of its first investigation codenamed "Titanic", in which former ministers Gordana Jankuloska and Mile Janakieski, general secretary of the government and others were suspected of having committed criminal offences against the elections and the right to vote. SPO motioned the court to issue detention orders for all eight suspects.

February 27: A ceremony on placement of foundation construction for 55-meter cross is held in settlement Butel, Skopje, under heavy police security. Placement of this cross, donation from the World Macedonian Congress, was triggered by reveal of the double-headed eagle monument in the Municipality of Chair. President of the World Macedonian Congress Todor Petrov was physically attacked at this ceremony.

March 2: DUI supporters demolished the foundations of this cross in Butel and erected camps on the location. Declaring the matter beyond its jurisdiction, the Constitutional Court rejected petition for constitutional and judicial review of the decision related to placement of cross in the Municipality of Butel.

March 3: U.S. Department of State Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Hoyt Brian Yee held meetings with political leadership and Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski. Yee indicated that the United States of America and the European Union are closely monitoring developments under the Przhino Agreement, revision of the voter register, media reforms and separation of the state and party.

March 15: Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts released an announcement for placement of real-time public debt counter visible to the public. In particular, this counter was to provide insight about the amount of public debt in real time, including increase or decrease by second. The same was removed after 24 hours. MASA announced they had not been formally informed and that the counter had been by placed by associate from its research centre. According to figures on public debt, each citizen was indebted by more than 2,000 euros.

March 15: The civil initiative AJDE! staged a protest outside the building of the Constitutional Court against the possibility for this court to take decision that would allow the president of state to grant pardons to persons convicted of election fraud. Protests continued in

the days that followed adoption of the disputed decision. Members of the political party GROM staged parallel protests in “defence of state institutions and the constitutional order”.

March 28: SPO announced launch of investigation codenamed “Torture” into arrest of Ljube Boshkoski, leader of United for Macedonia and former Minister of Interior. This investigation covered seven defendants, six of which are members of the police unit “Alpha”, with then-incumbent UBK Chief Sasho Mijalkov indicated as first defendant.

April 7: SDSM called for formation of wide civic front for free Macedonia.

April 12: President Gjorge Ivanov pardoned from criminal prosecution a total of 56 persons from government and opposition, including those suspected and criminally charged in SPO cases. Pardons were granted to Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his closest associates, such as ministers Gordana Jankuloska and Mile Janakieski, former chief of the secret police Sasho Mijalkov... Pardon was granted to opposition leader Zoran Zaev. This decision landed on fierce contempt among citizens and the international community. It remains unknown how the president knew the names of persons suspected and accused.

April 13: Citizens took to the streets in revolt with blanket pardons granted by President Ivanov and demolished his office in Skopje downtown. From there, demonstrators started marching towards VMRO-DPMNE headquarters, but the police prevented them to approach the VMRO Square, redirecting the protest to end outside the government building. This date is considered as the onset of protests organized by the Colourful Revolution, which was given this name in a journalist report from April 19, due to the fact that protesters threw paint balloons at state administration buildings. This informal movement appropriated the motto “No justice, no peace”. Night after night, members of the Colourful Revolution protested outside different state institutions, with speeches delivered by different participants and launch of paint balloons at administration buildings. The Colourful Revolution put forward a list of eight demands, including cancellation of blanket pardons and resignation from Gjorge Ivanov.

April 15: Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski announced the early parliamentary elections for June 5 and disbanded the parliament.

April 22: Cancellation of the meeting in Vienna with leaders of the four biggest political parties from Macedonia, proposed by the European Union.

April 27: Kosta Krpach is found dead in his apartment, in urban settlement Kapishtec, with a shotgun wound in his chest. The Skopje Prosecution Office informed they have found this case to be suicide. SPO revealed that Krpach served as witness in several court processes led by this prosecution and that he had received threats. It remains unclear how President Ivanov knew Krpach's status as witness for SPO in order to pardon him.

May 12: Germany's Special Envoy Johannes Haindl arrived in Macedonia to mediate the resolution of the political crisis. He visited the country again one week later. His appointment was part of the diplomatic effort to overcome the political crisis.

May 18: The Constitutional Court opened procedure upon petition from Talat Dzaferi requesting constitutional review of the decision on parliament's dissolution. Just several hours after the Constitutional Court took a decision on temporary suspension of effect in respect to the decision on parliament's dissolution, Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski summoned a plenary session and called MPs from the previously disbanded composition. Acting upon proposal from DUI, the parliament approved amendments to the Electoral Code with 96 votes, but they did not include new date for the early parliamentary elections.

May 27: President Gjorge Ivanov annulled the blanket pardons for 22 politically prominent persons.

May 31: Start of the court process against Zdravko Saveski and Vladimir Kumovski, activists from the Colourful Revolution, accused of having demolished the President's Office. Similar indictments were filed against Mariglen Demiri and Pavle Bogoevski. After the change of government, the Public Prosecution Office declined to further prosecute some of them, while others received acquittal verdicts.

June 1: The media reported on large-scale gold-framed paintings decorating the walls at VMRO-DPMNE headquarters and depicting then-current leader Nikola Gruevski and previous party leadership.

June 6: President Gjorge Ivanov fully annulled blanket pardons he had granted to all 56 persons. In the lead to this event, the civil initiative "We Protest" organized a protest outside the Constitutional Court, with counter-protest staged on the same location by the civil initiative "Citizens for Democratic Renewal of Macedonia" (GDOM). The first requested annulment of blanket pardons and creation of conditions for fair and democratic elections, while the latter requested the elections to be held on June 5.

June 14: Zoran Stavreski resigned from office due to health reasons, after he had served as both Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

July 1: Protests erupted outside SPUKM's seat (Student Parliament at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius"). Students demanded annulment of elections for president of this organization; university senate, rector's office, rector and deputy rectors to reconsider this matter; and requested authorities to explain deployment of special police forces with armoured vehicles at their protest, held the day before. Namely, an incident happened after balloting boxes for SPUKM's new leader were closed, when these boxes were taken to count the votes and when the rapid response unit was called to intervene.

July 2: The European Commission de-committed nearly 27 million euros under the second Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, known as IPA 2, because the Macedonian authorities had failed to demonstrate will to have the political crisis resolved.

July 7: U.S. Department of State Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland visited Macedonia to hold meetings with political leadership in the state for resolution of the protracted political crisis, support for the Special Prosecution Office and creation of conditions for credible elections.

July 19: Macedonia issued the fifth Eurobond in the value of 450 million euros. This happened after the first attempt for issuance was postponed by letter from SDSM addressed to the creditors, indicating that the government is not legally entitled to issue such bonds.

July 21: The so-called Przhino 2 Agreement is reached. It defined new conditions for organization of the early parliamentary elections, including amendments to the Electoral Code, the opposition's return in parliament and appointment of opposition ministers in the government.

August 4: The Skopje Court of Appeals recognized the "bombs" as evidence in the case led by SPO and related to violence outside the municipal building in Centar. Identical decisions were later taken in other court cases represented by SPO.

August 6: Twenty two people lost their lives as a result of torrential rains and floods in the Skopje region.

August 16: Albeit incomplete, the ad-hoc media body on monitoring election coverage and representation started its operation. In the course of its mandate, this commission

took several decisions on initiating misdemeanour procedures for unbalanced reporting and coverage by some media.

September 1: Mitko Chavkov resigns from the office of interior minister in the wake of appointment of the caretaker government. Oliver Andonov was proposed new minister of interior and his term of office lasted a single day. In the capacity of caretaker prime minister, Emil Dimitriev nominated Mitko Chavkov to be appointed Director of the Bureau of Public Security at MoI.

September 2: MPs expressly approved the caretaker government, according to provision from the Przhino Agreement. Oliver Spasovski is appointed minister of interior, while Frosina Remenski is appointed minister of labour and social policy.

September 15: SPO filed its second indictment against 14 persons accused of violence outside the municipal building in Centar. For the first time, an indictment filed by SPO included criminal charges against Nikola Gruevski.

September 27: The World Bank Office in Macedonia presented its regular semi-annual economic report wherein it warned that the state's pension system is about to collapse due to new employments pursued under government measures. The report indicated that as high as 89 percent of newly created jobs had been coupled with fiscal stimulations, including exemption of employers from payment of social contributions and similar charges for newly created jobs, which resulted in the need for PDIF's deficit to be compensated with budget funds.

October 18: SPO entered premises of UBK under two court orders and stayed there for 48 hours. It confiscated documents related to court orders for special investigation measures for interception of communications, record logs and portion of computer data extracted from the interception system for the period 2008 - 2015. A foreign expert also visited UBK to collect remaining computer data and logs. Before these events, SPO investigator was arrested for having photographed Sasho Mijalkov's real estate building.

October 28: Dime Spasov, former minister of labour and social policy and currently acting as deputy minister in the caretaker government, caused two traffic accidents driving an official vehicle and fled the police. His cabinet issued a statement that media reports aim to tarnish his image and rating.

November 9: For the first time, the European Commission's Country Report for Macedonia features the term "captured institutions", under the section on judiciary, regulatory bodies and the media.

November 16: In its judgment, the European Court of Human Rights found that, by failing to register the Ohrid Archbishopric headed by Zoran Vranishkovski, the government had violated the right to freedom of association and freedom of thought, conscience and faith, which it is obliged to respect in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

November 28: Start of the first hearing in court process "Fortress 2", where the Special Prosecution Office accused seven persons from the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence of having committed criminal offence defined as falsifying official documents and destruction of official records related to the illegal interception of communications.

December 11: Early parliamentary elections are held. VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition won two MP seats more than SDSM. Both political parties declared election victory. SDSM leader Zoran Zaev said that citizens had tumbled the regime of Nikola Gruevski with pen and the programme promoted by SDSM and its coalition "For Life in Macedonia" had won at the elections. Nikola Gruevski declared VMRO-DPMNE's victory on the elections, indicating that SDSM had benefited from significant voter support among the Albanian electorate.

December 16: VMRO-DPMNE members and party officials organized protests outside the building where the State Election Commission was in session to decide upon complaints lodged by political parties. The entire street outside SEC's offices was blocked and speeches were delivered in heated atmosphere. Standing outside SEC, Nikola Gruevski announced his party would not participate in repeated balloting and would not recognize such results. He continued to say that foreign ambassadors had meddled in internal matters of the state. In his speech, Gruevski announced start of the de-sorosoziation process.

December 16: Start of the first hearing in court process upon SPO's indictment which accused Nikola Gruevski of having instigated the 2013 events outside the municipal building in Centar. Initially, the court rejected admission of SPO evidence related to violence in the Municipality of Centar, including the "bombs".

December 19: PRO inspectors launched financial controls at two dozen civil society organizations. Later it was revealed that controls had been requested by SCPC.

December 25: Repeated balloting takes place at several polling stations in Gostivar and Tearce, after the Administrative Court approved complaints submitted by SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE. The vote tally from this round of balloting, however, did not change the breakdown of MP mandates.

## 2017: BLOODY THURSDAY AND THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

January 7: In Tirana, leaders of DUI, coalition Rebirth with BESA and the Alliance for Albanians, signed the joint platform with seven points, wherein they express respect for the will of citizens of Macedonia demonstrated at the parliamentary elections from December 11, 2016. This meeting was organized by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. The seven points of the platform included: attainment of full equality in compliance with the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the Constitution; attainment of economic equality and equity in social welfare, especially through equitable regional development; strengthening the rule of law as precondition for progress in Euro-Atlantic integrations; creation of the spirit of trust for good relations with neighbours and fast integration in NATO and the European Union. VMRO-DPMNE used this document to create a public narrative that it anticipates federalization and change of the state name. Vocabulary used by VMRO-DPMNE evolved from "platform", "new platform", "national platform", "platform of the Albanians", to "all-Albanian platform", "platform from Tirana" and "T(y)rana platform"... The last time Gruevski used this term was on May 31, just minutes before approval of the new government led by Zoran Zaev.

58

January 9: President Gjorge Ivanov awarded Nikola Gruevski with the mandate to form government.

January 17: Formation the association "Stop Operation Soros" and announcement of its contribution to de-sorosozation. In the period that followed, the association held press-conferences and made media appearances in attempt to generate negative perception in the public about civil society organizations supported by the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia.

January 29: Nikola Gruevski failed to form government within the constitutional deadline of 20 days. This was followed by a period in which President Ivanov refused to award Zoran Zaev with the mandate to form government.

February 23: SDSM and DUI negotiations resulted in agreement for formation of the new government coalition.

February 26: In his appearance on TV Sitel, Nikola Gruevski said unitary character of the state had been attacked and citizens are delusional if they believe the state could be saved by them staying at home. In 2019, the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption indicated that this interview served as trigger and instigator for the violent storming at the parliament from April 27, and suspected Gruevski of having ordered such violence.

February 27: A protest is organized against change of the state name. It started outside the EU Info Centre and ended in front of the parliament. Protesters requested all and any talks about the state name to be ceased; Law on Use of Languages and the Agreement with Bulgaria to be withdrawn; people detained and sentences for violence in the parliament from April 27 to be released. MOC bishops Agatangel and Petar fronted the protest and delivered speeches outside the parliament. Several protesters burned the Greek national flag. Henceforth, protests were organized every day under the name "For Joint Macedonia". Two dozen patriotic associations were formed and announced action to prevent any attempts to "destroy the state".

March 1: SDSM leader Zoran Zaev deposited 67 signatures from MPs to President Gjorge Ivanov in order to be granted the mandate for formation of government among SDSM, DUI, the Alliance for Albanians and BESA.

March 19: During his visit to Macedonia, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Hoyt Brian Yee encouraged leaders in the country to comply with the Przhino Agreement and implement necessary reforms.

April 23: A successful referendum is organized in the Municipality of Gevgelija against the opening of metal and mineral mines.

April 27: Violent storming in the parliament. Several hundred protesters from the association "For Joint Macedonia" stormed the legislative house to prevent selection of Talat Dzaferi as parliament speaker. His selection was immediately acknowledged by the United States, European Union and the international community. MPs Zijadin Sela, Radmila Shekerinska and others were seriously injured amidst these events. Two days later, the police apprehended several participants in the parliament's storming, including employees from the police and the army, as well as former prisoners convicted of serious criminal offences. The storming happened at 7:00 p.m. when parliament security allowed masked people to enter the building and they stormed the press centre. The

police responded three hours later. Previously, in a series of plenary addresses, replies, counter replies and procedural motions, MPs from VMRO-DPMNE blocked selection of the parliamentary committee on elections and appointments, which should propose the new parliament speaker. MPs were evacuated from the building in armoured vehicles late in the night, while the police used shock bombs to disperse groups of demonstrators. At an urgent press-conference held the same night, foreign ambassadors expressed concerns about these developments and called the police to ensure protection and safety of all people affected. Around 17 citizens, 12 policemen and several MPs sought medical assistance in hospitals across Skopje. This day was called Bloody Thursday.

May 3: The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services found that MRT had failed to properly and timely inform the public about events in the parliament.

May 9: The Public Prosecution Office filed an indictment against nine people who had participated in the parliament's storming. All defendants admitted guilt before the court for having committed the criminal offence defined as participation in crowd that would prevent officials from performance of duties and were issued probation sentences. The Court of Appeals had their probation sentences changed into imprisonment.

May 12: The Supreme Court terminated detention for suspect Sead Kochan, businessman and owner of Transmet, who left the country after his release from detention. Acting upon petition from civil society organizations, the Council for Establishment of Facts filed motions for establishment of responsibility with judges that allowed Kochan to flee the country.

May 17: President Ivanov awarded SDSM leader Zoran Zaev with the mandate to form government.

May 26: Serbian Ambassador to Skopje Dushanka Divjak-Tomikj was called by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explain presence of her advisor Goran Zhivaljevikj in the parliament on April 27.

May 31: The new government led by Zoran Zaev was approved several minutes before midnight, hence ending the two-year political crisis.

June 1: At the first plenary session after election of the new government, the parliament adopted legislative changes to revoke external assessment.

June 9: At a press-conference, VMRO-DPMNE members announced start of activities for democratization and modernization of this political party. They demanded internal reforms, earning the moniker "reformators".

June 11: A successful referendum is held in the Municipality of Bogdanci against continued work on construction of Kazandol mine.

June 13: Daily newspaper *Dnevnik* went out of print. By the end of April, after almost two decades, printing was stopped for newspapers *Utrinski vesnik* and *Vest*. The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers motioned criminal charges before the Public Prosecution Office for abuse of office and duties, indicating that former owners Srgjan Kerim and Jana Stanisavljeva had purposefully deflated assets of this legal entity by means of legal actions, in order to stop newspaper print. Previously, journalists went on strike due to unsettled payment of salaries.

June 17: Ministry of Education closed the dispersed studies at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius", and reduced the number of those hosted by other universities.

June 24: The new Minister of Culture Robert Alagjovzovski announced in public that working groups formed at this ministry will audit the project "Skopje 2014".

June 26: Goran Grujevski, former commander of UBK fifth division, and Nikola Boshkovski, employee at UBK, fled the country before they were supposed to be arraigned by the police upon decision by the Supreme Court. In October, they were arrested in Greece and applied for asylum.

June 29: SPO presented the Criminal Court with 17 indictments against 94 natural persons and 7 legal entities for a series of criminal offences revealed in wiretapped conversations. Together with these indictments, SPO motioned for detention orders targeting several former officials from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE, including party leader Nikola Gruevski. Hence, the total number of indictments filed by SPO reached 20.

July 2 to 4: UN Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz visited Macedonia.

July 4: Adoption of the government's plan 3-6-9, as first document for implementation of the urgent reform priorities.

July 15: As former Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski requests additional 20 bodyguards under auspices that he is receiving death threats. UBK assessed his situation and did not establish such risks, followed by rejection of his request.

July 23: A successful referendum is organized in the Municipality of Dorjan against opening of mines on its territory.

August 1: Prime Ministers of Macedonia and Bulgaria, Zoran Zaev and Boyko Borisov, signed the Agreement for Good Neighbourly Relations. It was ratified in both parliaments. Among others, the agreement includes provision for formation of joint multidisciplinary expert commission on historical and educational issues, which should provide scholar interpretation of historical events through authentic historical sources.

August 17: Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski is dismissed by the parliament. His dismissal was motioned by the government on the grounds of unlawful, unprofessional and untimely performance of public office.

August 20: Serbia revoked all staff members from the Embassy in Skopje due to intelligence acts against its interests.

62

September 3: A failed local referendum is organized in the Municipality of Bosilovo, at which citizens were asked to vote "for" or "against" opening of Ilovica mining complex (cooper and gold) and whether they generally approve or oppose mineral mines to be opened in the municipality. A second failed referendum with the same question was organized on September 17.

September 15: The senior experts group engaged by the European Commission and led by Reinhard Priebe published its second report. This report was structured in four chapters, those being: judiciary, law enforcement and prosecution, independent bodies and media, and civil society. It follows-up on findings from the first report published in June 2015 amidst the political crisis. Vast portion of recommendations from the first report had remained non-implemented.

September 24: The new government revealed that, in the period 2008 - 2015, VMRO-DPMNE's government had spent 38 million euros of budget funds on advertising campaigns. Vast portion of campaign funds, including "Third Child", "Explore Macedonia" or "Against Abortion", had been disbursed to bank accounts of television outlets with national concession and pro-government editorial policy. Relevant data had not been available for a period of three years.

October 5: The police raided home and office of Vladimir Panchevski, former president of the criminal court, upon orders from SPO and related to its pre-investigation on disclosure of data about third persons in the public and to interested parties, official logs from ACCMIS concerning SPO cases, and orchestration of court processes. Panchevski motioned criminal charges against special prosecutors, but the Public Prosecution Office rejected them.

October 15: Local elections are held. SDSM wins vast majority of mayor offices (57) and municipal councillors, while VMRO-DPMNE lost 51 and won only 5 mayor offices. DUI lost 4 mayor offices compared to previous elections, having won total of 10 mayor offices. After the polling stations were closed, VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski held a press-conference and accused the government of election irregularities and of having defiled democracy and the state. He declared that his party would not recognize the electoral outcome, demanding early parliamentary elections.

October 17: MP from GROM Chedomir Sazdovski left his political party which participated in VMRO-DPMNE's coalition and declared he would continue to serve as independent MP. In December, MP Amdi Barjam followed suit.

October 18: VMRO-DPMNE declared OSCE/ODIHR Election Monitoring Report as non-objective and failing to reflect the actual situation in terms of the election process.

November 2: Seven from 37 defendants in the court process "Divo Naselje" are issued sentences to life imprisonment by the Skopje Criminal Court. Thirteen defendants are sentenced to 4-year imprisonment, six are sentenced to 20-year imprisonment... Sixteen defendants were banned from the territory of the state. The Skopje Court of Appeals confirmed their verdicts.

November 8: The first court verdict is pronounced in cases led by SPO. In his absence, Goran Grujevski, former commander of Mol's fifth division, was sentenced to imprisonment in duration of one year and six months in the court process "Fortress 2" for having destroyed official documents and records related to the interception scandal, while six administrative officers from UBK were issued probation sentences. The Court of Appeals revoked the verdict for Grujevski and returned the case for repeated trial, but confirmed probation verdicts for administrative officers.

November 28: Thirty six people are arrested for the events from Bloody Thursday, including former BPS Chief Mitko Chavkov who managed the crisis headquarters on April

27. Other persons arrested include six MPs from VMRO-DPMNE, policemen, leaders of the protests "For Joint Macedonia" and leaders of patriotic associations. They were accused of having threatened the constitutional order and security. VMRO-DPMNE organized protests outside the court and the detention prison demanding MPs to be released. In 2019, sixteen of them were convicted by the Criminal Court to imprisonment in total duration of 211 years.

December 1: In interview published on the portal *Kurir*, Nikola Gruevski announced resignation as leader of the opposition party. Also, he indicated that his resignation is not conditioned by the electoral outcome.

December 11: SEC President and seven members resigned from office under public pressure after U.S. Ambassador Jess Baily revealed that, at closed session, they awarded themselves high amounts of remuneration for the last several election cycles.

December 12: VMRO-DPMNE announced they would not participate in work of the parliament and its bodies due to detention of MPs Krsto Mukoski, Ljuben Arnaudov and Sasho Vasilevski, all of whom were held at the Skopje Prison, as well as MPs Johan Tarchulovski, Zhaklina Peshevska and Ljupco Dimovski, who were ordered home detention. They were issued security measures by the court after the parliament had stripped their immunity, on request from the court.

December 23: At VMRO-DPMNE 16<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Congress, incumbent general secretary Hristijan Mickoski was selected as the new party leader.

## 2018: PRESPA AGREEMENT IS SIGNED, REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

January 11: MPs adopted the Law on Use of Languages. The opposition claimed the law is unconstitutional, while the government elaborated that its adoption promotes the use of languages spoken by ethnic communities in Macedonia. A week later, President Gjorge Ivanov announced he would not sign the proclamation act. VMRO-DPMNE's parliamentary group used Ivanov's move as occasion to submit more than 30,000 amendments to the law. The opposition demanded plenary session to discuss law amendments, but the parliament speaker denied their motion.



Court trial  
for "Bloody  
Thursday"



January 17: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg delivered an address in the parliament. This event was attended by MPs from opposition VMRO-DPMNE, which announced their return to the parliament only for this occasion.

January 24: Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras met Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev in Davos, Switzerland, to discuss the name dispute. Zaev announced that names of the airport and the motorway will be changed.

January 30: On proposal from the Ministry of Culture, the parliament revoked the Law on National Artist with the justification that it creates uneven treatment of artists.

February 6: Prime Minister Zoran Zaev announced that the motorway connecting Macedonia to the south border will be renamed "Friendship", while the Skopje Airport will bear the name Skopje International Airport. The government took decision to confirm this as a step in building friendship and trust with Greece.

February 21: The monument of Andon Janev Lazev – Kjoseto was removed from its location outside the Supreme Court in Skopje. A working group at the Ministry of Culture had established numerous legal violations in the procedure for its placement. A tree was planted in its place.

March 1: At joint meeting with representatives from CSOs, MoI, Financial Police and Administration for Financial Intelligence announced closure of "de-sorosozation" and admitted these organizations had been suspected of unlawful operation without reasonable grounds.

March 14: In tense atmosphere, MPs adopted the Law on Use of Languages. MPs from VMRO-DPMNE attempted to block discussion and vote. The parliament security prevented physical incident between Parliament Speaker Talat Dzaferi and MP Nikola Gruevski.

March 26: Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted decision to expel a Russian diplomat, in solidarity with the United Kingdom and the country's partners in NATO and the EU, which also expelled Russian diplomats after Sergei Skripal, a former Russian agent, was poisoned in Salisbury, England, for which London had accused Russia.

April 1: VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski announced that the political party will return to the parliament upon decision of the central committee, and will motion for vote of confidence against the government, which did not pass in the parliament.

April 11: Freedom House's Report "Nations in Transit" noted that democracy and democratic governance ratings have improved for the first time after 2010, i.e. after seven consecutive reports that noted backslide trends in democracy.

April 12: The government and opposition jointly approved number of so-called reform laws: Law on Establishment of Operational Technical Agency, Law on Interception of Communications, and Law on Protected Witnesses, which was requested by SPO.

April 18: EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn presented Prime Minister Zoran Zaev with the European Commission's Progress Report for Macedonia and underlined the state has deserved the unconditional recommendation.

May 22: Former Deputy Minister of Interior Gjoko Popovski is found guilty of having abused public office in the court process "Three Hundred" related to procurement of police vehicles and led by SPO. The Court of Appeals revoked his verdict and returned the case for repeated trial.

May 23: Former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski is convicted to 2-year imprisonment for having received reward in return for illegal influence in the case "Armoured Car" concerning procurement of luxury Mercedes. Other people convicted include former Deputy Minister of Interior Gjoko Popovski and former Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska, who was tried in separated procedure. On October 5, the Skopje Court of Appeals confirmed Gruevski's verdict.

June 12: At a press-conference and in the presence of all ministers, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev announced the solution to the decades-long name dispute with Greece. Zaev announced that the state's new name will be Republic of North Macedonia for external and internal use, and that the agreement anticipates confirmation of the Macedonian language with the United Nations and its enlistment as Macedonian without footnotes, while nationality/citizenship will be enlisted as Macedonian/citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia.

June 17: In village Psarades, Greece, on the Prespa Lake, Macedonian and Greek Chiefs of Diplomacy Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias signed the Prespa Agreement, together with the UN Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz and representatives from the European Union. This document replaced the Interim Accord signed in New York, on September 13, 1995. Small group of citizens protested outside the parliament before and after the agreement was signed, and the police had to intervene.

June 26: President Gjorge Ivanov did not sign the proclamation act for the Law on Ratification of the Agreement with Greece.

June 27: EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted decision to open accession negotiations with Macedonia in June 2019. The invitation to membership was conditioned with: implementation of the Agreement with Greece, urgent reform priorities, positive report from the European Commission and decision by EU Council. France and the Netherlands were among the most sceptical members to start negotiations, indicating that the Prespa Agreement is not sufficient for progress in EU integrations.

June 30: VMRO-DPMNE presented documents claiming that the government plans to build a camp for foreigners near Bardovci. Mol and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy issued express denial of such plans.

July 2: First meeting of the joint multidisciplinary commission for historical and educational issues between Macedonia and Bulgaria is held in Sofia, pursuant to the Agreement for Good Neighbourly Relations.

July 12: Macedonia is invited to start accession negotiations for NATO membership. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg presented Prime Minister Zoran Zaev with the invitation and congratulated his political courage.

July 20: The Skopje Criminal Court convicted businessman Sead Kochan and Vasilie Avirovikj in SPO-led case "Trust". Legal entities Transmet and Sileks nemetali were confiscated assets in the value of 17.5 million euros. The Court of Appeals confirmed the first instance verdict. Kochan was sentenced to 4.5 years imprisonment, while Avirovikj was issued probation sentence.

---

June 17: In village Psarades, Greece, on the Prespa Lake, Macedonian and Greek Chiefs of Diplomacy Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias signed the Prespa Agreement, together with the UN Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz and representatives from the European Union.

---

August 30: A counter is placed on the Macedonia Arch. In the period leading to early parliamentary election (December 2016), at party rallies Zoran Zaev promised that money stolen from the people would be returned to the state and would be registered on a counter assembled on the Macedonia Arch in Skopje.

September 4: The media reported on wires from the U.S. Embassy in Skopje disclosed by *WikiLeaks* wherein it is written that authorities in Macedonia have agreed to change of the state name as "Republic of North Macedonia" back in 2008, conditioned with recognition of the Macedonian language and nationality.

September 8: German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived to Skopje to give recognition to Prime Ministers of Macedonia and Greece, Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras, for their courage to achieve agreement and solve the decades-long name dispute, allowing Macedonia to join NATO. This was followed by diplomatic offensive from international representatives to support the agreement in the wake of the upcoming referendum. They included: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Wes Mitchel and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurtz.

September 15: SPO published a special report on three judges: Jovo Vangelovski, Svetlana Kostova and Sofija Lalichikj, and judicial council member Alexandra Zafirovska, wherein it is stated that, according to the "bombs", they had allowed direct influence of politics in specific court cases. In 2017, SPO requested dismissal of judges residing in their cases due to unprofessional and unconscious performance of their office.

September 20: Judge Vladimir Panchevski is interviewed at the Skopje Prosecution Office and is suspected of abusing the electronic system on court case assignment, ACCMIS, during his tenure as president of the Skopje Criminal Court. The Prosecution Office filed an indictment against him.

September 30: A referendum is held around the Agreement with Greece with the question: "Are you in favour of European Union and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?" VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski played game of tactics in presenting his opinion about the referendum question, but ultimately called the population to vote according to their conviction. A total of 666,743 citizens turned out on the referendum, of which 609,813 voted "for".

October 8: The proposal with four constitutional amendments was adopted by the government and was presented in the parliament. In particular, the proposal anticipated: addition of the adjective “North” in the name of the Republic of Macedonia throughout the entire text of the Constitution; changes to the preamble, whereby statehood traditions would underline ASNOM and all decisions would be enlisted individually; guarantees for inviolability of the country’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; and care for the diaspora and Macedonians living abroad.

October 8: The Skopje Criminal Court convicted former Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska to 6-year imprisonment in the case “Armoured Car” related to procurement of extra luxury Mercedes. The Court of Appeals confirmed her verdict, but reduced the imprisonment to 4.5 years. Later, the Supreme Court approved her stay of execution upon motion for extraordinary re-examination of the court’s verdict.

October 15: Speaking in the parliament, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev called for reconciliation between the government and opposition around events from April 27. “[Dear] colleagues from the right- and left-side isles [in parliament], let us extend a hand one to another. I am sending message of forgiveness for April 27. I know there would be a political price to be paid for this act”, said Zaev.

70

October 19: Under individual vote in the parliament, 80 MPs approved opening of the procedure on constitutional amendments pursuant to the Prespa Agreement, including MPs from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE. During the vote, MPs from VMRO-DPMNE and the party’s former leader Nikola Gruevski stood on the side. Previously, the court reverted house detention for several MPs, after which they attended the vote in parliament. At urgent meeting, VMRO-DPMNE executive committee expelled all seven MPs that voted “for”. Due to threats, these MPs were approved police protection, with protests organized outside their homes.

October 22: VMRO-DPMNE central committee decided to cleanse the political party from so-called “mijalkovists” and “reformators”. Former party officials Sasho Mijalkov and Nikola Todorov were expelled. Other expelled party members included Mitko Janchev, who served as vice president of the party, and Kostadin Bogdanov, who served as executive committee member. Reformer Petar Bogojeski was also dismissed from the office of deputy secretary general and was later fully expelled from party membership.

Nikola Gruevski arrives  
to court trial for  
“Armoured Car”



October 22: MP from GROM Pancho Minov announced his departure from the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE as long as Hristijan Mickoski is leader of VMRO-DPMNE, indicating that reasons thereof concern “undemocratic manner to replace members of different-mind”.

October 29: A new eight-member parliamentary group started to function at the parliament under the name “Independent Parliamentary Group of VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition for Better Macedonia”. This group is comprised of MPs expelled from VMRO-DPMNE. Some of their proposals were integrated in the further course of the procedure on constitutional amendments.

November 13: Former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski announced on Facebook that he is in Budapest and has applied for political asylum with the authorities in Hungary. The next day, the Macedonian police issued international warrant and requested his extradition. Later, on November 20, Gruevski announced that Hungary had positively responded to his asylum application. After his fleeing the country, SPO requested his detention in all cases it leads. Extradition was requested also by the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption for the events from April 27.

November 9: SPO opened investigation codenamed “Empire” which concerns money laundering, abuse of office and favouring trustees. Thirteen people were suspected, including Sasho Mijalkov and businessman Jordan Kamchev... They were arrested, but later, upon positive proposal from SPO, the court released them to house detention.

December 4: Former UBK Chief Vladimir Atanasovski is arrested and taken into custody as part of the prosecution’s investigation into events from April 27 in the parliament. Later, the Public Prosecution Office filed an indictment against him and against Trajko Veljanovski, Spiro Ristovski and Mile Janakieski for having organized the parliament’s storming.

December 5: The government launched open debate on draft amendments to the Constitution pursuant to the Prespa Agreement.

December 18: Law on Amnesty is adopted and covers participants in organized storming in the parliament from April 27, 2017. It exempted from further criminal prosecution 15 defendants, including MPs from VMRO-DPMNE covered by this indictment. Eight MPs from VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition voted to pass this law.

December 28: In a letter addressed to the Parliament Speaker and proposing entities, 16 CSOs demanded urgent withdrawal of the Law on Amending the Criminal Code with the rationale that such changes might lead to lenient sanctions for number of defendants in cases led by SPO or might give rise to statute of limitations, thereby ensuring that perpetrators who had violated the law are not held responsible for their offences. The parliament proceeded with adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code, but did not change the article on abuse of public office and duties in implementation of public procurements.

### **2019: PRESPA AGREEMENT IS RATIFIED BY GREECE**

January 10: Political party BESA conditioned its vote for constitutional amendments in the parliament with two demands: Macedonian citizenship not to be indicated in case of Albanian citizens and the wording Macedonian diaspora to be replaced only with diaspora.

January 11: Under vote count of 81 “for” and no abstained or “against” votes, the parliament adopted changes to the Constitution. The parliamentary session was boycotted by MPs from VMRO-DPMNE. It was stipulated that constitutional amendments will enter in effect when the Final Agreement for Resolution of the Name Differences between Macedonia and Greece enters into force. The constitutional law regulates citizenship as “Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia”. Words “Republic of Macedonia” are replaced with “Republic of North Macedonia”, and the word “Macedonia” is replaced with “North Macedonia”, except in Article 36.

January 14: Parliament Speaker Talat Dzaferi announced he had signed the Law on Use of Languages and that this law is published in the “Official Gazette”.

January 15: The Greek parliament ratified the Prespa Agreement with North Macedonia with 153 votes “for” from total of 300 MPs. In February, the Protocol on the Accession of North Macedonia to NATO was signed.



Katerina Blazhevskva

A DECADE ERODED  
BY DIVISIONS  
AND PYRRHIC  
REBIRTHS

"Now they see how difficult it is to solve this issue. For two years, I gave my all to find a solution and [the country] to join NATO, being careful not to vex the Greeks (2006-2008). After Bucharest, I realized that whatever we do it would be the same. So I told myself, at least we should do what we want."

This text message was sent by Nikola Gruevski, former Prime Minister and VMRO-DPMNE leader, to close party official in March 2018, amidst the most difficult stage of the Greek - Macedonian negotiations on the name issue. In this private message, Gruevski straightforwardly (“at least we should do what we want”) and post-festum reveals the motives behind all political steps he had made after the NATO Summit in Bucharest until the downfall of his last government.

Was Gruevski really “being careful not to vex the Greeks from 2006 to 2008” like he claims? Events show that arguments are not on his side. In that period, the Skopje Airport was renamed into “Alexander the Great”. Nikola Todorov, who served as Minister of Education (2009-2011) and Minister of Health (2011-2017) in the governments led by Gruevski, refers to this event as the first strategic error of the then-incumbent government.

“VMRO-DPMNE started furiously and inventively, like no other government before. But, in my opinion, it made a major strategic error from the very start. In hindsight, with the experience I have today, I believe the major strategic error of the government led by VMRO-DPMNE was renaming the Skopje Airport into ‘Alexander the Great’ in late 2006 and early 2007. I think this is where many problems started for both, VMRO-DPMNE and the state, with consequences suffered to present day, by VMRO-DPMNE and by the state. Without any particular reason, this decision seemed ‘to have poked the eye of the Greeks’. It woke ghosts of the past and, instead of gradual and inconspicuous attempts to build trust with Greece, we ‘went for each other’s jugular’. The problem is that we ‘poked the eye’ of the country that is one of the more influential nations in the world, much stronger and richer, integrated, incomparably better positioned in the international arena, a military and security giant compared to our country. Instead of attempting to join the EU and NATO under the temporary reference, we made one, I would say, insufficiently judicious and rushed move, thus opening the Pandora’s Box,

unfortunately, to our own detriment. If we are to analyse reasons thereof, I would say that was a romanticist approach to politics, but also a feeling of being wronged, i.e. great injustice being inflicted to a peaceful nation by negating its existence, and a feeling that somebody wanted us eradicated, annulled or 'stripped' of statehood", elaborates Todorov.

## LETTER FOR A FINAL BATTLE

In the aftermath of the NATO Summit in Bucharest, while international community representatives urged the Republic of Macedonia to dedicate intensive efforts to finding a solution to the name dispute, which implied obstacle for the country's integration in the Alliance, Gruevski opted for different tactics. Ten days after the Summit, the parliament was dissolved and early parliamentary elections were held on June 1, resulting in Gruevski forming a coalition government with DUI on July 26.

After having regained power, the ambitious and bold steps of his government from the previous two years, at least in the field of economy, fell into the shadow of other processes. Far away from the public eye, party membership was intensively updated on party computers, followed by even more intensive transition of party members from the party headquarters to payroll lists at state institutions. Party membership card, clientelism, obedience, loyalty, but also fear - became the key formula for Gruevski in his effort to unify his constituency and fortify his power. Media criticism of such methods was qualified as judgmental, malicious and non-objective attack on the "rebirth", while the media that continued to critically observe the ruling authorities faced political, but more importantly, economic pressures. Many companies were presented with the list of "unfit media" where the government would not like to see their advertisements aired. Division of the society, which started with a more benign differentiation between "ours" and "yours", quickly evolved into hard-line division between "traitors" and "patriots". In line with the principle "if you are not with me, you are against me", these two divisions did not leave space for anything else. From a 10-year distance, in his interview for TV 21, Deputy Prime Minister of Economy in VMRO-DPMNE's government Vladimir Peshevski would assess that "the point of breaking", i.e. derailment of the

---

Party membership card, clientelism, obedience, loyalty, but also fear - became the key formula for Gruevski in his effort to unify his constituency and fortify his power.

---

government had happened in 2011, after the closure of A1, the first private television in Macedonia, leaving the government without strong corrective mechanism.

Marty party officials, however, are convinced that the derailment started two years earlier, when “the seeds of evil” were first planted. It concerns the letter from the fall of 2009 wherein Gruevski called all party members to join the “final battle” against those of different mind. The letter shocked both the domestic and international public, and Gruevski was asked about it in the show programme “Quest Means Business” aired on *CNN*. After welcoming the Macedonian Prime Minister, host Richard Quest asked him if he would be disappointed if Macedonia does not join the European Union by 2014, to which he obtained affirmative answer. The host also inquired whether Macedonia shares the same values with EU member states – free market, legal state, democracy – to which Gruevski convincingly responded: “Of course we share the same values”.

“Do you?” ironically replied Quest, bringing out the scandalous letter and demanding clarification of messages sent by Gruevski in the letter.

“That is the letter I sent to members of the party. I usually do this once a year. Actually, this is just a kind of mobilization of people to join progressive forces in the country”, Gruevski justified his actions.

77

## **NAMES OF UNFIT PEOPLE THROWN IN THE AQUARIUM!**

In the years that followed there were no other letters written “once a year” by the Prime Minister. But messages from the first letter had already taken roots. Practices on persecution of political and media opponents continued, as well as the process of hard discipline within the party resembling military structure and hierarchy. The fact that Macedonia was assessed by the European Commission as “state capture” only after the political crisis’ culmination in 2015 did not surprise longstanding members of VMRO-DPMNE. They had felt such capture first-hand, much earlier than the state.

“The capture started with the political party, and for some [people], unfortunately, it was self-initiated”, explains Petar Bogojeski, founder and first president of the party’s Youth Alliance in Krushevo, central committee member and holder of other party offices,

the most recent being deputy secretary general, from which he was dismissed in 2018, together with other initiators of party reforms.

"There were frequent talks of kidnapped state in the context of Gruevski's rule in Macedonia. If that is accepted as true or understood as synonym for autocracy in the state, one could only imagine fragments of that same autocracy practiced in the party. Truth is that the state and party were kidnapped, but citizens' destiny was kidnapped as well. I do not want to be vulgar, but I have the impression that some people 'self-initiatively' accepted personal slavery under the rule of Gruevski. Some of them were happy to have the honour of being 'devoted slaves' to the boss. A kidnapped state meant party or personal control over each and every institution. Having in mind that the party was treated as personal property, it was actually a matter of personal, but not party control over institutions. What does kidnapped party mean? In essence, it is the same as kidnapped state. All party bodies and organizations exist to serve the image and work of the party leader. Only those accepting the motto 'you're not here to think, but to execute' are deemed fit to participate. All those with smallest grain of critical thinking or desire to think with their own heads were declared 'unfit'. Their names were circulated in text messages to all 'state offices', in order to receive adequate treatment by the authorities", explains Bogojeski.

78

What the broad public does not know is that first attempts to oppose "gruevism" had started as early as 2010. To illustrate that, Bogojeski refers to VMRO-DPMNE's Bitola Congress, in 2010.

"There were tensions to exert influence in the party. In essence, that was internal resistance to gruevism by some party members, manifested as fight between 'realists' and 'loyalists'. Of course, 'loyalists' emerged victorious, openly advocating for the leader. Why do I say this? I remember a meeting with Macedonian ambassador from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE who, on the second day of congress, at Shirok Sokak in Bitola, addressed me with the words: 'Petar, now you've entered the glass-bowl!' I asked what 'glass-bowl' means. Literally, it was an aquarium in the Prime Minister's office where pieces of papers with names of unfit [party members] are thrown in. Apparently, the bowl was being filled by the minute. At times of special mood entertained by the Prime Minister, he would draw one or more names of unfit members and circulate text messages to

---

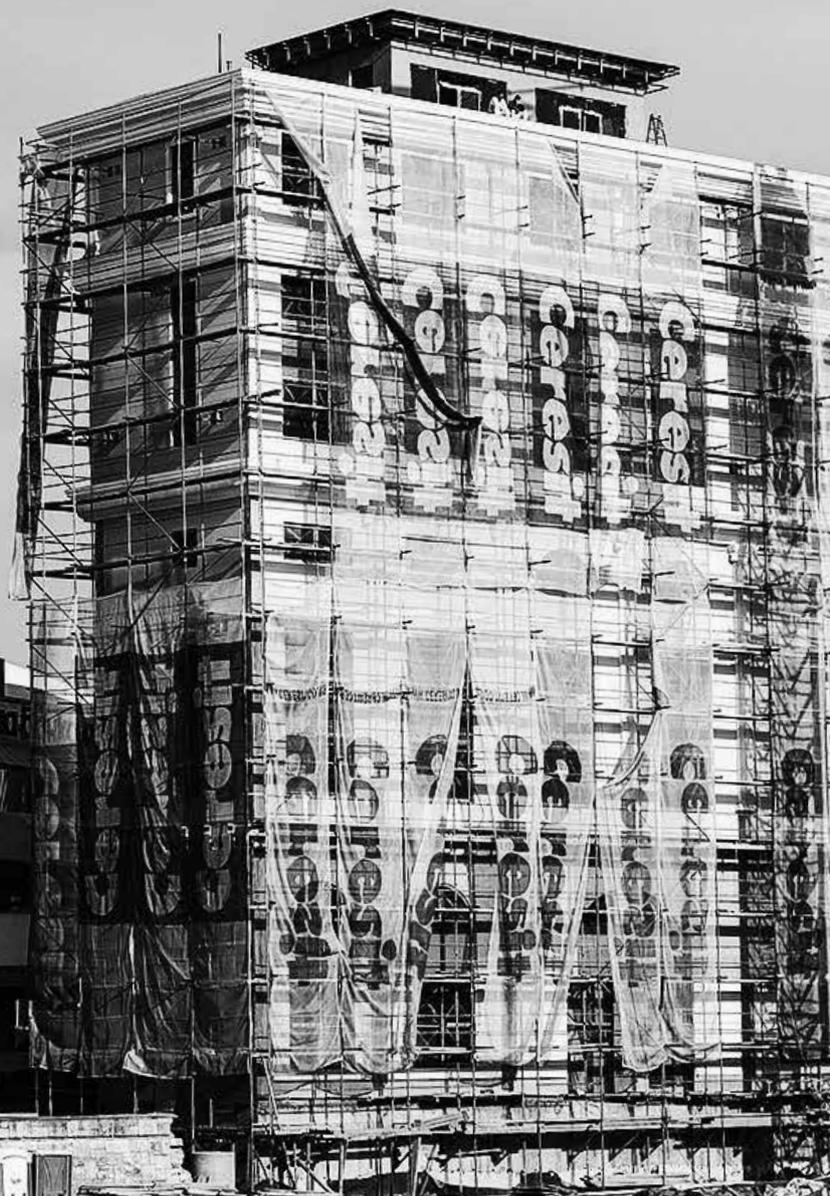
“I asked what ‘glass bowl’ means? Literally, it was the aquarium in the Prime Minister’s office where pieces of papers with names of unfit [party members] are thrown in”, recalls Bogojeski

---

on-duty government ‘torturers’ to take measures against the lucky winners - those the Prime Minister has drawn in his cabinet lottery. This speaks volumes about the democracy practiced. Immediately after the congress, at party debate in small municipality in western Macedonia, a deputy prime minister approached me and indicated: ‘Petar, don’t speak so openly on the phone, everything is recorded!’ I consider these examples sufficient to depict in the public that we all knew everything about the gruevism. But it was difficult to do something at times when the domestic public was literary befuddled by the gruevism, journalists were intoxicated with the Prime Minister’s glory, while the international community was ‘indifferent’. Every one of us knew that many things are not all right. His most loyal conformists called him ‘the man’. We started brief meetings in the parliament or in restaurants across Skopje. Topic discussed - what should be done. Few were interested in staging ‘hurriyet’. Many were ‘awaken’. I recall a meeting when this topic was raised. A friend endured only five minutes of ‘reformatory torture’. Disbelieving what we are discussing, especially that somebody intends to take action against the ‘great master’ Nikola, his hands were sweating, he went speechless. After five minutes, he stood up and left without a word, not even a goodbye. He thought he had attended a meeting with heretics. Terrified, he literally ran away. That was the state of mind among fellow party members”, shares Bogojeski.

## THE HIGH PRICE OF SILENCE

2010 would be remembered as the year when the most controversial megaproject “Skopje 2014” started, which had its first video promotion early that year. Three years after Alexander the Great “landed” on the Skopje Airport’s name plaque, the central area in the capital of Macedonia was turned into great construction site, with several dozen monuments and buildings whose architectural design solutions were intended to give the city a false patina and backdated past in the form of antique, baroque, and neoclassicism. Central figure in the city square named “Warrior on Horse” might have passed as anonymous hero if only the neighbouring square did not feature monuments of other members from this particular family: mother Olympia and father Philip the Second. Lot of marble was carved and lot of bronze was melted, all for the purpose of thinning





and marginalizing the Slavic “mortar” of history, making the antique lineage dominant. The lack of historical basis and memory was compensated with polystyrene and myths. Criticism and protests of opposition SDSM were received with counter criticism.

“Branko Crvenkovski and SDSM do not have credibility to criticize somebody for building because they have not built anything good during their mandate. It is hypocritical for Crvenkovski to request referendum for the project ‘Skopje 2014’, when he opposed the referendum on territorial organization in 2004. Crvenkovski wants to demolish and undermine everything that is good, only because it is not his deed”, read the reaction issued by VMRO-DPMNE.

VMRO-DPMNE members, however, claim that the idea for this project did not come from party ranks, but exclusively from the top leadership. Nikola Todorov says that, to present day, he does not know who is the project’s creator, but accedes they disapproved such endeavour.

“A number of state and party officials disagreed and criticized the mere volume of ‘Skopje 2014’, but none of us had the courage to state that in public and express opposition. This is one of the matters for which we should have been more vocal. As much as it might have seemed that damages to the party at that moment would have been greater if there was public criticism and disagreement, in the middle term, that would have led to fewer problems, and also to positive perceptions about the party and its policies”, says Todorov.

He claims that absence of public criticism had proven to be bad for other projects as well, and as illustration he refers to the criticized Law on Abortion, adopted during his tenure as Minister of Health.

“If my colleagues had opposed me back then and if they criticized me in public, thereby criticizing the legal solution I proposed and defended; if they had pressured me into withdrawing from that idea, I would probably not have made the mistake for which I later felt responsibility and the need to make public apology. On the other hand, fact is that it is dishonest to assess any person or any party solely on the basis of something that is not good or you disagree with, especially when large number of projects were implemented and results were achieved that could not have been imagined previously, like the serious decrease of unemployment, the opening of new factories, the building of new hospitals, the enormous amount of subsidies in agriculture, or the intensified

investments in infrastructure, water supply and sewage systems, education and sport facilities, roads, airports...", emphasizes Todorov.

### THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT IN PARTY SYNERGY

These arguments were indicated by the government as well. The emphasis on: "We are building", "Macedonia is transformed into great construction site", "The construction industry is booming", was visible on the ground. In parallel, efforts were made to build and upgrade "patriotism" with various government-sponsored campaigns, including those that promote optimism, respect for good values, hoisting of state flags to the army orchestra sounds every second Saturday in the month with rotating locations: the Parliament, the Government, and the President's Residence. The so-called "rebirth" was pursued in parallel with the process of clear differentiation between citizens who passed the party's complete systematic check-up, on one side, and all others who, on different grounds, do not fit the image of patriots and renaissance men to the linking of VMRO-DPMNE, on the other side. That was also the period of mass ribbon-cutting ceremonies to launch all and anything: water fountains, sidewalks, tennis courts, etc., sometimes including two official openings for one and the same facility. It was never revealed how many kilometres of ribbon were used during Gruevski's decade-long governance, although the calculation formula is rather straightforward: X multiplied by 2 meters (X denominates the number of people cutting ribbon to open facilities). According to informal assessments, the length of ribbon used was sufficient to cover the distance from Skopje to Brussels, as the EU capital, where the state was running in the spot as the candidate country since 2005.

82

After the early parliamentary election on June 5, 2011, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI secured another government mandate, in the course of which the ruling authorities further strengthened their arrogance, media pressures and efforts to undermine the opponents. The parliament operated as vote machine for adoption of laws in fast-tracked procedure without consultations, but with gross ignorance of the opposition's arguments. This practice culminated on December 24, 2012.

"The man with a red tie and raised hand is the Macedonian Minister of Finance". This was the photo caption featured on *CNN* to explain its readers that a member of the executive government issued commands in the legislative house on the day known as "Black Monday". It was the day when parliamentary debate for adoption of the 2013

---

“The man with a red tie and raised hand is the Macedonian Minister of Finance”. This was the photo caption featured on CNN to explain its readers that a member of the executive government issued commands in the legislative house on the day known as “Black Monday”.

---

state budget ended with forceful eviction of journalists and opposition MPs. Stavreski gestured and ordered parliament security to remove opposition MPs who objected the budget's adoption. The image of violence from the Macedonian parliament travelled the world and was aired by many TV networks, including *CNN*, which up to that point in time had broadcasted the most expensive advertisements for Macedonia to promote its landscapes and tourist destinations, but also advertise the country as place of legal security and foreign investment paradise. A political crisis followed and was resolved with mediation by the EU, ending with the March Agreement which included return of MPs in the parliament, establishment of inquiry committee to clarify events from December 24, electoral reforms, preparations for local elections, efforts to ensure inter-party dialogue and efforts to guarantee media freedoms. In August 2013, the inquiry committee developed its final report endorsed by all members from the government and opposition, but in spite of that, Ilija Dimovski - in the capacity of committee member from VMRO-DPMNE - compared the report's significance to roll of “toilet paper”.

Recommendations and commitments for political dialogue, media freedoms and separation of powers - remained just letters on paper. Actual deeds showed the ugly face of the societal reality.

“There is an atmosphere of intimidation aimed at critically-minded journalists and those engaged in investigative journalism. Macedonia, generally speaking, does not have a problem with the laws, but with their implementation”, stated UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Freedom of Expression Frank La Rue in June 2013 after his several-day visit to the country on invitation by the government. He highlighted the several cases of closed media, i.e. TV A1 and newspapers *Vreme*, *Spic*, and *Koha e re*, failure to investigate the traffic accident from March 2013 which resulted in the death of Nikola Mladenov, owner of newspaper *Fokus*, as well as lawsuits against journalists from *Fokus* motioned by Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence Sasho Mijalkov, for quoting statements nonetheless. One month after La Rue's visit, the Public Prosecution Office closed investigation into Mladenov's death and qualified the event as traffic accident. Non-separation of the state and party, but also non-separation among the three branches of government was formally crowned at the press-conference held for that purpose, when the podium was

shared by Skopje District Prosecutor Gordana Geshkovska, Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski, President of the Criminal Court Vladimir Panchevski, investigative judge Dushan Josifov and Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska! The investigation was closed with conclusion that the accident was result of unadjusted speed to road conditions, at 142 km/h.

But the government "was driving" at much faster speed.

## THE PHENOMENON GRUEVSKI

Gruevski welcomed 2014 as the seventh consecutive year in which he enjoyed great popularity and highest approval ratings in Macedonia. Citizens were calling into open radio and television shows with proposals to declare him a saint! His fellow party members described him as active 24/7, person unmatched in work dynamics, openness to meet everyone, his kind and spontaneous demeanour. He was described as person of incredible insightfulness in matters from all spheres of action; person who retains even the smallest details of what his cabinet members announced and person who regularly inquires how far along matters have moved. Sociologists found it serious professional challenge to explain the so-called "phenomenon Gruevski". Some believed his political aura is actually a manifestation of psychological status that dominates the political electorate in Macedonia. Neither particularly charismatic nor especially eloquent, Gruevski became the mirror reflection of his constituents, who believed he intuitively and instinctively knows them and their particular needs. They perceived him as one of their own; person who listens and responds in "their" language; person who visits them in their place of residence, wears similar shoes and steps into mud on their subsidised fields. Even his French-sounding pronunciation of "r" had convinced them he is just as imperfect as they are. Gruevski served as inspiration for newly-composed folk song, featuring chorus lines that illustrate such idolatry and personality cult: "Nikola, Nikola, mother gave him birth/ to lead people into brighter future/ Nikola Gruevski/ God-sent to restore faith in Macedonia". Linguists were convinced that portion of his success is actually due to his everyday speech and vocabulary: simple, unburdened by foreign words and decorated with folk wisdoms, making it understandable to wide masses. Political analysts located the reason thereof in the alternative name for leader-based parties - sultan parties, where the leader's power is unquestioned and the party is ruled by strict hierarchy, blind obedience and fear from falling out from leader's grace, which leads to



avoidance of polemics or public debates with the leader and blind praise of his character and deeds. Consequences of that dominant political culture, authoritarian in all parameters, were of great proportions: majority of citizens, politically and economically fatigued, treated freedom as burden instead of benefit, democracy as something that "complicates matters" and when exercised in excess – "harmful".

"And what is that democracy [you speak of]", Gruevski asked once, juxtaposing this metaphysical notion with what is visible to the eye: new playgrounds, fountains, buildings, roads. He went as far as suspending the state institutions by solving problems that affect citizens on the spot and before cameras during his visits to different municipalities. Telephone in hand, he issued orders for having certain issues solved by particular date, for receiving updates about progress made in construction of roads, sewage systems, social housing, approval of social allowance. The myth about his "firm hand" was shattered to pieces by a telephone conversation leaked in the public and revealing Gruevski's practice, previously unknown, to rely on advice from clairvoyant. The public was scandalized by the interest this declared Demo-Christian politician shows for advice offered by fortune-teller: "People from within want to shatter our strength", "NATO is artificially kept alive and Europe will disintegrate", "God-willing, we will not be accepted in the EU, we have no business [dealing] with them".... Most appalling were revelations that she had advised him of planets entering his area of work, i.e. weeks unfavourable to discuss new investments. The greatest attention-grabber from that séance, however, is the clairvoyant's key assessment that "You are your greatest enemy!"

Nobody ever learned whether Gruevski had paid adequate attention to that assessment. But, having in mind Nikola Todorov's testimony about the governing matrix at VMRO-DPMNE when this party reached its power-height, it seems nobody had the courage to publicly say anything to the leader.

"VMRO-DPMNE introduced a completely new system of governance, promoted for the first time on the Macedonian political scene. If I have to describe the system in several words, I would say it was a model based on development of detailed and appealing program with specific projects and giving account for what has been delivered, on one side, and exerting constant pressure for realization of projects, on the other. In simplified terms, it meant that we promise implementation of certain project, followed by pressure for fast and timely realization, and then we give account for its completion. This was a management approach



applied to political operation, something that no previous government had practiced. In terms of party organization, high level of discipline was instituted and, from the outside, it resembled semi-military structure executing all tasks in disciplined manner. To great extent, that was the case. As much as it might seem unbelievable, I have to emphasize that intra-party debate was always pursued on many issues and often included collision of opinions and views. No minister or director was spared of criticism at meetings held by municipal committees and even by the central committee. I view this as positive. On the other hand, the negative side of such practice was that rarely, and at the time of VMRO-DPMNE's great power, almost never and almost nobody gathered the courage to criticize the party leader. That was perceived, and I see it is still valid today, in worse form, as going against party interests. This, unfortunately, was and is not exclusive to VMRO-DPMNE, as it is present with other parties, probably as result of the level of democratic awareness that we, as a nation, have achieved", assesses Todorov.

### **"DOING BUSINESS" WITH THE IDENTITY'S DEFENCE**

Gruevski was not declared a saint, but he certainly secured himself strong, informal political "beatification" in the domestic arena. In the international arena, the situation was much different. The name dispute with Greece blocked Macedonia's integration processes, and

Gruevski made efforts to leave an impression of being dedicated to settle this dispute. For that purpose, he fostered regular communication with his counterparts from Greece, primarily in epistolary form. He addressed them with letters, but deployed an approach that proved not to lead to the ultimate goal. In July 2008, he wrote to Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, wherein he requested recognition of the Macedonian minority and correction of the injustice inflicted on ethnic Macedonians who had fled Greece as refugees during the Civil War and are unable to reclaim their property and dual citizenship. Karamanlis responded that the letter is far from advancing negotiations or good neighbourly relations.

"The purpose [of the letter] is to interfere in internal affairs of the neighbouring state and defies the essence of negotiations. I am convinced that the future of the Balkan countries lies in the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, not in nationalistic formulas from a bygone era, which must be abandoned once and for all", was written in Karamanlis's response.

Some political parties in Greece assessed Gruevski's letter as "post-electoral ramblings" while others perceived it as "Gruevski's move that burdens the atmosphere and negatively affects the negotiation process". That did not change Gruevski's resolute. He sent a letter featuring same remarks to President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso. In early 2009, attempts to reinvigorate the name talks yielded no results.

"At this moment in time, it is impossible to expect progress, especially due to the increasingly emphasized nationalist politics by the authorities in Skopje", declared Greece's Chief of Diplomacy Dora Bakoyannis.

"Greece is a country with strong ties to nationalism and it should learn from Macedonia how to respect minority rights", replied Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Miloshoski after the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a verbal demarche in reaction to his interview for newspaper *Tages Zeitung*, wherein he advocated the rights of Macedonians in Greece to be respected. Narrowing down the name dispute to "the issue of Aegean Macedonians" and Athens' strong guard diminished all opportunities for any kind of breakthrough. Contacts at the level of Prime Ministers were revived from October 2009 by the end of 2011, when Georgios Papandreou from PASOK came to power in the Greek government. In this period, Gruevski and Papandreou had met eight times, mainly in Brussels, and once in Prespa. In spite of this frequency, meetings ended with declaration

of same entrenched positions, especially after Skopje had planted its territory with Hellenic heritage symbols and when Athens' reactions were played up to ensure cohesion among Macedonian voters. For years, the arguments remained unchanged – defending the name and identity against Greece's "maximalist demands".

After Papandreou left the office of Prime Minister, in November 2011 Gruevski addressed a letter to Prime Minister Lucas Papademos asking Greece to allow Macedonia a date to start negotiations for EU membership and find a solution to the name issue later. In July 2013, he addressed Prime Minister Antonis Samaras with an identical ask and proposal for negotiations to continue under auspices of UN Mediator Matthew Nimetz, but allowing talks to be conducted by several negotiators with relevant mandates and even by the Prime Ministers.

"Honestly I do not see the added value of talks outside the negotiations teams that already exist. A solution would not emerge by appointing more negotiators with 'political mandate'. If both sides had showed the same political will, the same political courage and the same desire to find a solution, the issue would have been settled long time ago. The essence [of this matter], however, is obviously somewhere else. An answer is needed if there is actual commitment to the decades-long process", was the position upheld by the Greek Prime Minister.

89

Similar remarks were made by the domestic public.

"If the Prime Minister is truly determined to settle the issue with Greece, he should immediately start creating an atmosphere in the domestic public that would be conducive to constructive debate. For this debate to start, immediate action is needed to discontinue divisions between patriots and traitors, thus giving a clear signal that [authorities] are willing to find a solution to the name dispute", assessed Denko Maleski, former chief of diplomacy.

But "doing business with the name" for party goals and victories under the veil of defending the identity never stopped. On March 28, 2014, UN Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz marked the two-decade anniversary of "running in the spot". Even he was unaware how many times he had crossed the Atlantic to visit Skopje and Athens, or even how many times he hosted meetings in New York. All in all, after twenty years of mediation efforts in the name dispute the result came to zero.

## THE NAME: A RECIPE FOR ELECTORAL VICTORY

Gruevski, on his end, was unable to count which consecutive victory he had won in the spring of 2014 at the double elections, early parliamentary and regular presidential, at which he “was saving” the name and the state against traitors. Events that followed include the opposition’s negation of election results, waging assessments of electoral fraud and declining to accept MP mandates. SDSM leader Zoran Zaev conditioned the opposition’s return in the parliament with five demands.

“Conditions need to be created to separate the state and party, to adopt media regulations, to update the voter register with great precision, to organize the census and to establish caretaker government. All of this is necessary to create conditions for fair and democratic elections and for citizens to be able to make own decisions, not vote under pressure. We promised not to accept criminal elections and we stand firmly on that position”, declared Zaev in June of that year.

The opposition’s criticism corresponded in full with assessments made by La Rue who, after his visit to Skopje, presented the report on Macedonia before the UN Human Rights Council in June 2014. In this report he highlighted key weaknesses from areas monitored and recommendations to address them.

“State officials and the political leadership in general should refrain from the systematic submission of judicial complaints against investigative journalists and the media. The state should ensure the independence of national courts as a matter of priority. The appointment process for judges and for membership of regulatory bodies should be carefully analysed and revised in the light of similar relevant international practices. The financial and technical autonomy of judicial bodies needs to be fully secured. The independence of journalists’ associations and the right of journalists to affiliate themselves with any association of their choice should be fully protected. The financial and administrative independence of the public broadcaster must also be enhanced. Expenditure on advertising by state institutions, political parties and public enterprises should be fully transparent to the public. Systematic assessments must be carried out to ensure that government subsidies or expenditure on advertising do not favour specific media outlets or generate dependency. The Law on Interception of Communications

should be revised in order to ensure that it conforms to national and international norms protecting the rights to privacy and to freedom of expression. Particular attention must be given to ensuring that the surveillance of private communications only occurs under the most exceptional circumstance and exclusively under supervision of an independent judicial authority”, were just some of the recommendations.

Vast portion of these remarks were later repeated in the Report by the Senior Experts Group led by Reinhard Priebe and engaged by the European Commission to scan key shortcomings in the five most important areas in Macedonia.

By then, the Rise of Leviathan benefited from the fact that, for years and in the name of “stabilocracy”, the EU turned its blind eye to the country’s backsliding in key areas. EC’s reports regularly noted concerns, but veiled in diplomatic gloves and administrative language that became subject of free interpretation, depending on the reader. A decisive assessment of Macedonia as “state capture” was crafted during the political crisis.

“Concerning the political criteria, the country was faced with the most severe political crisis since 2001. Democracy and the rule of law have been constantly challenged, in particular due to the state capture affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society. The country suffers from a divisive political culture and lack of capacity for compromise”, was noted in EC’s Progress Report in November 2016.

According to Nikola Todorov, derogation of institutions that resulted in the assessment on “state capture” is not exclusive to the decade-long governance of VMRO-DPMNE.

“I think the derailment started long ago. That bleak period started with the criminal privatization, continued under the first government led by VMRO-DPMNE, and then with retaliatory and revanchist governance under Branko Crvenkovski’s government from 2002, to finally arrive to the EU’s remark on state capture, and I do not see improvements today. Unfortunately, I have to agree that we are state capture - a state held in servitude to its parties and vanity of its politicians. In my opinion, that is the biggest problem. Undemocratic parties, absence of intra-party democracy, vanities that feed on power, building a personality cult around the leader who is viewed as semi-god, partisanship of institutions, putting institutions in service to party interests, transformation of political parties into employment agencies for their membership, and great dependence of

common citizens from politics and political parties are the crucial problems in our state. They erode the Macedonian society, especially its core values, and constantly weigh on the society as a sinking stone”, elaborates Todorov.

## BEGINNING OF THE END

To land a helping hand in overcoming the growing crisis, the EU Delegation in Skopje appointed Belgian-born expert Peter Vanhoutte to facilitate talks between the government and opposition. The summer dialogue between Gruevski and Zaev did not yield results and in October, during tête-à-tête conversation with Gruevski, Zaev announced to his interlocutor that the opposition would disclose insightful information (the “bombs”) that could shatter the government’s declared political and moral credibility. This announcement made by Zaev, later also shared in TV interview, did not worry or awake the government, but would later hallmark the entire 2015.

While President Gjorge Ivanov was wishing citizens health, success and wellbeing in the new year 2015 and advised them “to rejoice the small things that make up the greatness of life”, the end of 2014 heralded that citizens would no longer be distracted with small things, but would insist on big changes. Protests were organized by high-school students, and soon afterwards disenfranchisement was articulated by other groups in society. Declaring 2015 as the year of investment decisions by at least 25 new companies, continued effort for membership in the EU and NATO, investments in capital infrastructure, investments in healthcare and education reforms, Gruevski welcomed the year that became the beginning of the end of his governance. He threw down the glove first and crossed his Rubicon on January 31, and there was no going back! The Prime Minister who sovereignly controlled and managed the state’s entire institutional apparatus for whole nine years stated in public that he had knocked on Mol’s door and reported “secret blackmail and threat” by SDSM leader, which would later be known as the docket “Coup”. In fact, the so-called “blackmail” was SDSM’s publicly revealed strategy: “Gruevski must listen why SDSM insists on caretaker government to organize the next elections, irrespective of evidence on electoral fraud at our disposal!”

---

While President Gjorge Ivanov was wishing citizens health, success and wellbeing in the new year 2015 and advised them “to rejoice the small things that make up the greatness of life”, the end of 2014 heralded that citizens would no longer be distracted with small things, but would insist on big changes.

---

With criminal charges lodged, Gruevski did not leave Zaev any other choice but to start detonating the “bombs” at press-conferences. Several dozen “bombs” followed the first revelation from February 9, 2015, and further confirmed the point of effervescence in the political crisis and the magnitude of wrongdoings and abuse of the institutions.

From illegally wiretapped conversations of more than 20,000 citizens, the public learned how budget funds were actually spent. The Potemkin’s Village of “responsible and rational operation” crumbled down within 15 minutes, i.e. duration of single conversation between Minister of Finance Zoran Stavreski and Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska.

“It’s unbearable; I’m artificially inflating revenue”, “We owe more money by the minute”, “We’re not normal”, “We’re lunatics”, “I’m not growing money in my backyard”, “When money isn’t there, it isn’t there”, “We spend on chocolate, but don’t have bread”, “Prime Minister has lost touch with reality”....

Stavreski as economist proved to be the biggest critic of Stavreski as minister. Conversations with his colleagues revealed voluntarism in other spheres, ranging from election fraud to indications about kickback payments and various commissions to battle out opponents by destroying their property and even their human lives.

## THE AGENCY OF CHANGE

The alarm sounded from Skopje to Brussels and Washington. Under EU mediation, leaders of the four biggest parliamentary parties were seated on the negotiation table to find a way out from the crisis. Negotiations took place in Brussels, but primarily in Skopje, at the EU Residence in settlement Przhino, Skopje, after which the brokered Skopje Agreement was broadly known under its trivial name - Przhino Agreement. These were long and painstaking talks, resulting in agreement reached on June 2, 2015: organization of early parliamentary elections; the opposition’s return in the parliament; consent from all four parties to appoint a special public prosecutor to open investigation about the wiretapping affair; appointment of caretaker Prime Minister hundred days before the elections and inclusion of opposition-nominated interior and labour ministers in the caretaker government, as well as deputy ministers with veto rights, i.e. “tied signature”, in the ministries of finance, agriculture, and information society and administration.





Gruevski left the office of Prime Minister on January 18, 2016, but on the account of assessments made by the opposition, as well as the United States and the EU, indicating that conditions are still not secured for organization of fair elections on April 24, they were postponed and were held on December 11, 2016.

Elections were not hallmark of the year 2016, but the Colourful Revolution, as powerful outburst of articulated civic activism carrying the narrative of crucial changes and incorporating disenfranchisement of all previous protests. Intellectuals, students, civic activists, pensioners, employed people, unemployed people, party affiliated and non-affiliated citizens, all walked the streets of Skopje under the motto "No justice, no peace" and demanded Gruevski to resign from office. Protests staged by these "colourful [people]" quickly expanded to other towns across the country. This civic revolt painted façades of kidnapped institutions and buildings pertaining to "Skopje 2014", which had drained millions and millions of budget funds. The government responded to these protests by staging counter protests, keeping silent about cases of journalist-owned vehicles burned, and sending party soldiers to publicly label critics of the government as "traitors", spit on them, insult them, and lay down funeral wreaths outside their homes...

Despite government efforts to label the Colourful Revolution as partisan, it became the strongest civic agency for unmasking and tumbling down the skewed governance system with all its distorted values implanted on the state's substance. Its defiance was tested by the head of state Gjorge Ivanov, who proved himself strong apologist of the party that nominated him for the president office. On April 12, 2016, in the name of "reconciling the society" he illegal granted blanket pardons to 56 persons whom he believed are affected by investigations of the newly established Special Prosecution Office. Under pressure from mass protests organized by the "colourful" and criticism from the international community, he later annulled these pardons. This venture, broadly perceived as "coup on the attempt to make the legal state functional", was not Ivanov's original sin.

95

Protest by the Colourful  
Revolution when the  
square was painted red

## GRUEVSKI LEFT, GRUEVISM STAYS

Gruevski's departure from Street Ilindenska no.2 did not reduce tensions in the society. Emil Dimitriev, caretaker Prime Minister appointed from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE, was considered within his party as "guardian of the Prime Minister's chair" in hopes for Gruevski's "grand re-entrance". All that happened at the time when the media in Europe and in the region raised the same question that bothered the public at home: "Gruevski is leaving, what about gruevism?" Bulgarian newspaper *Trud* published an article titled with this question and analysed the pillars on which Gruevski's government remained in power and the legacy he leaves behind.

"Many media outlets kept his back while benefiting from budget funds for advertisements or securing parliament seats for their owners, and additionally furthered the sugar-coated image about infallibility of Gruevski and his team. This perpetuated the old saying about the land of milk and honey", read the article published in *Trud*.

Except for the media, assessed to be the fourth pillar of the government led by "former broker at the Bulgarian Balkan Bank in Skopje", the newspaper also describes other three pillars.

"The first pillar is complete control over the Macedonian judiciary, making it direct subservient to the executive government and courts delivering some kind of 'revolutionary justice' by means of orchestrated court processes. The second pillar is partitioning of the public administration which, in a state marked by unemployment of 30 percent, has become the safe haven for regular income, but also the main pool of voters for the ruling party. Third, the economy's corruptive character, serviced by narrow group of close party activists and donors and marked by distribution of shares and tenders pursuant to the ethnic quota – Albanians in the government get this much, the rest goes to Macedonians, and instituting regular practice of business takeover with active participation of Mol and the secret services", analysed *Trud*.

Events that followed prove that these methods were still broadly practiced. President Ivanov engaged in another unconstitutional blockade of political processes by awarding Gruevski the mandate to form government, although his coalition had not secured parliamentary majority, having won 51 MP seats against 49 seats won by SDSM's coalition. SDSM managed to secure parliamentary majority together with DUI, BESA and the Alliance for Albanians, and on February 27, he presented Ivanov with 67 signatures. Ivanov

started a game of tactics, while VMRO-DPMNE supporters organized protests against the new majority, accusing this coalition of being bound by the “T(y)rana Platform”, which leads to bilingualism and federalization. Outside the parliament building, protests were organized by the movement “For Joint Macedonia”, while inside the building, selection of new parliament speaker was blocked with procedural obstructions for days at an end. All that culminated in “people storming” the parliament on April 27, 2017 - the day when parliamentary majority, in extraordinary conditions, appointed Talat Dzaferi to serve as Parliament Speaker. The investigation later revealed that storming of the parliament building was not spontaneous move on the part of protesters, but planned, prepared and organized act of violence, coming from individuals within the institutions.

Only after these blood-shedding events, which featured physical attacks and injured MPs from the majority, and only after photos of Zoran Zaev's bloodied face and Zijadin Sela's lifeless body circled the word, Ivanov awarded the mandate to form government on May 17, under the caveat that mandate holder Zaev presents him with declaration/guarantee for preservation of the state's unitary character. All this resulted in shaving off six months from the majority's term in office. One hundred seventy one days after the elections, the new government was appointed in office.

## RECIDIVISM AND REFORMS

Processes within VMRO-DPMNE to liberate the party were pursued in parallel to the nation-wide effort for liberation of the state capture.

“It took us four years to form a circle of few people who would gather the courage and raise the voice; to say that we know and disagree [with current situation at the party]; show that we are not all the same”, recalls Petar Bogojeski.

“The public was boiling. Shackles were loosened. Everybody was asking whether there are reasonable people in VMRO-DPMNE. Are all ‘VMRO-ians’ the same? We listened, observed. We were neither blind nor deaf. But, there was a serious problem. As soon as a team of twelve was gathered, half of them got cold feet. The ‘grand master’ had stated he would restore strength and all of us [reformators] would be tried. That is how we moved in vicious circles. Time passed. We had the concept, theses, approach ready, and we finally arrived to the first press-conference of the ‘reformators’. It was necessary. We had to go public. There was no point in being silent. We gathered a group of around fifteen people

for the first press-conference from all party structures – officials, members, activists, less active members... What happened? Some of them 'forgot' that a press-conference is in the works. Two did not found the venue. One was honest enough to send me a text message that he would not come. Only eight from the initial fifteen gathered the courage and that is how the second public phase of 'reforms' at VMRO-DPMNE started. The public is well informed about what happened afterwards. We had defeated Gruevski, but not the gruevism inside. Today, when I talk about this, I still have the same opinion. The challenge remains. The concept is clear: democratic VMRO-DPMNE for democratic Macedonia, European VMRO-DPMNE for European Macedonia", says Bogojeski.

Although at the Congress held on December 23, 2017, VMRO-DPMNE selected the new leader Hristijan Mickoski, throughout the entire 2018, the party leadership did not demonstrate clear departure from the governance matrix of the previous leadership, which diminished hopes the party would be modernized and democratized.

## **NECESSARY DEMOCRATIZATION**

98

Yet again, the question is raised of how much do consequences and recidivism from "state capture" continue to affect perspectives for development and democratization of the Macedonian society, and of political parties.

Nikola Todorov believes this is a matter of communicating vessels. "Democratization of the Macedonian society is directly correlated and dependent from democratization of political parties. On the other hand, democratization of political parties is directly conditioned with abandoning the understanding of elections as game of life and death. If political factors in the country understand electoral defeat as disapproval of policies and politicians by the majority, if they learn to congratulate the winner and accept their defeat with dignity and as message from majority of citizens, they would succeed in making the first important step towards democratization of political parties. Many other steps should follow, but the first is always the most important. To ensure democratization of political parties, it is important to review their statutes, methods for selection of party leaders, their mandates, competences; it is important to limit their power, the control they are entitled to and to build principles that support strong inter-party debate on all issues, including issues and decisions insisted upon by the leader or party leadership. I view

---

In addition to regular use of words “traitors”, “patriots”, “steal” and “lie”, in the aftermath of the Prespa Agreement, for the first time the public discourse features frequent use of words like EU, NATO, good neighbourly relations, cooperation, partnership, synergy and future.

---

stable budget financing for political parties as positive step towards party democratization, as something that I strongly advocated for and discussed with the then-current opposition. This funding method will help parties avoid the entrapment of shady persons and suspicious businessmen who are prepared to offer little, but just enough to sustain the party while in opposition, in order to be repaid much more when the party comes into power. I believe this is a solution for that problem, of course, unless greed of certain individuals takes primacy. The second important thing concerns media freedoms and media landscape, as well as opportunity for all who disagree with certain policy or approach to publicly state their disagreement and criticism without suffering any consequences. And, vice versa. If something is good, it should be recognized and praised, irrespective of the fact whether the media outlet is pro-government or pro-opposition. Also, it is important for the public service broadcaster not to pursue pro-government editorial policy. I know, somebody might say all media should be objective and unbiased. I agree. But fact is that even developed democracies have pro-government and pro-opposition media. That is why I underline the public service broadcaster, which

must not be abused or used as propaganda machine by the ruling party. Third important precondition for democratization of the society is the need for political parties to understand they bear great responsibility for the state, irrespective of the fact whether they are in government or opposition, and that some matters require building of national consensus or national strategy. The principle whereby ‘everything starts from me/us’ does not bring anything good for the state. What is done well and functions should not be destroyed or tarnished out of whims or ‘shame’ to acknowledge the political opponent’s success, but should be the new starting point for attainment of even better results by the next government. And, vice versa. What is not or was not good should be criticized and changed. Good things should be perceived as high-raised bar that should be reached and exceeded, and raised higher, while bad things should serve as lesson learned, not to be repeated!”, elaborates Todorov.

## MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

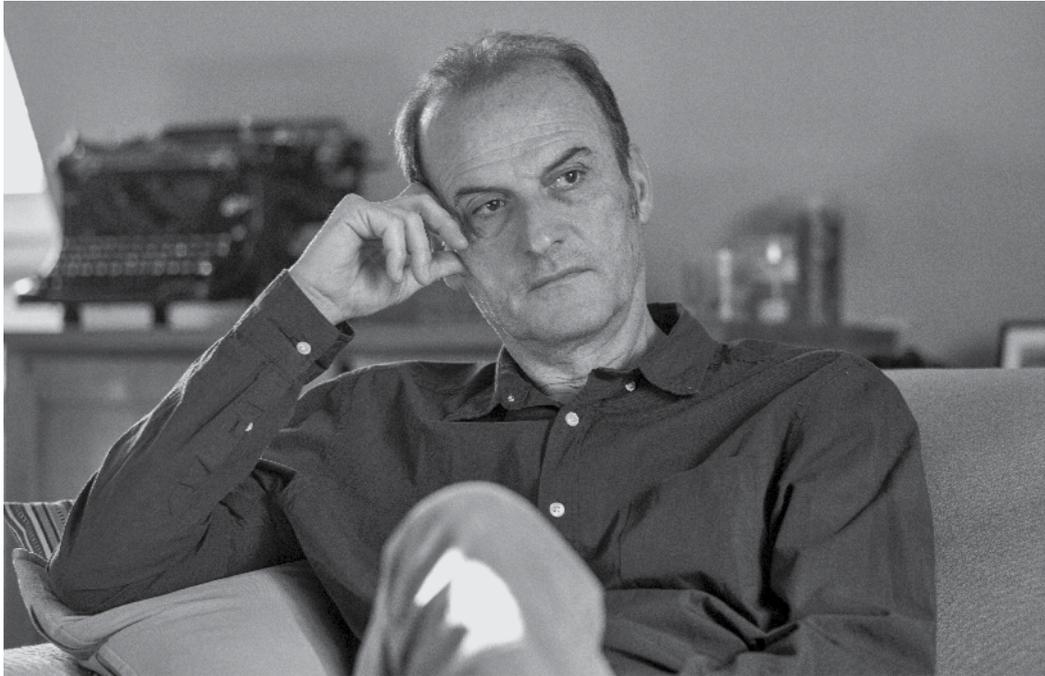
Macedonia exceeded two high-raised bars: on August 1, 2017, Prime Ministers Zaev and Borisov signed the Agreement for Good Neighbourly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation between Macedonia and Bulgaria, which opened new pages in relations between the two countries. Opposition VMRO-DPMNE criticized the agreement and did not attend its ratification in the parliament, indicating that it is harmful to national interests of Macedonia.

An even greater criticism targeted the final agreement on the name dispute settlement signed by Greece and Macedonia on June 17, 2018 in Prespa, after long and painstaking negotiations. Vast number of congratulations to Prime Ministers Zaev and Tsipras for their courage and visionary approach to cementing the new partnership and unblocking the country's integration perspectives under the new name – Republic of North Macedonia, landed on fierce criticism by the opposition. It attempted to overshadow the fact that all these years same proposals had been exchanged on the negotiations table ("North", "Upper", "New") and that some "bombs" revealed that these proposals were also subject of backchannel negotiations through persons outside the official negotiation team.

Settlement of the three-decade-long dispute was depicted as national treason, defeat and sell-out of national identity and language, despite the fact that these are fully guaranteed under the agreement. NATO's invitation for Macedonia to join the Alliance from July 11, 2018 at the Brussels Summit did not soften the opposition's rhetoric.

Ten tempestuous years have passed from "Bucharest" to "Prespa", but the political speech remained the same. In November 2016, academic Viktor Friedman, linguist and Macedonist, held a presentation at the Institute of Macedonian Language "Krste Petkov Misirkov" on his research of vocabulary used in the "bombs". In his lecture titled "Language in the Bombs as Authentic Macedonian Slang, Grammar and Lexis", Friedman stressed that the "bombs" provide vocabulary corps that allows many conclusions about the speech used by contemporary elites in Macedonia. The analysis had shown that wiretapped conversations deployed a fund of around 130,000 words, most frequent among them being "money, arrest, apprehend, stupid and trash". The word "fool" is in strong competition with "idiot" and "moron", but the word "stupid" kept its dominant position.

Three years later, some of above cited words are still massively used in public speech of politicians. However, in addition to regular use of "traitors", "patriots", "steal" and "lie", in the aftermath of the Prespa Agreement, for the first time the public discourse features frequent use of words like "EU", "NATO", "good neighbourly relations", "cooperation", "partnership", "synergy" and "future".



Ljupcho Popovski

FROM BUCHAREST  
TO PRESPA:  
WHEN AMERICA  
RENOUNCED  
GRUEVSKI

1.

At times it seems amazing how some defeats outside the realm of wars, in the dark arena of politics, could change the habitus of one nation. Such defeats do not make the nation collapse; it is not less worthy, and it could not be assessed that its perspectives have suddenly fallen into abyss. But sometimes, they undermine the society, erode it from

different sides, rearrange the priorities, open the path for authoritarian leaders – in simple words, they change the state and it embarks on the road never travelled before.

Failure at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, in April 2008, is one of those moments in time which independent Macedonia remembers the most. Politics is inclined to promote other dates in history, when it was successful (electoral victory, application for EU membership, judgement of the International Court of Justice in The Hague), but citizens, it seems, mostly remember the failure, or more precisely the defeat, maybe because it had caused the greatest trauma. And because Macedonia, after that April 2008, has changed so much that it became defaced. In the first moments after the Bucharest defeat, the public gained an impression of inconceivable power possessed by Greece to oppose the United States' request for Macedonia to join NATO, recalling the consensus clause. Later it was proved that Greece had not been alone in its opposition, but there were several other countries that lacked understanding for Macedonia to be granted membership invitation, whereby there was no formal need for Athens to officially lodge its veto. Actually, NATO leaders did not vote on Macedonia's invitation because Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis was not the only person at the table who needed to be convinced. A week later, it became perfectly clear that then-incumbent government structures in Macedonia, in some way or form, had welcomed the defeat to schedule snap elections. Such course of events illustratively describes Abraham Lincoln's dilemma from the Civil War in America: "My great concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with your failure". Evidently, political leadership in Macedonia at that time included people who had been content with their failure, which allowed them to build strong foundations for uncontrolled governance.

Did that foreign policy strategy have system or was everything done on impulse, to seize the moment and to turn the great defeat on the world stage into an even greater victory at home? Some things that were known back then, and others that we had learned later, suggest the concept of domestic triumph had been designed much earlier, several

months after VMRO-DPMNE came into power in the summer of 2006, with unstable coalition that operated as minority government even before Bucharest. In early 2007, decision was taken to rename the Skopje Airport into "Alexander the Great", marking the start of efforts to erode great success achieved with the United States' recognition of the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name and the status of candidate country for EU membership from 2005, and to present Greek diplomats with an opportunity to design the new strategy for assuring key players from capitals across the world that Macedonia is the one driving the nail on the negotiations process to settle the name dispute. Ghost of the Antique was released from the bottle. Consequences that emerged thereafter with the antiquization process could not be controlled.

And everything could have been different. In March 2011, *WikiLeaks* released documents from early 2008 showing that the situation related to Macedonia's NATO membership and the name solution had actually been favourable and that the momentum had been irreversibly lost. In sublime manner, these documents show that, back then, Macedonia did not have any concept about what it wants to achieve or where it could strike a compromise, and that there was no politician (or several) to volunteer their backs and carry the burden that will capitalize on the future.

104

In January 2008, Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis met then-incumbent U.S. Ambassador in Athens Daniel Speckhard to discuss the Bucharest Summit and Macedonia's admission in NATO. It was known in advance that this summit would be about enlargement and opening NATO perspectives for Ukraine and Georgia. U.S. Administration under George Bush made exceptional efforts to extend membership invitations to Croatia, Albania and Macedonia. The document posted by *WikiLeaks* dates from January 5, and is cable sent by the U.S. Embassy in Athens. It reveals details from conversations between Karamanlis and Speckhard. In hindsight and from post-Prespa perspective, some of those proposals seem wonderfully favourable for Macedonia, but at the time they were unacceptable for the authorities in Skopje.

According to this cable, at the meeting with Speckhard, Karamanlis had said that a mutually acceptable solution, which could include composite name of "New, Upper, North, or whatever Macedonia" for use in international fora and another name for internal use, has to be found before the NATO Summit in Bucharest. Speckhard asked the Greek Prime

Minister whether it would be possible to show actual progress in finding solution to the name dispute before Bucharest, leaving finalization of the agreement for later, during ratification of Macedonia's NATO membership protocol. Karamanlis was not inclined to that proposal from the United States and insisted the name agreement to be reached before the Summit. "Without a solution, Greece cannot approve Skopje's entry in Euro-Atlantic institutions", said the former Prime Minister of Greece.

Both governments were reconsidering the most recent proposal tabled by mediator Matthew Nimetz. According to the cable, Nimetz had proposed a two-name solution (Republic of Macedonia for internal use and composite name for international use – in the United Nations, NATO and other organizations). Karamanlis had a feeling about that moment in real-politics and told Speckhard: "Greece could live with that, but the composite name had to be used in all international fora, including by the United States". Karamanlis explained to Speckhard that the Greek public strongly objects use of the name Macedonia, but that he agrees the name Macedonia to be used in the country's new title, which had resulted in his sunken approval ratings. And that he cannot make further concessions.

Only four months before Bucharest, Greece had been willing to accept a two-name compromise – one for internal, and another for international use. Macedonia was also willing to make a double-formula compromise, but completely different from Greece's reasoning – one name (Republic of Macedonia) for international use, and another, composite name, for Greece. From today's perspective, it seems that a golden chance had been missed with that proposal from Nimetz.

On the same day, *WikiLeaks* published another cable sent by the U.S. Embassy dated August 20, 2007, referring to conversation with then-incumbent Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Petros Molyviatis. U.S. diplomats considered Molyviatis to be Karamanlis' person of confidence, describing him as "partner", unlike his successor Dora Bakoyannis, who was believed to rival the Prime Minister. Molyviatis had said that Athens views an opportunity to settle the name issue before the NATO Summit, but doubted that Skopje and Washington share the same view. He continued by inquiring whether the United States wants to join the fast resolution of the name issue because, in his opinion, "it is possible for Washington, together with Athens, Skopje and UN Mediator Matthew Nimetz,

to work on strategy to solve the issue by the end of the year (2007)". He had said that if the United States does not show interest, the issue could be dragged for years. Molyviatis shared the Greek side's impression that Washington holds the key to the issue and that after the United States recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name, the Greeks believe Skopje enjoys unquestionable support from this global superpower.

However, what seemed a strategic advantage in the summer and fall of 2007, and in early 2008, was lost within several months. The political situation in Macedonia was fragile. After Nikola Gruevski's conflicts with his ministers from DPA and NSDP, and after DUI's boycott of the parliament, VMRO-DPMNE contemplated new, stronger mandate on snap elections. Both success and failure in Bucharest would make excellent excuse for that: NATO admission would be depicted as international confirmation for validity of government policies, while membership blockade would be presented as heroic struggle against the name change, even at the cost of not joining the Alliance.

Before the Bucharest Summit, mediator Matthew Nimetz made last-minute attempts to broker an agreement. In the last days of February, he summoned negotiators Nikola Dimitrov and Adamantios Vassilakis to New York, for a key round of talks before the NATO leadership meeting. The negotiations fell through and solution seemed unattainable. Nimetz warned that no solution to the name dispute could have repercussions on the region's stability in the aftermath of Kosovo's independence. He announced that Greece is clear about Macedonia not having territorial aspirations towards its southern neighbour and that both countries respect each other. Furthermore, he reported that negotiators Vassilakis and Dimitrov had no objections to ethnic identity of the nations in both countries, but that was not enough to overcome the bilateral dispute. In this process, Macedonian negotiator Nikola Dimitrov claimed that Macedonia wants to join NATO, but cannot cut the branch underneath it and play games with its national identity.

"There are no new ideas and, I must admit, there is a gap in positions of the two countries. The two governments have significant differences about the proposal tabled on February 19. It remains to be seen whether these differences could be overcome", stated Nimetz. In the last round of talks before Bucharest, Macedonia insisted on long-term strategy with a double-name formula. Greece demanded composite name that would include the word Macedonia, to be used in all international relations. While negotiations were underway in New York, Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis reiterated that Athens would

veto Macedonia's NATO accession if no solution is found by the Summit scheduled for April 2.

In the same period, President George Bush and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer met in Washington to discuss NATO enlargement and the Macedonian issue in particular. "We hope that the nations applying to join NATO will continue to fulfil their obligations", said Bush after the White House meeting. Scheffer added: "Tickets for the membership are still not issued". Several days later, Scheffer travelled to Athens to discuss the name issue, but even at that time it seemed that the breakdown in Bucharest is inevitable.

An enormous delegation from Macedonia left for Bucharest under artificial unity. Actually, there were two delegations – one led by President Branko Crvenkovski and the other, more numerous, led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. They were accompanied by a number of reporters. In the eleventh hour, aware of the likelihood that the Summit might end in defeat, Macedonian leaders attempted a compromise proposal to save the membership invitation. That is when the Macedonian proposal "Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)" emerged. It was an alibi game for specific singular use and it was evident the proposal would not pass, because it was not a result of talks between Skopje and Athens, which should have included many other details. In its own right, the last-minute proposal was confirmation of chances missed over the last 15 years and the poor foundations on which the country had built its foreign policy strategy, tied to the double-name formula. Despite the great success achieved with recognition of the constitutional name by the United States and by more than 130 countries, several days later Macedonia learned that it had departed for Bucharest to some kind of political butchery, from which some people managed to emerge alive, very much alive.

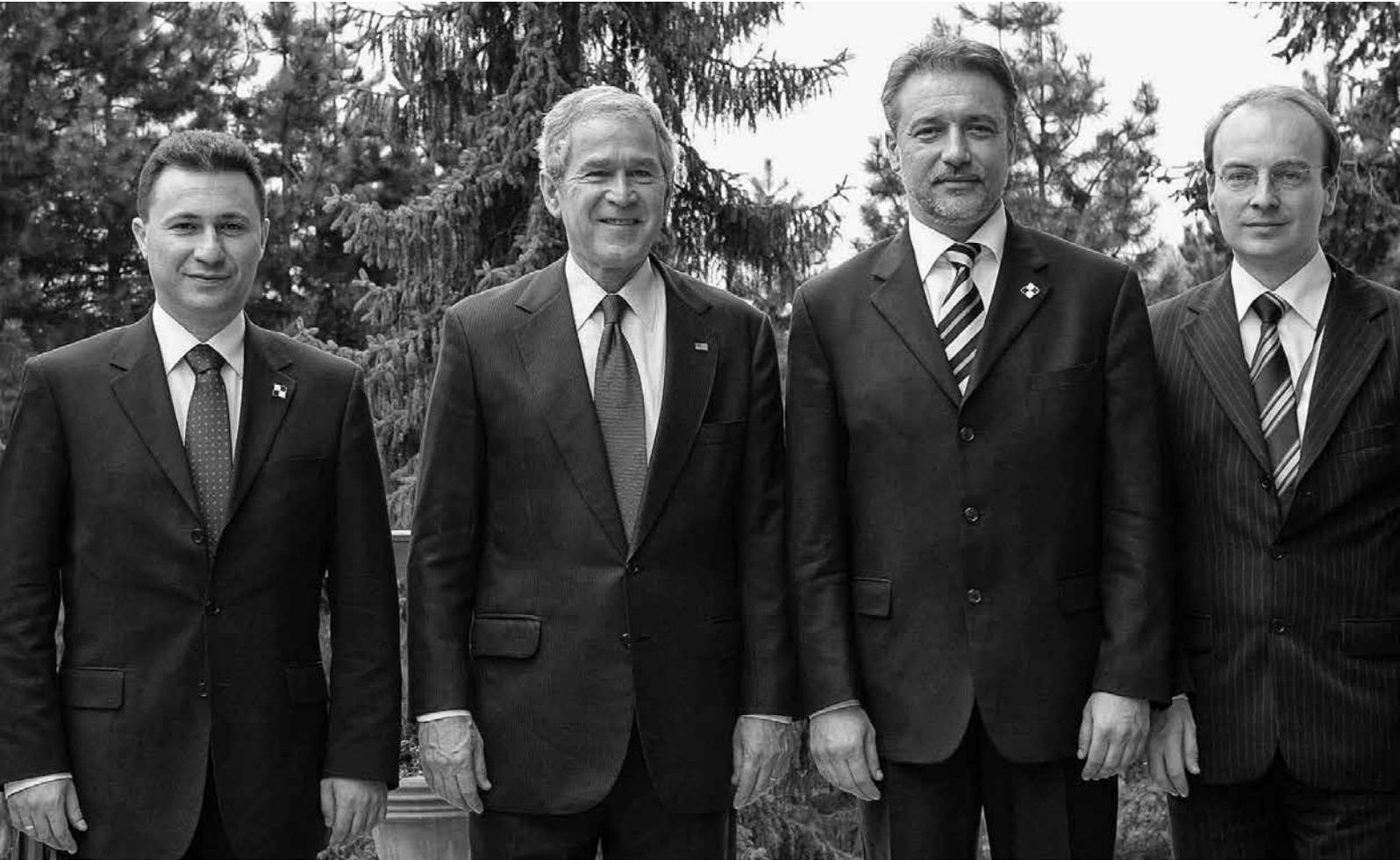
Details about Bucharest preparations and events in the capital of Romania show how Macedonia had functioned in that moment. In that period, Stevo Pendarovski served as foreign affairs advisor to President Crvenkovski. He says he remembers those events as if they happened yesterday.

**Pendarovski:** I keep detailed notes since Boris Trajkovski's tenure [as head of the state], especially when Nimetz visited Skopje or state leadership met to design the strategy that would be presented to Nimetz. I continued this practice during

Crvenkovski's tenure. A week or two before Bucharest, we held series of meetings. Crvenkovski's Cabinet was represented by Natasha Savova, and Gruevski's Cabinet - by Martin Protogjer. Antonio Miloshoski attended meetings in ex-officio capacity, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. No other people were in attendance. Nikola Dimitrov occasionally came to meetings in the capacity of national negotiator, but only if he was in the country. He was not here when the state leadership was building its position. I served Crvenkovski as advisor on security, but also on foreign policy issues, and attended sessions in that capacity.

Key round of meetings were held a week before Bucharest. Branko was always proactive. He told Gruevski: "Why don't we make a proposal to the Americans; they always say we don't want this or that name; and tell us to come up with our proposal". We could not go with FYROM; they had tried before; it did not pass. Greeks resolutely rejected it. Finally, Gruevski mumbled something about [adding] Skopje in brackets. He said: "That was proposed in 1992 and was rejected". Branko did not want to give up: "Let's propose it. We'll say it means we are proactive, no matter it was rejected before". At one of these meetings Gruevski replied: "I don't know. Let me think". At the next meeting, Gruevski sat down and told Crvenkovski: "Can we talk in private?" Branko agreed and we all left the room and moved into the hallway. Their face-to-face meeting lasted about ten minutes. Those waiting outside the room did not have any idea what is happening. Branko appeared on the side door (at that time, the President's Cabinet was in the parliament building) and called us back. Once inside, Branko said: "Stevo, we've agreed with Gruevski the official minutes to include the following formulation: 'The President and the Prime Minister have agreed to propose [the name] Republic of Macedonia (Skopje). Hence, the country's negotiator is tasked to communicate this idea to Nimetz and wait for a response from the Greek side.'" And it was done.

Crvenkovski later shared what Gruevski had told him: "Let's do this as trial balloon, so they couldn't say that we are not proactive, but I plead with you, nobody must know. Not the media, not anybody." After the fact, for years to come, Gruevski denied he had tabled that proposal, but it is written in the minutes and a copy is kept in the President Archive to present day. At the level of state leadership, Gruevski and Crvenkovski made only one compromise on the name issue. It was immediately



U.S. President George Bush with Macedonian Prime Minister Gruevski,  
President Branko Crvenkovski and Foreign Minister Antonio Miloshoski

rejected by the Greeks as unacceptable, and that is how the whole matter ended. Gruevski did agree to Skopje in brackets. The NATO Summit was held on April 2 and 3, but our proposal was rejected as early as April 2. In all honesty, it was rejected before we went to Bucharest.

Then-incumbent Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Miloshoski says that a concept was in place for the strategy around the Macedonian proposal for a compromise name. And that the initiative did not come only from Macedonian political leadership. Today he explains how the proposal "Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)" came into play.

**Miloshoski:** There was an actual strategy, and it was coordinated with Washington. At that time, Washington viewed us with inclination. Most likely because the Bush Administration upheld such opinion; Condoleezza Rice had sympathies [for our country] on the account of our participation in Iraq and other regional projects that were of importance to them... A capital of sympathetic inclination was accumulated. But I do not know their assessments about Greece. The proposal "Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)" was tabled as compromise in talks led by Nimetz and talks between Athens and Washington, Skopje and Washington, and [it was said] that Greece should take it seriously. Washington shared the same opinion and recommended us to accept this, attend coordination meetings and leave it to them to take care of other aspects with Athens. But Washington warned us they are unable to exert influence in other regards. This warning implied: "Are you certain of your relations with Paris?" As the Summit was approaching, they frequently raised this question. I visited Paris and invited Ilinka Mitreva to join me, in an effort to demonstrate unity on the foreign policy front and despite her political provenience. At that time, Bernard Kouchner was the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ilinka accepted my invitation, especially being known as Francophone. That resonated with sympathy. At the meeting, we presented our position and engaged in discussion. Kouchner said: "I support your proposal. It seems logical. But you should know that I'm the foreign minister not the President of France. Nikola Sarkozy is the president." Later I met with Sarkozy's chief diplomacy advisor Jean-David Levitte who assured me that if we accept Nimetz's proposal Paris would not raise objections. I think he did not know what Sarkozy knew or he was unaware of his president's intentions. Later we learned that Greece signed military contract with France for procurement of helicopters, submarines... in enormous

amounts. In Bucharest, we heard that without France's solidarity, Greece would not have been able to lodge its veto.

In Bucharest, on the morning of April 2, it seemed that the matter would be solved favourably for Macedonia. In particular, President George Bush had an address prior to the Summit's start wherein he explicitly said that Macedonia, Croatia and Albania will become members of NATO. This address was received with euphoria in the country, meaning that our American friends have settled the matter. This came as reward for everything we had done in the past years, especially during the 1999 NATO intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Here is what Bush said in his address.

"Tomorrow, NATO will make an historic decision on the admission of the three Balkan nations: Croatia, Albania and Macedonia. The United States strongly supports inviting these nations to join NATO. These countries have walked the difficult path of reform and built thriving free societies. They are ready to contribute to NATO and their citizens deserve the security that NATO brings. As we welcome new NATO allies, we also confirm that the door to NATO membership remains open to other nations that seek it – in the Balkans and beyond. This week, our Alliance must also decide how to respond to the requests by Georgia and Ukraine to participate in NATO's Membership Action Plan. These two nations inspired the world with their Rose and Orange Revolutions, and now they are working to consolidate their democratic gains and cement their independence."

As Stevo Pendarovski says and the public had already sensed, in the eve of April 2, 2008, the country's NATO membership came to nothing. That was officially confirmed the next day. In one day, from great euphoria the nation fell into great depression. Each and every individual in the state felt insulted and played by big nations exercising their power on a small and impoverished country. In all likelihood, most citizens learned that, in the club of equals, Washington is not almighty and its influence cannot push through some boundaries.

In fact, even our delegation in Bucharest believed that Bush's morning address on April 2 meant the matter is settled to our benefit. This is how Stevo Pendarovski describes that moment: "We were bewildered. We thought something had happened because, in the background, the Americans exerted pressure. We thought the country would be admitted under the reference FYROM. Knowing that the proposal 'Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)' was rejected and having listened to Bush's claims that the country will receive

an invitation (after all, he is President of the United States), it was believed that we would be admitted as FYROM. On the other side, the Greek strategy was clear about not allowing the country's membership under FYROM, because this reference became irrelevant after 130 recognitions. Hence, their reasoning must have been not to allow our membership, because they would have no other points of contention. Moreover, it was broadly known that, for Macedonia, NATO is more important than the EU".

The delegation and journalists were caught in wonderment for several hours until other news started arriving. It would be remembered that the Macedonian delegation in Bucharest was one of the biggest state delegations sent abroad. Actually, there were two delegations – one led by the President, and the other, more numerous, led by the Prime Minister. "I think the delegation included more than 40 people. Miljakov was there. All hotshots [were there]. A good number of them did not even know what was happening or had thought it would be an historical summit so they should be in the official photo... The government's delegation was enormous, from all ministries. The communication between the two delegations resembled a cat-and-mouse game. Just like in Skopje. Antonio Miloshoski was the only person from that team attempting, as he had before, to maintain an open line of communication between the two delegations", recalls Pendarovski today.

Everybody returned from Bucharest indisposed, albeit entertaining different thoughts. Gruevski was already contemplating the idea of snap elections, while Crvenkovski was pondering the last year of his presidency tenure in the absence of a central theme for the state's foreign and security policy, as key area of competences pertaining to his public office. George Bush attempted to create a shared context for all three countries from the Adriatic Group (Croatia, Albania and Macedonia). Immediately after the NATO Summit, he travelled to Zagreb and held a joint meeting with leadership from all three countries. He was well aware of the fact that Macedonians felt their expectations had been betrayed by the United States and therefore, in his speech on the Saint Mark Square in Zagreb, he stated: "Macedonia should take its place in NATO as soon as possible. Macedonia has made difficult reforms at home and is making major contributions to NATO missions abroad. Unfortunately, Macedonia's invitation was delayed because of a dispute over its name. In Bucharest, NATO allies declared that, as soon as this issue is resolved, Macedonia will be extended an invitation to join the Alliance". High-ranking members from his administration, including State Secretary Condoleezza Rice, called

for this issue to be resolved in the shortest period possible, not months, but weeks, because the administration inclined to have this matter solved is outgoing. Nobody was willing to hear this message in Skopje, let alone in Athens. The Greek government faced denunciations by many NATO allies, but sustained them and started building new strategy for the upcoming period. The shock effect created by America's recognition of Macedonia's constitutional name had already faded.

George Bush's joint meeting with leaders of the three countries from the Adriatic Group in Zagreb is one of the more important events remembered in Macedonian foreign policy from the last 15 years. This is how Stevo Pendarovski describes that meeting he attended as member of the Macedonian delegation.

**Pendarovski:** The day is April 5. The gathering is dubbed as celebratory summit as two members of the Adriatic Group are joining NATO, but one is not. To spare the Macedonians of any humiliation, we were invited as well. Condoleezza Rice was there, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley was there. It was us against the America dream-team. Attending were Stipe Mesic, Ivo Sanader, also Sali Berisha and Lulzim Basha, who was the Albanian Foreign Minister. Our delegation included Crvenkovski and Gruevski, and their teams. The meeting with President Bush lasted for hour and a half. The name issue was discussed for about hour and ten minutes.

Bush led the discussion. Before and after, whenever somebody would tell me that Bush is a president of small capacity I used to tell them that we do not know Bush. In reality, that meeting was another attempt to reach a compromise. Bush knew the name dispute in all its gory details – unbelievable, but true. Gruevski was silent almost the entire time and spoke once. Before that he had uttered one or two brief replies to say: "No, no". When he finally spoke, Gruevski said: "We have information that you'll make an official visit to Slovenia soon. I would like to ask. Slovenia and Macedonia are not far away. Come and visit Macedonia as well". Bush briefly replied his cabinet would reconsider this invitation. Here you have Gruevski unwilling to make compromise, but desiring Bush to visit Macedonia. That is all he needed to say.

Crvenkovski spoke once or twice and told Bush: "You know, Mr. President, making compromise is not easy. First, it concerns the name. There are no guarantees, and I must tell you that currently [the country] has a temporary name. If this matter is to be settled, whatever is agreed will be final. After the fact, there will be no chances for correction." Seated opposite to Branko, Condoleezza Rice responded: "President Crvenkovski, you're an experienced politician; you've held high state offices for years, and you know that in politics nothing is forever. Join [NATO] under a certain name and later, should you wish, bring back the old name." That was the flexible approach required of us.

Sanader, Mesic, Sali Berisha all spoke at the meeting. Basha joined the conversation. Somebody said the issue is burdened with history, to which Bush replied: "Please, don't talk about history. History is of no interest to me. I want us to do something for these people, today".

At the meeting Bush was decisive: "Please, use this administration; we'll be leaving soon. Do what you will, but if you make a compromise, it would be best to do that by Congress hiatus. After the Congress returns, we enter election campaign. Everything will be blocked. Use this outgoing administration, because we're very in tune with the dispute. After all, my first decision after the 2004 victory was to recognize Macedonia. In doing so, I wanted to encourage you to settle the dispute, not quarrel with your neighbours. Don't lose time on elections. Use this administration by the end of this year, but the next two months will be crucial. I reiterate - we don't want you to join NATO, but make Greece dissatisfied and force it to leave NATO. Greece is our long-time partner. We want both countries in the Alliance. How you do it - that's up to you. But don't think that we cheer for you and against them. Just as we've never cheered for Greece and against you. This administration is inclined and determined to help you". And all Gruevski said in response was to invite him for official visit. [United States] were determinedly against elections. They told him to hold the elections in October, but Gruevski would not listen. He already had a plan.

And it happened. A week later, on April 12, and upon formal request from DUI, the parliament was dissolved and the early elections were announced. On the account of

disappointment and indignation from Greek's blockade and the disoriented opposition, VMRO-DPMNE triumphed. At the elections held on June 1, 2008, VMRO-DPMNE won 63 seats in parliament; SDSM suffered a knock-down with only 27 seats, while DUI won 18 seats. That paved the way for 9-year joint government by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. And the name? The name could wait for another 10 years.

Since the Bush Administration was very inclined to our country, Macedonia was granted some kind of consolatory bilateral reward. One month after the Bucharest Summit, the Declaration for Strategic Partnership and Cooperation between the United States of America and Macedonia was signed on May 7, 2008, in Washington. Both chiefs of diplomacy, Condoleezza Rice and Antonio Miloshoski, signed the declaration at the State Department. It is the most important document on relations between the two states. That document is the pillar of friendship between the two countries – one being global superpower and the other small and poor country from the Balkan.

Antonio Miloshoski says the signing of that declaration was initiated by the Macedonian government. In some form or manner, it should have depreciated the Bucharest failure and reassured the Macedonian public that their state is not alone and has a powerful ally to keep its back. This is how Miloshoski explains the events at that time from today's perspective: "We asked for that agreement. It happened as post-Bucharest initiative to maintain relations. Disappointment and demotivation overwhelmed our society, so [the agreement] was intended as specific political measure for bilateral relations with America, but in respect to NATO. Also, it was intended to demonstrate that the country has a reliable partner on its side. There were two official streams of thought in Washington about that initiative. One, at the State Department or at parts of the State Department, including Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic, was against signing agreement on strategic partnership, while the White House and Condoleezza Rice (who served as national security advisor during George Bush's first presidential term) believed the agreement is necessary. She categorically supported the agreement. An identical agreement was also signed with Turkey".

---

At the meeting in Zagreb, Brush clearly stated: "We don't want you to join NATO, but make Greece dissatisfied and force it to leave NATO [...] it's up to you how you do that. But don't think that we cheer for you and against them, just as we've never cheered for Greece and against you". – Stevo Pendarovski

---

The declaration's text is precise and outlines America's stance on Macedonia, its place in the region, borders and security. The text reads:

"The United States of America and the Republic of Macedonia are determined to expand and deepen the close partnership between the two countries based upon common goals, interests and values. The two countries wish to enhance their strategic relationship through intensified consultation and cooperation in the areas of security, people-to-people ties and commerce.

The United States and Macedonia reaffirm their support for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and a unitary, multiethnic Macedonia within its existing borders. Macedonia and the United States note that a democratic, secure and prosperous Macedonia, with friendly and constructive relations with its neighbours and as an active participant in regional and international economic, political and security fora, is vital to peace and stability in Southeast Europe".

In the following years, when VMRO-DPMNE found itself isolated from the international community, Gruevski as solitary authoritarian populist forgot the commitments from this declaration and on several occasions, more indirectly than directly, portrayed America as his great enemy. On its side, Washington, as global superpower, never forgot commitments from the document signed in 2008. At times, actions taken by the United States were disliked by local authorities here, but they were always in line with the declaration: "The United States continues to support security, stability and economic development in Macedonia".

116

## 2.

Two developments hallmarked the period from the Bucharest breakdown until the onset of the political crisis in the first months of 2015, when the opposition started releasing the "bombs". The first concerns the Macedonian lawsuit against the Greek veto before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, while the second are Nikola Gruevski's

talks with United States Vice President Joe Biden and State Secretary Hillary Clinton, in February 2011. These talks marked the point of melting support from the United States for the incumbent government in Macedonia, and especially for the incumbent Prime Minister. At the time, all efforts were focused on the implementation of the pharaonic project "Skopje 2014", meaningless antiquization of the capital, accelerated loss of international friends, effort to install new identity on Macedonians, use of all and any leverage to create an authoritarian state based on the creation of despot system wherein the first feudal lord decides about life and death of his subjects. The feudal foreign policy network was almost fully created by Prime Minister Gruevski to suit the needs in the country, instead of Macedonian interests in the architecture of Europe. Both chiefs of diplomacy during that period, Antonio Miloshoski and Nikola Poposki, and the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were subjected to desires crafted in the Prime Minister's Cabinet and they had to implement them as loyal servants. It is clear that foreign policy is jointly coordinated by governmental actors competent for such matters and that the chiefs of diplomacy have to implement that policy. It is equally true that foreign ministers could be more elegant and softer in carrying out the directives. At that time, it seemed that Miloshoski and Poposki are obedient implementers of assignments issued by the Prime Minister's Cabinet and that, from opportune reasons, they did not attempt to change the pre-designed course of action (if for no other purposes, then to expand their operation beyond the assigned performance norm). Once the Macedonian public heard the "bombs", it became perfectly clear that single command centre had decided all matters in the state, including the manner in which diplomacy is pursued.

Macedonia motioned a complaint before the International Court of Justice on November 17, 2008. It implied a quest for justice, but belated, because the policy of meaningless antiquization had already destroyed what could have been achieved with such motion. Macedonia requested Greece to respect legal obligations from the 1995 Interim Accord, referring to this document as binding for both countries. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Miloshoski, who also served as Macedonia's representative before the Court, elaborated reasons behind this complaint in the following manner: "We submit the application before the International Court of Justice with the single purpose of protecting our rights from the Interim Accord. Careful thoughts are put into reconsidering initiation of such lawsuit, but we do not see any other way for justice to be delivered and for our

rights to be protected. We hope this step would encourage Greece to align its actions with the international legal obligations and would encourage both countries to find a final solution to outstanding issues in the spirit of good neighbourly relations and cooperation, as envisaged in the Interim Accord. We do not ask the Court to reconsider political matters and, therefore, the name dispute is not subject of our application. Also, we want to emphasize our firm dedication to all aspects of the Interim Accord, in particular the negotiations process with Greece under the auspices of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy".

The lawsuit was an attempt for Macedonia to restore some of its positions lost after Bucharest. And a successful attempt nonetheless. Three years later, on December 5, 2011, the Court took a judgement in favour of Macedonia with 15:1 votes (only the Greek ad-hoc judge voted against). According to this judgment, Greece has violated the 1995 Interim Accord by lodging its veto in Bucharest, but the Court did not instruct Athens to comply with its commitments from the Interim Accord in the future, as Macedonia had requested. Several points from this judgement are important: first, the Court ruled that Greece de-facto lodged a veto at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, defying allegations that consensus had been reached by the Alliance; second, "Greece had failed to demonstrate breach of the Interim Accord on the part of Macedonia. There is no evidence that Macedonia sponsored state and media propaganda against Greece"; and third, it rejected the crucial request from the Macedonian side for Greece not to block its membership in international organizations.

118

It served as some form of consolation for Macedonia, but was soon proved to be empty consolation. Both NATO and the EU announced they are not obliged by the judgement from The Hague, probably starting from the fact that, in essence, they are clubs of member states, not international organizations. Chances for Macedonia to be granted invitation at the next year's NATO Summit in Chicago were slim to none, especially after it was announced that it would not be an enlargement summit. The winds of time had already changed for Macedonia.

Today, Antonio Miloshoski responds to motives behind the lawsuit and whether the authorities were convinced the judgment could help the country or it served the purpose of moral satisfaction.



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton shakes hands with Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski after their bilateral meeting at the State Department in Washington D.C., February 16, 2011

**Miloshoski:** As foreign minister of the state that has assumed obligations under the Interim Accord I had the duty to react to any breach of clauses contained therein. If I failed to react, I would have acted as irresponsible signatory to that accord. The Bucharest blockade inflicted damages to Macedonia and we did not only have the right, but also the obligation to react, in order to reverse such damages, by taking the legal path to which both countries had agreed. That was one aspect. The other aspect is that we had confidence in our arguments. Here, I consulted prof. Toni Deskoski and prof. Sasho Georgievski, and in New York we consulted prof. Thomas Franck, who was part of the Greek team in 1992-93 when Macedonia was admitted in the United Nations. It was assessed that materials are there and that we could win the case. The level of assurance was not hundred percent, but still rather high. It was done as obligation, reaction to the Interim Accord, but also as step that could help us unblock NATO membership.

Several aspects of the judgement were important for us, but unfortunately they were not used. One aspect concerns the fact that Greece had accused us [of acting in breach of the accord] by using the country's constitutional name in official correspondence with the United Nations. The Court established that the country has constitutional right to use its name and that such action does not amount to violation of the Interim Accord, as well as that the country has international right to use its constitution and constitutional name. If greater attention or energy was invested in this process, a series of other clauses could have be part of some final agreement.

My letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, wherein I informed him that we have agreed to the name "Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)" was more a notification about our resolution to motion lawsuit. After all, Ban Ki-moon already knew from Nimetz that we had agreed to the name change. It was purposefully crafted in such manner because we had assessed that written referral to that fact, already known to Ban Ki-moon, could give us additional boost in obtaining the court's judgement.

Gruevski's visit to Washington and talks with Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton from February 16, 2011, is an important milestone in Macedonia's foreign policy, and especially for the

political future of Gruevski. Then-current administration of Barak Obama was in full force, with great influence in the international arena. It wanted fast resolution of the Greek-Macedonian name dispute and security on the Balkan. White House and the State Department were very engaged in that matter. Leading to these talks, several low-ranking diplomats from the United States visited Skopje, expressing concerns about democracy level, media freedoms, judiciary and political dialogue in Macedonia. After Gruevski was called to Washington, the public in Macedonia assumed that many things would not be the same for the Macedonian Prime Minister - for better or for worse.

Even the staging of these talks seemed to reveal their disastrous outcome for Nikola Gruevski. After his meeting with Hillary Clinton at the State Department, there were no customary statements given by the collocutors, Gruevski was left to leave the venue alone. At his regular press briefing, State Department Spokesperson Philip Crowley had to give an assessment about these talks: "The agenda included bilateral and regional issues. At the meeting, the Secretary of State expressed concerns about trends regarding the rule of law, independent media and civil society. She reiterated our hopes that Macedonia and Greece resolve together the longstanding name issue, so that Macedonia can move forward on seeking NATO membership and fulfilling its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Secretary Clinton expressed appreciation for Macedonia's contributions to the international force in Afghanistan, recognizing Macedonia as one of the highest per capita troop contributors".

121

The press-release from Joe Biden's Cabinet conveyed similar undertone. Namely, the Vice President had noted the importance the United States attaches to rule of law, freedom of independent media and good interethnic relations in Macedonia. He had expressed hope that Macedonia and Greece resolve the name dispute together, and had thanked Macedonia for its contributions in the mission in Afghanistan.

Insistence on media freedoms was understandable, especially knowing that Washington meetings took place several months after the dramatic police raid at A1 television, which at the time held the highest viewer ratings, in late November 2010. After learning about assessments made by his American collocutors for these meetings, Gruevski literally rushed to the street in Washington to make a statement for journalists. He elaborated that vast portion of meetings were focused on Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration and the name dispute: "America's position is that Macedonia and Greece should resolve

this problem and that only [the two countries] can find a solution and should not expect others to settle this matter and that we need to stay focused. Of course, we share this position as well. We will remain strongly focused on the name issue”, stated Gruevski on that occasion. He also added that he had informed Biden and Clinton about the progress made by Macedonia in sectors such as education, economy, judiciary and public administration. In all likelihood, while still in Washington and under impression of what he had been told, he already started contemplating new early elections, just as he had done in Bucharest. And it happened - the elections were held in June 2011.

Later, then-incumbent U.S. Ambassador in Skopje Philip Riker, who was part of the American delegation at these meetings, told the author of this text he had never met a politician who wasted his time granted with the Vice President of the United States. Riker shared that Gruevski had spent 20 minutes from his 30-minute meeting with Biden to elaborate Macedonia's success under the *Doing Business* index and economic reforms, failing to show particular interest to discuss the name issue.

Today Antonio Miloshoski, who joined the Macedonian delegation to Washington as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, describes extraordinary meaning of these meetings and their role in the future course of Nikola Gruevski's governance.

**Miloshoski:** The opportunity to settle the name dispute in Washington fell through in February 2011. At that time, Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton invited the Macedonian delegation for meetings. Gruevski led the delegation, and I accompanied them. Macedonia's Ambassador to the United States Zoran Jolevski was there, and the delegation included Martin Protogjer. We also had meeting with Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Phil Gordon. In discussion with him, the proposal "Republic of Upper Macedonia" was tabled and included a double-name formula (different from the double formula proposed by Kiro Gligorov or Branko Crvenkovski - the constitutional name for all [countries] and a dual name for Greece). This was a different formula - the constitutional name [for internal use] and no changes to the constitution, and "Republic of Upper Macedonia" for international use. That would have allowed members of the United Nations to individually decide how they would sign bilateral agreements with our country, in one way or another. The nationality was Macedonian and the language would be like in the UN, with an addition in the nationality section: "citizenship of the Republic of Upper Macedonia".

Hillary Clinton expected Gruevski to confirm this [proposal] with her. She desired that, as it would have been a small success for her, but a significant one for the region, brokered by America through diplomacy. But, Gruevski did not accept the proposal at this meeting, and with Biden.

In my opinion, it was exactly at that moment in 2011 when a decision was made, if that could be said, or a signal was given by the administration that maybe a new alternative should be sought for Prime Minister of Macedonia. I believe that happened there and then. Hillary looked rather nervous. They had a tête-à-tête meeting in her cabinet, which lasted about 20 minutes and later joined the plenary part [of the meeting]. It was evident that the meeting had been unsuccessful.

At the meeting, Biden raised one key question: "Could we expect you to settle the issue with Greece and how can we help?" This was a priority topic discussed both with Biden and with Hillary.

Gruevski had several motives to reject Biden and Clinton's [offer to help]. First, I think, was that American diplomats had different perception from that of Gruevski. American diplomats believed that Gruevski as Prime Minister, his political party and parliamentary majority, are strong enough to push a solution - of course, acceptable and dignified solution for Macedonia - but Gruevski had other logic. He believed that his strength as Prime Minister, his parliamentary majority and popularity among constituents give him the right to reject a solution. I am under impression that a solution could have been reached in talks with Papandreou. Different name variants were discussed and, on several occasions, it seemed that a solution is possible.

---

At meetings with Gruevski, Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton tabled the proposal Republic of Upper Macedonia as double formula. The constitutional name remains for domestic use, while Upper Macedonia is for international use. But Gruevski did not accept the proposal.  
- Antonio Miloshoski

---

The Americans did only give up then, but also signalled that the operation to have Gruevski replaced could start. We all know how matters unfolded. After these meetings, Merkel's foreign policy advisor Christoph Heusgen, a very influential person, called for meeting at the level of foreign ministers. He called, we talked and he told me: "Antonio, I hear disappointing news that in Washington you haven't agreed to something that you and your people discussed and something that emerged as product from talks with the Greek side". I told him: "Yes, an agreement was not reached because of certain matters related to parts of that draft agreement". "All right", he said, "could you ask Gruevski and Ivanov to see if they are willing to have the Greek delegation in Berlin and your delegation to come here; we receive conflicting information, from you and from the Greeks, about why that was not accepted. They say it's your fault. You say it's theirs. Could you come to Berlin and hold talks here, so we can witness and assist?" Gruevski and Ivanov accepted. For them, that was not a problem. Papandreou and Droustas were already scheduled to be in Berlin, on different matter, because it was the time of financial crisis in Greece and they went to ask for money. After they had seen that an agreement for the name issue was not reached in Washington, the Greeks presented it as our handicap, not theirs, and they did not feel the need to justify themselves before the Germans. In essence, the Greeks were also looking to postpone the meeting. That happened in February, and by July 2011, I resigned.

This testimony by Antonio Miloshoski, as a person from the Prime Minister's inner circle, clearly depicts the manner in which the foreign policy was pursued at the time. Nikola Gruevski left for Washington to hear what he had assumed, but he still went there unprepared and uncoordinated with other relevant actors. He simply viewed this visit to Washington as personal promotion and some form of recognition in the aftermath of dramatic events at A1 television, already contemplating new and snap elections. In rather harsh words, but verified against several reliable sources, Stevo Pendarovski retells the manner in which foreign policy was designed during the cohabitation years, when he served as advisor to President Branko Crvenkovski.

**Pendarovski:** Antonio Miloshoski was not the foreign policy creator; it was designed in the Prime Minister's Cabinet. It was the first time in the history of independent Macedonia for any foreign minister to blindly follow what he is told. [The country's

foreign policy] was exclusively created in the Prime Minister's Cabinet, to avoid saying it was designed by Gruevski himself. In truth, Martin Protogjer was ten times more powerful than Antonio. Protogjer was attached to Dimitrov as doppelganger negotiator, because [the government leadership] started doubting Nikola had become closer to Branko Crvenkovski. Not under influence from Branko, but under influence from the Americans. They said Dimitrov had started becoming more flexible. In those last months, whenever Nimetz visited [the country], Dimitrov was not called to attend. It was customary to hold two meetings - one at the government and the other with the president. In the capacity of name negotiator, when Dimitrov came to Skopje, he was not called to attend meetings in the government, but only those held in the President's Cabinet. It is known that when accompanying Dimitrov on his meetings abroad, Protogjer would sit quietly almost the entire time. Even Nimetz had felt uncomfortable. The purpose behind Protogjer's presence at such meetings was evident - he was there to monitor Dimitrov and prevent him mudding the waters.

Truth to be told, in the first months of intensive negotiations Antonio did attempt to make a breakthrough. I recall an occasion when Antonio told Gruevski: "Mr. Prime Minister, we could consent [to that aspect] to see the Greeks' reaction". To which Gruevski responded: "Why would you think that?" Antonio replied: "Well, to show we're proactive. It's a game of diplomacy. I don't say it is good". Gruevski retorted: "Go on, make the proposal, but make it on your behalf". And Antonio replied: "That's not right. We should build an official position..." "There's no official position", responded Gruevski. To me, it seemed like he treated all of his associates with great debasement. Discussions continued and Antonio said: "Item seven..." At one point, after several attempts by Miloshoski, Gruevski turned to him: "Antonio, when did you join the government; when did you become minister?" Antonio was bewildered: "I don't understand!" Gruevski cut into his words: "Did you take part in the elections? Did you promise citizens what you're saying now? You may talk like this only after you promise that to citizens. You joined [the government] after the elections and became minister after we'd already won, so keep quiet." Thereafter, at least in my presence, Antonio did not even try [to say something] and blindly followed orders. All the while, Gruevski was saying: "No, no".

What Stevo Pendarovski shares today, in one way or another, is confirmed by Antonio Miloshoski. Certainly, it is difficult for a former chief of diplomacy to acknowledge he

did not create the foreign policy. Or more precisely, that he was assigned to realize ideas designed from another centre. It is logical for the Prime Minister to give personal flavour to policies in different spheres. Otherwise, he would appear uninterested to govern, participate in processes and make suggestions when needed. In the Macedonian case, at that time, the matters crossed all boundaries when the ministers needed to be delegated responsibilities. In his unique manner, Nikola Gruevski revealed that in his interview for newspaper *Dnevnik* from January 11, 2012, several months before the NATO Summit in Chicago, when it became clear that Macedonia would not be invited to join the Alliance. It is one among many interviews given by Gruevski that would be remembered for years to come on the account of his strict criticism targeting the former U.S. Ambassador Philip Riker (not named in the interview) and his self-appraisal for taking a stance against the international community in relation to the lawsuit before the Court in The Hague. "Some of our allies were against, and even angry, because we acted contrary to their recommendations not to motion a lawsuit. Practically, that was my first major disagreement, to avoid saying conflict, with an important ambassador in our country, which negatively affected the remaining time of his mandate here, and even today, if I could say that. They interpreted that step to mean that we do not want to settle the dispute and that is why we go to the court. That was not our intention, but the opposite. We desired to settle the dispute before the judgement was announced. [The judgement] was as reserve option, in case a compromise solution is not reached. And it happened. Also, we were aware that the judgement, in its own right, would not automatically mean solution to the problem, but we thought it would strengthen our position".

Explanation for Gruevski's treatment of government ministers is found in the last question: "How do you manage, for six consecutive years, to maintain an atmosphere in the government free of squabbles and chicanery among ministers?" His response actually reflects the authoritarian concept for cabinet management as small work-cell, and by association, the entire society.

"The formula is simple. I overburdened them with work; they do not have time to squabble. They need to have time for that. Under a full-packed program, tight deadlines and fast dynamics, but also under pressure for timely completion of all projects, with me working alongside and with equal tempo, people do not have time for more elementary needs, let alone for squabbles and bickering. The government's train is running 300 km/h. If somebody takes a moment to deal with such matters, they get derailed and know the train would leave them behind. The economic council was in session on Christmas Eve

and decided to implement 50 additional specific measures by June, aimed to improve conditions for doing business. Even before this decision, ministers were overburdened and now I added 50 new tasks. The tempo is fierce, does not leave space for improvisations". It seems this statement contained everything that needs to be said about the feudal and despotic regime from that period in time.

Today, Antonio Miloshoski is more candid about the work he was entrusted with, but only within strictly defined frameworks. His present-day elaboration of events might seem an excuse, but from a 10-year perspective, it illuminates the manner in which the foreign policy system operated back then, especially in regard to the name talks. Miloshoski does not deny that the foreign policy was created in the Prime Minister's Cabinet.

**Miloshoski:** I think, for the most part, the foreign policy was created by the duo Gruevski – Protogjer, and to present day I do not know if other informal individuals, without official status in executive government, were involved. Maybe some advisors, who might have shared their opinions that served as pool for ideas. But I still think these two, for the most part, created the foreign policy. On the account of my longstanding experience and years in the party, and by association, the integrity I had acquired, MFA could not be fully circumvented. I noticed that, for example, in preparations for The Hague lawsuit. Initially, the Prime Minister's Cabinet expressed scepticism whether we should entertain the idea of international lawsuit. It was believed that, historically, Macedonia had never gained anything on the green table in the international fora, where others decide on our behalf, but we presented arguments for the lawsuit and believed we would not lose the dispute. Knowing Gruevski, if he was certain about this matter and wanted to make that step, he would have acted as the state's representative before the Court. When I elaborated the proposal to him and at the government session, they said: "OK. You represent the state and we'll see what comes out of that, since you insist so much". Assessment were made that the lawsuit might be lost and, in such case, responsibility would fall on the person who initiated the matter. Crvenkovski had similar position, but from completely different reasons. He said: "We shouldn't motion [the lawsuit], but if that is your decision, I won't oppose. In my opinion, we shouldn't waste time on that". My point is that, for certain actions, MFA had great influence in decision-making, but the Prime Minister's Cabinet had the final word in matters of key strategic directions and actions.

Gruevski wanted to demonstrate strictness and instructed us, diplomats, to visit villages across Macedonia, not only capitals across the world. The single motivation behind that was for him to be liked by vast majority of citizens. That is linked to a 30-year old stereotype in domestic politics, perpetuated by all governments, including the current government, and concerns the perception that ambassadors have the singular task of attending cocktails, enjoy life of privileges and do not bother with actual matters. That stereotype was not surpassed during the tenure of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI's coalition government, and I am not certain it is surpassed today. We hardly succeeded to secure salary raise.

However, Gruevski's message to have our shoes mudded and stay away from red carpets in Brussels was two-fold. The first message targeting diplomats and staff members at MFA, implied: "I have a plan for that, so you don't need to think; you just come down from the high horse and talk to people". The second [message] was addressed to parts of the international community: "You're not that important to me, as long as the people vote for me. All of you in Brussels, Washington and Berlin might view me differently, disrespect and even criticize me, but that is of secondary [importance], as long as I enjoy the people's support in Shtip, Karbinci, Cheshinovo and Obleshevo, in Lozovo and Veles". That was his philosophy to the very end. It meant that if he wins the elections with actual projects or populism or combination of both, his victory should be recognized and respected by all. I think he understood international relations, but sought to relativize them.

The former chief of diplomacy also elaborates when secret name negotiations took place, referring to them as "discrete", and the behaviour of people holding high state offices at the time. It serves as an interesting take on the events. It is not fully clear whether the event he refers to in his elaboration concerns the same one from the "bombs" or a completely different situation.

**Miloshoski:** I remember one time when more discrete talks were pursued about the name. Then Sasho Mijalkov, being Gruevski's person of trust, had several meetings with Alex Rondos who was Papandreou's confidant. He is an American of Greek heritage. Sometimes they met in Prague, but also in Vienna, to discuss a solution.

Gruevski perceived Papandreou's coming into power as sign of hope that we could be more pragmatic, because Papandreou is pragmatic. Gruevski was ready to make a step in that direction. I think these two also met in person, once or twice in Brussels, and again in Tripoli, to discuss possible solutions. After Mijalkov's return from a meeting with Alex Rondos we discussed what is acceptable and what is unacceptable for us. Papandreou did not insist on constitutional changes, but on insertion of a constitutional provision that would create duality between the state name in Macedonia and the name to be used as permanent replacement for FYROM. In one such discussion I saw certain pragmatism with Mijalkov, likely due to other motives. He said: "All right, I think this is something good and we could close [the dispute] in this manner", to which Gruevski told him: "I'm not certain. What do you say, Antonio?" I said it is all right, provided the constitution is untouched and the composite [name] is valid. Then we discussed [the proposal] "Republic of Upper Macedonia", without changing the nationality. [If that's the situation], we could do that, I said. Sasho agreed that we could, but Gruevski responded: "Yes Sasho, you say we could do that because you don't need to sign, I have to sign". Nothing came out of that, but it serves as example of his behaviour. Just like in the case of legal interpretation on amnesty for The Hague Cases, Kosovo's recognition and the border - he never signed any of those. He told me: "Antonio, you go and announce [in the public] about the border, about Kosovo". He told Vasko Naumovski to sign the interpretation for the Hague Cases in the parliament. His prerogative was not to sign unpopular decisions; unpopular according to his criterion, and probably according to parameters from public polls that were important to him on all matters. I have the impression that a solution could have been reached in talks with Papandreou. They discussed different options and, in several moments, it seemed a solution is possible. It never happened.

According to these testimonies, so-called golden chances had been missed to find a solution for the name dispute. The entire truth, most certainly, cannot be in statements, but fact is that the then-incumbent government in Macedonia failed to capitalize on America's inclination, judgment from The Hague, sympathies from vast number of European states, and settle the name dispute in less painful manner with a double-name formula (although not the one proposed by Macedonia). There are two points of melting support for Macedonia in finding a name solution. The first concerns antiquization as

the project that inflicted serious damage to Macedonia, and the second is the so-called "non-normalcy", when the system lost touch with the reality and was transformed into authoritarian regime. These two points destroyed Macedonia's position, giving Greece diplomatic advantage and making postulates from the time of the double solution with "Republic of Upper Macedonia" almost impossible. At this point in time, Zoran Zaev took the central stage. Maybe out of personal conviction or maybe under coercion, as claimed by the opposition, maybe because he was being prepared for compromise name - it was his efforts that led to North Macedonia, which is now imprinted in the Constitution. Some would condemn him for decades to come, while others might be grateful for him gathering the courage, together with Alexis Tsipras, to cut the nod and open Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic perspectives. Only time would show what kind of repercussions that agreement could have on the Macedonian ethnic code. Be that as it may, the agreement is signed and all must live with it.



When Zoran Zaev emerged as an important player on the political scene in Macedonia, only a handful of people could have assumed that he will invest all his energy in finding a solution to the name issue. And in signing the agreement with Bulgaria, which had been locked for years due to historical depositions accumulated in Skopje, but even more in Sofia. The constellation seemed improbable for such venture. The serious political crisis in the state after the opposition disclosed the "bombs", dramatic negotiations in Przhino, caretaker governments, postponed elections, uncertain electoral outcome, parliament deadlock, and violent storming of the parliament from April 27, 2017. None of these events foreshadowed that Zoran Zaev, the day after becoming Prime Minister on June 1, 2017, would venture the road to brokering "peace agreements" with the neighbours, to eliminate the two biggest problems in the foreign policy arena that held hostage the country's European future. As well as that, in the eyes of many, he would transform into one of the greatest "national traitors", while others would praise him as a man of uncommon courage. A courage hinged to vision, albeit foggy, but a vision nonetheless. The most important fact about Zaev in this tense political gambit is that two people, from Sofia and Athens, were willing to set aside nationalistic historical myths and prejudices

and join him in forming the visionary triangle that would open new doors in the region, fortify security and define new horizons. Nothing from plans designed by Zaev would have come to fruition without Boyko Borisov and Alexis Tsipras.

Let us leave aside the classic chronology of events, assessments by analysts, journalists and diplomats, and see how all of that looked from Zoran Zaev's perspective. For the purpose of this publication, Zaev describes how the agreements with Bulgaria and with Greece came to fruition, crucial moments when these efforts could have failed, his extraordinary friendship with Tsipras, the sacrifice he made but believes was worth the effort. His testimony includes exceptional details, some of which are revealed in public for the first time, while others cast different light on the events. First he speaks about the agreement with Bulgaria.

**Zaev:** Prior to formation of the government I lead, there were no contacts with Borisov about signing agreement. I, as the opposition leader, was granted official meeting with Borisov, most likely because, at the time, he publicly shared negative sentiments towards Gruevski. Borisov argued that monuments and politics [led by our country] are intended to provoke the neighbouring state, Bulgaria. Those were his views. At the meeting in his government, he showed friendship, but was careful both in discussions with me and in public statements he made. The idea for signing the agreement came during my first official visit to Bulgaria as Prime Minister. This conversation was different, because I visited in official capacity. He asked me: "Zoran, what can Bulgaria do for Macedonia as good neighbour?" I told him: "We should solve the agreement because I intent to enter talks with Greece and striking a deal with them would not be possible without previously signed agreement with Bulgaria". This is what he said: "All right. You caught me unprepared. I haven't thought about that. I know the two states have a problem, but are you ready to enter an agreement if I make preparations and we discuss this in greater details". I assured him of my full commitment, of the fact that levers are in place to solve the problems, of being knowledgeable about solutions and which issues are deadlocked, and of requiring authorities in Sofia to demonstrate wisdom to settle the problem at hand.

After the visit to Bulgaria, we formed a working group led by ministers of foreign affairs from both countries. Within a month, month and a half, they managed to draft

the agreement in consultation with us, the Prime Ministers. On August 2, 2017, Borisov came on official visit and we signed the agreement. There were no talks about this agreement from before. We discussed the need to improve cooperation between Macedonia and Bulgaria because, after all, we are first neighbours and Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonia's [independence], it is a friendly country, and both nations are close... These were the matters discussed before. When I raised the issue of signing an agreement at the first official meeting after I became Prime Minister, he was surprised. He could not have imaged that we would raise this topic so soon, but reacted positively, and that is why the agreement was reached so fast. In all honesty, I expected more problems to emerge during fast talks in that summer. It was not easy. We accepted the shared history and they conceded by allowing both nations and Macedonian language to be included in the agreement, as important step in building this lasting friendship. It was a win-win situation. I really believe that parts of our history are shared, but there are autonomous parts as well. I do not have any problem defending what I am saying because I believe in that. Experts who worked with us also believe in that and that is why the agreement brings only benefits [for both sides].

132

Zaev says that Borisov encouraged Tsipras to be open to settlement of the decades-long dispute with Macedonia, indicating that an excellent chance is presented and that nobody could know whether such opportunity will appear again. "Without being courteous, I honestly must say that Borisov had a strong desire to see Macedonia as member of NATO and the EU, because that is also of interest for Bulgaria. As part of the four-member group for cooperation among Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania, Borisov had used all and any meeting to speak with Alexis Tsipras about the importance of our country joining the EU and NATO. He also had bilateral meetings with Tsipras to encourage him, and often engaged in such conversations with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, given his close relations with her. I personally, and I believe our people as well, will remember him for the assistance provided in signing the agreement with Bulgaria, but also with Greece."

As inclined as any Prime Minister of Bulgaria might be towards Macedonia, he could not resolve the name issue, just as the same could not be done by Washington, New York, Brussels or Berlin. The name dispute could be settled only by Skopje and Athens. Today,



Zaev and Tsipras  
in Prespa



Zaev says that all matters had been resolved at his first meeting with Tsipras in Davos, on January 24, 2018, at the World Economic Forum. The decision to find a name solution was made at that meeting, and it was said that the two countries must become partners and friends. Follow-up negotiations between the foreign ministers were intended to fortify the path whose direction was paved by the two Prime Ministers. This fact, shared by Zoran Zaev, casts a completely new light on the overall process and its finale in Prespa. It shows that in the region plagued by distrust, doubts, hoaxes, distortions, appropriations, hatred, nationalism and dark shadows of the past, two young leaders, unburdened by nationalistic myths, were able - at given moment in time - to make a decision about the future of both nations and volunteer their backs to the whips of national treason. Most certainly, the path to that decision in Davos implied victories and defeats, impasses and perspectives, but the circle of irrationality had to be drawn to demonstrate how absurd it actually is. Here is what Zaev says about the meeting in Davos.

**Zaev:** Before Davos, there were no back channels for dialogue. My first meeting with Tsipras was in Davos. I had no contacts before. My left-winged political party, the Social Democratic Alliance, engaged in written exchange with SYRIZA and we were invited to Athens to attend their programme congress on April 26, 2016, as guests. I was unable to attend that event because friendly countries had advised me of a particular scenario that would be detrimental to my life. I will not say anything more about that, but that is the reason why I did not attend the congress. No other communication was exchanged. In the wake of Davos, communication was exchanged between foreign ministers and their respective cabinets, but Alexis and I met and talked for the first time in Davos. We talked alone for two hours straight. We opened our souls and the agreement was reached right then and there. Details were left for discussion at the [negotiations] table, but the underlying essence of the agreement was settled in Davos. There, this is the first time I talk about this matter, which resulted in creation of lasting value for our country. In those two hours, when we talked alone, I told him what is important to us: the identity, language, cooperation, and I asked for partnership. Therefore, the agreement also implies strategic partnership, not only final solution to the name dispute. In return, he asked for three things that are of importance to Greece: composite name with geographical determinant and erga omnes. Of course, they expressed difference of opinion and remarked the identity issue, but we remarked the erga omnes clause. Then and there I realized that any

solution beyond the realm of erga omnes is not a solution. It would create new set of problems, especially with [our] membership in the EU and NATO. It would be difficult to distinguish what could be used internally and what is intended for international use. These would be new squabbles. These were the breaking points.

The conversation flowed like this. I asked him: "Alexis, what are you?", and he said: "I'm Greek". "Are you really Greek or do you have other heritage", I asked again and he replied: "My grandfather from the mother's side, i.e. her father, was from Kavala and was Macedonian." I told him: "Well, you're Macedonian then?", and he repeated: "No. I'm Greek." I tried again by saying: "You're at least half-Macedonian", to which he said: "No Zoran, I'm Greek". "All right", I said, "at least quarter Macedonian". "No, Zoran, I'm Greek", he continued. Finally, I told him: "All right. You're Greek, but then leave me be Macedonian. The feeling of national belonging cannot be solved by any agreement". That is how our right to self-identity was defined. They wanted clear differentiation of Macedonian language as part of the Slavic group of languages, as it was already registered with the United Nations in 1977.

We also settled the aspect related to identity issues. Under those circumstances, I immediately realized that we cannot demand what we desire and that, for an agreement to be reached, the solution must be lasting and for overall use. For example, if the Municipality of Dojran addresses the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with project application that implies EU funding, it would not know how to communicate: under the name for internal or international use? A problem would emerge because, once the country becomes member of the EU, the lines of distinction about what is for internal and what is for international use will be entangled. In the long run we would have encountered problems in this regard as well. Mind you, Greece still has all the tools to block [our membership]. This was the breaking point. Nevertheless, the conversation in Davos was truthful and realistic, and it led to the agreement.

---

Before Davos,  
there were no  
back channels  
for dialogue.  
I had no  
contacts with  
Tsipras before.  
In Davos, we  
talked alone  
for two hours.  
We opened  
our souls.  
Essence of the  
agreement was  
settled in  
Davos. - Zoran  
Zaev

---

Maybe Zoran Zaev was unaware of details from the proposal tabled in February 2011: "Republic of Upper Macedonia" for international use, but the constitutional name for internal communications, which Nikola Gruevski had rejected at meetings with Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton, and which had actual chance of being accepted, given that it was proposed by the United States as dignified compromise that would not offend any side in the dispute. Gruevski did not want to assume responsibility for the name change while watching the rise of antique-looking buildings on the main square in Skopje and waiting for the gigantic monument of Alexander the Great to be casted. Maybe Zaev was aware of these details, but had realized that Macedonia's position is dramatically weakened by the antiquization, corruption, state capture and autocratic regime, and therefore the American double-name formula held no actual value. Or maybe he simply wanted to solve the problem as soon as possible, even by agreeing to erga omnes, to open the door for NATO membership.

Zaev claims that friends and partners from abroad did not provide any particular assistance, nor that he had been under pressure to sign the agreement. In his opinion, he was offered nothing more and nothing less from what Gruevski had been presented with. "There was no secret negotiator going back and forth to deliver messages". The agreement was truly born at bilateral talks between the two countries, with "Matthew Nimetz and his legal experts drafting international legal formulations featured in the current text of the agreement. But, somebody had to inform Nimetz about the essence of what we had agreed". He does not deny that the United States, Germany, Britain, and others sent their messages of encouragement for agreement to be reached, but that was not counted as pressure. "I talked at length with Wes Mitchel (then-incumbent State Secretary, a/n), who encouraged me to make the step and I know same talks took place with Tsipras".

The public is well aware of several critical points in the period from the Davos meeting until the agreement was signed on June 17, 2018, in Psarades, Prespa. The Macedonian Prime Minister elaborates some of them.

**Zaev:** Although we accepted the underlying principles of the agreement, their translation into legal text was not as easy as it seems. Work on drafting the agreement started. The two foreign ministers, Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias, held several meetings in Vienna to hammer out certain issues. Discussions between us were two-directional. The name is one thing. [The public] is aware of the proposal

about "Ilinden" [Macedonia]. But there were other proposals - "North", "Upper", "New"... They insisted on one-word name like "Newmacedonia" or "Northmacedonia". That was infeasible. These were [the proposals] tabled at the start of negotiations. We proposed a double name formula. A lot of time was spent on legal distinction between the identity and the new name. The negotiations culminated when it was confirmed that according to the agreement I would be Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia and would address the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, but would speak about Macedonian economy, Macedonian girl, Macedonian heroes, Macedonian villages, because these pertain to the realm of identity. Furthermore, we will have Ministry of Health of the Republic of North Macedonia, but Macedonian health system. It was agreed that in cases of associations that do not benefit from the state budget and have no overlapping matters with the state, they would be entitled to self-identification and name. These are the formulas used to distinguish [between the name and the identity]. I believe this agreement could truly serve as tool for other regions in the world to solve similar issues.

And finally, when it came to the venue for the signing ceremony we agreed that it should take place in Prespa, but on the Greek lakeside, although our side is greener, more beautiful and theirs is drier, riddled with stones. To Tsipras it was important [to have the agreement signed there] because this location has a place in their history, linked to our history, in the sense that communists, i.e. socialists, fought against fascism there. In truth, we fought fascism together. Moreover, every year he spends several days vacationing in Prespa and said that is why this place is important to him. Tsipras told me: "Zoran, we'll sign the agreement on our side [of the lake], and I'll come to your side to have Macedonian salad, to confirm the identity issue." That is why I had Macedonian salad made for him in Prespa. It is made of tomatoes and peppers, but no cheese.... I am sharing all of this because, at that time, we were preoccupied with drawing lines between the identity and the state name.

In the domestic arena, the proposal "Republic of Ilinden Macedonia" created a major confusion, to put it mildly. Such solution seemed misshaped, even unfeasible. It could not be translated in English language and sounded like artificially coined phrase. Many thought and still believe it was used as test balloon to gauge the public opinion (both here and in Greece), so that an actual solution could be chosen from those on the table. Actually, it was important for the Macedonian public to break [its silence] about any

name that would be used erga omnes, so that the actual name could be presented as final solution. A leadership meeting was held, with the president in attendance. After the name was revealed in public, the overwhelming reaction was bafflement. According to several sources, Nikola Dimitrov had proposed "Republic of Ilinden Macedonia" in the course of negotiations. Zaev does not deny that the proposal came from Dimitrov, but he also does not confirm, apart from saying that the proposal was real and that he and Tsipras had agreed to it. He continues that, due to the proposal being rejected in Greece, they finally arrived to "North".

**Zaev:** Alexis and I found the proposal "Republic of Ilinden Macedonia" hundred percent acceptable. But the decision was not solely ours to make. We might hold the office of Prime Ministers, but we are still common people. Hence, he browsed through history and tasked his advisors to double check, and they unearthed maps of the Ilinden Uprising taking place around Kastoria and Florina... [This uprising] fought against the Ottoman Empire, just like the fight against fascism. Together with Tsipras we presented the solution to leaders at the EU/Western Balkans Summit in Sofia. We told them that a solution is in the works, but did not disclose the actual name, because we had to test the solution at home. This proposal did not land on support in both countries. President Ivanov was rather positive at the leadership meeting and even issued a carefully crafted press-release. It was received at knifepoint by the opposition. Negative reactions came from Greece as well. The solution fell through. There was no particular strategy in place [about it being a test balloon]. We truly believed the solution could pass.

The name proposal did not come only from Nikola Dimitrov. Nikola was part of the team. We held consultations before all meetings, everybody was in attendance: advisors, experts, the foreign minister... Attending were Radmila Shekerinska, Bujar Osmani, professors, members of the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts, etc. and two professors of international law.

The idea for that name came from us. Nikola was very creative throughout the entire process. I do not even remember whether it was Nikola who first mentioned "Ilinden". It might have been him. What I am certain of is that we accepted and believed in this proposal. Alexis and I, and our advisors, discussed the proposal on the eve before the Sofia Summit until three o'clock in the morning. We had an official meeting and

another meeting that was kept off-books. It happened later that night, at the hotel. That is when we defined all details pertaining to "Ilinden Macedonia". Another meeting was held the next day, since we agreed to sleep it over and reconsider the proposal anew. This happened during the EU/Western Balkans Summit. We returned home, but as early as Saturday the proposal was rejected. Negotiations around "Ilinden Macedonia" ended by the next Wednesday and Thursday.

At that point the negotiations could easily fail. I have to say that actual drama was raised several times with people here in Skopje shedding tears over the fact that collapse of negotiations is inevitable. It was difficult and painful. At one time, [the Greeks] leaked the text of possible agreement in public. Within an hour we responded by leaking a draft agreement to our liking. Contents thereof included extreme positions. In all likelihood, those texts could be viewed as first written positions of the two countries. The question was how to go back [to the negotiation table]. After "Ilinden Macedonia" fell through, it was difficult to go back and start anew. However, the desire to find a solution prevailed and the path towards that goal manifested itself.

Prospects of the entire process were uncertain. What happened afterwards? These are the events after "Ilinden Macedonia" fell through. In May, we celebrated my son's junior graduation. As I was welcoming guests at a restaurant in Strumica, in the period from 19:30 until 21:00, I am texting Tsipras: "I have gained a friend in you. I regret we were unable to reach an agreement. Maybe the new generations coming after us would be able to find a solution. Let's keep our friendship, because it will boost the friendship between our countries." He replied with a similar message. In the meantime guests are still arriving. After all, I am a father of junior graduate. Around 23:30 hours I managed to send him new message and he responded: "Zoran, the weekend is ahead of us. Let's sleep it over. Maybe we'll start again on Monday". That is how that night went by: welcoming guests, making toasts, writing messages and thinking how close we are and still everything might fail.

We chose the proposal "Republic of North Macedonia". Other proposals included upper, north, new, Vardar... We opted for "North" from pragmatic reasons. There are no countries in the world with "upper" in their name. "North" carried an inherent differentiation. The more we started using this name, the more acceptable it became. It

does not offend parties in the dispute, except for nationalists who wish to build their ratings and score additional points in the political and nationalist arena. .

These exchanges between the two Prime Ministers implied several coded diplomatic message, but also a direct line of communication. It stands out from usual communication pursued when an issue of such importance for both countries is resolved. Zaev says that, together with Tsipras, they had agreed it was for the best.

**Zaev:** Communication with Alexis Tsipras happened once or twice a week, via *WhatsApp*. I reveal this for the first time. *WhatsApp* link could often be interrupted when you receive phone calls. Both of us showed patience and waited for the other to finish the call. Also we had to make breaks to engage in other matters pertaining to the office of Prime Minister, but came back and continued talks. Discussions lasted for an hour or two. I remember one Sunday. It was the Environment Day in Dojran. I was invited to attend the event by the local mayor and plant trees along the lakeside. On the parking lot in Old Dojran, in front of the hotel that remains bare construction after many decades, I talked to Tsipras for hour and a half in preparation for the Sofia Summit and the need for breakthrough in negotiations. That conversation included details that relaxed the overall atmosphere.

After an hour he told me: "Zoran, there's a new problem. There's another problem." Bewildered I asked: "What's this new problem?" He responded: "You have a very beautiful daughter". So I asked him: "Do you have sons?" He said he has two sons. "Well, we're close to a solution. You give an island because my country does not have seacoast and make a concession on the name issue, and I'll give my daughter in marriage". He laughed... His children are much younger, six and eight years old. The joke served the purpose of building friendship and helping each other. It was not easy for him either. At that time, protests were organized in Athens. Here we had policemen battered. Nationalism was on the rise in both countries, but we were determined to do the right thing for our states. He knew about my daughter from the Greek media that carried photos of her and her boyfriend at the Acropolis....

Prespa Agreement created a new partnership on the Balkan between two - previously estranged - states, but it also created an uncommon friendship between two top

politicians from the two capitals that have not only failed to understand each other, but had no desire for that. This is probably one of the most interesting benefits arising from the agreement. Zaev says Tsipras had informed him last summer at the Western Balkans Summit in London that he would banish two Russian diplomats from Greece “for attempting to break the agreement with you. They crossed the red lines by trying to meddle in this affair”. This mirrors the specific relation between the two Prime Ministers – they behave like their respective countries had been partners for years. Zaev says they continuously exchanged information about developments at both parliaments in relation to the agreement.

**Zaev:** He asked me if I have a solution to secure two-third majority vote for constitutional changes. I told him I have a plan of engaging in talks and attempting to encourage [opposition MPs]. Prior to the first vote on October 19, I had secured 90 MPs. Some of them renounced support in the last minute. When the plenary session started, the vote count dropped to 78. We continued late into the night and the final vote tally came to exactly 80. That was done only by conversation. Speculations that money exchanged hands and that threats were levered are not true. True is that reconciliation was discussed. I have already said that in public. People were fragile. Father of one female MP, whose name I will not disclose, had been threatened in the wake of parliamentary vote and told her: “If you vote [for], I’ll hang myself”. “There’s nothing to be done”, I said. “Don’t [vote], please”. After all efforts to have the constitutional changes adopted, Kammenos left [the coalition government]. From 151, Tsipras’s [support in parliament] fell to 145 MPs. I asked him: “My friend, what will you do now?” He said: “Zoran, you promised and delivered. I’ll do what I’ll do and I’ll deliver [the vote] as well. I’ll engage in talks. It’s just that I can’t tell you the actual date. I don’t know how much time I’ll need to secure the required number of MPs. But, that is my responsibility”.

I said my country has found a new friend in its southern neighbour, but I have also gained a friend in Alexis Tsipras, progressive politician of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for whom I am certain would do the best for his country, just as I do the best for my country. I believe mine and Alexis’ friendship will last forever. I hope our children will find their way to respect each other and become friends, but the most important thing for me

is for our nations, the citizens from both countries to build friendships, and translate that friendship into specific projects and economic benefits. This summer I will pay him a private visit. I do not know if I should take my motorbike and my spouse. I want to keep this friendship. Honest friendships are forged when people undergo traumatic and difficult moments together. He likes driving motorbikes as well, but his security does not allow, while I manage to escape mine. There will be times when both of us would not be Prime Ministers and it would be easier to maintain the friendship. I have four-wheelers and we could take a ride across the hills in Strumica, spend time together and introduce our children to each other. I truly desire and believe that will happen.

Maybe that will actually happen and maybe politics and obligations would drive this friendship apart. After all, that is up to Zoran and Alexis. The states and the nations have other things at hand. Other Prime Ministers and other governments will come into power and the Prespa Agreement could face numerous obstacles that some politicians might not be willing to address. Fact is that the vicious circle started by demonstrations of millions people in Thessaloniki in early 1990s and charged nationalistic troops, but was finally closed in the calmness of Psarades and Oteshevo, in Prespa. Macedonia had to take a deep breath and denounce something that seemed unimaginable because of the high stakes involved. Prespa Agreement did not solve its internal problems, but it archived one of the key blockades. Now the nation and its politicians have to demonstrate another type of maturity – readiness to take their place in the architecture of Europe. They also have to show wisdom, knowledge, experience and faith they can do that.



Zaev and Tsipras  
in Prespa





Milka Smilevska

SKOPJE 2014:  
THE FALSE GLOW  
OF POLYSTYRENE

WHO IS THE AUTHOR AND  
WHO HAD THE IDEA FOR  
CONSTRUCTION OF "SKOPJE  
2014"?

Skopje is open and warm city, with specific developmental and historical path of rises and falls, disasters and endowments, and has achieved level of modern city of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The city's main feature is its stratum

of various eras and different expressions, which stand in testament of the continuity of city life and evidence that each period of time has left its specific mark, its specific architecture.

In 2006, when VMRO-DPMNE and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski came into power, Skopje had fallen victim to architectonic and identity re-engineering known as the construction project "Skopje 2014", which was officially promoted in February 2010, i.e. four years after its actual start.

Although he was never revealed as author of "Skopje 2014", it seems that all evidence and information lead to the conclusion that the project's mastermind is Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, in power from August 2006 to January 2016. A single man had the idea to build a new city and in this endeavour he was assisted by a legion of experts and the political structure in power, especially in regard to processes on changing laws, urban plans and competences, without which Skopje's fast-paced transformation would not have been possible.

As part of his election program called "Rebirth in 100 Steps" which brought him to power in 2006, Nikola Gruevski announced: "This program has a single goal: rebirth of Macedonia! Rebirth of its spirit. Rebirth of its vitality. Rebirth of its essence. Rebirth of its destiny!"

Immediately after coming into power in 2006, the Prime Minister announced investments for construction of the Museum of VMRO and Victims of Communism, planned to be completed by 2010. He also announced construction of the Skopje Theatre, demolished by the earthquake in 1963, and the City House, in the place of and according to the architectural form of the former Officers Hall. According to the party's program, these buildings should also be completed by 2010.

Preparations for project implementation started immediately, in the fall of 2006. Violeta Alarova is Mayor of the Municipality of Centar and she provides strong institutional support for realization of this project. Evidence thereof, for example, is the implementation dynamics for the procedure on placement of the monument of Alexander the Great, which was completed in one year. On March 16, 2007, the Municipality of Centar

announced an open call for design solutions for the sculpture of Alexander the Macedon. The same year, on July 9, the central place on the Macedonia Square was selected as the final location of this monument and was integrated in the Detailed Urban Plan for the Small Rink, adopted by the Municipal Council in Centar. The open call for monument design ended on October 5, 2007, when the municipal administration announced it had not selected a first-ranked design, but that all design solutions are purchased, including one by Valentina Stevanovska that was later chosen for realization.

Main investor of this project is the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, led by VMRO-DPMNE, which never gave account before the citizens about the actual cost for transformation of Skopje's centre. In 2010, responding to questions raised by MPs in the parliament, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said the project would cost 80 million euros in total, distributed across eight budget years and that the state budget will allocate 10 million annually for that purpose. In April 2013, the account report made by Minister of Culture Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska indicated that the project's costs amount to 207 million euros. Nevertheless, estimates in early 2018 show that the price tag of "Skopje 2014" amounted to 700 million euros.

Confirmation that former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski is the author of "Skopje 2014" is found in wiretapped conversations revealed in 2015 by then-opposition SDSM. On May 29, 2015, they disclosed the "bomb" for "Skopje 2014" and indicated: "Nikola Gruevski is the ideologist, urban planner, designer and implementer of 'Skopje 2014'". They disclosed recordings of three conversations between the Prime Minister and then-

incumbent Minister of Transport and Communications Mile Janakieski. "Nikola Gruevski draws and redraws balconies on baroque-styled hotels, deals with building contractors, admits Valentina Stevanovska is the regime's sculptor. In the second wiretapped conversation, based on fountain images from Rome, he wants to build an identical fountain behind the Universal Hall, obelisk included. Gruevski personally designates locations for state institutions and plans baroque-style buildings for private companies. The Prime Minister selects project designs for the Vodno Tower on behalf of the allegedly independent Agency for Electronic Communication, selects project designs for multilevel parking garages, compares styles and deals with artistic impressions. Instead of acting as Prime Minister to all citizens of Macedonia, Nikola Gruevski works as architect and interior designer", revealed opposition SDSM.

---

Main investor of this project is the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, led by VMRO-DPMNE, which never gave account before the citizens about the actual cost for transformation of Skopje's centre.

---

Nikola Gruevski: Which [style]? Baroque or classicism? Does [the building] have pillars?

Mile Janakieski: I think they're baroque.

Nikola Gruevski: Baroque is one [thing], classicism is another, Mile. [Buildings] in Washington are classicism. They have pillars, like the building of the Constitutional Court.

In conversation with Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska from 2013, focused on the next year's budget and "Skopje 2014" that was already under construction, Minister of Finance Zoran Stavreski says: "All right, Gorde. Tell me, am I crazy? I don't know what to think... 300-400 million euros for buildings and monuments instead of actual needs, and there is no money".

On January 6, 2012, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski admitted he stands behind the project "Skopje 2014" at the unveiling ceremony for the Macedonia Arch. This was his first public appearance in relation to "Skopje 2014" which, in his words, he used to respond to attacks and criticism for this project.

"Yes, I stand behind this project. I think it is good, of good quality and beneficial, and there is nothing wrong about it. Yes, I support this project, as I have done in thousand other cases when I believe in something; when I, and when we, have an idea and vision how to make something better, more useful and more beneficial for citizens and the state".

Architect Vangel Bozhinovski, who supported the construction of "Skopje 2014", says Nikola Gruevski designed this monumental and architectonic project from patriotic reasons, because he wanted to leave a mark for his people and their culture. "He understands that such desire and such need of this country and of this nation is important for creation of a voting machine. Being a politician, I think he understood that. All his victories, which were many in number, are based on the fact that he had discovered the spirit of the nation and their needs. For too long, politicians have treated this nation as small; a small country; saying they cannot do anything about that! But Nikola Gruevski has set on the path to achieve grandiose work."

As critic of the project, professor and architect Miroslav Grchev reminds that historians tend to measure and analyse the civilization level [of a nation] through the prism of architecture. "Architectonic language is the most profound expression here. It could

be read only by professionals, but is felt by others. The emergence of 'Skopje 2014' is something completely different. It makes you wonder whether somebody should study our nation today or within a hundred or a thousand years from now, on the basis of this architecture. They would absolutely gain a wrong image about the nation's civilization and education achievements judging from the manner in which the city is designed and built and from the manner in which this culture is materialized. It is an abuse by then-current Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and is completely different from what had been done, back in the time, by emperors and dictators, because they had not removed architects from the table and said they would do everything themselves. Nikola Gruevski's authoritarian thought and mafia-party mannerism come to full expression in 'Skopje 2014'. He merged party and the state and decided not only to rebrand the nation from outside, by falsifying the complete history, but has also succeeded to brainwash the young generations."

Professor and archaeologist Nikos Chausidis says it is evident that the project is materialization of someone's desires and dreams. "Viewed in psychoanalytical terms, all enlisted symptoms of exaggerated dimensions could be interpreted as attempt to compensate for certain size-related or status-related complexes."

148

In the opinion of many architects and urban planners, "Skopje 2014" is a controversial project. It is assessed as anachronous, semi-crazy performance that insults emotional intelligence; an absurd creation with odd message, odder aesthetics, and oddest ideology paradigm. It lacks temporal, geographical, economic, cultural and social context. It is expertly irrational and does not anticipate the future. Buildings from "Skopje 2014" are not architecture, they are stage decoration. Architect Danica Pavlovska says the concept of monumentalism with quasi-historicism, decorated with insultingly named baroque as architecture, does not correspond to modern-day trends. It is retrograde.

"A mark on the city", reminds prof. Miroslav Grchev, "had been made by abused mediocre people from our profession, who put their signatures wherever they were told by the authorities and did what was asked of them, irrespective of consequences for Skopje. This is contrary to contemporary architecture as expression of democratic societies, which does not recognize dictate or canonization".

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, however, successfully imposed his dictate and "Skopje 2014" is one of the most successful projects in his first two years of governance. Hence, at the 2008 early elections, his upgraded program "Rebirth in 100 Steps" inferred that the open call for placement of 40 sculptures in Skopje's central area is already published and should be completed in March 2010. The Prime Minister said that, after coming into power, they have started projects that imply rebirth of culture and announced construction of buildings on the left bank of Vardar, from a museum complex dedicated to the Macedonian Struggle, through the Archaeology Museum and the Orthodox Temple on the main square, to the Old Theatre already under construction.

By the end of his term, in spite of numerous criticism and protests staged by experts and citizens, Nikola Gruevski did not decline single building or monument from this controversial project. While the project's video presentation in early 2010 featured 97 buildings in Skopje's central area, by its completion the total number of buildings reached 234, i.e. 2.5 times more than initially planned.

The controversial and megalomaniac project that marked the decade under VMRO-DPMNE's rule and its creator Nikola Gruevski raised concerns that it was used for money laundering and served as lard for criminal and wasteful behaviour. The Special Prosecution Office opened pre-investigation about the project "Skopje 2014".

To present, nobody has been held responsible for such architectural and identity engineering inflicted on the central area of Skopje and nowadays it represents new reality for young generations, especially those born after its construction started and already in their teenage years. At the same time, Nikola Gruevski - designer, planner and implementer of "Skopje 2014" - is political asylant in Hungary, miles away from Skopje and the neo-baroque he had imposed on the City of Modern and Solidarity.

## RESISTANCE TO THE PROJECT "SKOPJE 2014"

### "Don't Rape Skopje"

On March 28, 2009, the First ArchiBrigade fronted an architectonic uprising against usurpation of the public space with plans for building a church on the city square. The protest was violently suppressed by a group of counter protesters, 40 times more numbered and assisted by the authorities.

In late February and early March, a group of activists led by Nikola Naumoski and Ivana Dragshikj started to organize themselves, after postal boxes in buildings across the Municipality of Centar had been stuffed with leaflets announcing the church's construction on the Macedonia Square. After learning that the church is planned to be constructed with public funds, they sounded the alarm and reached out to their peers from the student cohort at the Faculty of Architecture.

In short period of time, they organized a brigade of around hundred and fifty activists, mainly young architects and, on March 28, headed to the Macedonia Square to stage occupation of the space and demonstrate how it would look after construction of the building.

Ten years later, activist Ivana Dragshikj recollects the police report compiled after the incident and read at the hearing held by parliamentary committee. It reports that around hundred protesters, who had duly scheduled their protest several days earlier and had engaged monitors to keep order, were happened upon by four thousand counter-protesters, separated by police cordon of 36 officers.

From the start, the police was knowledgeable of plans for attack on protesters and that they would be pushed out of the square.

"The first reaction of authorities was that we do not have any right to make decisions about what happens with our public space, our city, and that we do not have any right to express public opinion", says Ivana Dragshikj about the attack.

The police did not defend them, but yelled and ordered them to leave the square because only 36 police officers are deployed against four thousand counter-protesters, indicating they are not there to protect them.

---

The controversial and megalomaniac project that marked the decade under VMRO-DPMNE's rule and its creator Nikola Gruevski raised concerns that it was used for money laundering and serves as land for criminal and wasteful behaviour.

---

After the protest, activists from the First ArchiBrigade were targeted with continuous verbal attacks and discrediting. Nikola Naumoski, one of the protest's leaders, was said to have opposed construction of church on the square because he is cousin to opposition member Radmila Shekerinska from SDSM. Activists Sonja Ismail had been against the usurpation of public space because she is daughter of Gjuner Ismail, former minister of culture in the government led by Branko Crvenkovski. All of them were given offensive and insulting names, such as: "antichrists" "junkies", "shqiptars".

Many protesters were targeted with misdemeanour charges for having disrupted public peace and order.

The ArchiBrigade did not concede and was still preoccupied with defending the public space, unaware that the tsunami called "Skopje 2014" is about to hit the shore and swipe the previous look of the city downtown.

Two weeks after the protest against public space usurpation was suffocated, on April 11, 2019, activists organized themselves as Freedom Square and staged another gathering in Skopje's centre. The main message was that they have the right to and will continue to organize protests. This event gathered several thousand people.

After this protest, however, activists faced more attacks and defamation construed by the government and promoted in the media under its control. As time passed, less and less people came out to show disagreement with the city's architectural and monumental engineering. Activist Ivana Dragshikj lost her job at OSCE/ODIHR, while Head of Mission Peter Eicher told her he had done that on request by Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska. Later, her mother was demoted at the Ministry of Defence. Activist Irena Cvetkovikj was denied the title of associate professor she had earned because professors sitting in the senate and close to ruling VMRO-DPMNE voted against. Activist Sonja Ismail was evicted from her social housing apartment, while numerous activists attending the protests had their car tires punctured, their faces circled in newspapers and had suffered many, visible and invisible, forms of aggression, sometimes on the streets.

Freedom Square mobilized citizens to take part in public surveys organized at the time when changes were adopted to detailed urban plans in the Municipality of Centar. They called citizens to complete survey forms and even prepared forms they could endorse, if they wish, in order to deposit as many negative opinions as possible and with the

ultimate goal of preventing the procedure on adopting changes to urban plans. Activists had problems finding the local community where the new urban plan was displayed for comments and deposition of opinions; later, when they learned the exact location, the local community had instituted uncommon working hours.

At the same time, activists from Freedom Square attempted to organize a referendum in the Municipality of Centar for citizens to declare whether they want religious building on the Macedonia Square. Municipal administration entangled them in institutional labyrinth, first by letters exchanged between the Municipality of Centar and the Ministry of Justice about the actual location for collection of referendum signatures. The first problem implied that activists had not collected signatures on the right location, and later the location was right, but citizens could deposit their signatures only during working hours, which effectively instituted insufficient period of time for collection of required signatures. Ultimately, the referendum initiative fell through.

"At the same time, the regime's propaganda machinery was fully mobilized against us, but several media outlets were inclined to cover our side, like TV Alfa and TV A1, and newspapers *Utrinski vesnik* and *Dnevnik*, which did not depict our activists as somebody's children and deviants, but as people articulating an opinion different from those upheld by authorities", recalls Ivana Dragshikj.

152

In early 2010, one by one, authorities started erecting safeguard fences around plots in Skopje's central area, to which Freedom Square responded with equal boost of energy and strength in organization of protests and civic discord. They demolished fences on construction sites, but authorities retaliated with use of even greater physical strength.

Activists decorated fence boards around the fountain and monument of Alexander the Great with the graffiti: "Antique-Mania Film Presents!", "Stop the Rebirths!", and "Don't Rape the Public Space!"

"Purpose of that gathering was to send a message to competent authorities that were playing games with the look of the city centre and with our lives. We wanted to indicate that erection of fences marks the start of the process for disruption of public space", says Ivana Dragshikj from Freedom Square.

Pressure from authorities led to the group of protesters being decimated to one or two hundred people that could be mobilized at any moment in response to government's acts of wilfulness. Hence, they transformed their resistance into activities for development of



analysis on green areas destructed by "Skopje 2014", production of short films, work on developing local communities and mobilization of citizens.

A more broadly organized resistance to the project "Skopje 2014" by architects and urban planners happened after the public presentation of the video that visualises the look of the city's centre, which was held on February 4, 2010.

At the presentation named "Visualization - Skopje 2014", Minister of Culture Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska and Mayor of Centar Vladimir Todorovikj explained that animation video had been designed to clarify all and any dilemmas about the look, location and size of monuments and buildings planned, but failed to indicate the cost for construction and beautification of the city's centre. The animation featured buildings on the riverbank and around the Macedonia Square, Triumph Arch near the building Pelagonija, Obelisk in the Park of Women Fighters, monument of Alexander the Great, other sculptures and monuments, willow trees and spring fountains in the River Vardar, and radical change of façades on already existing buildings.

President of the Association of Architects of Macedonia Danica Pavlovska says that, after having viewed the short film, they immediately recognized a city-wide disaster and their profession had to react to the fact that they had not been consulted about this project. In particular, the video featured images for intervention in the space with buildings, façades, creation of new images, all serving the purpose of engineering a new identity, without having consulted professionals.

In their official statement, architects asked the authorities whether the version presented for rebuilding the central area is a fruit of serious study developed by urban planners, architects, sculptors, designers and planners, and whether it represents insight into a plan open for public discussion, i.e. feedback from citizens, or whether, in the words of Minister of Culture Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska, it represent insight into a concept that is yet to be developed.

Architects appealed to investors of initiated buildings to stop the first stage of their constructions. They proposed exhaustive analyses to be developed pursuant to the valid General Urban Plan for the City of Skopje, on the basis of which, state-wide or international open call would be announced for redefinition of the city's centre. At the meeting, architects reminded that an open call was announced for the Detailed Urban Plan of the Small Rink. AAM requested re-examination of changes made to DUP for the left bank of Vardar, which had breached the protection zone's boundaries for riverbed regulation by assigning construction plots and usurping the pedestrian zone. Architects

proposed the government to commission an expert group for development of draft program for new detailed urban plan of the city's central area, in compliance with GUP and contemporary trends, which should be adopted after broad public debate and would be followed by announcement of international open call for urban plan development.

In the final conclusions adopted at their extraordinary assembly, architects distanced themselves from the project "Skopje 2014" in its current form, because it lacks temporal, geographical, political, cultural and social context. "In expert terms, [the project] is unsubstantiated. It does not anticipate the future. We, the architects, together with citizens, are relegated to inadequate position. Both expert and general public opinions were exempted from adoption of these exceptionally important decisions for the project 'Skopje 2014'. It is necessary for those who think and act differently to express their opinion as well".

AAM advocated for respect of the overall creative freedom and independence of urban planners and for conceptualized sustainability of the project "Skopje 2014", which is of broader importance for the city and the state.

At the extraordinary assembly, prof. Mihail Tokarev said that architecture today is going back in time, to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the academies were dictated which style to use for state buildings, schools, administrative buildings. "In doing that, we are going back in time and assigning styles to technical buildings, such as multilevel garages. Sometimes, these are non-existent styles, like neo-romanticism".

155

The Association of Architects translated their declaration and sent it to associated professional organizations in the countries from the region, receiving support from those based in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Sofia, with the message: "Do something while there is still time".

At home, not a single representative from any government level attended the extraordinary assembly to listen to opinions from experts, nor did they do that later, at any moment during the construction of "Skopje 2014". Ignorance of views upheld by citizens, expert public and the media, which were against the imposed project, would be present throughout the entire tenure of the government led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski.

A period of powerlessness ensued, when the government showed no understanding for public verbal and written addresses from architects and urban planners; dialogue was never opened and a period of media blockade was instituted.

With guest appearances from domestic and foreign authorities, the Association of Architects spoke in the public and indicated the madness of the performance that was under construction. The purpose was for citizens, who might not immediately feel or perceive consequences of "Skopje 2014", to understand the absurd creation erected in front of their eyes.

During his visit to Skopje in October 2011, world-renowned architect Mario Botta called Macedonian architects and urban planners to take action. He told them: "How is it possible for the profession to allow construction of 'Skopje 2014'".

However, civic and professional resistance to "Skopje 2014" managed to win a single battle and prevent baroque reinvention of the City Trade Centre.

One of female initiators behind the civic initiative "I Love GTC", architect Danica Pavlovska remembers that a number of colleagues reacted to announced attack on GTC with outburst of dissatisfaction, anger and rage. "[In particular] because this building was under protection, it was verified and labelled as cultural heritage. It was believed that the anticipated project design, financed by the government, would not only devastate GTC, but would also destroy its concept and the urban spirit it fosters. Hence, the citizens recognized and identified themselves with the trade centre and were affected by this attack, resulting in greater support for the initiative 'I Love GTC'. We were surprised with citizens' response and the outburst of urban culture, irrespective of their gender and age. At the protest in June 2013, thousand and six hundred citizens, holding hands, created a protective hug around GTC. This gesture sent the message about significance and necessity for actual protection of the trade centre. That was a moment of strong emotions".

For citizens of Skopje, GTC is one of the city symbols and the protest gathering sent a demand to central and local governments to discontinue all and any activities to change this building's look and character because GTC is living heritage and important pedestrian artery in the city.

We demand the City Trade Centre to remain the city's landmark!

The government reacted with counter action, annulling the decision on GTC's protected status as cultural heritage, in attempt to break down the spirit of citizens. Activist Danica

---

Ignorance of views upheld by citizens, expert public and the media, which were against the imposed project, would be present through the entire tenure of the government led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski.

---

Pavlovska says that, as professionals, they continued to foster this initiative with different gatherings, installations, speeches in defence of GTC.

A local referendum was organized on April 26, 2015, at which citizens in the Municipality of Centar had to answer the question: "Do you want to preserve authentic look of the City Trade Centre's façade?" Voter turnout was 40.53 percent against the census of 50 percent plus 1 vote, and the referendum failed. Nevertheless, 95 percent of citizens voted FOR preservation of GTC's authentic look. The referendum day went by with obstructions from authorities. In particular, they monitored people going to polling stations, disconnected elevators in the buildings, VMRO-DPMNE distributed proclamation against the referendum vote, while President Gjorge Ivanov and his family, all of whom have residence in the Municipality of Centar, did not turn out to vote.

"The referendum failed both formally and legally, but its echo proved to be crucial for this devastation to end with GTC. Although they had a project design and have secured construction permit, authorities stopped here because of the resistance. I want to believe we are to be merited with that", says activist Danica Pavlovska - Cigi.

## ANTIQUIZATION

Antiquization is politicization of the society with topics from the antique and history.

The project "Skopje 2014" is known for its intention to complete the identity definition of Macedonians. Such ideological engineering is not targeted only at the city, but the nation, and aims to fully define Macedonians. Macedonians, as a nation, are brought in relation to antique Macedonians and Alexander the Great.

From Macedonia's independence, authorities in Greece had fostered concerns that the young state will attempt to appropriate their antique history. Hence, in June 1992, Greek journalists asked President Kiro Gligorov about the identity of Macedonians. He responded that Macedonians are Slavs who had arrived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and have no direct lineage from Alexander's civilization.

Immediately after coming into power, this position about the identity of Macedonians was changed by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, followed by decision to rename the motorway and the Skopje Airport as namesakes of the antique conqueror Alexander the Great.

In the spring of 2009, President of the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Science Georgi Stardelov reacted and said they have not been consulted by authorities about the process of antiquization in the Macedonian society. Stardelov says that Slavic origin is key substrate of the Macedonian identity, because its pillar is the Macedonian language, which pertains to the group of Slavic languages.

That meeting was attended by the first President Kiro Gligorov who said that Nikola Gruevski's government has entered the trap of Greek politics, which had always wanted to show the international public that the northern neighbour is stealing their history.

"No antique period could save us. We need to look at the present, the poverty around us, and we need to do something for the benefit of people, instead of dreaming about the Alexander the Great", said President Kiro Gligorov.

Two years later, on the twentieth anniversary from Macedonia's independence, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski marked the occasion with official launch of the fountain and monument officially named "Warrior on Horse", but actually depicting the antique conqueror Alexander the Great.

158

Greece reacted immediately. Minister of Foreign Affairs Delavekuras called placement of the monument of Alexander the Great as antiquization politics and attempt to appropriate Greek history, create nationalism and conflicts.

"This politics is contrary to the spirit of the Interim Accord. It provokes and deserves to be condemned. It undermines our bilateral relations and hinders negotiations led under auspices of the United Nations. It goes against the principles of good neighbourly relations and will create unavoidable repercussions on the neighbour's Euro-Atlantic perspectives".

Greek members in the European Parliament reacted as well. In a letter addressed to the European Commission, Maria Eleni Koppa from PASOK wrote that the government in Skopje provokes Greece and continues to appropriate Greek history with its antiquization policy.

"In the last two years, reports for FYROM express concern about the phenomenon of antiquization, giving rise to questions whether the European Commission and the Council

intend to directly raise and urgently address this problem with authorities in the country", asked Greek MEP Maria Eleni Koppa.

Professor and archaeologist Nikos Chausidis says that if Greece, but also European and global organizations by association, had not taken anachronist and absurd actions in the past, targeting the name, history and identity of Macedonia, its capital would not have been turned into construction site for such grandiose, and equally anachronist and absurd, monument about the present day and time, i.e. the monument of Alexander the Macedon. "These attacks and humiliations forced the Macedonians to raise their guard. This guard will condition the completion of specific societal and political ambiance. This ambiance will profile and bring into power political figures of certain profiles. Such figures will perceive attacks and humiliations of Macedonia as both motive and justification to invest funds in construction of such monument – all for the purpose of satisfying their people, while fortifying their rule over them".

Professor and architect Miroslav Grchev refers to the monument of Alexander the Great as violence on the space that disgraces the Macedonian nation before the entire world, because it represents them as a nation that does not know its history. "If we, as a nation, celebrate Alexander the Great as the most important figure, then we are confused about our own identification and self-perception", says Grchev.

As regards antiquization of the Macedonian society, in 2012, director Slobodan Unkovski would say that in global terms, the antique history of the world, fortunately or unfortunately, had been written long time ago. "Claims by some local historians, inventors and supporters of Macedonian antique origins will receive attention for their views only within the confines of our country, with a portion of our suffering diaspora, and in neighbouring Greece, stuck in its ideas about the past. In the world, unfortunately, we are still exposed to ridicule."

Under the Prespa Agreement, reached in June 2018, the Macedonian government has committed to distance itself from the antiquization imposed by the previous government led by Nikola Gruevski, which had created animosity with Greece. Macedonia agreed to re-examine the status of monuments, public buildings and infrastructure in the country and if they, in any form or manner, refer to the antique history of Greece and the civilization that represents integral part of Greece's historical and cultural heritage, will take adequate corrective measure to effectively resolve this matter and to ensure



respect for such heritage. It is expected that plaques will be placed on the monuments of Alexander the Great and his father Philip the Second, indicating that these historical figures belong to the Hellenic civilization.

## MONUMENTS

Twitter post: "The best prank in 2014 would be: let's meet at the monument".

On June 15, 2011, late in the night, at 2 a.m., parts of the bronze sculpture of Alexander the Great arrived in Skopje. The Municipality of Centar indicated that the monument is called "Warrior on Horse". Workers from Beton and the Italian foundry Ferdinando Marinelli assembled the many parts of this monument behind barricades on the Macedonia Square and did not allow journalists and cameramen to approach. The monument is 14.5 meters high, placed on 10-meter pillar. It was casted in Florence, at the foundry Ferdinando Marinelli, with the price tag of 5,300,000 euros. A marble fountain is constructed around the monument, decorated with eight lions and eight warriors from Alexander the Great's Phalanx, the total cost of which amounted to 4,100,000 euros. In sum, the total amount paid for construction of the fountain and monument was 9,400,000 euros.

161

Preparations for assembling the monument lasted for entire week. On June 22, 2011, at noon, majority of gathered citizens followed the monument's erection with admiration, while a small number of them believed that money had been spent to no avail. Erection of the sculpture, weighing 30 tons, landed on applause, ovations and exaltations: "Long Live Macedonia!" Citizens rejoicing the monument's placement wore t-shirts with the inscription "Alexander – King of Macedonia".

The euphoria that welcomed the monument of Alexander the Great is perceived as late romanticized nationalism that all countries had went through in the early stages of their independence, but hundred years ago, in early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The monument of Alexander the Great triggered divided reactions in the Macedonian society. While some considered this expensive monument with fountain an example of antiquization that hinders the country's chances for integration in NATO and the EU, others believed the monument of this antique conqueror should have been placed on the square in Skopje long time ago.

Mayor of Skopje Koce Trajanovski and author of this sculpture Valentina Stevanovska attended the monument's placement. She expressed happiness and pride that people are present to see the monument on which she had worked for three years.

A week earlier, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski took his family for casual walk on the square and saw the monument when it was brought in pieces.

Why is the monument of Alexander the Great placed on central location on the square in Skopje?

The monument is 25-meters high and weighs 30 tons, and has colossal dimensions. The horse's pose, with raised front hoofs, is intended to depict battle victory. The equestrian, Alexander the Great, is also placed in triumphant pose, with his sword raised high as signal to the army to follow him, but also as sign of victory! The figure on horseback with high-risen sword is clear symbol of victor and conqueror.

Psychiatrists, when analysing the monument and the governance method of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, indicate that he wishes to personify himself in Alexander the Great; a leader, powerful, invincible, waging a sword, just as Bucephalus on two legs, towards the south. On the twentieth anniversary from Macedonia's independence, the Prime Minister addressed citizens gathered in the square and officially unveiled the grandiose fountain and monument "Warrior on Horse", as it was officially named.

The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs viewed this monument as provocation from Skopje, stealing Greek history and step backward in name negotiations. At the first meeting after Alexander the Great was placed, Greek Foreign Minister Stavros Lambrinidis advised his counterpart Antonio Miloshoski that Macedonia should look into the future instead of rewriting history and that it should build bridges between the two countries instead of putting up walls and monuments. As regards placement of the monument of Alexander the Great in the centre of Skopje, EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule stated that when there are open issues with neighbouring countries, one must refrain from actions that could be perceived as provocation. Anonymous western diplomats in the country commented they are concerned and that hopes for fast resolution of the name dispute have declined after the statue was placed.

Less than a year later, in late May 2012, local authorities in the Municipality of Centar erected another monument with historic figure from the antique civilization, Philip the Second, on the Square Karposh Uprising. The bronze sculpture of Philip the Second is 15 meters high, placed atop 13-meter pillar, and located in the space between Church St. Dimitrija and the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Three fountains are constructed around the monument, and the entire project is worth around 5 million euros. The sculpture with official name "Warrior" had been constructed at the Guastini Foundry from Vicenza, Italy. It is authored by sculptress Valentina Stevanovska, who is the best paid sculptor within the project "Skopje 2014", with royalties in the amount of 2,940,000 euros.

Monuments of Alexander the Great and his father Philip are among the most expensive sculptures commissioned by the Municipality of Centar during the tenure of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. Over a period of several years, his government has transferred 58,023,986 euros to the municipality's account for implementation of this project, payment of foundries and placement of numerous monuments, 46 in total, in the narrow central area. Irregularities have been found with these procedures. According to the law, the local government cannot erect monuments paid with funds from the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia. The Law on Monuments and Memorials has been violated in terms of the procedure for erection of monuments, which had been led as procedure for erection of memorials. That was pursued in order to avoid long procedures for monuments led in the parliament and instead competences for placement of monuments were unlawfully assigned to municipalities, which implement simplified procedures. Hence, all monuments, including those of Alexander the Great and Philip the Second, are not monuments for which the parliament should have taken decisions, but are purposefully classified as memorials, i.e. busts and sculptures, which fall under competences of local governments.

On January 6, 2012, official ceremony was held to unveil the Macedonia Arch on the Pela Square in Skopje, decorated with motifs from Macedonian history, culture and tradition, and designed by sculptress Valentina Stevanovska. Its construction costed the budget 4.5 million euros. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski expressed public gratitude to different-minded people and said: "...independently from what will happen in the future on this place and in the time to come, this project already has its history which, in the future and most certainly, will be studied, retold, praised or critiqued, rewritten or documented by

many". "One day", said Gruevski, "we will all be gone, but the works will remain... One day, political and partisan dust and fog raised for this project will recede; will be gone; and the view will no longer be blurred. The works will remain to shine in all their glory, while critics and future generations, unburdened by daily politics and party manipulations, will be able to make their final judgment".

And they do, just as the former Prime Minister had prophesized more than seven years ago. Hence, in the opinion of professor and archaeologist Nikos Chausidis: "What devaluates the project 'Skopje 2014' is not the selection of anachronistic styles for its realization or the concept on turning the city into museum. The criticism mainly targets poor quality of buildings, in architectural and sculptural terms, failing to fulfil the most basic academic level of technical and stylistic clarity under assigned styles, let alone make a breakthrough that would imply supra-standard creative expression".

"In general, what is missing or completely absent from statues that are part of the project 'Skopje 2014' concerns author's attempt to depict the internal spirit of figures represented", remarks professor Nikos Chausidis. "Their sculptural technique is void of emotions, charm, movement, play and metaphysical dimension. It is reduced to simple statement and declaration, unjustified greatness, theatrical heroism and unsubstantiated pride. But, these are manners common to politicised arts which, at any time and any place, believe that quantity, i.e. size and number of works, is more important than quality, more important than artistic achievement; they believe compliance with deadlines is more important than the spiritual depth of such constructions".

Three willow trees in the River Vardar represent a sculpture by author Iskra Dimitrova, titled "Faith, Hope, Love", which was awarded as first-ranked design on the open call announced by the Ministry of Culture in 2012. This artistic work triggered major dilemmas in the public on the account of its price tag - 278,000 euros. Author Iskra Dimitrova defended her work by indicating that trees are work of art, not nursery plants. The opposition criticized this installation with three willow trees for its high price tag and called it unproductive expenditure at times when the state borrows more than 250 million euros.

## ARE MONUMENTS OVERPAID OR DID THEY SERVE AS MONEY LAUNDROMAT?

---

Sculptor Andrea Pisani, owner of the Arte Bronzo Foundry, says that these monuments, according to their format and size, would be constructed at his foundry for 2,700,000 euros or almost by three times cheaper than the actual amount paid. He does not know how the authorities in Skopje agreed to pay this amount of money.

---

Sculptor Andrea Pisani, owner of the Arte Bronzo Foundry, confirmed that government officials had visited and offered him to cast a number of monuments from "Skopje 2014", but he declined. He is surprised by the amount of 8,500,000 euros which the Municipality of Centar paid to the Ferdinando Marinelli Foundry from Florence, for construction of four lions that were placed on the bridge near the government building, the monuments of Goce Delchev, Dame Gruev, Nikola Karev and the mouldings for the central square fountain. Pisani says that, according to their format and size, these monuments would be constructed at his foundry for 2,700,000 euros or almost three times cheaper than the actual amount paid. He does not know how the authorities in Skopje had agreed to pay this amount of money. "After completion of these works, the Ferdinando Marinelli Foundry from Florence could easily stop its operation" says Pisani, commenting several-times higher earnings compared to the actual costs, according to his estimates. In 2014, all this information was handed over to then-incumbent President of the Anticorruption Commission Mirjana Dimovska, but she did not form a docket to investigate possible wrongdoing by the authorities under agreements signed for casting of monuments in Italy.

## BUILDINGS AND CHANGE OF FASADES

Under the project "Skopje 2014", architecture is transformed into stage decoration. As architecture, the concept of monumentalism with quasi-historicism, decorated with insultingly named baroque, does not correspond to modern trends. It is retrograde. Over the period of 10 years, this gruevist mega-project managed to construe false, instant history, with instant architecture.

"The project's aggressive realization is best seen in information that the Detailed Urban Plan for the city's central area, Small Rink, was amended as many as nine times during

its implementation. Construction [of this project] abused mediocre architects and people of this profession who were ready to sign or do anything they are told", says prof. Miroslav Grchev, one of the biggest opponents of this project. "Vast portion of buildings are not positioned on free plots, but as part of complexes and ambiences which, from urbanistic, architectural and stylistic aspect, have been formed and completed long ago, and have been filled with historical and emotional aura. Eye-striking is the strong insistence to new constructions, at any price, which should be built on highly frequented, but exceptionally narrow and inadequate locations, even when they need to be crunched against existing buildings and stand two-three meters from nearby façades", concludes prof. Nikos Chausidis.

Buildings are constructed in a style that could be denominated as "contemporarily eclectic, pseudo-classical anachronism", because it is evident that architecture is conceptualized and construed pursuant to modern structural and technological solutions. Architect Vangel Bozhinovski says he insisted on Macedonian baroque, but cannot understand his colleagues who firmly stood on the position that this style should be copied. "I wonder why is that the case", says Bozhinovski, "and I go back in time before the emergence of historically-styled construction; we were building in the modern [style] and had the same situation; if 90 percent of these [buildings] are copies, the share of non-original projects back then was the same".

Architects and urban planners became aware of great changes that would take place in the city centre after the presentation of the project's visualization in 2010 and changes to the urban plan, which anticipated a number of buildings, lined one after another, on the left bank of Vardar. Citizens of Skopje definitely lost the plateau outside the Macedonian Opera and Ballet which, after all planned buildings were constructed, resembles a narrow alley. Some architects expressed discontent that the space between new and existing buildings is too close and that buildings are lumped one against another. They warned about the line of construction in this area being dangerously moved towards the River Vardar, and that buildings are constructed on the riverbank's wall, something that had been unimaginable before.

"The logic of urban mafia lies in the basis of 'Skopje 2014'", says Nikos Chausidis, "[and this logic] does not respect construction heritage, harmonic compositions, or sociological and ideological justification of buildings. All these absent or allegedly present components

are taken into account only in regard to the most important, singular goal: construction of my building to be approved by institutions and citizens, earning me great profits and power”.

All buildings from the project “Skopje 2014” are exceptionally expensive. The Archaeological Museum is an investment worth 42 million euros, but its building floods whenever it rains. Its top floor, lying under pipes of different installations, houses the Archive of Macedonia’s depot. All documents from centuries in the past and guarding the nation’s identity are now under risk of pipes bursting and water leaking whenever it rains. An additional risk for preservation of archive materials is seen in the vicinity of Vardar and moist carried by river waters. The Archaeology Museum is richly decorated with classicistic façade, but underneath this façade, indoor space is barely wider than 15 meters, making the grandiose pillars in Ionic style resemble a stage plateau, built as purpose in itself, because there is no space behind to justify such grandiosity.

Next to it is the building that houses the Agency for Electronic Communications, with price tag of 11.5 million euros, constructed by the company Granit from Skopje. This building is oddly-looking, with seven floors and high-risen loft, but its indoor space is only 10 meters deep.

Next in line of administrative buildings on the left bank of Vardar is the Public Prosecution Office’s building, an investment of 14,734,000 euros. At its official launch, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said that [this building] solves the issue of insufficient space and rent payments for state institutions. The building is constructed as rotunda and was built within a period of three years by the company Beton from Skopje.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the last building in this row, worth 20 million euros and constructed by Beton from Skopje. It was officially launched on October 23, 2012, the Day of the Macedonian Struggle. It is 27 meters high, with a floor area of 13,500 square meters. MFA’s new headquarters is decorated with 37 sculptures of prominent diplomacy figures, which are difficult to be detected, sitting on the roof, while another 14 sculptures depicting traditional clothes from Macedonia and Europe adorn the building’s façade.

Buildings from “Skopje 2014” do not exhaust investments on the left bank of the River Vardar. The list of buildings expands to the surrounding areas and includes replacement of façades in the city's central area.

The City of Skopje started replacement of building façades in 2011. In that, reconstruction works were made only to front sides of buildings, although at the time when the project was promoted the city authorities had assured the public that the purpose of this effort is for tenants in Skopje's central area to benefit from energy efficient building envelopes.

Priced at 16.5 million euros, Nikola Gruevski's government started works on refashioning the exterior of the government's headquarters in baroque style. Constructed in 1970, this building is authored by architect Petar Mulichkovski who does not agree with changes made on the basis of the new design by Zharko Chaushevski.

In 2012, the government offered architect Petar Mulichkovski cooperation, but he refused and said: “I do not agree. The baroque-style change makes no sense. That building is a work of art, awarded on the open competition by top-notch experts from Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade. New façade of the government's building is make-up and hairstyling. In that, the government offers citizens a picture-book instead of technical solution. The project resembles camouflage, inferring that something needs to be covered, which is both negligent and unbecoming. Modern-day architectural and urban works aspire to move forward. They cannot go back in time to the baroque of 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century”, author Mulichkovski argued, but to no avail, as the government ignored his pleas. “There is no logic in building facilities in the style from 300 years ago. That is stupid, and impossible. It is disgraceful to go back, when construction and architecture across the world are going forward and apply modern-day technical solutions.” Professor Petar Mulichkovski says he offered the government a design with reflective-glass façade, but it was rejected. They wanted a government building styled in the fashion from 300 years ago, as if the Macedonian cause pertains to that ideology, when it clearly does not. In the world there are no practices on changing the look of such an important building without its author to be consulted. The Government's Department on General and Joint Matters, responsible for façade and interior redesign, announced that, according to the law, the government building is treated as facility of applied arts, but Mulichkovski says the building is state ownership, not personal property of the government, because governments are temporary category and subject of change.

Architect Danica Pavlovska who, together with the Association of Architects of Macedonia, assisted author Petar Mulichkovski in his attempt to preserve the government's authentic look, says the author had been put in humiliating position. The professor requested several meetings with Prime Minister Gruevski, who denied his requests, leaving him to explain his secretary how painful it is for him to have his work destroyed... The Association of Architects motioned a lawsuit against the government on the grounds of disrespect for copyrights, but due to his age and fatigue, prof. Petar Mulichkovski declined to move forward with this process in its early stages.

---

Architects say that, by changing façades of buildings, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski had embarked on a venture to destroy all traces of modern architecture in Skopje, built after the earthquake in 1963. They add that such destructivity is rarely witnessed in the history, implying demolition of cultural values of a previous period in time.

---

Architects say that, by changing façades of buildings, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski had embarked on a venture to destroy all traces of modern architecture in Skopje, built after the earthquake in 1963. They add that such destructivity is rarely witnessed in the history, implying demolition of cultural values of a previous period in time. The government did not stop, but continued by refashioning MEPSO's façade, constructed in 1989, with plaster materials.

At the same time, three new buildings are declared cultural heritage: the Museum of Macedonian Struggle, the Macedonia Arch, and Mother Theresa's Memorial House. Replacement of façades on residential and administrative building in neoclassical style continued, 26 in total, including new façades for the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Transport and Communication, EVN and "Pelagonija".

"History has not seen a counterfeit of such proportions", says architect Miroslav Grchev. The same set of buildings is debased and covered with layers of kitsch, while modern architecture from the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s remains underneath. "There are records of public procurements, unprecedented in the history of architecture, wherein it is written that projects concern new façades in neoclassicism, neo-romanticism, and gothic style. The basis for this horrifying grotesque

called 'Skopje 2014' does not imply an architectural idea, but anti-modernist idea that originates in low education of then-incumbent government led by Nikola Gruevski. At the time of Yugoslavia, especially after the earthquake, Skopje was the silicon valley of world architecture and urban planning. It served as laboratory for development of

most courageous, futuristic works. Nowadays, 'Skopje 2014' is caricature, a shameful venture of ideology wishing to skip over an entire period of time, reducing architectural modernism to domestic communism and wishing to create discontinuity at any cost. In that, it attempts to erase memories of older generations with new façades, and falsify the history for young generations with polystyrene".

New administrative buildings for the highly-esteemed state administration in Macedonia displayed their weaknesses not long after construction, but investments in them did not stop with construction works. Buildings on the bank of the River Vardar are flooding and their roofs leak whenever it rains; their walls are cracking. A series of irregularities were observed in their construction, including practices to save money on construction materials. More than 90 percent of newly-constructed baroque buildings are leaking.

## **TWO SHIPS IN THE RIVER VARDAR**

The decision to anchor ships in the River Vardar was adopted during the tenure of former Mayor Koce Trajanovski. The company Phalanx, owned by Davor Andreeski, was awarded two locations for tourist ships, while the third location was taken under concession by Stojan Filipovski, owner of the restaurant Vodenica. According to their contracts with the City of Skopje, they were supposed to build and operate these ships for a period of 10 years. The first galleon, called Royal Macedonia, was officially opened in June 2014. The ship that operates as hotel, owned by Filipovski, was opened in 2016.

The study on reducing flood risks in Skopje, developed by UNDP in cooperation with the City of Skopje and the Crisis Management Centre, showed that bridges and ships in the River Vardar have reduced the river-flow capability by one third. The study enlists that most recent anthropogenic changes have decreased the projected flow capability of the riverbed by 25 to 35 percent from the initially projected water flow of 1,150 cubic meters, and that embankments, barriers and other facilities should not be constructed in the River Vardar.

"In the past few years, Vardar's regulated riverbed in the central area of Skopje has been subjected to anthropogenic changes. After 2010, two pedestrian bridges were built and one more bridge for the Ferris Wheel, which is currently under construction. Also, changes include placement of three static ships in the riverbed, intended for entertainment purposes. Having this in mind, the current situation of the Vardar riverbed in Skopje is visibly changed from its projected parameters, mainly due to the large quantity of bulwark deposited in the riverbed and the infrastructure that takes up part of the cross-sectional profile" reads the study.

## DIVISION OF THE CITY INTO MACEDONIAN AND ALBANIAN PART

In early 2012, construction works started on the Skanderbeg Square in Skopje. Opponents to this type of ethnic projects say that, in multiethnic Macedonia, the capital is divided from the aspect urban planning. Skopje's centre already hosts grandiose monument to the ancient hero Alexander the Great and now the Albanians are given space where they could celebrate their national identity. Both construction projects are financed from the state budget.

In early 2012, the ruling party DUI organized official event to mark the start of construction works on the Skanderbeg Square. This ceremony was hosted by Mayor of Chair Izet Medziti, DUI leader Ali Ahmeti, and Mayor of Tirana Ljulzim Basha, as the guest of honour. It featured intonation of the Albanian anthem and hoisted the Albanian flag, but failed to include any Macedonian symbols. Macedonian politicians were not in attendance.

Architects who designed the Skanderbeg Square say that everybody would benefit from this. They announced construction of underground parking garage and landscaped entrance to the Old Bazaar, with a price tag of 10 million euros. The same amount was already invested by the government for the monument of Alexander the Great.

As early as 2007, Mayor of Chair Izet Medziti unveiled the monument of Skanderbeg on the left side of Vardar. In 2011, Nikola Gruevski's government placed the monument of Alexander the Great on the city's right side. Macedonians and Albanians have built parallel symbols of mono-ethnic identification in the country where multiethnicity guarantees its stability.

In 2012, when construction works started on the Skanderbeg Square, on the place where his monument is located, Mayor of Chair Izet Medziti again denied that the square is intended only for the Albanians.

"This square will not divide, but will link the two municipalities, Chair and Centar. It connects old Skopje to modern Skopje, and represents a bridge of different cultures and different ethnic communities".

Nikola Naumovski, activist from Freedom Square, says the problem with the new Skanderbeg Square is the fact that Macedonians would not feel it as theirs, just as it is believed that Albanians do not feel close to the square with the antique Alexander. Now, both communities have separate squares, instead of shared place where Macedonians and Albanians will build friendship and closeness.

Both parties in the government coalition, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, had agreed and had divided Skopje along the River Vardar and Boulevard Goce Delchev. One side of the city already has a square and now the Albanians will have their square.

Miroslav Grchev, professor of architecture at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius", says that monuments from the government's project "Skopje 2014" have three-fold purpose: to permanently praise the government that had built them; to change the national identity of Macedonians, by emphasizing Alexander the Macedon as myth-like model of the Uber-Macedonian; and to secure not only symbolic, but also physical line for the city's ethnic division between Macedonians and Albanians.





In mid-October 2012, on the hundredth jubilee of Albania's statehood, DUI officials revealed the monument of Hasan Prishtina, located in front of the Trade Centre Mavrovka. At the event, the Mayor of Chair stated that with the placement of monument honouring this Albanian ideologist they become direct architects of Albanism in Skopje.

One year later, the statute of Tsar Dushan stirred tensions in Skopje. DUI official Bekir Asani used sledgehammer to destroy this monument of the Serbian Tsar, placed on the Bridge of Civilization. His party demanded the monument to be removed, indicating that seven centuries ago the Serbian Tsar had played negative role in the history of Albanians. MP Ermira Mehmeti said that Albanians are gearing up for mass protests and are calling for civic demolition of the monument. "I think our presence at the Bridge of Civilization had calmed down emotions and prevented destabilization of the situation".

Ivan Stoilkovikj, MP from the Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia, reacted and said that the incident has deep background and heralds possible preparations for early parliamentary elections.

"It is a matter of organized group that wants to shake down political life in Macedonia. The fact that DUI members took part in the incident only aggravates their position, because this event would serve as blot of ink for any future cooperation [with them]".

At the same time, Mayor of Centar Andrej Zhernovski formed a commission to clarify dilemmas in the public whether all procedures had been followed in placement of the monument of Tsar Dushan. They have already established that the Bridge of Civilization includes 15 monuments whose placement is not documented, including Tsar Dushan's statute. In the aftermath, Mayor Zhernovski announced removal of all monuments and statues that have been illegally placed in the municipality and that the municipal administration will engage in principled work to remove, in his words, all cuckoo eggs which the government wishes to plant in this opposition-run municipality.

In September 2014, monuments of equestrians with weapons were placed opposite the monuments of Skanderbeg and Hasan Prishtina. Vast number of intellectuals, Macedonians and Albanians, reiterate that the project further enhances Skopje's division along ethnic and religious lines.

The policy of ethnic divisions in the capital was confirmed with incidents in early 2011 on the Skopje Fortress which, instead of telling the most beautiful story about Skopje and the documented history of this site, has become the symbol of clashes between Macedonians and Albanians.

The incident on the Fortress took place on February 13, 2011, and included fist-fight between supporters and opponents to construction of the museum-church.

Two days earlier, late in the night on Friday, February 11, large group of people led by Mayor of Chair Izet Medziti used steel-cutting tools to demolish the shell construction because, in their opinion, the orthodox population wishes to appropriate the cultural heritage accumulated on this site. "We were here yesterday, and will hold vigil tonight, and whenever needed, because will not allow any form of discrimination", stated Mayor of Chair Izet Medziti.

The violent incident with massive brawls on the Skopje Fortress ignited interethnic tensions.

One group was led by Artan Grubi, president of the non-governmental organization "Wake Up", and the second group was fronted by the fan club "Komiti". Seven people were injured, one of which policeman. The incident happened after both groups arrived to the Fortress and started brawling and throwing stones.

175

The police failed to manage the situation, which was due to non-coordination or their abuse for political purposes. TV-aired footage showed Deputy Minister of Interior from DUI Dzevad Buchi releasing one protester when he was being apprehended by uniformed policemen. Buchi personally took off handcuffs from a number of apprehended persons. The Deputy Minister of Interior would later say he was there to calm the situation.

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski condemned such violence and called the institutions to resolve this incident.

"I appeal to everybody not to use these events for partisan goals. We will not allow any such event to play with citizens' feelings and be used for private interests. We will do all within our powers to restore normal dynamics of matters", stated Gruevski.

However, it remains unclear how coalition partners in the government were unable to coordinate their positions about the construction of museum-church on the Skopje

Fortress and have created an atmosphere of interethnic tensions and dissemination of hate, especially on the social media.

A year later, the Skopje Basic Court issued probation sentences to 50 defendants, accused of having caused massive brawl at the Fortress. The court's press-release indicated that all defendants were issued probation sentences in duration of three months which shall not be enforced unless in the period of two years they do not commit new criminal offence. The court verdict was taken without main hearing for all defendants, and all of them were issued the same sentence for criminal offence defined as participation in crowd that would prevent an official to perform official duties and participation in brawl. Convicted persons included Artan Grubi who, at the time of this incident worked at the Dutch Embassy, but at the time when the court verdict was taken, i.e. one year later, was Chief of Cabinet to DUI president Ali Ahmeti. A number of participants in the incident, i.e. 14 of them, demanded to be tried in order to have their innocence proven. A year later, the court issued them stricter sanctions, i.e. 7-month probation sentences provided they do not repeat the criminal offence in the next two years. Artan Grubi was one of them.

## **“SKOPJE 2014” AFTER THE REGIME’S FALL**

In 2017, after the change of central and local government, moratorium was declared for the project “Skopje 2014”.

At the 2018 Venice Biennale, architect Dejan Ivanovski and his colleagues Filip Jovanovski, Sanja Avramovska, Valbona Fejza and Miroslav Pejovski showcased an architectonic experiment focused on identification and liberation of the captured public space in Skopje's centre and creation of new concept for this space, which had been destroyed by “Skopje 2014”. “The entire construction fund from the period 2010-2018 in the centre of Skopje, especially between the Stone Bridge and the Freedom Bridge is mainly build on public space”, concluded Macedonian architects in their presentation. Unfortunately, the space, which for long time was intended to serve as pedestrian zone and forms unity with facilities gravitating around it, is erroneously treated and re-imagined with changes to the Detailed Urban Plan. Five inhumane and voluminous structures are constructed in this space, those being: Archaeology Museum, together with State Archive and Constitutional Court; Agency for Electronic Communications; Colonnade “Independent Macedonia”; Public Prosecution Office, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The pedestrian zone, as defined urban and spatial unit, is comprised of city parts isolated from traffic and is exclusively intended for movement and recreation of pedestrians. "This part of the city", say the architects, "should be as intended - free public space which belongs to the people. This architectural experiment is a process of research which, by engaging in systematic, programmatic and spatial analysis of five buildings on the bank of the River Vardar, attempts to re-examine dimensions built, which serve as volume for violent injection of program packages in these disproportioned and naïve dimensions. This proposal for re-programming parts of buildings' ground levels and floor areas is an attempt to open, liberate and repurpose them, under new program and in close relation to the context in which these buildings are found". Portion of the space explored by the architects is closed or useless for the institutions, and they are inaccessible to citizens who could be future users of that space. "The entire process for creation of this experiment includes four key actions: liberation of the space and non-functional contents in five buildings; connecting the freed space with the location in which they are found, by designing vertical and horizontal lines of communication; decontamination of buildings from all and any decorations, including domes which, under the new changes, lose their purpose; and reprogramming the freed contents".

In his elaboration of this architectonic experiment, Dejan Ivanovski reminds that Zhivko Popovski, author of the City Trade Centre, had indicated the need to maintain a distance of 40 meters from both sides of Vardar, as free zones designated for pedestrians. "In an act of aberration, some people had identified this as free space for construction of new buildings. Hence, they constructed buildings that are long, but narrow, and practically stand there as stage decoration, i.e. it had been proved this space is inadequate for the Skopje administration to perform its work". "The ideas for 'Skopje 2014' are black-and-white", says Ivanovski, "demolish or leave them. We have another proposal. We believe that the buildings should not be demolished. First, they should stay, as items to be removed would not affect elevators and stairways, which vertically connect the buildings. In the next step, we identified spaces in the four building on the Vardar riverbank that are non-functional, although there are many other buildings of this type. The intention is to open these spaces by dismantling windows and making them public, i.e. open to citizens. The second procedure proposed concerns connection, because buildings are not connected to the location and are outside the context. The proposal is for all building decorations to be removed, including domes, tympanums, pillars, decorations; and bridges to be liberated of sculptures and ornaments". Architect Ivanovski says that "concrete

pillars on the Archaeology Museum, initially projected at 70 centimetres, have become double in dimensions with the addition of marble decorations. These decorations are unnecessary, expensive and they are unnatural to the Macedonian [building tradition]". The group of architects proposes constructive action, whereby the empty space will be given to cultural institutions and citizens will be allowed to use them in their free time. In other words, they should become more democratic. The entire occupied space on the riverbank should become a public space. According to the team's estimates, their proposal would result in liberation of one third of space pertaining to the Archaeology Museum, more than two fifths of AEC's building will be opened to citizens, but in the case of buildings hosting PPO and MFA, chances for intervention are lower, and according to the architects' project, only 15 percent of their space could become public.

Architects who developed the proposal for space liberation say their goal is not to develop archival or nostalgic attitude to the past, but the proposal attempts to establish critical relationship to the present and to previous layers in this complex construct of ideas and practical views, in order to create new constructive glimpse towards the future.

Architect Dejan Ivanovski says it would be best if buildings on Vardar's left bank are demolished, but that cannot be done in Macedonia. There is neither capacity nor machinery for that purpose, and demolition would take place over several years, resulting in dust and building debris affecting citizens' health.

In general, the fact that SDSM's new government did not show any position towards "Skopje 2014" is problematic, especially knowing that they strongly opposed this project, which had instigated the change of government led by VMRO-DPMNE, first in the Municipality of Centar, and later in the City of Skopje, and the country. Some architects suggested switching off lights on buildings from this project, in symbolic gesture of disapproval of baroque buildings. "At the same time", they say, "building of the Postal Office has fallen into darkness, as well as other buildings considered architectural heritage of the Skopje Modern. Another proposal is to remove the façade on the government building and to build new, modern façade. The same proposal is valid for more than 25 buildings that had their façades changed by previous authorities, some of them older than half a century. The idea is to remove old façade styles and solve the problems with thermal and sound insulation".

Miroslav Grchev, professor at the Faculty of Architecture, believes that damages caused by "Skopje 2014" are not only architectural and that architecture professionals still lack understanding that everything should be restored to their original form and that illegal buildings should be demolished. Buildings with new façades should have their original look restored. "It has been two years since the new government took office", says Grchev, "but we had failed to show courage, virtue and knowledge to remove architectural layers imposed by VMRO-DPMNE, at the time of their dictatorship. That is why I believe that we still live in state capture".

In February 2018, SDSM's government removed one monument from this project - Andon Lazov Kjoseto.



Vladimir Milchin

CAPTURED  
CULTURE  
IN STATE  
CAPTURE

What had befallen on culture in the Republic of Macedonia in the years from the Bucharest failure, when the state was denied invitation for NATO membership, until the signing of Prespa Agreement? Any attempt to answer this question would be impossible without having answered the question about what had befallen on the Republic of Macedonia in the years when the state was captured by Nikola Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE and Ali Ahmeti's DUI!

<sup>1</sup> The government coalition of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI was in power from 2008 early elections until 2016 early parliamentary elections.

What is state capture? It is a systemic political corruption, wherein private interests have significant influence on decision-making processes in the state for personal benefits. That corruption also involves non-transparent income of public officials, buying votes on the elections, executive decisions, court verdicts, and unlawful funding of political parties. A state capture happens when ground rules of the game are shaped by particular interests, not by the national interest.

What is culture? Culture is the sum of characteristics, knowledge and memory of a group of people (e.g. a nation), such as language, religion, social customs and arts. Oxford Dictionary defines culture as arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievements, viewed collectively.

Western contemporary culturologists identify three models of culture. Cross-cultural societies are those where differences are understood and acknowledged. They could bring about individual change, but not collective transformations. In cross-cultural societies, one culture is often considered "the norm" and all other cultures are compared or contrasted to the dominant culture. Intercultural describes communities in which there is deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms, and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together. Multiculturalism is the presence or the support for presence of several different cultural or ethnic groups in the society. People may live alongside one another, but the groups do not necessarily engage in interactions with each other.

The failure, desired by ruling authorities, for the Republic of Macedonia to join NATO in 2008 had enabled the state capture. The government was aware that captured culture is precondition for state capture. Hence, culture was under party-issued orders to re-tailor the memory and identity of Macedonians. The culture was captured by VMRO-DPMNE's

regime for almost 10 years, with orders executed by Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska, who served as Minister of Culture in the period from 2008 to 2017. That zeitgeist would be remembered as *gruevism*.

## THE YEARS BEFORE BUCHAREST

In May 2001, the Council of Europe dispatched a group of experts to get acquainted with Macedonia's cultural policy. They were given insight into 250-page document, drafted by several civil servants at the Ministry of Culture and few external associates, with Nove Cvetanovski coordinating this group. Experts from the Council of Europe requested to meet several people active in the sphere of culture, to hear their opinions about the cultural policy and the ministry's document. One topic discussed at these meetings concerned the idea for privatization of cultural centres. Experts were surprised to learn that ASNOM's centres had been constructed with people's money, collected as voluntary contributions, and that some of them host professional theatres. Questions that were raised also inquired about anticipated decentralization of culture without previously defined terms and conditions, i.e. possibilities and obligations to be fulfilled by the municipalities.<sup>2</sup>

It took several years, three governments and four ministers of culture to finally organize a public debate about the Draft National Program on Culture. Two years before the regular parliamentary elections in 2006, on December 4, 2003, Minister of Culture from SDSM Blagoj Stefanovski presented the National Program on Culture for the period 2004–2008, together with the network of national institutions. This document anticipated downsizing national institutions from 115 to around 50, with establishment of cultural centres in 14 towns,<sup>3</sup> which would merge several institutions or cultural activities. Around 600 from total of 2,450 employees at national institutions were planned to be transferred to local governments. The Minister of Culture acknowledged that envisaged "soft" decentralization of culture would happen before the package of local government laws is adopted, including the Law on Financing Municipalities. He enlisted a number of capital investments: new building for the Veles Theatre, new building for the Turkish Theatre in

<sup>2</sup> *Direct meetings for the culture strategy*, Vest, 14.5.2001

<sup>3</sup> National institutions - culture centres. The model was introduced during the tenure of SDSM's Minister of Culture Blagoj Stefanovski, but was multiplied during VMRO-DPMNE's governance. It replicated the model introduced in France when the Minister of Culture Andre Malraux had decentralized the statist centralized culture in France.

Skopje, and new concert hall in Skopje. The so-called reconstruction of the Skopje Old Theatre and construction of space at the culture centre in Prilep to accommodate the local theatre exceeded his term of office.<sup>4</sup> To date, the Turkish Theatre's new building is still a shell-construction, while theatre space at the cultural centre in Prilep had been

---

Culture was instructed to fabricate arguments about the newly composed Macedonian nationalism, about alleged antique roots of Macedonism, about Macedonia being the cradle of orthodoxy, about the "baroque" Skopje that was allegedly razed by Piccolomini, about the second rebirth.

---

forgotten all together. In spite of numerous functional problems, the Philharmonic's Concert Hall,<sup>5</sup> the reconstructed Old Theatre occupied by MNT<sup>6</sup> and the Veles Theatre<sup>7</sup> were pompously launched during VMRO-DPMNE's governance. The reconstructed Old Theatre, in all its kitsch and false gold, became just another "pearl" of the project "Skopje 2014".

Decentralization of culture that had been announced in 2003 did not trigger even smallest reflection on transformation of the competent ministry: new system, new rules and new responsibilities. The Ministry of Culture had to frontline efforts to overcome the fear of changes. But, people at the ministry were far from cognizant that decentralization of culture cannot happen without de-concentration of powers entrusted to the minister and the competent ministry. In the years after 2006 elections, powers enjoyed by ministers of culture were reduced to execution of orders issued by leaders of VMRO-DPMNE, DPA and DUI.

Unlike SDSM, Nikola Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE had a well-designed plan for abuse of culture. In particular, culture was instructed to fabricate arguments about the newly composed Macedonian nationalism, about alleged antique roots of Macedonism, about Macedonia being the cradle of orthodoxy, about the "baroque" Skopje that was allegedly razed by Piccolomini, about the second rebirth. Hand-in-hand with the offensive to

<sup>4</sup> *Soft decentralization of culture*, Nova Makedonija, 5.12.2003; *Ministry of Culture proposes the new network of national institutions*, Utrinski vesnik, 5.12.2003

<sup>5</sup> There are no pipe organs necessary for performance of the classical repertoire; the stage podium cannot accommodate a symphonic orchestra in its full composition.

<sup>6</sup> New decorum could not be brought into the new building because the entrance is of inadequate dimensions.

<sup>7</sup> Veles Theatre was officially launched on December 24, 2014, but to present this building has not been issued technical approval. Heavy rains regularly flood the theatre.

recompose the memory of Macedonians, in the background, culture was being corrupted and criminalized. Intellectuals and artists willing to serve the authorities were bribed with management offices, titles and awards, with those unwilling to accept such roles being cast to the margins. The different cultural identities, Macedonian and Albanian, were barricaded behind high fences, while ethnic and linguist barriers were fortified.

The two parties in government, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI,<sup>8</sup> have a shared hate of modernism, internationalism and antifascism.<sup>9</sup>

"In the same broadcast,<sup>10</sup> the media reported about the court verdict about the fire arson at Postal Office of Macedonia's central building, i.e. the building which a local street 'philosopher' of conservatism (and member of 'gruevist's elite') considered to be 'highly outlandish in terms of architecture, making foreigners puzzle why it had not been turned into the city's logo',<sup>11</sup> where, at the time, another fresco by Lazeski had found its place (but vanished in the fire).<sup>12</sup> There was no verdict about this fresco (likely to the philosopher's joy?). Not a word. Like nobody cared; neither the court nor the government, not even the Ministry of Grub and Games, let alone the Association of Painting Artists of Macedonia (DLUM). They are so enamoured with their kitsch, polystyrene covered with concrete and false gold!"<sup>13</sup>

---

Intellectuals  
and artists  
willing to serve  
the authorities  
were bribed  
with management  
offices, titles  
and awards, with  
those unwilling  
to accept such  
roles being cast  
to the margins.

---

## FIRST VOICES OF THE RESISTANCE

First voices of resistance against the abuse and criminalization of culture emerged in late 2006. In the New Year's survey for the weekly *Aktuel*, published on December 29, 2006, Darko Markovikj, the bard of Macedonian caricature and animated film, wrote:

8 The coalition with DPA lasted only two years.

In these two years, DPA appointed two ministers of culture.

9 Exhibition "Artist and the Dictatorship" (Chifte Hammam, 2014) was opened only 24 hours.

10 2014

11 Branislav Sarkanjac, *Vreme*, 8.5.2010

12 After the fresco at the Railway Station that was destroyed in the 1963 earthquake.

13 Column by Zlatko Teodosievski, reprinted in "What is Gruevism".

"The optimism will be spread like butter on bread! I welcome 2007 with great optimism, because I regularly watch and read all press-conferences of the current government. I follow their newspaper columns, show programmes, music and entertainment on television stations, and all that instils me with unimaginable optimism. Life in 2007 will be much cheaper; we will no longer have to buy newspapers and pay TV subscription, because we would have memorized optimism by heart. We will be closer to NATO and the EU, able to see them with a naked eye, or more precisely, with one eye, given that all of us would have become one-eyed, rubbish-talking wisecracks.<sup>14</sup> [...] In the field of culture, I expect many things to happen. Announcements have been made for construction of buildings, streets, squares and monuments, merging culture with the construction business and resulting in single mafia, instead of separate mafias in construction and in culture."

"Glory of the Antique was selected consciously, serving as key link in the chain of the Rebirth of Spirit. It is conducive to manipulation of the nation, which would most certainly not denounce it, having been denied everything else: from the national flag to the state name? In that mythical fight to defend the single ounce of dignity that remained, literally anything could be planted to the people, as long as it boosts political ratings. Even Gruevski could be passed as Alexander of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, having shown strong effort and faith in God. How dare somebody grumble about his modest oratory skills with so many Greek in-laws and traitors in his surrounding that must be defeated at once? Moreover, even the Prime Minister starts to resemble a man who truly believes his self-assigned role", wrote journalist Nikola Mladenov in October 2008.<sup>15</sup>

"What is Gruevism" is an inventory of texts by 26 authors, published in the post-Bucharest years. It was published in December 2015, by the publishing house Templum, with financial support from the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. Nikola Gelevski, who served as editor of that publication, was among first intellectuals who wrote critical essays on *gruevization* of the culture in Macedonia. That inventory was a timely and intransigent collection of remembrances, intended for those who refuse to concede to oblivion.

14 An allusion to the animated series "One-eyed" and the talk show "Eat Rubbish".

15 Column in the weekly *Fokus*, reprinted in the inventory "What is Gruevism".

## MACEDONIAN PRAYER

In December 2008, show programme aired on MRT's first channel and pretending to serve as *Voice of the People*<sup>16</sup> premiered a video called "Macedonian Prayer". Author of this scandalous video, Niche Dimoski Makedon, had set on the path to convince Macedonians, whom he had renamed Macedonoids, of being the people chosen by God to serve as genesis for the white race "from here, to Japan". The attack launched by the quasi-public broadcaster MRT on common sense of its subscribers, which lasted for 9 minutes and 22 seconds, implied a pretention to serve as revelation that orthodoxy predates the antique: from God, through Alexander and Disciple Paul, to Nikola Gruevski! "Macedonian Prayer" was reprised umpteenth times on programmes aired by MRT. Most certainly, that would not have been possible without an order from almighty Nikola Gruevski.

Republic of Macedonia was thoroughly ploughed in search of the tomb of Alexander the Great or Alexander the Macedon as many preferred to call him. Antiquization was encouraged from the time of VMRO-DPMNE's government led by Ljubcho Georgievski, whose coalition partner was Vasil Tupurkovski, the creator of the idea for antiquization. Nikola Gruevski upgraded the myth about antique origins of Macedonians. Equipped with lots of money and vociferous support from strictly controlled and well "fuelled" media, and a dozen intellectuals and artists, he started the effort to lobotomize Macedonians.

From 19<sup>th</sup> century to present day, in the East and the West, strong is the pull of myths about the "chosen, heavenly, godly" people and nations, of the ancient, indigenous, of those who maintained primeval blood undiluted, in spite of transmigration and interference among tribes and peoples, and in spite of plagues and wars. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, what is the oldest nation in the world?" is the question raised by myth maniacs while tailoring, with unbearable easiness, late romanticism ethno-geneses to fit the idea of straightforward lineage, not only across centuries, but across millennia. In the fairy tale, Snowwhite falls into coma after taking a bite of the poisoned apple planted by the evil queen, her stepmother. And she wakes up only after being kissed by the prince on white horse. In the belated fairy tale trumpeted to Macedonians, they are Snowwhite who had fallen into the coma of Slavic tradition after taking a bite of the poisonous apple planted by the Comintern, and woke up as antique Macedonians or as Hunza people, after being kissed by prince Gruevski.

Monument of Olympia  
with Alexander III of  
Macedon and Philip  
II of Macedon in the  
background

16 Editor and host was Slobodan Tomikj.



"President Ivanov is not the single contender for the title - Ideologist of Paljurcism. A dozen philosophers, politicologists, historians and journalists are also in contention for this title. Converters and chameleons, fictitious liberals, party membership collectors, turbo-folk lovers, misers, Europhobes and West-haters, all maintain the swamp that threatens to stupefy and sink us all."<sup>17</sup>

## UNFINISHED URBANICIDE

"Just when an impression was gained that development of the city's central area moves in positive direction, pursuant to the new changes in society, in 1997 a young team of urban planners<sup>18</sup> designed the new Detailed Urban Plan for the narrow downtown district called Small Rink, adopted by the Municipality of Centar. It opened the gates to city profiteers and later to peddlers of populist politics, to engage in intensive construction works on all empty plots. The Macedonia Square was retiled after its cobblestone was removed and its historic avenue, lined with old chestnut trees, was timbered. Hence, the square was expanded disproportionately to create conditions for 'new ideas'. Controversial buildings like 'Lumiks' (on whose account the cult 'cobble stone' were removed, n/a) and the block 'Tiffany', which serves as traffic and ecological barrier, will remain permanent scars on and restrictive defects in the space. That was the start of guerrilla construction in the entire centre, grossly abused under the project 'Skopje 2014'.<sup>19</sup>

Law on Public Procurements was adopted in 2004.<sup>20</sup> Article 67 of this law legitimized negotiation procedures without prior announcement of call for bids. Unclear formulations in this article would be later used for corruptive businesses in implementation of the project "Skopje 2014".

The final knockdown was made on March 23, 2012, with the decision of the Skopje-based Administration for Protection of Cultural Heritage terminating the protection status for Skopje's downtown pedestrian zone "Central City Area II", comprised of more than 130 facilities,<sup>21</sup> and leaving only four buildings under protection. This decision opened the path for a construction offensive, with modernist façades of commercial and residential buildings in Skopje's strict centre being replaced by neoclassical. The single building

17 Vladimir Milchin, 9.12. 2010, in "What is Gruevism", p. 58

18 M. Grchev, V. Korobar and M. Penchikj

19 okno.mk, Dushanka Shulovikj, "Does Skopje have central area?", 21.5.2019

20 "Official Gazette of RM" no. 19/2004, articles 67 and 68

21 <https://prizma.mk>, *Architects of the modern Skopje condemn the city's retrograde retrofitting.*

whose tenants did not concede to pressures from authorities is located on the corner of Street Macedonia and Street Dimitrie Chupovski, in close vicinity to Mother Theresa's Memorial House.

On May 3, 2012, the city hall councillors from VMRO-DPMNE and DUI approved the decision on renaming 293 streets in the capital.<sup>22</sup>

### SKOPJE UNDER SIEGE BY "SKOPJE 2014"

In April 2019, a stroll down pedestrian zone Macedonia would lead you to street billboards with tourist maps abounding in "pearls" from the government's project "Skopje 2014". The map includes 44 photographs of facilities recommended for visit to domestic and foreign travellers in the capital, one of them being the recently constructed Hotel Marriott, owned by the chief of secret police and first-line cousin to Nikola Gruevski. "Warrior on Horse" (Alexander the Macedon) looms over the Macedonia Square. On the opposite bank of the River Vardar, located on the Square Karposh Uprising and leading to the Old Bazaar, father Philip the Second greets his son Alexander, with mother Olympia holding baby/child Alexander, sat in the fountain beneath. The Museum of Macedonian Struggle is comprised of Museum of Macedonian Struggle for Statehood and Independence, Museum of VMRO and Museum of Victims of the Communist Regime. Next we have the National Theatre,<sup>23</sup> MEPSO's building<sup>24</sup> and its pseudo-classical façade; the government building adorned in new white coat and fenced with iron bars; the white cube called City House and the white rotunda of PE Water Supply, casting its shadow on the Fortress, also reconstructed recently; the Criminal Court; the hidden modernist structure for the Macedonian Philharmonic;<sup>25</sup> the unfinished building of the National Bank of RM; the Faculty of Dramatic Arts;<sup>26</sup> the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Public Prosecution Office; the Agency for Electronic Communications; the Archaeology Museum of Macedonia, which also houses the Constitutional Court and State Archive; the Macedonia Arch with nearby giant figures of VMRO's founders sitting in mammoth-sized armchairs; just below them is the forgotten monument of Krste P. Misirkov; the Monument of Fallen Heroes

<sup>22</sup> [www.mkd.mk](http://www.mkd.mk)

<sup>23</sup> Macedonian National Theatre, sometimes called the Old Theatre.

<sup>24</sup> Macedonian Electricity Transmission System Operator, JSC

<sup>25</sup> The Colonnade "Independent Macedonia" shields it from the view of by-passers.

<sup>26</sup> FDA has still not moved in the inadequate building which it should share with another public administration institution.

for Macedonia and the unique Prometheus wearing underpants; the parliament building with domes; the grotesquely eclectic Mother Theresa Memorial House; the unfinished Church St. Constantine and Elena; the Ministry of Finance; ELEM;<sup>27</sup> the Sports Centre "Philip the Second", and the cable-car on Vodno. All in all - 26 facilities. The Macedonian Opera and Ballet, the Museum of Holocaust, the Old Railway Station and the City Zoo had been spared of "rebirth" makeovers. The Stone Bridge, the Skopje Fortress, Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Kurshumli Inn, Saint Salvation Church, Skopje Old Bazaar, National Gallery of Macedonia (Daut Pashin Hammam), St. Panteleimon Church, the inaccessible and abandoned Aqueduct and Marko's Monastery are all part of the authentic cultural heritage of Skopje and the Skopje Region. Matka Canyon remained untouched by the fall of gruevism, and the Madjari Ridge had been long forgotten.

This map lacks the so-called Belvederchen, favourite spot for photo sessions among newlyweds, before it was crunched between the bulky, but unfinished Officers Hall and another building under construction. This topography of clutter, dilettantism and ineptitude fails to include the refashioned department store or the concrete mass (sculptural composition?!) that should have been a shrine to Mother Theresa.

190

## WHAT DO NUMBERS FROM "SKOPJE 2014" TELL?

PRIZMA, project of the Balkan Network for Investigative Journalism (BIRN), compiled a database on buildings from "Skopje 2014" financed with public money. Findings of the research team were published on the internet on January 5, 2017,<sup>28</sup> and showed that, by 2017, total of 137 facilities had been constructed under "Skopje 2014", as follows: 28 buildings, 6 multilevel parking garages, more than 6 façades, 34 monuments, 5 squares, 1 Ferris Wheel, 2 underground parking garages, 4 bridges, 39 sculptures, 1 arch, 2 fountains and 9 other amenities. A number of these remain unfinished.

In the period January 2008 - January 2017, more than 684 million euros were spent on this project. Priced at 42 million euros, Archaeology Museum is the most expensive building, and it also hosts the Constitutional Court and State Archive. The most expensive multilevel parking garage carries the name of Todor Aleksandrov (174 million euros). Among façades, most expensive is the new envelope of the government building (17.7 million euros). In the category of monuments, "Warrior on Horse" holds the top place, with

<sup>27</sup> Power Plants of Macedonia, JSC

<sup>28</sup> <http://skopje2014.prizma.birn.eu.com/>

a price tag of 8.3 million euros. The most expensive square is Skanderbeg Square (14.2 million euros). The unfinished Ferris Wheel costed 19.7 million euros. The most expensive underground parking garage is constructed below the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (9.7 million euros). The most expensive sculpture is the Colonnade, placed on the riverbank (14 million euros). The Macedonia Arch costed 6.3 million euros, while the price tag for the fountain on the Macedonia Square is 2.6 million euros. Among other amenities, the most expensive is the telecommunication tower on Vodno (18.5 million euros), and the least expensive was the carousel (160.000 euros).

The project "Skopje 2014" was financed by the Government of RM, through its Sector on Common and Joint Matters with 22.9 percent, the Ministry of Culture with 18.8 percent, the Municipality of Centar with 8.8 percent, etc.

## DEFENCE OF THE INDEFENSIBLE

Aco Stankovski, painter and apologist of gruevism, proclaimed an ode to authorities defending "Skopje 2014" in the name of the people: "Even the government is a type of aesthetics... and the people who vote and distribute political powers are fully satisfied with design solutions of the project which, in its classic and epic realism, is more than adequate to the nation's expectations and aesthetics".<sup>29</sup> Zlatko Teodosievski, one of the fiercest critics of gruevism and of his apologists, wrote in response: "Here I mainly refer to violent interruption of the culture continuum, radical changes to existing culture and its replacement with another... nowadays (and likely in the future) chiefly called 'gruevism'. [...] Of course, I do not think that Macedonia is the single example in the world, in the sense that discontinuities are incidents in the world, but the opposite. In the world, historical and cultural discontinuities, in some sense, are continuity or upgrades to what exists. The philosophy of sword, or if you please, the philosophy of destruction, is unknown to great civilizations. (In this regard, I have flagrant imposition of similarities between 'gruevism' and its crucial project 'Skopje 2014' and the destructive appetites of the so-called Islamic State! [...] That entire 'cultural revolution', 'new system of values' and 'new society' had been reduced to polystyrene, marble that looks like marble but it's not marble, false gold and poor-grade bronze."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Utrinski vesnik, 8.1.2013

<sup>30</sup> *Philosophy of the Sword*, in "What is Gruevism".



АРХЕОЛОШКИ МУЗЕЈ НА МАКЕДОНИЈА



"Gruevski has made complete ideologization of the public space. He changed history textbooks. He shifted the focus and replaced the heroes to whom Macedonia should pay homage. He opened an ideology-based museum and expects everybody to rejoice that. Therefore, the first order of business for the new government is de-vmroization of the Macedonian society. [...] In such bleak, entangled and transitional ambience, Gruevski decided to implement the project 'Skopje 2014'. This project has completely provincial, even pathogen basis: historical baroque is replaced by trans-historical dichotomy of baroque/classicism, and authorship of trans-historical baroque is attributed to Alexander and the Hellenism, with recommendation for both models to be used in construction works as binary opposition: classicism and baroque."<sup>31</sup>

### APPEARANCE OF GODOT

"Sunday morning. I see white sunbeds on Koce's second beach. Sparkled with raindrops, they shine behind the line of palm trees. In the background, I see the old-new 'golden-casted' MNT and Museum of VMRO, hiding the Museum of the Holocaust in the background. On the left and slightly elevated, sitting atop the bridge, is the greenish arse from one of the two Assyrian-Japanese Lions. To the right, below the Stone Bridge, a high-risen plateau waits for its monument that should keep company to Kaprosh, located on the other side of the bridge. Down this line are the hotel Stone Bridge and three-storey building, continuing with Komercijalna Banka, suppressed by the monstrous sight of the Archaeology Museum, which also houses the Constitutional Court. High above this heavily-paid megalomania and crowdedness looms an iron-made scaffold, known for the fact that blood had been shed for its erection!<sup>32</sup> An insult to the eyes, an insult to the mind. I think of what old citizens of Prilep would say: 'abudzubur' (hodgepodge). Immediately I recoil: 'in what direction are white sunbeds turned?' Sweat beads appear on my forehead after I realize they are turned towards the concrete pillar with a plate atop, haphazardly implanted before the Ristikj Palace. A painting by James Ensor flickers before my eyes; phantasmagoria of 'Christ's Entry into Brussels'. My sweat cannot be compared to that of 'dandy' gruevists, whom I imagine stretched on sunbeds, excitedly expecting the arrival of the Long-Awaited Godot. Yes. The "Forum of Sunbeds', which had suppressed the old-looking Macedonia Square, is the right place to be for the Appearance of Godot. On that

31 Robert Alagjovzovski, February 2010, weekly *Sega*, reprinted in "What is Gruevism".

32 Unfinished church on the Skopje Fortress

day, Goce and Dame will make their horses kneel. Both Assyrian-Japanese Lions will turn their muzzles to the pillar in front of the Ristikj Palace. Chento will lower his hand and raise his hat, greeting Godot. Saints Cyril, Methodius, Clement and Naum will rotate by 180 degrees, cross on this side of the bridge, and will, bareheaded, kneel between Goce and Dame. Salonica Assassins will denounce bombs and guns, and Karposh will dismount from his horse. On that day, the Triumph Arch will defy its weight, rise from the floor, and will, in manner of flying carpet, take a flight, remaining to float high enough for the Long Awaited to pass beneath it. Knocks, squeaks and screeches from unexpected movement of concrete, marble and bronze will be subdued by the toll of bells on all churches in Skopje, with the sound made by the iron scaffold at the Fortress tolling most pleasantly of all. Bells will deafen the cries and shrieks of commies, sorosoids, archi-brigadiers, CEM members and thousands of other ingrates, sceptics and saboteurs, sweated and crunched in the National Arena 'Philip II'. Blessed are the wise urban planners who designed only two exits for this hall, allowing both of them to be walled-in within seconds by the Godot-loving construction industry. Blessed are the urban planners who decorated the Museum of VMRO's façade with arrays of windows, quadrangular and egg-shaped, allowing the hundreds of Godot-loving wax figures to wave hands on the day when Godot appears. They will fill the empty present with history. Tears of joy from melting wax will cover the land of Macedonia, immortalizing our future as lovers of Godot. Where is the nation? Do they have enough handkerchiefs to wipe their tears? Or will they use miniature flags given to them? The 'sixteen-pointed' flag in the right and the 'ventilator' flag in the left hand. The nation, decimated, is lined on both sides of the street passing under the floating Triumph Arch. They use miniature flags to wipe dried tears and sweat. Damned are the urban planners for not designing much bigger Triumph Arch to shield them against the burning sun. The silence hanging like a dark cloud over the "Forum of Sunbeds" is interrupted only by the hooks of shod horses coming from the parliament, upgraded with domes. A child whisper is heard: 'Bucephalus, Bucephalus!' Then another child whispers: 'How will he climb the pillar?' Silence threatens to burst. High above people's head, the Long Awaited flies over, riding a winged-horse, and lands right atop the pillar! Eruption of the nation-wide joy is prevented by the first child's exclamation: "It's Pegasus! Our Bucephalus has no wings! Pegasus is a Greek horse!" Forgetting that swimming is banned on Koce's beaches, dishevelled gruevists throw themselves in Vardar and, after having swum to the other side, un-showered, they chase people across narrow streets and send them to courses in revised history. The pillar tumbles down under unplanned weight of

wings and buries the unknown equestrian. Was it Godot? Was it Canko? Was it Grujo? In the deafening silence that ensues, hoofs of the forgotten pony hauling the plastic waste collectors' carriage resonate more soundly".<sup>33</sup>

### THE POTESKIN'S VILLAGE<sup>34</sup> ON SHIROK SOKAK

In the centre of Bitola sits an empty building made of polystyrene and plastic-looking sheet; a movie theatre without repertoire; a shell-structure without content, intended to replace the facility where the brothers Manaki had projected films in 1923. Construction works on this building with total area of 400 square meters started back in 2013, but are still unfinished. Only the shell construction costed 900,000 euros.

"Local authorities had used polystyrene to construct the Manaki Cinema in Bitola, as evidenced by crumbling façade ornaments. This facility costs 900.000 euros and its cinema theatre inside is still not equipped. For days, the Municipality of Bitola is silent and does not answer why polystyrene had been used for the façade of the Manaki Cinema on Shirok Sokak. Two weeks ago, workers had removed safety barriers outside the cinema, after which citizens of Bitola were able to see that white parts of this construction resembling to be made of solid materials are actually made of polystyrene. Under the effects of atmospheric phenomena, parts of this structure crumbled down."<sup>35</sup>

196

### TO REMOVE OR TO REPURPOSE?

The dilemma whether it would be more expensive to remove or to repurpose (transform) is about to instigate heated debate. Several façades and monuments from "Skopje 2014" already display traces of disintegration. There are three unfinished facilities on the already crowded Macedonia Square: left to the Triumph Arch is the façade-stripped and scabby-looking Pelagonija, building of the former construction company with the same

<sup>33</sup> Column by Vladimir Milchin, published in *Spic* on 4.5.2011 and reprinted in "What is Gruevism".

<sup>34</sup> Metaphor for the attempt to create false impressions. Prince Potemkin ordered construction of fake portable villages, including villagers, pastors and herds, across empty steeps in South Russia for Empress Catherine II to see that Russia progresses and blooms under his govern.

<sup>35</sup> [www.slobodnaevropa.mk](http://www.slobodnaevropa.mk), *Manaki Cinema is still not opened, but its polystyrene façade started crumbling*, 3.4.2017

name, and ELEM's skyscraper is on the right, bandaged with worn-off canvas. Leprosy has befallen on the centre of Skopje.

How much will Skopje's liberation from the ugliness called "Skopje 2014" cost? How much will restoration of old façades cost? There are no estimates. There are no estimates even for the cost to finish unfinished works and, more importantly, to maintain the shoddiness of new buildings, façades and monuments.

In the case of two public institutions whose competences are closely tied to culture, the destructive intervention by the authorities could be corrected. Decision for the Faculty of Dramatic Arts to be moved from the barracks in Karposh into inadequately designed and equipped building can be justified only with interests of the capital, which had set its eyes on that attractive land plot. It is not a secret that orders for FDA to move into a new buildings made back in 2011 were given to then-current dean and his predecessor by Prime Minister Gruevski in person. Having the Faculty of Dramatic Arts share the same building with state administration is unknown precedent of global proportions. The State Archive was robbed of its purpose-made building with the Government's decision no. 41-874/1 from 21.2.2012, whereby the Archive is moved in the Archaeology Museum's building. Premises of the State Archive were awarded to the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption. Decision to relocate the State Archive in the newly-built Archaeology Museum had disastrous consequences: museum space had flooded several times, damaging portion of the archive fund. FDA's case is less known in the public, but damages caused by reallocation of the State Archive did not remain secret. The archive's staff alerted the public: "The State Archive is the most important institution in the Republic of Macedonia that keeps and stores vast number of documents related to the history of our state. Several years ago, for unknown reasons, this archive was moved from its purpose-built premises, constructed in compliance with all world standards on archive storage, processing, arrangement and use, into the Archaeology Museum's building, located near the River Vardar. In doing so, the extensive documentation of our historical existence is now stored in inadequate conditions. New premises are ideal for destruction of that historical fund, which holds great importance for us. To stop further deterioration, we ask you to sign this petition and make loud demands for the State

Archive to be returned to its purpose-built premises, in the name of our ancestors, the present and future generations.”<sup>36</sup>

Neither the petition nor their letter to Prime Minister Zaev yielded results. The State Archive remains tenant at the Archaeology Museum.

## AMNESTY FOR "SKOPJE 2014"?

SDSM's government needed one and a half year to remove the monument of assassin Kjoseto, metal fence-bars around the government building and the Ferris Wheel. It seems that SDSM has given up the idea to deal with the legacy of "Skopje 2014" and has still not found the right moment to announce its decision.

"There are laws and they must be enforced. Another option would be to adopt new law granting amnesty for 'Skopje 2014'. To some extent, such decision is all right, but those making it would have to bear the responsibility and be enlisted in the history for having done that",<sup>37</sup> says President of the Association of Architects Martin Panovski, who was member of the working group tasked to deal with "Skopje 2014" and has resigned from this post. He adds that feasibility studies on removal of several facilities are completed, but no action is taken, concluding that, for some time now, we are moving towards amnesty for the project "Skopje 2014". After the government decided to announce an open call for repurposing the Monument of Mother Theresa, a facility which the working group had no dilemma should be demolished, Panovski submitted his letter of resignation elaborating that he does not want to serve as alibi for completion of "Skopje 2014". In his opinion, the facility intended to commemorate Mother Theresa is illegal construction, located on street, and should be either demolished or legalized, but such decision belongs to the government, instead of "testing" architects.

The sculptural composition "Mother Theresa", 32 meters high, was intended as donation by controversial businessman Subrata Roy from India, who announced this project together with Prime Minister Gruevski. On the account of his arrest in India for tax fraud, Gruevski's government took over this project. Its implementation started in 2015 and was estimated to cost 5.5 million euros.<sup>38</sup>

36 Ako.mk, 20.2.2018, *Petition to Zaev from employees at the State Archive and INI to return the Archive in its original building*. Employees' petition on [www.Change.org](http://www.Change.org) was signed by 1.070 citizens in February 2018.

37 Prizma.mk, 19.2.2019

38 Skopjeinfo.mk, 28.2.2019

The working group chaired by prof. Miroslav Grchev from the Faculty of Architecture had established that majority of monuments in Skopje's centre should be removed because they have been placed by means of decisions taken by the Municipality of Centar instead of decisions taken in the parliament. According to the law, the parliament takes decisions on monuments of importance to the state, while the municipalities can only erect memorials for individuals or events that are of local importance. Imprecise definition of the importance of individuals, dimensions and other aspects had allowed the Municipality of Centar to build 20-meter high memorials that cost more than 8 million euros and feature individuals from state and world history, which are declared persons of local importance. Panovski regrets the working group has still not started dealing with, in his opinion, more serious portion of the project, such as buildings and façades, especially those of the government, ELEM and others. "Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments is also presented with a problem. They need to protect these buildings, because of their great importance. But they have no idea how to do that. Should buildings be protected in their current or previous look? If the latter, then efforts to restore old façades must start immediately", says Panovski and adds "polystyrene can be removed with bare hands, but only if there is will [for that]".<sup>39</sup> "The working group gave its opinion in the 2017 study, together with all arguments. This building, located in middle of the street, is in violation of the Law on Construction, Law on Roads and Law on Spatial and Urban Planning. [...] Actually, this building, as illegal construction, violates all laws in effect and its construction is therefore qualified as criminal offence. Arguments whereby it is more expensive to demolish than to repurpose the monument are false because, to my knowledge, there are no studies conducted to estimate the cost of demolition. I do not know how somebody could plant such information to the government and led it to such absolutely erroneous decision. I confidently claim that demolition is not more expensive",<sup>40</sup> says Grchev.

Panovski referred to obstructions by expert services from the competent ministry, where most staff members were recruited during VMRO-DPMNE's governance. The working group, formed in the summer of 2017, was denied insight in project designs for the building that accommodates the Archaeology Museum and the Constitutional Court, although these documents are stored on computers at the Ministry of Culture!

The decision not to restore original façades of the government, department store and other buildings in Skopje's central area would be disputable by its effect of having

39 Prizma.mk, 19.2.2019

40 Skopjeinfo.mk, 28.2.2019

legalized violation of copyrights held by respective designers who had not agreed to such interventions on their buildings.<sup>41</sup>

## DIRTY LITTLE WAR FOR THE FORTRESS

The Skopje Fortress had been ploughed many times over in search of evidence that it is the site of byzantine city Justiniana Prima. However, fierce reactions were caused by the attempt to build a church at the Fortress, on the location where, allegedly, medieval church had existed. Just like in the legend: what had been built by orthodox people in the day, was demolished by Muslim population overnight. This drama culminated when the Deputy Minister of Interior (from the ranks of DUI) prevent policemen to apprehend those engaged in demolition activities.

Even today, the Fortress is the site of an unfinished building of steel and concrete, which stands as reprimand that manipulations of cultural heritage for the purpose of demarking ethnic and religious territories could set fires that are hard to extinguish.

"By exploring the Skopje Fortress's underbelly, politicians, not architects, seemed to have found what they were looking for. It is not like they were not warned in advance. They were. Ever since the start of one of the many 'archaeological' campaigns by means of which Macedonian archaeology was reduced to disgraceful discipline of organizing fairs, 'neighbours' of the Fortress were first to warn that things are not going for the better and would not turn out as desired by those heavy-paid archaeologists. And it happened. Matters spiralled out of control, and, fortunately, ended with only several drops of blood shed. At least for the time being, because all indicators show that design and implementation of the 'Operation Fortress' is a typical criminal association, abounding in elements of grand treason! One does not need to be very honest, nor very literate, to understand it is a matter of typical manuscript of the police-intelligence underground, assisted by a choir of media trumpets, and by public, and not so public, troublemakers."<sup>42</sup>

---

Even today,  
the Fortress  
is the site  
of unfinished  
buildings of  
steel and  
concrete, which  
stands as  
reprimand that  
manipulations  
of cultural  
heritage for  
the purpose  
of demarking  
ethnic and  
religious  
territories  
could set fires  
that are hard  
to extinguish.

---

41 Petar Mulichkovski, Slavko Brezovski and Trajko Dimitrov

42 Gjuner Ismail, 9.3.2011, reprinted in "What is Gruevism"

“Gruevski’s regime installed high mobilization and nationalistic practice inside the ethnic campus, intensified the conflict on the outside, i.e. name dispute with Greece, and brought the internal interethnic conflict to the point of drawn knives, which resulted in incendiary incidents at the Fortress”<sup>43</sup>

“[The so-called] ‘thinkers’, ‘builders’ and similar low-lives, with filthy mouths and full pockets, instantly realize ideas of the FALSE PROPHET and his apostles, by holding semi-literate lectures on baroque, history, the world and the age, with their mouths foaming when appearing with the criminals [in an effort] to destroy themselves from negligence, turned into megaphones, in late-night hours, and reprised hundredth times! Because ‘intellectuals’, as noted earlier, are hauling carriages and keeping silent, sunken into the glory of being the most important horses in the state, whereby propaganda is left to vagabonds who have not completed their medical treatment or have not served their sentences”<sup>44</sup>

## BUYING LOUD OP, AT LEAST, TAGIT SUPPORT FROM ARTISTS

By 2007, the state award “11 October”, first introduced in 1959, was the only award in the Republic of Macedonia for annual or longstanding achievements in several areas, including arts. In 2007, Gruevski’s regime introduced another state award,<sup>45</sup> “23 October”, representing “the highest acknowledgement of longstanding achievements in the field of science, culture, education, protection of state interests and promotion of state priorities, values and cultural-historic heritage of Macedonia”. In 2009, the third state award was introduced, “St. Clement of Ohrid”, representing “the highest acknowledgement of longstanding achievements in the fields of education, culture, art, health, sports, protection and promotion of human environment, and social activity”, awarded on December 8, the Day of St. Clement of Ohrid. All three state awards are issued by the parliament, i.e. the parliamentary majority that appoints the board which takes decision on award recipients.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Alagjovovski in weekly *Sega*, April 2011, reprinted in “What is Gruevism”.

<sup>44</sup> Gjuner Ismail, 9.12.2012, reprinted in “What is Gruevism”

<sup>45</sup> October 23, Day of VMRO, previously declared state holiday  
– Day of the Macedonian Revolutionary Struggle.

Actor Petre Temelkovski is the single artist who is recipient of all three state awards. He became triple laureate in the period from 2008 to 2011.

DUI, former coalition partner to VMRO-DPMNE and nowadays to SDSM, also demanded its own award. On May 22, 2018, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted amendments to the Law on Culture and thereby established new, fourth state award that covers art as well. This award is named "22 November", i.e. Day of the Albanian Alphabet.

The government led by Gruevski also introduced honorary title - Culture Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia. By 2011, nine titles were awarded, mainly to artists from Macedonia who live and work abroad. This was followed by establishment of cultural and information centres in New York, Istanbul and Sofia, tasked to work on affirmation of Macedonian culture and language. Little is known in the public about activities of these centres, and it remains unclear whether their existence and financing are justified. In spite of questioned justification for the need of such establishments, on April 20, 2019, the government led by Zaev took decision to open another cultural and information centre in Tirana.

In 2011, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the Law on National Artist of the Republic of Macedonia. The national artist title was awarded by the President, on proposal from the Minister of Culture. All six recipients of this title were entitled to monthly monetary benefits in the amount of 1,000 euros in MKD counter-





ПОЛИЦИЈА

ПОЛИЦИЈА

ПОЛИЦИЈА

value, and have the right to publish a monography, financed from the state budget. Astonishingly, this title resembles the title of People's Artist awarded by the Soviet Union and introduced by Stalin in 1936.<sup>46</sup> VMRO-DPMNE, a political party that defines itself as right-winged and anti-communist, had resorted to a Stalinist measure to buy the loyalty of artists. In the summer of 2017, the new parliamentary majority led by SDSM revoked the Law on National Artist on proposal by the government.

At the same session, held on July 27, the government approved the proposal on amending the Law on Culture "to protect the Budget of RM from harmful managerial contracts signed with executive directors at cultural institutions and decided to conduct an extraordinary audit of their performance in the first six months of 2017. It has been shown that damages thereof are expressed in billions MKD".<sup>47</sup> *Radio Free Europe* reported that directors of cultural institutions were not held responsible for abuse of office, non-purposeful spending of public funds, pecuniary task contracts, failure to adopt programs, failure to submit reports, etc.<sup>48</sup>

"In one day, 77 actors, stage directors and dramatists were given employment contracts. Two months ago, we initiated a procedure for employment of around 120 actors, stage directors and dramatists in all theatres across the Republic of Macedonia, and employments at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet, Macedonian Philharmonic and Tanec", stated Prime Minister Gruevski on December 29, 2014.<sup>49</sup> The Ministry of Culture announced that since 2006 "more than 600 employments have been effectuated in the field of arts and that monthly income in this sector was increased by 60 percent."<sup>50</sup>

It is an undoubted fact that, when in government, political parties develop ambitions, with state funds, to become patrons of creators who, in turn, are expected to provide loud or, at least, tacit support for their policies. Awards and titles are not the only tools used to buy the loyalty of intellectuals and artists. The sinecure, Roman invention of well-paid position for no work performed, had proved its efficiency. The pluralism system opened broad space for sinecures to be granted to obedient followers of party orders.

46 That year also marked the start of the Great Purge which liquidated artists whose works did not comply with the cannons of social realism.

47 <https://tocka.com.mk>

48 [www.slobodnaevropa.mk](http://www.slobodnaevropa.mk), *Many privileges, little responsibility for state-appointed managers*, 15.11.2017.

49 <https://daily.mk>

50 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk>, 25.12.2014

Injurious effect of these policies is visible in every step. But, a less known case is the closure of the Macedonian Lectorate at the Masaryk University in Brno. The mandate of the Macedonian lector had ended in the summer semester of 2017 and new lector was to be appointed in the fall of 2017. To that effect, administrators at the Institute of Slavic Languages in Brno have sent an official letter to the Dean's Office at the Faculty of Philology in Skopje as early as February 2017. In March, the letter was forwarded to the Macedonian Language Seminar within the Rector's Office at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius". The first reaction from the Macedonian side, however, arrived to Brno in early December 2017 (nine months after the letter's receipt). "The most obvious loss is this lectorate's discontinuation for the first time since the 90s, and later the cancellation of the Macedonian language and literature course at the Masaryk University in Brno, in 2019. In that, we have discontinued the tradition that had started back in the 60s. To restore the courses in Macedonian language and literature and reinstitute the Macedonian Lectorate to equal footing with the others at the Institute, we need to re-start the procedure for establishment of the study program in academic year 2019/2020 the earliest and convince people at the Institute that spending time and resources to re-establish the lectorate is worth the effort [...] It goes without saying that enormous damages have been caused on the promotion of our culture and language in that environment, because the active lector could also start his/her work as unofficial ambassador and promoter among students, as one of the most vital spheres of any society. Contacts were lost, cooperation opportunities were missed, projects remained unrealized, and the list continues. In this specific situation, however, the greatest long-term loss is the disrupted reputation of the Macedonian studies and of our country, which competent administrators no longer view as serious partner for cooperation. Mitigating this damage would require great amount of dedication and work", says Dime Mitrevski, doctorand of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Masaryk University in Brno.<sup>51</sup>

## LAST MONTHS OF THE RESTLESS MINISTER

In December 2017, council members advising the Minister of Culture Alagjovzovski were provided datasheets on the operation of 25 national institutions in the field of drama and performance arts for the year 2016: eight drama theatres, Macedonian Opera and Ballet,

<sup>51</sup> [www.fakulteti.mk](http://www.fakulteti.mk), *Death of the Macedonian Lectorate in Brno*, 21.12.2018.

Folk Song and Dance Ensemble "Tanec" and Ohrid Summer Festival, as well as national institutions – cultural centres which include additional five professional theatres. Data presented therein show dramatic discrepancy between the total number of visitors and the sum of tickets sold and free tickets. MNT reported a total of 116,365 visitors, but has sold 32,476 tickets and distributed 13,295 free tickets, which amounts to 45,711 tickets in total. Where are the remaining 70,645 visitors? Albanian Theatre reported 7,413 visitors, has sold 83 tickets and awarded 7,330 free tickets. The sum is correct, but the low number of tickets sold is worrying. Turkish Theatre reported a total of 8,302 visitors; it has sold 124 tickets and did not report the number of free tickets because they are not subject of payment. Tetovo Theatre reported it was attended by 2,080 visitors, but has not sold a single ticket, meaning that it awarded 2,080 free tickets. In the case of Veles and Prilep Theatres, free tickets accounted for more than 50 percent of the total number of visitors. Dramatic case of underestimated accountability is the report submitted by the Ohrid Summer Festival wherein it is indicated that they have sold 3,679 tickets and awarded 3,062 free tickets, but the total number of visitors is rounded up at 20,000 people. Even the Macedonian Philharmonic has problems with accountability. It reported 20.8 visitors! Is it possible for these figures not to have caught the attention of responsible officers at the Ministry of Culture? Why has nobody requested correction of figures at least from the Ohrid Summer and why were directors of national institutions not held responsible for their apparent underperformance in attainment of their mission? Is it because nobody at the ministry bothers to read reports? Or because directors were clients and obedient followers of coalition parties in the government led by VMRO-DPMNE?

Data on revenue from renting premises are indicative of major misunderstanding about the mission of national institutions - culture centres. They have earned more from renting the space than from the activity for which they are established. For example, NICC "Trajko Prokopiev" in Kumanovo, which hosts Macedonian and Albanian drama ensembles, reported revenue from tickets sold in the amount of 995,950 MKD, but revenue from space rent amounted to 7,031,645 MKD. Strumica Theatre, which is part of NICC "Anton Panov", reported revenue from ticket sales in the amount of 968,500 MKD, but revenue from space rent in the amount of 1,354,460 MKD. In the case of the Shtip Theatre as well, revenue from ticket sales was lower compared to revenue from space rent: 369,300 MKD and 855,596 MKD, respectively.

Based on which criteria did institutions in the field of culture gain the status of national institutions? Which rights and obligations arise from that status? Does the status imply complete or partial funding from the Ministry of Culture's budget? Does the ministry hold other obligations towards national institutions? What are national institutions' obligations towards the ministry? Is the local government obliged to participate in their funding? Is such obligation different in cases when the centres also include drama theatres? Why the Veles Theatre is part of the national institution – culture centre, when this town does not have culture centre? These questions remain unanswered, while the number of hybrid institutions, theatres accommodated at NICCs, continues to grow.

On October 22, 2007, when Arifhikmet Djemaili from DUI was the incumbent minister of culture, NI Tetovo Theatre<sup>52</sup> was officially opened as part of the NICC "Iljo Anteski – Smok". In April 2019, official website of the Tetovo Theatre enlists information that it employs 15 actors and 15 administrative and stage workers. In her address after the premier performance of the first play in Macedonian language, on November 24, 2015, Minister of Culture Kancheska–Milevska announced that the theatre employs 49 people, 29 of which are actors. However, she did not announce that the organizational unit for plays in Macedonian language employs only two actors.<sup>53</sup> The relevant website does not include any information that the Tetovo Theatre performs plays in Macedonian language. According to data from the Ministry of Culture, the Tetovo Theatre has staged only 14 plays. This is an infamous record in the entire history of theatre in Macedonia.

207

In January 2011, the National Institution National Theatre Ohrid was established by means of government decision and is accommodated as part of NICC "Grigor Prlicev".

In November 2011, NI Comedy Theatre was formed and in March 2012 it was awarded the building known as the Centar Theatre. Actress Jelena Zugikj, who is staunch supporter of VMRO-DPMNE, was appointed first manager of the new theatre.

<sup>52</sup> This is enlisted on the Municipality of Tetovo's website, although the Law on Culture recognizes only the category of national institutions.

<sup>53</sup> Slobodan Trendov and Gjorgji Neshkoski

On November 2, 2018, on proposal from the newly appointed Minister of Culture Asaf Ademi,<sup>54</sup> Zaev's government adopted the decision for establishment of NI Gostivar Theatre, housed at NICC "ASNOM". On that same day, NI Gostivar Theatre had 27 employees.

After the National Program on Culture was published, on January 22, 2017, Robert Alagjovovski, chair of SDSM's committee on culture, waged accusations against former minister Kancheska-Milevska for illegal distribution of the ministry's funds. Actually, the Ministry of Culture only published grant beneficiaries under this program, but not amounts of funds awarded. He promised audit of this procedure.<sup>55</sup> According to SDSM, the program which the minister had signed is actually her personal retribution to all artists, authors, intellectuals, institutions and organizations that have criticized work of the Ministry of Culture or have participated in civil protests.

Arguments presented by the accused minister implied that the culture budget is increased by 1543 percent, i.e. program funds are increased by 893,367 MKD.

"Funding for culture activities is declining, from 53 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2011. 72 percent of these funds are spent on construction works. Therefore, one of the most important measures of SDSM is reform of the funding system for culture", responded the future Minister of Culture Robert Alagjovovski.<sup>56</sup>

208

## THE GRANDIOSE PROJECT "1000 BOOKS"

In the period 2009 – 2016, the government led by Gruevski acted as the biggest publishing house in the Republic of Macedonia. The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture served as government partners in implementation of the project "1000 Books".<sup>57</sup> Project activities also included "Reading Room - 1000 Books" at the City Trade Centre in Skopje.

The website [www.1000knigi.mon.gov.mk](http://www.1000knigi.mon.gov.mk) hosts information on all 18 fields and editions from the project "1000 Books", six of which pertain to the area of culture: Culture and Arts

<sup>54</sup> He assumed this office on June 2, 2018, from his predecessor Robert Alagjovovski, who served as the minister of culture from June 1, 2017 until June 4, 2018. One of the first measures taken by minister Ademi was to prohibit projections of the feature film "Mocking of Christ" on September 3, without even having watched the movie. He resigned on May 6, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> MKD/MK, 21.1.2017

<sup>56</sup> Sloboden pecat, 21.1.2017

<sup>57</sup> <https://SkopjeInfo.mk>, *1000 translated book in all areas - the project is upgraded*

{36 volumes}; History, Philosophy, Anthropology and Archaeology (19 volumes); Stars of World Literature (45 volumes); 130 volumes of Macedonian literature works; Nobel Prize Winners (104 volumes) and Macedonian literature in English language (120 volumes).

It remains unknown whether over the period of four years, the edition "Stars of World Literature" completed translation and print of 45 volumes in Macedonian language, as reported on [www.1000knigi.mon.gov.mk](http://www.1000knigi.mon.gov.mk), or total of 560 titles, as indicated at the final promotion event and reported by news portal [a1on.mk](http://a1on.mk) on March 30, 2016, paraphrasing the Minister of Culture: "The completed edition 'Stars of World Literature' has published all 560 titles!" Be that as it may, central position on cover pages of all 45 volumes, published by the printing house Magor, is given to the Ministry of Culture's logo, amounting to precedent in the publishing industry, both in the country and beyond.

"The project 'Stars of World Literature' is one of the most important civilization benefits that will enrich the Macedonian spiritual space and will allow access to colossal achievements in development and creation of the written word. [...] The collection of this monumental selection of works includes the most important shining examples of human thought – capital works that originate in the most distant spiritual and artistic springs of the most renowned literary achievements of recent times. [...] With this content-abounding librarian venture, the Macedonian public gains access to major achievements from the vault of the world literature", reads the praise by those who designed and implemented the project.<sup>58</sup>

Curious readers, however, cannot avoid noticing several facts that cast a different light on this venture, first of them being print circulation. Versification of the monumental renaissance epic "The Angry Orlando" by Ludovico Ariosto is printed in Macedonian language with circulation of only 50 copies. Has the publishing house Ars Lamina Publications run out of paper or it assessed that only this number of libraries and readers are interested in this work? The retold epic "Parsifal" by Wolfgang von Achenbach has a circulation of 100 copies. Print circulations for the selection of "Japanese No Dramas" and "The Capture of Izmail" by M. Shishkin (same publishing house) are not indicated. The inventory "Manifestos of the Western Literature Avant-Guard" has a circulation of 200 copies, which does not surprise. But surprising is the fact that prose version of the monumental Indian epic poem "Ramajana" is published in only 200 copies. These are print circulations that could hardly meet the needs of libraries in Macedonia. Major epic

58 Reviewers of the edition "Stars of World Literature": Mitko Mandzukov, Luan Starova, Tashko Shirilov, Eftim Kletnikov, Dragi Mihajlovski, Venko Andonovski and Ratko Duev.

poems like "Ramajana", "Mahabharata", "Jerusalem Delivered" and others will wait to be versified in Macedonian language, just as "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" were versified by prof. Mihail Petrushevski.

It takes excessive megalomania and great incompetence to translate and publish 1000 books within a period of only four years. At the official launch organized for the last group of translated works, held at MASA, Minister of Culture Kancheska-Milevska stated that more than 500 translators had been engaged in this effort! It remains a mystery where were they recruited, on the basis of which previous track record they were identified as translators with sufficient and solid knowledge of the foreign, but also of the Macedonian language. Indisputable is the fact that quality of translations is below required level. That could be seen in translations of scholar books which the government published to serve as textbooks at faculties of arts.

"In the light of this self-isolation policy, not the need for meddling, but for promotion of the Macedonian golden spirit, I see the government's trickery with the hundred and thirty volumes of Macedonian literature translated into English language. Instead of accepting the pains-taking liberal model of cultural interference, of assessing other cultures for which they believe would be interesting to translate Macedonian authors

in their respective languages, the Macedonian government assumed the role of imposing its own selection of good novels from Macedonia to the world, the role of translating such works in their mother tongues and the role of marketing these translations on fairs across the world. This is so contrary to contemporary trends in international cultural cooperation, making it predestined to debacle. Like a scarab, we are pushing our cultural bullshit and expect the world to admire the effort and take interest. Since that would not happen, we decide to roll it in front of ourselves and rejoice its beauty, embellished in foreign language, by our foreigners, i.e. translators. There is no greater defeat for the Macedonian cultural democracy from the situation in which, instead of economically weak and confused publishers, the state assumes the role of renting the biggest space at fairs to promote works that are its creation, but also ours. Or to promote, before the domestic audience, works intended for other cultures, but made here. What a wonderful symbiosis of the market and the state, of individual and collective strives!"<sup>59</sup> wrote Robert Alagjovovski in April 2011 for the weekly *Sega*.

---

"Skopje 2014"  
and "1000  
Books" are twin  
projects. They  
are the fruits  
of the time  
of unreason  
which pretends,  
ruling the  
presence, to  
retailor the  
past in order  
to be able  
to rule the  
future.

---

“Skopje 2014” and “1000 Books” are twin projects. They are the fruits of the time of unreason which pretends, ruling the presence, to retailor the past in order to be able to rule the future.

## ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S NIGHTS: HITTING ROCK BOTTOM TWICE

On December 21, 2012, around a hundred actors, directors, musicians, ballerinas and ballet dancers, male and female folk dancers, took to the streets of Skopje in protest against the opposition, which demanded budget cuts in the parliament for the 2013 state budget proposed by Gruevski's government.<sup>60</sup> Photographs from this protest include directors of national institutions in the field of culture holding banners with messages such as: Art.<sup>61</sup> “We, the artists, do not deserve to work in montage facilities”, said actor and MNT Director Dejan Lilić, standing in front of the new building for the Macedonian National Theatre. “Art is a prayer for Macedonia and mirror of its soul”, pathetically concluded the actor who played Hamlet before being appointed director of the gold-gilded theatre, MNT. Such messages were approved by the Minister of Culture and the Prime Minister, as well as other directors who carried this banner. Two days later it became clear that they are merely extras in the overture to violence, staged by the government. Blood was shed in the parliament on the night between December 23 and 24, 2012. It was the first St. Bartholomew's Night in independent Macedonia. “The scenario, according to which the government will put its 2013 budget proposal to the vote at plenary session in the parliament, although intra-committee discussions have not been completed, is not denied by anybody.”<sup>62</sup> First, journalists were removed from the plenary hall to hide from the public the violence against opposition MPs.<sup>63</sup> But footage made by MPs with their mobile phones reached and horrified the public.

211

60 <https://a1on.mk>, *Peaceful protests of artists in Macedonia started*, 21.12.2012.

61 <https://mkd.mk>, *Actors, musicians and artists on protest: we don't deserve to work in montage barracks*

62 <https://slobodnaevropa.mk>, *Budget drama: SDSM patrols, the government wants to circumvent committees*, 23.12.2012.

63 <https://slobodnaevropa.mk>, *The budget adopted by force*, 24.12.2012.

The second St. Bartholomew's Night happened on April 27, 2017. The outgoing government attempted a coup d'état. That night, amongst parliament benches, Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska, as minister of culture in the caretaker government and elected parliamentarian, hugged a man masked with a so-called phantom hood.<sup>64</sup> Opera singer,<sup>65</sup> actor,<sup>66</sup> film director<sup>67</sup> and pianist<sup>68</sup> from the civic initiative "For Joint Macedonia" had been cast to play the role of agitators in this bloody drama, inciting violence to prevent the vote for selection of new parliament speaker. The ultimate goal was to prevent change of government after the early elections. Artists who led the initiative "For Joint Macedonia" were not alone in igniting fire. Leaders of the Civil Movement to Defend Macedonia (GDOM) also included two actors,<sup>69</sup> while the Macedonian Manifesto was advocated by poet,<sup>70</sup> director<sup>71</sup> and conductor,<sup>72</sup> all of whom, truth be told, did not storm the parliament.

64 <https://sdk.mk>, Culture workers as paid army of minister Beti about the attack on the Parliament, 2.5.2017.

65 Igor Durlovski, professor at FMA and manager of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet

66 Vlado Jovanovski, actor in MNT, host of documentary television series "Explore Macedonia"

67 Boris Damovski, film director

68 Elena Misirkova – Loza, pianist, ambassador of Macedonian culture in Austria

69 Toni Mihajlovski, art director of MNT from November 2015, and Petre Temelkovski, 11 years tenure as director of MTF "Vojdan Chernodrinski" and single recipient of all three state awards

70 Eftim Kletnikov

71 Aleksandar Rusjakov

72 Zapro Zapro

## CULTURAL HERITAGE LEFT TO THE MERCY OF TIME

---

During the rule of Nikola Gruevski, cultural heritage remained unprotected, neglected and exposed to merciless commercialization.

---

During the rule of Nikola Gruevski, cultural heritage remained unprotected, neglected and exposed to merciless commercialization.<sup>73</sup> Over-dimensional hotels and restaurants were erected high above the pearls of medieval sacral architecture. Frescos are crumbling down and disintegrating under the ruined ceilings of churches.<sup>74</sup> Over-dimensional residences for bishops are erected above fire-stricken monastery quarters.<sup>75</sup>

Overnight, politicians from governing parties in Macedonia became believers, both Orthodox and Muslim. Priests blessed politicians, in exchange for the latter turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to destruction of authentic look of religious buildings and to hate speech echoing at churches and mosques.

In its last draft report, UNESCO recommends the Ohrid Region to be removed from the category of cultural and natural wealth to the list of endangered world heritage because the authorities had failed to implement priority recommendations within the assigned two-year framework. UNESCO demands the state to institute complete moratorium for any urban transformations on the lakeside until finalization and adoption of effective legal protection solutions and mechanisms for their implementation. The authorities are required to make an estimate of illegal buildings and to establish their impact on the protected area, as well as to demolish all buildings that impose danger to the environment, while adherently enforcing laws and rulebooks to prevent new illegal construction of buildings.<sup>76</sup>

Greed and barbarism of the new self-made rich people, hand-in-hand with corrupted party nomenclatures, have gobbled up the authentic values in urban and rural settlements. Mass migration leaves the pearls of traditional architecture to the effects of time, while we stand by and watch them deteriorate. Exceptions therefrom can be counted on single

<sup>73</sup> The so-called Macedonian village stands above the monastery St. Panteleimon in Nerezi, and is currently empty.

<sup>74</sup> Saint George Victorious in Kurbinovo

<sup>75</sup> Quarters of Saint Jovan Bigorski, September 2009.

<sup>76</sup> okno.mk, 20.5.2019, *UNESCO recommends Ohrid to be put on the list of endangered world heritage*

hand. Although UNESCO's recommendations and demands concern the Ohrid Region, they are valid for the entire territory of the state.

The single piece of good news comes from the announcement made by the local government in Bitola, indicating that funds have been secured to revitalize the ruined Officers Hall on Shirok Sokak.

## A FINAL WORD...

The first two ministers of culture in coalition governments led by Nikola Gruevski did not keep their offices for more than one year. Both, the first and the second, were appointed from the ranks of the Democratic Party of Albanians. They were replaced by the eager female minister who managed culture for almost ten consecutive years.

The first two ministers of culture in the coalition government led by Zoran Zaev did not stay in office for more than one year. Robert Alagjovovski<sup>77</sup> made way for Asaf Ademi.<sup>78</sup> Yet again, culture had fallen victim to coalition negotiations. After one year in office, Asaf Ademi handed in his resignation. This was preceded by an explosion of dissatisfaction with the 2019 National Program on Culture, and resulted in late implementation of culture programmes.

"In the absence of vision about the importance of culture, the Prime Minister undermined this sector, making it a subject of intra-coalition arrangements. However, the overall European culture policy teaches us that culture must always be above party calculations. Culture is a universal and cosmopolite area that surpasses the political and ethnic criterion. Culture recognizes only the principle of exceptional artistic quality. That also creates an obligation in terms of appointment of culture ministers. He/she must be a person of great cultural, creative or intellectual authority. In the best case, he/she should have a right vision for the culture."<sup>79</sup>

77 Minister of Culture from June 2017 until May 2018 from the ranks of SDSM, later appointed as National Coordinator for Culture Development and Interdepartmental Cooperation

78 Minister of Culture from June 2018 until May 2019 from the ranks of the Albanian party BESA

79 m.dw.com, 11.2.2019, *Culture and Macedonian Identity* – Kica Kolbe.







Biljana Bejkova

FROM CIVIL  
DEFIANCE TO  
COLOURFUL  
REVOLUTION

*"Today, the Sun of Freedom does not rise in Macedonia. Today, our sun is setting. It's becoming darker and darker, and we are surrounded by utter darkness. A heavy fog of propaganda is lingering over the country. Our hibernated mind has produced thousands of political monsters. Benefiting from our indolence, they are sucking the blood of the*

*country we established with grave difficulties. Taking advantage of our fear and our simpleton's spirit, they are trotting all over our rights and freedoms.*

*Dear citizens, those of you who want to live in a European Macedonia, not in a neolithic, biblical, nor antique Macedonia, join us in our struggle against the occupiers of our mind and spirit!"*

[Manifesto of the Citizens for European Macedonia]

January, 2009. Dark clouds hang over Macedonia. Just few months after the NATO Summit it became clear that authoritarian tendencies of Nikola Gruevski, which could be sensed much earlier than Bucharest, are becoming more prominent. Unstoppably, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI's government was galloping into regime, wherein united party and criminal power-players, assisted by the propaganda of the Goebbels-like media machinery, ruthlessly stomped on democracy, truth, justice, rule of law, freedom of expression, and other civil rights and freedoms.

## **CITIZENS FOR EUROPEAN MACEDONIA**

That winter, six intellectuals and activists (Vladimir Milchin, Roberto Belichanec, Nikola Gelevski, Branko Geroski, Mersel Biljali and Zharko Trajanoski) were determined in their intention to plainly and accurately dissect the regime on the open scene, but also to encourage and stimulate civil resistance. On February 1, 2009, their determinedness hatched the "Citizens for European Macedonia" (CEM) and the first "Manifesto for European Macedonia". Loud and clear, they publicly declared disapproval for isolated and provincialized Macedonia, ruled by the tyranny of party despots. At the same time,

CEM members called all citizens to join them in the struggle to restore the dignity of citizens, and the fight against “alleged democrats” that enforce Bucephalisation, “corrupt the media, judges, academics and rectors” and “pretend to be patriotic, but are, in fact, self-worshipping lovers of fame, money and power”.

Hence, in the wake of summer 2009, the caravan of six outspoken intellectuals and activists embarked on its expedition for “enlightening” debates across Macedonia. It did not take long for ruling VMRO-DPMNE to realise the “danger” of public civil debates about its non-democratic policies and methods of governance. Already on February 19, a group of party supporters violently prevented CEM’s debate at the cultural centre in Struga. This brutish incident did not discourage CEM members, but demonstrated evident and undeniable intentions of ruling authorities to silence civil criticism with any method and at any cost, and to prevent civic activism for democracy and respect of fundamental rights and freedoms.

## **FIRST ARCHIBRIGADE AND FREEDOM SQUARE**

218

While CEM members bravely continued to cruse settlements across the state and spread the word about Nikola Gruevski’s autocratic rule, one month later, on March 28, the government demonstrated its violent nature yet again. Responding to calls by MP from VMRO-DPMNE, several hundred believers, party members and supporters gathered and brutally attacked, throwing kicks, punches and curses, around hundred students from the Faculty of Architecture, organized in the informal initiative “First ArchiBrigade”. On the central square in Skopje, students with banners peacefully protested against construction of religious building in the capital’s centre. This protest was triggered by VMRO-DPMNE’s idea to build an orthodox church on the central square in Skopje, and the follow-up demand of the Islamic Religious Community for construction of a mosque on the same location. The police did not prevent the outburst of violence, and the government did not condemn this act. Students were not intimidated, but additionally motivated to maintain their demands and mobilize citizens. This gave rise to the youth initiative “Freedom Square”, joined by numerous civil society organizations, which initiated and fronted series of peaceful civil protests on the streets in Skopje. The young architects called for action: “Citizens of Skopje, men and women, we are raising the voice; the voice of the

city and the voice of freedom. These are two key matters we want to address. [...] Our city and our state are faced against new terror of singlemindedness (call it faith, nation or party, whatever). Freedom and democracy can be maintained and fostered only if we oppose the terror of uniformity; the terror of those waging threats and raising fists in the name of their truths",<sup>1</sup> and hundreds of citizens that spring persistently and peacefully protested with music and whistles against construction of any religious building on the square, and demanded respect for the right to different opinion.

The civic engagement was not exhausted with organization of protests. Freedom Square and CEM collected 1,059 signatures and motioned a petition for municipal referendum so that citizens could declare whether they are "for" or "against" construction of religious buildings on the city square. VMRO-DPMNE's municipal government obstructed the referendum motion, but parties in the government coalition soon reversed their intention to build church or mosque on the central square in Skopje.

For many, events in the first half of 2009 represent the start of actual political articulation of civil defiance against Nikola Gruevski's regime. According to Vladimir Milchin, emergence of CEM and First ArchiBrigade, separately from each other, has exceptional importance: "CEM members were people of certain age, known in the public for their engaged political stances, while students from the ArchiBrigade were young people facing the dark side of politics for the first time. This diapason of age and experience had a symbolic significance. Two generations, without any connections between them, raised their voice almost on the same day".

Although the government, under pressure from civic activists and citizens, renounced the idea for construction of religious building on the Skopje's square in 2009 (decision was taken to build a church in vicinity of the Army Hall), in early 2010 it returned the strike with the gigantic project called "Skopje 2014", whose purpose was to completely rearrange the city's post-earthquake modern look by planting fake baroque and neo-classicism. As construction works on "baroque" and "antique" buildings, monuments and sculptures gained in intensity, Nikola Gruevski's autocratic governance gained strength. In 2010, redundant workers continued the struggle to have their status solved and organized

<sup>1</sup> Blog "Squaring the Circle". Available at: <http://kvadraturanakrugot.crnaovca.mk/2009/04/10/protest-ploshtad-sloboda/>

hunger strikes, while the government launched a “witch hunt” targeting different-minded people and critics. The lustration process started and the police raided the highest-rated A1 television. In this period, the authorities crafted the phenomenon of parallel, quasi non-governmental organizations and institutes, such as “Dimitrija Chupovski”, and later “Pavel Shatev”, and numerous phantom organizations whose singular purpose was to serve as doubles to actual civil society organizations, “overshadow” their activities, create noise in the public space, defend and advocate for policies of the governing coalition. Vast portion of these organizations and institutes were awarded budget funds in continuity, while some of them appeared as donors of monuments that are part of “Skopje 2014” (e.g., Association for the Spiritual Unification of Setinci, Popadinci and Krushoradi).

On June 5, 2011, Nikola Gruevski was given new, four-year term in office. For free-minded citizens that meant one thing – the regime will expand and the space for free action and expression will be dramatically narrowed. It did not take long for these fears to be confirmed. This confirmation arrived on the first post-election day. VMRO-DPMNE’s ruthless gallop had taken its first victim – Martin Neshkoski.

---

CMM members were people of certain age. ArchiBrigade were young people. This diapason of age had symbolic significance. Two generations, unconnected, raised their voice almost on the same day.

---

220

## STOP THE POLICE BRUTALITY

On June 6, 2011, in the early morning hours after the early parliamentary elections ended and amidst celebrations organized by the victorious coalition “For Better Macedonia”, 22-year old Martin Neshkoski, supporter of VMRO-DPMNE, lost his life on the Macedonia Square in Skopje. This tragic event had been preceded by the young man’s squabble and chase with security officer at the event, employed in Mol. According to several witnesses, Neshkoski had died from strong punches on his head and body, inflicted by Igor Spasov, member of the special police unit “Tigers”. In the first 24 hours, the authorities attempted to hide this homicide. Mol’s chronicle included a piece of information that young man’s lifeless body had been found, without traces of violence, and the media reported confusing information about this event.

First reports of this event were published by *Makfax* and *Netpress*, both informing that a boy had died on the square in Skopje after being battered by member of MoI. This two news reports would set the tone of media coverage in the days that followed. The pro-government media persistently attempted to minimize this event by defocusing, relativizing, twisting facts and by discrediting citizens who demanded the government to be held accountable.

Information on Neshkoski's brutal murder and the authorities' attempt to hide this atrocity had upset citizens and revolted young people. Immediately after news of this murder emerged, they started spontaneous gatherings and protests, every day, for many days, growing in numbers and determination. The civil revolt on the streets was transformed into movement against police brutality. Every day, at 6 p.m., citizens gathered to demand justice for Martin. They demanded resignation from then-incumbent interior minister Gordana Jankuloska and police spokesperson Ivo Kotevski, full and complete investigation of the murder, criminal prosecution of all and any who had attempted to hide this murder, as well as full respect and protection of human rights and freedoms.

Protesters' demands were not fulfilled. The court process against Igor Spasov started in November 2011 and ended in January 2012, with conviction verdict and 14-year imprisonment sentence.

Neshkoski's case confirmed that pro-government media, entangled in political and business networks with parties in the government, served as brute instrument for political fight. In continuity, they defended the government's position, by constantly underlying that the case is resolved and closed, sporadically reported on demands of the protesters and, in the later stages, deployed direct labelling of protest organizers and some participants, calling them "members of opposition SDSM and the Soros Foundation" who are attempting to politically abuse the protests at any cost. A particular culmination of events came in the form of the so-called "counter-protest" against alleged politicization of this unfortunate event, organized on the fifteenth day from the start of protests. This counter-protest, and the one organized against First ArchiBrigade were designed by VMRO-DPMNE and heralded the series of future counter-protests, organized by ruling authorities and their supporters, against citizens and their efforts for freedom and democracy.

Some organizers from the movement continuously sent public messages that the protests do not welcome members and supporters from opposition SDSM, as well as activists from civil society organizations financed by the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. “The justification implied that their presence would colour and politicize these protests and would play into the hands of regime media as evidence for labelling the protest and its activists. Back then, and today, I think that strategy was designed by the authorities in power and there were links between individuals from that group of people and structures at VMRO-DPMNE, or more precisely, at ‘MOI-VMRO’. The same thing happened later in respect to ‘Together for Peace’, AMAN, the Student Plenum, protests in 2015 and 2016”, believes Petrit Sarachini, representative of this movement. In his opinion, the movement managed to unmask the regime’s brutality, but also served as process in which citizens learned to articulate their demands through protest movements.

New media and social networks (*Facebook* and *Twitter*) proved to be of special significance and efficient alternative space to inform the public, and to coordinate the protests in Skopje and several towns across Macedonia. According to the analysis of NGO Infocentre,<sup>2</sup> in one week, the support group for the protests against police brutality on *Facebook* had amassed more than 21,000 members and supporters, *Twitter* hosted around 6,000 tweets with hashtags #protestiram and #martin, while videos from the protests uploaded on *YouTube* were viewed more than 40,000 times.

In that, the new media and social networks became allies to civil resistance. Unlike most traditional media that were direct instrument in the hands of those targeted by these protests and movements, the new media and social networks provided “free zones” where authorities did not have and could not install control and censorship.

In parallel to more prominently expressed civil disenfranchisement, pressures and threats levered by the government towards critics and people who thought differently and fostered disagreement with its method of governance became fiercer and more frequent. Primary targets of such attacks were the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia (FOSM), representatives of civil society organizations, journalists and the media. In 2011,

2 Media Mirror: Media Manipulation and Propaganda, NGO Infocentre, December 2011, pg. 11. Available at: <http://nvoinfocentar.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Mediumski-manipulacii-2011.pdf>

among others, the government finally managed to close A1 television, lustrated Vladimir Milchin (FOSM's executive director at that time), demolished the business complex Kosmos, an investment of businessmen Fijat Canoski, and attempted to stage takeover of the civil march "Together for Peace".



This trend continued in 2012. The government increasingly created policies that were not only contrary to citizens' interest, but had led to their impoverishment and had threatened their fundamental rights and freedoms. Propaganda and manipulations replaced professional, unbiased journalism in almost all traditional media, including the public service broadcaster – Macedonian Radio-Television, while attacks on critically-minded journalists and civic activists became more frequent and louder. They were continuously labelled as "sorosoids", "traitors", "hirelings", "foreign spies", etc.

For example, in the first half of 2012, great attention in the public was triggered by the address in the European Parliament (EP) delivered by Lidija Dimova, then-current executive director at the Macedonian Centre for European Training (MCET), in relation to the new IPA programme for the period 2014-2020. The pro-government media did not cover Dimova's address at the European Parliament and did not seek her statement or comment, but fiercely, manipulatively and propagandistically attacked and criticized her of allegedly having requested "the EU to cancel IPA funds for Macedonia" and commented that "sorosoid Dimova had spat on Macedonia".

As the authorities narrowed their hoop, civil disenfranchisement and revolt grew in proportion. The log hot summer had woken burning social urges of citizens. Under the motto "Aman" (Enough!), a group of citizens dissatisfied with increase of prices for district heating, electricity and fuels, started a series of protests outside the Energy Regulatory Commission's office building. Every Tuesday, citizens gathered on the Pela Square to send loud and decisive message: "Revolted and angered by new decisions of the Energy Regulatory Commission, we, group of citizens who were gathered self-initiatively on the social networks, decided to initiate a process of self-advocacy for our rights. It is time to



say – enough! What is being done on the backs of citizens does not qualify as normal. At times of economic crisis and penury, the Regulatory Commission and the Government of Republic of Macedonia dared to intrude on what constitutes the greatest agony for most citizens - their empty pockets".<sup>3</sup>

Protests and activities of AMAN lasted for months and were expanded to other towns across the state. Initiators of this social movement were inclusive in their approach and continuously called dissatisfied citizens to join them and demand competent institutions to restore old prices for district heating, restore the cancelled cheap electricity tariffs, reduce prices of oil derivatives to reflect the living standard, etc. Although of social character, with the exception of citizens and civic activists, this movement was not supported by trade unions.

Citizens were persistent, the protests gained in numbers, but the authorities continued to ignore their demands and spearheaded a "special war" against the movement. In spite of efforts to weaken and destroy this initiative from inside, government structures launched fierce persecution against its initiators, with the support of their propaganda machinery. Overnight, common disenfranchised citizens became "Soros's hirelings", "traitors", "provocateurs", "enemies". Direct physical attacks became more frequent and targeted protestors, and their families. The government did not choose means to threaten and silence them.

After one such attack, activist Vasko Lazarevski, on behalf of AMAN, made a statement for the media: "We are entering a dangerous zone of threats merely for the purpose of your attempt to silence the initiative for collection of 10,000 signatures to petition for changes to the Energy Law. Our demands are civic, not political, and that is why we will continue the initiative until our demands are delivered. We call citizens to shake off fear and join us by signing [the petition]".<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to all threats and attacks, the movement AMAN managed to collect more than 13,000 signatures for amendments to the Energy Law. However, even these thousands of signatures were insufficient to convince the ruling majority which, contrary to the citizens' will, rejected AMAN's proposal in the parliament, in February 2013.

The so-called "Black Monday" showed that the government would not move an inch from its firm intention to make Macedonia "state capture". In the wake of December 24,

<sup>3</sup> Tocka, 13.8.2012, "Every Tuesday, the civic initiative AMAN organizes protests against price increases"

<sup>4</sup> Plusinfo, 30.10.2012, "Activist from AMAN received life threats".

2012, the then-current opposition organized protests outside the parliament's building against adoption of the 2013 state budget, which continued the next morning. Outside the parliament, opposition supporters were on one side of the street, and the pro-government's counter-protest "Front for the People" was organized on the other side. The atmosphere was tense, but incomparably less stressful to events unfolding in the legislative house. The parliament security, under command from the ruling majority, physically attacked opposition MPs, but also journalists who found themselves in the plenary hall at that moment.

## **FREEDOM FOR KEZHO**

"Black Monday", actually, heralded the events that would take place in 2013, which started with the opposition's protests under the motto "Resistance", closure of several critical media outlets and change of media owners, forcing editorial desks to cancel shows and fire employees overnight, and recruit journalists from pro-government media; lawsuits and redress claims in enormous amounts motioned by state officials against owners, editors and journalists from critically-oriented media; threats waged at journalists and editorial desks that had to make public apologies or withdraw reports they had already published.

2 2 6

The pro-government media published discriminatory lists of alleged "homosexual journalists", posted stories wherein journalists were depicted as hirelings, were accused of having served the needs of SDSM and even attributed disastrous state-of-affairs in regard to media freedom, detected also by the international organization Reporters without Borders, as exclusive merit of "the Soros Foundation and journalists it finances". Headlines with references that "in continuity, Soros's money contaminates the media" (Site1, 5.2.2013) were not a rare occurrence throughout that period, including constructions such as: "[...] the image about media freedoms in Macedonia, as presented in the Reporters without Borders' latest report, is created by people close to Vladimir Milchin and the Foundation Open Society – Soros, having in mind that, according to practices in other countries, this organization creates its reports on the basis of business goals and George Soros is one of its financiers. Relationships between particular group of journalists and the opposition's political goals, and their servitude, is best seen in the fact

that a group of journalists publicly stood behind SDSM's political campaign, attending protests organized by this political party" (*Kurir*, 6.2.2013).

New confirmation of observations made by Reporters without Borders about the dramatic drop in media freedoms and freedom of expression in Macedonia came on May 28, 2013. The Ministry of Interior conducted the police action dubbed "Liquidation" and related to the court process on double homicide in village Oreshe, Veles. Eight people were apprehended and suspected of being involved in illegal activities, including journalist Tomislav Kezharovski from daily newspaper *Nova Makedonija*. He was arrested for having authored a newspaper report in 2008 wherein he allegedly revealed the identity of protected witness in the case "Oreshe".

Complete institutional dominance in public reports about Kezharovski's arrest started to change several days after the police raid, thanks to his journalist colleagues who used the social networks to call for protests. For the first time the public was informed about violated rights of journalist Kezharovski and repercussions from this case on public speech and freedom of expression in the country from the protests organized under the motto "Freedom for Kezho". This case gained an international dimension due to protests and activities of journalists. Key global media organizations, including OSCE, demanded Kezharovski to be immediately released from detention.

227

Demands of the media community and human rights organizations were not only ignored, but the court expressly conducted proceedings as part of which, on October 21, 2013, Kezharovski was convicted and issued imprisonment sentence in duration of four and a half years. Two days later, on October 23, a civil protest was organized outside the Museum of Macedonian Revolutionary Struggle, attended by journalists and civic activists. The police prevented protesters to approach the museum building and clashed with them. More than hundred policemen were engaged for this protest gathering, coming from both regular and special police units. Such demonstration of power had served a singular purpose: to instil fear among journalists and activists. By the protest's end, in a sign of revolt, protesters lighted candles before the police cordon.

The pro-government media, for example, the portal *Kurir*, used all and any means to discredit the protests and their participants: "Not journalists, but pensioners, brutes and people attending all protests organized in the country gathered today, in front of the Museum of VMRO. They attempted to provoke clashes with the police by breaking through



СТОП ЗА  
МОНТИРАНИ  
САУДАТОР  
НЕ МОЖЕТЕ  
СИТЕ АЗ НЕ  
ДАБОРИТЕ

СУВА  
СПИЕТЕ А  
МИНТО?  
#ДЕТОНАТОР

СЛОБОДА  
СИТЕ НЕ  
ОСУДЕНИ  
#ДЕТОНАТОР

ТЕЛЕФОН МИ  
САРАМЕ ПРАВДА-СТО  
? #ДЕТОНАТОР  
ТОД  
#МИЛОСТ

КЕЖО И НМЕ  
СМЕ СО ТЕБЕ  
#ДЕТОНАТОР

НОВИНАР  
ЗАД РЕ  
#ДЕТОНАТОР



ГИ ИЗВАКАМИ  
СЕГА УМНИТЕ  
СЕ НАШИОТ МЕ

ПОБЕДА  
ЗА  
КЕЖО



СЪЕДИНИТЕ СЕ  
И ВЪВЕДИТЕ

КАТЕ  
ВЪВЕДИТЕ

НЕ РЕДЕКОМАН  
КОМИТЕТЕ  
НА СЪСОБ

ЗАДОЛЖЕТАТА  
ПРАВДА Е  
НА ГОЛЪМА  
ПЕРА

СИ  
СМЕ  
КЕ

ПРОБАТ  
МАТЕ ТО  
ТВОРИ ЗА

КОЛКУ ЧИНИ  
СЛОБОДАТА?  
ВЕ ПРЪЩА  
НИКОЛА НАДЕВ

Тас с  
ВИН

**eurolink**  
ООУТРАНКА А.Д. СООБ  
www.eurolink.com.mk  
02/15888

**ProCredit Bank**

the cordon. They pushed against police shields and threw stones at policemen from the special unit, while shouting insults and profanities. Unknown persons fronted the protests and demonstrated brute force. The police stayed calm, reacting in a European [manner], despite provocations and attacks on the part of gathered brutes" (*Kurir*, 23.10.2013).

Critical media and journalists attempted to alarm the domestic and international public about serious threats to freedom of speech and media freedoms in the case of Kezharovski, while pro-government media remained passive even after this case became one of the most contentious issues in the society, or attempted to mitigate consequences from its broad presence in the media. Pressure from domestic and international organizations, as well as public pressure to have this case re-examined, proved to be crucial and resulted in Kezharovski's release from detention in November 2013. .

## PARK DEFENDER AND I LOVE GTC

Other police arrests took place in 2013. On the night of September 12, in the park near the former Hotel Bristol, in downtown Skopje, several hundred policemen apprehended and took into five-hour custody 11 activists from the civil initiative "Park Defenders".

In the spring of 2013, Park Defenders emerged as the voice of citizens against demolition of green areas for the benefit of quasi-baroque buildings from "Skopje 2014". By staging several-month siege in the small park across Hotel Bristol, they attempted to prevent its transformation into construction site. During the civic "camp", park defenders organized numerous educational, entertainment and recreational activities with the single purpose of building citizens' awareness about the need to keep green areas in the capital.

After having witnessed citizens' consistency and determination not to roll back on their demands for protection of the small park, authorities resorted to force and night-time police action was organized to remove the camp and apprehend activists. In response to this brute behaviour by the authorities, park defenders called for protests and reiterated they would not denounce their fight.



The Health Education and Research Association (HERA), supported by more than 70 civil society organizations and networks, organized a series of civil protests under the motto "My body, my choice". Citizens demanded the government to withdraw this legislative proposal because, in their opinion, it is contrary to women's rights already guaranteed under the Constitution, but also contrary to international human rights treaties which Macedonia has ratified.

This government policy to restrict pregnancy termination actually emerged as "forceful measure" to increase the population's natality rate. Measures were accompanied by controversial and aggressive campaign. The campaign titled "Choose life, you have the right to choose" featured one of the most controversial video ads ever aired in Macedonia. In this video, the producers created an atmosphere of joyful expectation of childbirth until the moment when an "unfortunate father" is cynically congratulated that the abortion is successful, having killed a healthy baby. Such innocuous, but morbid turning point served the purpose of causing shivers with viewers and make such association unbreakably and strongly connected to abortion and its significance. In that regard, the campaign and its message closed the doors to any kind of debate, qualifying abortion as homicide. This specific video caused fierce reactions in the public and numerous demands from civil society organizations for its complete withdrawal from broadcast.

232

The government sustained its legislative proposal, and the law was passed in parliament. Restrictive administrative procedures for pregnancy termination remained in effect until 2019.

The civil society organizations continued to monitor government policies, provide argument-based criticism and active warnings that autocrat Nikola Gruevski is forcefully installing corrupted, criminal and discriminatory regime, instead of guaranteeing justice, rule of law, non-partisan operation of state institutions, respect for civil and political rights and freedoms.

Although appearing to be firm and impenetrable, in 2014, the regime installed by Gruevski showed its first serious cracks. It was shaken by corruptive scandals, followed by the opposition's non-recognition of results on the early parliamentary elections and taking to the streets in protest. The streets were more frequently and massively crowded with common citizens as well. The reasons were many and varied. Citizens in Gevgelija protested against presence of arsenic in drinking water, while citizens in Tetovo took to the streets against the polluted air. Residents from the Reka Region organized protests

to protect River Radika and National Park Mavrovo, while civic activists from Skopje staged a protest outside the Public Prosecution Office, after masked hooligans had demolished the LGBTI Support Centre and had battered activists who were celebrating its anniversary inside.

## STUDENT PROTESTS

Civil discontent, although still highly atomized, reactive and focused on various issues and problems, gradually started to shape into civil resistance and struggle against the autocratic rule of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. But something was still missing. Something that would make citizens more resolved to take their fight for freedom to its fruition.

---

In students, citizens found the courage they lacked, and civic activists acknowledged that student protests could be the possible point of turning and of amassing the resistance.

---

Just then, "miracle" happened. On November 17, 2014, around 3,000 students unexpectedly poured onto the streets in the capital. For the first time, young people self-initiatively marched against the bad education system and the new Law on Higher Education, proposed by then-incumbent government. The mass protest of students amounted to miracle, because during Nikola Gruevski's tenure in government the university autonomy was fully undermined, with most students behaving disinterested, apolitical and apathetic to developments in the society. For example, back in 2009 they did not support their peers - students of architecture organized as the First ArchiBrigade.

The first student march led to new protests. In students, many citizens found the courage they lacked, and civic activists acknowledged that student protests could be the possible point of turning and of amassing civil resistance. Unlike protests against police brutality, which were non-inclusive, students demonstrated greater openness and asked for support from all citizens dissatisfied with the regime and looking for changes. Although staged in the winter season, student protests that followed were the most massive civil protests by that time, accounting for more than 10,000 participants. Slowly, but surely, a critical mass for changes had been awoken and built.

Protests resulted in formation of autonomous zones at universities in Skopje and Bitola, in February 2015, followed by mass protests and boycott of classes by high-school students. Dissatisfied with performance of then-current government, university and high-school students, supported by the Professor Plenum, teachers, parents and citizens in general, demanded thorough education reforms that would ensure quality education for youth. Before the school year ended, high-school students returned to their school desks, but when the new school year started, supported by the Student Plenum, they again took to the streets and renewed their demands for quality education.

The student movement had no leader. It was organized horizontally, as plenum. On one side, such structure allowed equitable participation of all members, but on the other, it demanded lots of energy and time for that large and complex horizontal structure to be functional, sustainable in the long run, and immune to numerous internal and external influences and perturbations.

On that account, the relatively fast decline of the Student Plenum was somewhat expected. For some direct participants, reasons for its decline, in addition to "fatigue" and "burnout", implied attainment of their primary goal (preventing adoption of the proposed law on higher education), "inability to agree on shared political vision", as well as deep internal disagreements which, at one moment, had led to secession by greater group of plenum members.

"[...] Finally, I am not quite certain that the Student Plenum should not have ceased to exist in the form in which it was created. Maybe its political power lied in 'blitzkrieg' existence and operation, and, in my opinion, it was completed as success story in the public's eyes [...]", believes then-active member Anastasija Petrevska.

Ivana Tufegdžikj, also former member of the plenum, disagrees that the Student Plenum declined very fast: "The movement survived, although with a much smaller group compared to its beginnings, and participated in the process for drafting the Law on Higher Education, sustained challenges like the student elections, protests against blanket pardons, and after adoption of the Law on Higher Education, issued a press-release that it would discontinue its operation...".

As regards influences to which the Student Plenum was exposed, another former member Ljumi Bekiri says: "Everybody attempted to exert influence on the student movement. [...] Some of these young people attempted to impose their agendas, for example, members of political parties, members of leftist associations, students close to certain professors, etc. Nevertheless, I think that did not affect the struggle against reforms pursued at that time, and some people used the Student Plenum for personal goals [...]"

Petrevska stresses that the Student Plenum "was exposed to influences from certain civil or youth organizations, e.g. YEF (Youth Educational Forum)", and that "then-current opposition also exerted perfidious influence". In her opinion, influence from the leftists, unlike influence coming from the opposition, was not perceived as external: "[...] I don't equate it with the opposition's influence, whose interest for the plenum was exclusively focused on scoring political points. There was a natural overlap between the leftist movement and the plenum, in terms of the sphere of action and in terms of building the plenum as movement. Many plenum members were leftists..."

Unlike Bekiri and Petrevska, Tufegdjkj emphasizes: "In hindsight, I could not say there were any influences. Yes, there were internal divisions in the plenum, different opinions and different approaches about its ultimate goal, about keeping it as student movement or allowing its transformation into civic movement. Be that as it may, political circumstances in that period changed fast and impacted decisions of the movement, but also their internal debates".

The Student Plenum and its protests were not supported by the universities, but rather encouraged formation of the Professor Plenum. Professors who are members of the plenum stressed that their primary goal is to support students. Professor Rumena Buzharovska clarifies: "[The Professor] Plenum was formed as separate body that should support the Student Plenum, not compete against it. It was not formed to influence the Student Plenum".

In response to the Professor Plenum, a counter-plenum with more than 200 signatories was soon formed. In Bekiri's opinion, the role played by the Professor Plenum could have been encouraging, but parallel formation of counter-plenum was demotivating for students. Additional controversies about the role of the Professor Plenum were caused

by several professors, who were also plenum members, with their mentorship behaviour towards students and attempts to impose certain decisions.

"[...] From a distance, I observed tendencies for the student protests to be 'channelled' and disciplined. Some professors, close to President Ivanov, successfully executed this task, mentoring students, i.e. acting on their behalf. Infiltrations and demagogy could be seen from afar, given my previous experience from June 1968 when I was student at the Belgrade University", says Vladimir Milchin.

After students' arrest and the police's violent raid at the library "Brothers Miladinovci" from May 5, 2015, the Student Plenum left working groups at the Ministry of Education and Science and announced boycott of any possible decision reached by them. Also, the Student Plenum strongly reacted during elections for the Student Parliament at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in 2016, when government's exponents committed a series of electoral irregularities, including theft of ballot boxes. Students who attempted to indicate irregularities and prevent electoral fraud were targeted by intervention from "special forces" at the Ministry of Interior.

236

## AJDE!

In late 2014, civil resistance's maturity and increasingly clearer political articulation was announced by the Platform for Citizen-Oriented Politics AJDE! On December 23, a performance was staged outside the parliament's building by 123 civic activists, to announce the platform and its declaration: "Politics belongs to us, citizens, and we are joining forces as free-minded individuals of different views and ideas. We are open to all people who identify themselves with the values we advocate for [...] Our goal is to strengthen and unite fragmented democratic forces in the country. We do not intent to monopolize the space for action. We call for wide mobilization to incite hope and courage among people. They cannot silence all of us! They cannot chain all of us!"

AJDE! was founded by hundred civic activists and individuals from entire Macedonia. This platform was recognizable for its attractive actions, with featured elements of performance and street theatre. "The civic platform AJDE! achieved something nobody had attained before - civil unification for systemic, multi-fold issues that created main problems in our society. AJDE! was a platform for civic mobilization, action and house for



Promotion of the Platform for Citizen-Oriented Politics AJDE!



all citizens who wished to change the society for the better... As such, it was the perfect introduction to the regime's downfall", believes activist Pavle Bogoevski who became MP after the regime's fall.

Similar opinion is shared by activist Angela Ilievska: "AJDE! had individuals. In AJDE! I saw true desire for change and, what was important for me at that moment, I saw no subordination to and promotion of particular political party. AJDE! promoted citizens and all that belongs to them...". Ljumi Bekiri also found AJDE!'s independence and authenticity to be of crucial importance: "AJDE! represented a sum of several civic activists that encouraged activism in society and were recognizable in public for their authenticity and independence. One of the most important segments of this platform included its full independence from any influences. AJDE! articulated its political opinion about state-of-affairs in the country, an opinion that often differed from those of political parties, but was very close to many citizens".

---

AJDE! was platform for civic mobilization, action and house for all citizens who wished to change the society for the better.

---

238

This platform created, organized and implemented numerous actions, performances and protests. Activists from AJDE! were always visible, easily recognizable for their authenticity, originality and precision in message creation and dissemination. In 2015 and 2016, AJDE! continuously caused headaches for the authorities. It staged protests and demanded liberation of the captured public service broadcaster, Macedonian Radio-Television. It organized a series of protests and demanded resignations and sanctions for all culprits responsible for the death of nine-year old Tamara Dimovska, because competent state institutions had failed to ensure her timely medical treatment abroad. AJDE! demanded freedom for journalist Kezharovski and collected 7,000 signatures against the law that unconstitutionally attacked livelihood of contract-based and precariat workers. Protests were organized against attempts to prohibit the opposition's "bombs" and to introduce censorship. It openly supported formation of the Special Prosecution Office and advised prosecutor Katica Janeva that she would have her hands full in dealing with the regime's crime and corruption.

AJDE! mobilized citizens and had important role in the Freedom Camp, erected outside the government building. "AJDE! succeeded to gather serious number of active, dedicated and strong individuals under jointly articulated political, but non-partisan action. AJDE! was creative energy drive that penetrated the public space through social networks and

mainstream media. AJDE! played significant role in ensuring a link or bridge between non-partisan and partisan protest forces at the time of 'Citizens for Macedonia' and Freedom Camp", assesses Marjan Zabrchanec, then-current civic activist.

Thanks to AJDE!, in early March 2016, series of mass protests were organized outside the Constitutional Court against the possibility for this court to take decision that would allow the president of state to pardon individuals convicted of election frauds. Citizens, almost daily, chanted "No justice, no peace" and demanded resignations from constitutional judges that served as the regime's extended hand. The last and most massive protest against the Constitutional Court's decision was held on March 15 and it was actually the last activity of this platform.

"The protest was neatly announced, but the space was illegally occupied by Stevche Jakimovski's political party GROM. At that time, SDSM's secretary general Oliver Spasovski already served as minister of interior, but the police failed to clear the usurped space in spite of several promises made. The narrow passage between MNT and protection fences around the Museum of Holocaust, the convoy led by activists from AJDE! faced water cannons and Mol's armoured vehicles. Access to the Constitutional Court was closed off. This was perceived as attack on AJDE!'s credibility and became the reason for internal rifts. That bitter taste is present even today", recalls Vladimir Milchin.

Ilievska has similar opinion: "AJDE! practically stopped to function after the protest outside the Constitutional Court. This protest was announced with an intention to stay there until early morning hours when the Constitutional Court was to take decision whether the president is entitled to grant pardons to persons convicted of election crimes. The protest was massive, but protesters were stopped near MNT and were denied access to the Constitutional Court. In the meantime, the space was occupied by tents and counter-protesters organized by Stevcho Jakimovski, who stayed there until the morning. All that happened at the time when Oliver Spasovski held the office of interior minister in the caretaker government."

For most of its members, AJDE!'s decline was neither accidental nor insignificant. "AJDE! was suffocated because of its potential." According to Spirovska: "[AJDE!] was not allowed to exist because of the reason behind its actions. Even today, there is a need for AJDE! to remind us that politics belong to citizens, encourage us to continue fighting for social

justice and democracy. AJDE! declined quietly, although it should have been the voice of justice”, confidently claims activist Simona Spirovska.

Civic activist Vladimir Vangelov believes that AJDE!'s decline went in favour of “those who wished to have movement that is easily controlled and functions upon instructions from ‘Bihakjka’, instead of autonomously”, while Ljumi Bekiri states that AJDE! stopped to exist because of clarity and precision of its independent and uncompromised political messages: “Such [activism] did not sit well with political elites, because they were unable to control the movement and bend its will to serve their goals. In this case, of course, they were assisted by people from inside AJDE! The civil voice and cry for free society does not suit any government, irrespective of how tolerant and open it might be, especially not on the Balkan”. In the same vein is the opinion of activist Sasho Velagikj. According to him, if AJDE! had continued to exist “it would have been autonomous and authentic movement and would have amassed much greater power”. That is why Ilievska states that: “AJDE! will never suit any political party. Actually, that was our goal, to return politics in the hands of citizens”.

240

Zabrchanec has a different view on this matter, and in his opinion: “[...] At key point in time, AJDE! took the decision to stop its expansion and did not pursue absorption of new individual members, which could be one of many reasons why it did not survive in its initial format and did not continue to grow. However, it cannot be said that AJDE! stopped to exist because some goals of that informal platform were articulated through ‘Citizens for Macedonia’ and the Colourful Revolution. Members of AJDE! should take pride in the political articulation that was achieved.”

**MAY 5, 2015**

In early 2015 it became clear that the days of the regime are slowly, but surely, numbered. Students were protesting, AJDE! as well. Protests demanding resignation from health minister Nikola Todorov and all responsible for the death of young Tamara Dimovska gained in numbers and attendance. Anger and revolt of citizens were increasing, while dissatisfaction with state-of-affairs in the healthcare system grew among medical doctors. Citizens organized series of activities and protests against the so-called law on precariat workers, which only few months after its adoption was revoked by the

Protest after release  
of the “bomb” about  
Martin Neshkoski's  
murder





parliament. In the meantime, citizens continued to protests against unconstitutional charges for disconnected district heating. The winter's end and spring's start were marked by protests against the Court of Appel's decision to sentence journalist Tomislav Kezharovski with 2-year imprisonment, as well as protests outside the Macedonian Radio-Television (MRT) with demands to respect the law and to perform as professional and unbiased public service to citizens, instead of being the government's propaganda megaphone.

The social and political situation in the state was particularly heated with the case "Coup", in which opposition leader Zoran Zaev and six other persons were accused of having used illegal interception and spying methods and of having waged serious treats to high state officials. Except for Zaev, all suspects were issued detention orders. In addition, the Public Prosecution Office issued a press-release wherein it warned that disclosure of materials that could become subject of further criminal proceedings is prohibited and punishable by law. This caused storm of reactions in the media, journalists and activists, all of whom perceived the prosecution's warning as direct attempt for censorship.

242

Turmoil on the political scene was enhanced with disclosure of the so-called "bombs" by the biggest opposition party, SDSM. Vast number of journalists and civic activists were presented with "folders" containing their wiretapped conversations. At the same time, SDSM motioned criminal charges against the Prime Minister, but also other ministers and officials. The opposition's materials were published only by critically-oriented media, while public service broadcaster and pro-government media covered contents of disclosed conversations in insignificant scope or not at all.

Contents of the "bombs" enhanced civil dissatisfaction. On May 5, immediately after publication of telephone conversations related to Martin Neshkoski's murder, which revealed attempts on the part of Mol and the government to conceal his murder and its perpetrator, citizens started to massively gather outside the government building and expressed their revolt, among others, by throwing eggs at its façade. In the late-night hours, incidents happened between citizens and the police, with witnesses claiming they had been provoked by implanted protestors. The police disbanded protestors with excessive force and series of arrests and apprehensions, mainly of students. The events from May 5 caused great media interest across the world and great international support for citizens in the Republic of Macedonia to continue their struggle for freedom and democracy.

For many, May 5 represents introduction to the finale of the fight against the regime, an important catalyst of civil revolt and true political articulation of civil resistance. “I think the main and most essential driver of civil resistance and its articulation happened with disclosure of the wiretapped conversations, i.e. the ‘bombs’. In my opinion, the protest from May 5, 2015, signified the start of actual civil resistance. Not only for its massiveness, but also manifestation of revolt [...]”, stresses activist Uranija Pirovska.

Protests from May 5 and their epilogue fortified determination of citizens to continue public expression of their dissatisfaction and to demand the government to step down. Day after day, they gathered on the cross-section near the government building because the police had limited their right to movement and to expression of protest outside the government’s seat. But that did not prevent citizens to gather, day-in and day-out, under the motto “Every day at 6 p.m.” and to continue protesting and marching the streets in the capital over the next ten days, expressing their revolt in front of important state institutions.

## **CITIZENS FOR MACEDONIA AND FREEDOM CAMP**

243

On May 9, i.e. immediately protests from May 5, controversial gunfights happened in Kumanovo’s settlement “Divo Naselje” between the police and a large group of armed people. Actual reasons for this armed incident are still unknown, but it should be stressed that citizens remained cool-headed and dignified, i.e. they did not allow this armed conflict to disturb interethnic relations.

Daily protests of citizens culminated on May 17, outside the government building, with the organization of non-partisan rally, attended by more than 60,000 citizens, united under the informal coalition “Citizens for Macedonia” that was comprised of 80 civil society organizations, individuals and almost all opposition parties. This massive civil rally ended with erection of tents outside the government and formation of the so-called Freedom Camp.

The civic initiative AJDE! had its own tent, which served as place of gathering and overnight stays not only for its members, but also for citizens wishing to join informal conversations, protest marches or attend cultural events and political debates organized on daily basis as part of the camp.

In response to the civil protest, on May 18, ruling VMRO-DPMNE organized a party rally outside the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and setup counter-camp in the Park of Women Fighters under the official name "Camp of Democracy Defenders".

Civil protests continued in the period after May 17 and included demands for resignation of the government. Inter-party negotiations were initiated under mediation from the European Union and the United States to resolve the political crisis and to secure conditions for fair and democratic elections, and resulted in the Przhino Agreement, signed on June 2, and the annex thereto, signed on July 15.

In mid-July, the Freedom Camp was officially closed and soon afterwards SDSM, one-sidedly, announced its exit from the coalition with civil society organizations and activists, and its withdrawal from "Citizens for Macedonia". "SDSM's return to parliament and entry in the so-called Przhino government is not disputable. Disputable is the fact that civil society partners did not attend Zaev's press-conference, although that was agreed. This created negative resonance, which was perceived like SDSM had betrayed its previous partners", states Vladimir Milchin.

By the end of 2015, "Citizens for Macedonia" organized the civil action against apathy, fear, poverty and poor government policies, called "We Deserve Better!" Around 200 activists from 70 civil society organizations took part in the campaign conducted in 30 bigger settlements across the state.

## I PROTEST

The motto "I Protest" or more specifically the hashtag #protestiram was first used during protests against police brutality in 2011. At that time, activists called to protests via social networks and used hashtags #protestiram and #martin. As the civil resistance was growing and strengthening, the motto/hashtag "I Protest" was more often used and its namesake civil movement emerged immediately after the protests from May 5.

While Marjan Zabrchanec views "I Protest" as slogan that spearheaded protests against police brutality and was used throughout the years by different groups with different protest demands, activist Jordan Shishovski is of completely different opinion. According to him: "I Protest' was civil movement formed immediately after the events from May 5, 2015, as consequence of the shock effect from the police's excessive use of force and desperation with the political impasse. In spite of the fact that 'I Protest' was formed as movement by number of activists in those days, it practically represented natural continuation of many movements created throughout the years".

Pavle Bogoevski also believes that "I Protest" was a movement of civic activists (not organizations or political parties) "with plenum-like coordination, i.e. [decisions required] consensus among activists attending coordination meetings, which were organized in public spaces and were open to anybody who wanted to join".

Controversies around the movement "I Protest" were additionally enhanced due to the conflict, i.e. misunderstanding among representatives of "I Protest" and "Citizens for Macedonia".

"The reason for that conflict was stubborn resistance by small number of activists to any kind of cooperation with the opposition, i.e. political parties in opposition. 'Citizens for Macedonia' was a movement comprised of tens of formal NGOs that cooperated with the opposition. Activists who objected cooperation with the opposition viewed these organizations as part of the problem, not the solution. This difference could not be overcome [...] Additionally, contradictory is the fact that loudest advocates of the position that civil activists should not cooperate with political parties are the same who formed political party soon after the movement "I Protest" ended and were among first political parties that participated in the civil-led Colourful Revolution", says Bogoevski.

According to Zabrchanec, reasons behind the conflict were "unsuccessful attempts by members of Solidarity, Lenka and Levica to monopolize the revolution's motto and their lack of preparedness for inclusion and cooperation with political parties towards attainment of the ultimate goal".

On the other hand, Shishovski stresses that "I Protest" was a movement mainly comprised of activists wishing to act independently from established political elites and that the goal was to mobilize citizens who were against then-current government, but because of distrust in then-current opposition were reluctant to join the protests: "After May 17, a number of civic activists introduced aggressive campaign, on the terrain and in social media, with pressures for 'I Protest' to join the camp of 'Citizens for Macedonia' and SDSM. This created disquietude and quarrels, which led to indifference, loss of trust in the possibility for independent civil movement and the movement's decline".

In the opinion of Misha Popovikj: "[...] Main difference between 'I Protest' and 'Citizens for Macedonia' was the scope of changes expected or advocated for. But, the difference [of opinion] does not have to mean conflict. [...] The conflict was born around the initiative for resistance to be gathered in one place - the Freedom Camp. Different expectations and methods of civic activism were debated through that prism, meaning that movements cannot exist in different places as that would weaken the resistance's effect".

## REFUGEES WITHOUT BORDERS

246

The year 2015 saw a major influx of refugees from areas threatened by ISIS attacks. Civic activists and common citizens joined forces and continuously assisted refugees who transited Macedonia on their way to the European Union and were facing numerous problems and violence on their path. Several dozen refugees even lost their lives.

Citizens forced the government to adopt legal changes allowing the refugees legal transit in the state, and raised their voice against violence inflicted on migrants and inhumane conditions at the Reception Centre for Foreigners and the Asylum Centre. Activist Suad Misini went on hunger strike to protest the government and the state's treatment of refugees. On November 14, civil protest was organized on the Skopje square in support of refugees, while the traditional march for tolerance organized by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights was dedicated to refugees and was held under the motto "Refugees without Borders".

Refugees attempting  
to cross the Greek-  
Macedonia border



PO

AG STAR

WACF  
STAR  
TOWERS COMPANY  
HAWAII  
SIN 07

The second half of 2015 was marked by series of threats and physical attacks on journalists, civic activists and opposition members. In Skopje, protests were organized against construction of the Ferris Wheel under the motto "Skopje is not Disneyland", while unknown group of creative activists staged guerrilla actions as criticism for the project "Skopje 2014". Thanks to these "guerrilla activists", trees in Skopje were given eyes, sharks swam in the River Vardar, and palm trees were inhabited by monkeys.

Enormous air pollution in Tetovo, Bitola and Skopje triggered many civic initiatives, protests, blockades and demands for the authorities to take adequate measures to reduce pollution and protect the environment.

In the course of 2015, supported by activists and citizens, the LGBTI community organized protests outside the Public Prosecution Office due to institutional silence about violence and discrimination of their members in Macedonia. From its establishment in 2012, the LGBTI Support Centre had been the target of as many as five hooligan attacks, none of which had been resolved.

Even Roma community in the state, on several occasions in 2015, expressed its dissatisfaction with unequal treatment in the society and permanent discrimination on the part of authorities.

248

## **COLOURFUL REVOLUTION**

Civil revolt, resistance and defiance reached their crescendo with the Colourful Revolution. On April 12, 2016, then-incumbent President Gjorge Ivanov granted collective pardons to 56 politicians and other suspects of criminal offences for which relevant proceedings were initiated before state institutions and the Special Prosecution Office (SPO), including suspects for which proceedings had not been initiated. On April 13, several thousand angry citizens took to the streets, broke through the police cordon and expressed their revolt with Ivanov's decision on his "people's office" in downtown Skopje. First they threw eggs and later entered the office, demolishing and setting part of inventory on fire. This fire symbolically marked the start of the final civil battle against the regime.

Tens of thousands citizens staged daily protested in Skopje and they were soon expanded across the state. In Skopje, protests started at 6 p.m., outside SPO's offices, because citizens wanted to express their support for the work of the Special Prosecution Office.

The first paint-throwing happened on April 15 and targeted the Macedonia Arch on the Skopje square. Thereafter, “paint” became the weapon of choice for the non-violent civil resistance. In revolt and disapproval of blank pardons and Gruevski’s governance, paint was thrown at buildings from the project “Skopje 2104”, but also buildings housing legislative, executive and local government. On that account, the civil resistance was given an informal name - Colourful Revolution.

Protests were accompanied by dozen invitations for informative talks, apprehensions, misdemeanour sanctions, criminal charges and house detentions for protesters. House detention was issued to several members of political party Levica and one student, while the first people at the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, but also other activists, human rights defenders and citizens, “earned” misdemeanour charges. Almost constantly, participants in the Colourful Revolution encountered barriers that limited their movement during protests, with occasional violence by the police, and numerous cases were observed of implanted police members who filmed the protests. Also, participants in the protests reported multitude of verbal and physical threats they are facing, including pressures and demotion at their jobs (especially those employed at state and public institutions).

249

In parallel to protests of the Colourful Revolution, several so-called counter-protests were organized across the state by supporters of the Civil Movement for Defence of Macedonia (GDOM), expressing support for the current government and demanding the elections to be held on June 5. At the protest in Skopje, GDOM member Aleksandar Pandov publicly demanded civil society organizations and some political parties to be temporarily prohibited. In the aftermath of this statement, Nikola Gruevski also made public statements wherein he called civil society organizations “sectarians” and hirelings, and indirectly threatened the Colourful Revolution that “people are perturbed and he would not be able to stop them”. This choir was joined by President Ivanov who, in his public address, among others, said that, at one point and in the context of the crisis and civil protests, he had reconsidered activation of the army.

Protests of the Colourful Revolution ended in June, when Ivanov withdrew his abolition. In July, the so-called Przhino 2 Agreement was brokered and marked the start of preparations for caretaker government and parliamentary elections.

The Colourful Revolution was organized under the motto “No justice, no peace” and had eight demands: (1) withdrawal of blanket pardons; (2) Ivanov’s resignation; (3) Constitutional Court to deliver its opinion on constitutionality of SPO; (4) formation of special judicial chamber at the criminal court to reside in cases led by SPO; (5) withdrawal of the decision to hold parliamentary elections on June 5, 2016; (6) participation of independent civil society representatives in resolution of the crisis; (8) crisis to be resolved on the territory of Macedonia; and (8) formation of caretaker government to implement urgent reform priorities from the Priebe Report.

Ivanov withdraw the abolition, but did not resign from office. The Constitutional Court did not deliberate SPO’s constitutionality, while legal solution for SPO became part and parcel of ongoing justice reforms after the regime’s fall. The elections were postponed, solution to the crisis was negotiated in Macedonia, but talks for Przhino 2 Agreement did not include civil society representative, and caretaker government was not formed.

An important characteristic of “colourful” protests was the absence of any party symbols, but presence of tens of thousands independent citizens and members of various opposition parties. In the course of time, some protesters became visible and recognizable persons of the resistance, although this movement did not have leaders. Many raised the question of who coordinates the Colourful Revolution.

“The Colourful Revolution was coordinated by a horizontal body which, over more than 100 days of protests, included more than 100 different people attending meetings - citizens, individuals, members of NGOs, members of parties, communities and groups”, explains Marjan Zabrchanec and adds: “Meetings were held every two or three days, late in the evening. Sometimes they lasted for hours, because it took time to align positions among different citizens who volunteered to participate in the coordination, and later reach agreement on operational and organizational plans for action.”

---

An important characteristic of “colourful” protests was the absence of any party symbols, but presence of tens of thousands independent citizens and members of various opposition parties.

---

Similar experience is shared by Jordan Shishovski: "The coordination body included representatives of civil society organizations, political movements, political parties and individual civic activists. [...] Everybody's voice was heard. There was a tendency for decisions to be taken by agreement".

However, the biggest and most important value of the Colourful Revolution was its inclusivity, although, in hindsight, some believe that such inclusivity was flawed: "Insufficient distinction between entities within protests. Distinguishing partisan and civic activists would have contributed to mobilization of people that harboured negative opinions about then-current opposition, but shared the values of civil society organizations", stresses Shishovski. In the opinion of Misha Popovikj, its weakness lies in: "our mentality, whereby matters must appear united. That is why some movements left and re-joined [the revolution]. And it was very simple: everybody should have protested in the manner they thought is best. Everybody was allowed to leave the main protest, but the most important thing was to express protest".

Today Simona Spirovska believes that: "inclusivity was probably the biggest value, although it did not result in what I had hoped, i.e. citizenry that thinks outside the frames of political parties. I had hoped that citizens would, at least, remain vigilant". On the other hand, Bogoevski believes that: "after the goal was achieved, differences between various entities came to the surface and complicated the process for defining positions of the movement. Irrespective of that, inclusivity is the revolution's most beautiful feature".

Involvement of various independent and partisan entities inevitably imposes the question whether there are/were attempts for takeover or assimilation of the Colourful Revolution. Zabrchanec believes there were never any serious attempts for the Colourful Revolution to be overtaken by group, party or organization. In his opinion, diversity of citizens that protested and inclusivity in coordination of their activities have created a movement that could not be assimilated. Bogoevski says it would be ungrateful to name those attempting to overtake the movement, but he is of the impression that the biggest attempts came from people, parties and organizations that had previously attempted the same with other movements in the past.

On the other hand, Spirovska is specific: "There was tangible intolerance between Levica and SDSM, which was not hidden during the protests. Accusations were waged by both sides and concerned attempts to take over the revolution. Even today, the Colourful Revolution is abused by all and any. Some have declared it is dead, while others wish to have it on their side". Jordan Shishovski says that logistics for protests dependent on then-current opposition, which had created a form of gravitational pull for civic activists and their inclination to this party. According to him, this has caused demotivation, demobilization and indifference among non-partisan citizens. Misha Popovikj believes that political parties in Macedonia enjoy low trust as factors of positive change, and that is why the word "civil" is so attractive: "Political parties wanted [...] to attach themselves to the broad social movements. That was the case with both SDSM and Levica, in respect to the Colourful Revolution. And that was no secret. They entered coalitions with many non-governmental [organizations] and were in the 'heat' of protests for the entire time".

According to Uranija Pirovska, attempts were made to overtake/assimilate the Colourful Revolution, mainly by lower echelons at SDSM. In her opinion, these attempts are visible even today and are mainly due to erroneous understanding that only parties have the power to change things: "In that, they forget that without the civil sector and individuals with high awareness for civic activism, SDSM would not have had credibility before the international community and, accordingly, would not have enjoyed its support".

The Colourful Revolution, says Vladimir Vangelov, emerged as pinnacle of several previous movements and, from the very start, SDSM and people close to them "successfully managed to impose themselves as leaders". Vladimir Milchin, while closely following the presidential campaign (2019) and the presidential debate around the Colourful Revolution between Stevo Pendarovski and Gordana Siljanovska, concludes that the Colourful Revolution "is still a target of manipulations".

At the parliamentary elections in December 2016, several active participants from the civil resistance and Colourful Revolution were included on SDSM's candidate lists and were elected MPs (Irena Stefoska, Ivana Tufegdjikj and Pavle Bogoevski). After the elections, a number of activists became advisors in the coalition government of SDSM and DUI, were employed or were engaged under task contracts at ministries and state institutions, both on local and national level, while others became members of management boards, etc. Direct participation of the so-called civil "resisters" in the government has divided the public and opened discussions whether they undermine the Colourful Revolution,

and whether building personal carrier in politics on the foundations of the Colourful Revolution is adequate and justified.

“I would not say I had built my political carrier on the foundations of the Colourful Revolution, although I completely understand perceptions behind that claim. Once my nomination was announced, I thought at length, mainly about the Student Plenum, and how my candidacy would impact future movements, whether it would prevent their formation, whether my decision today would result in declined trust for these movements. Ultimately, dominant was the argument that, at this moment and under current circumstances, I need to take full responsibility and influence policy-making processes from inside, but also the process for democratization of the society”, explains Ivana Tufegdžikj.

“As young man who wants to see and be agent of changes in society, building a political carrier on postulates of the Colourful Revolution, i.e. the movement in whose organization I participated honestly and dedicatedly, seemed more adequate than climbing party ranks and engaging in processes of political articulation. In doing so, I remain non-partisan politician, formally and factually, who can act according to personal principles, unbound by decisions of relevant bodies at political parties from the coalition to which I belong”, stated Pavle Bogoevski, who submitted his resignation in June 2019.

253

“Non-partisan citizens who nowadays work in the government are not representatives of the Colourful Revolution or the civil society. They were not delegated by anybody, nor do they have the right to present themselves as representatives of that revolution in the government. They are obliged to equally serve all citizens, irrespective of the fact whether they came from the Colourful Revolution or not. Not a single achievement by the Colourful Revolution has been lost [...]”, claims Marjan Zabrcanec, who serves as special advisor on public relations in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet.

“For the thesis that ‘Colourful Revolution had been undermined’ to make sense and for things that happen in reality, such as two-year persecution against civic and non-partisan activists who were visible, but also heavily attacked and blasphemed, members of the Colourful Revolution, and who later joined the institutions or ‘found livelihood’ (to use the words of those upholding this worldview), I need at least one argument, single example of somebody [from these group] who had violated the laws, abused office

or had done anything wrong and thereby justify these attacks[...]", emphasizes Petrit Sarachini, coordinator at the government's sector on public relations.

"In principle, I believed that non-partisan revolutionaries who joined the legislative and executive government would be able to help in bringing about expected changes in governance", says Uranija Pirovska. She is confident that majority of them have not done that for opportune reasons, but agrees that the public opinion is mainly based on erroneous understanding of their motives. "I cannot say that [their transfer in the government] undermined the Colourful Revolution. Failed ideals of the Colourful Revolution were result of non-attained goals for which it was born", concludes Pirovska.

Professor and activist Mirjana Najchevska says that any person coming into power can be corrupted: "It's that simple. Power corrupts. Having in mind that many young members of the Colourful Revolution joined governing authorities, it was inevitable they would be corrupted. They did not undermine the Colourful Revolution or what it has achieved, but they were unable to become a key factor of change, which could have been done by more experienced members of the Colourful Revolution".

254

Misha Popovikj thinks the answer to this question depends on actions of those who joined the government. If they only press buttons upon orders, if they are complacent with spontaneous administration that lacks grandiose ideas for progress and justice, then - in his opinion - they undermine the ideas for which they protested. "Now, we can see both of these behaviours in the group of people from the Colourful Revolution who joined executive and legislative government", comments Popovikj.

Those granted legislative and executive offices are not and cannot be representatives of the Colourful Revolution, underlines Vladimir Milchin: "They were selected by leaderships of SDSM and DUI. When did that selection happen? Before or during the Colourful Revolution? What was their agenda? I do not know, but it is clear that their behaviour after joining the government is shattering the Colourful Revolution's capital and the idea for civil resistance". Vladimir Vangelov is categorical: "I would say that, from the beginning, their goal was to find positions in the government. Methods of organization and channelling resistance were actually aimed to create a movement that would be easily disbanded later, after public offices are distributed". Simona Spirovska states: "The

biggest expectations brought us biggest disappointments. These individuals might not have supported all mistakes of the new government, but they also did not oppose them”.

Having in mind all developments, including those in the period after the regime’s fall, questions were raised in the public whether this experience will serve as motivation for active civic engagement or we will face a period of civil passiveness, disappointment and apathy. According to some activists and analysts, the Colourful Revolution is the most successful story of the civil resistance, which had showed that a regime can be changed. They believe this experience is something that cannot be easily or fast forgotten, and are convinced that citizens would never again allow oppression and capture for many years to come. In their opinion, developments after the regime’s fall, good or bad, could be attributed only to individuals, political parties and coalitions, not the movement that united all actors in the society.

In the opinion of some analysts, the apathy of citizens after the regime’s fall comes from the slow dynamics of changes, perpetuation of some negative practices by the current government, and the fact that justice is still not delivered for organizers of crime and corruption.

According to some activists and analysts, we are facing a period of civil passivity because the government managed to disband, i.e. subdue, important part of the civil society, but they are convinced that it will be created again and soon, i.e. this part of the society will be reorganized into authentic independent civic activism.

## **LAST STRIKE OF THE REGIME: DESOROSOIZATION**

The Colourful Revolution ended, so did the parliamentary elections. The regime was already on its knees. Although Nikola Gruevski was unable to form government, his fight against the civil society did not stop. On the contrary, this fight was enhanced and brought about the so-called “desorosoziation”. This process served as culmination of his hatred for free-minded citizens, civil society organizations and activists, the Open

Society Foundation, and George Soros. All of them were blamed for his defeat. That is why Gruevski, together with his mentors from Russia and Hungary, devised an act of retaliation.

On December 17, 2016, standing atop barrel in front of the State Election Commission's building where commissioners were reconsidering appeals lodged for the early parliamentary elections, Gruevski addressed supporters gathered on the street with "proclamation" by VMRO-DPMNE, where the fifth point concerned desorosoziation: "We will fight for desorosoziation of Macedonia and strengthening the independent civil sector that would not be controlled by anybody. Efforts will be made to regulate financing of foundations and non-governmental organizations, according to yardsticks from most advanced democracies across the world".

He also addressed desorosoziation in his mega-interview for *Republika* from January 3, 2017. There, Gruevski directly linked the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia, non-governmental organizations and, of course, George Soros, to SDSM, and even assigned them subordinated position: "Yes, we had a tough opponent. I'm not referring to SDSM, which just served as cover, a tool [...] If they did not have George Soros to keep their backs, bankrolling millions [of dollars] into Macedonia, the entire network of non-governmental organizations, media, politicians, in the country and abroad, all of whom he pays, and influence in the most powerful countries in the world, which is decisive when it comes to smaller countries like ours, it would not have been that difficult and the economy would have been stronger, we would have had more new jobs."

One month after publication of VMRO-DPMNE's proclamation, the media reported on formation of new citizens association called "Stop Operation Soros" (SOS). On the same day when news was announced of SOS's formation, pro-government media published several dozen texts and video stories on desorosoziation, mainly targeting financial operations of civil society organizations.

For example, the portal *Republika* published an anonymous text titled "Every month, SOROS staff members earn around 10 average salaries", wherein it was claimed that "SOROS Foundation acts as para-political organization, paying enormous funds to people on their payroll".

Just one week after public news about SOS's formation, the Macedonian public was able to learn the second goal behind this so-called citizens association – internationalization of the desoroization process and alarming the American Congress about the work of USAID and U.S. Ambassador in Macedonia. Representatives from “Stop Operation Soros” announced they would seek answers from U.S. Embassy and USAID Mission in Macedonia about “their cooperation with and funding for the Foundation Open Society Institute”. In the days that followed, SOS announced they have conducted research and distributed its findings to competent institutions in the United States and worldwide, to sound the alarm about the funding of vast number of non-governmental organizations, financed by the Foundation Open Society Institute and about abuses of the United States Agency for International Development – USAID”. Media reported that six congressmen, led by Christopher Smith, had addressed Ambassador Jess Bailey with a letter wherein, recalling rights pertaining to their congressional office, they demanded oversight on performance of the American Ambassador and explanation of his diplomatic actions in Macedonia. On February 7, 2017, *Utrinski vesnik* wrote: “VMRO-DPMNE has declared ‘war’ to U.S. Ambassador Jess Bailey, on American territory. Faced with the possibility of losing power, this party resorts to all ‘weapons’ to push for change of U.S. policy towards Macedonia”.

257

In parallel to announcements for desoroization and in addition to “black” propaganda, Gruevski materialized his threats into specific inspections performed by the Public Revenue Office (PRO) and pre-investigations launched by the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption and conducted at twenty civil society organizations that were part of the informative civil campaign in the wake of the elections, “We Decide”, financially supported by FOSM. Over the next months, inspectors from PRO, Financial Police and Ministry of Interior, almost every day, visited and conducted thorough inquires of civil society organizations and their financial operations.

Targeted civil society organizations continuously alarmed the domestic and international public, and demanded termination of unfounded inspections, threats and pressures.

Pre-investigation procedures against civil society organizations were officially closed in 2018 when Mol and the Financial Police publicly confirmed these inquiries had been unfounded and did not show irregularities in their operation. PRO's inspections ended in May 2019, with adoption of authentic interpretation for articles under the Law on Personal Income Tax that served as basis for threats and pressures on civil society organizations.

# WHEN DID ACTUAL POLITICAL ARTICULATION OF CIVIL RESISTANCE HAPPEN?

## FROM CITIZENS FOR EUROPEAN MACEDONIA TO COLOURFUL REVOLUTION

258

Participants and initiators of numerous and varied expressions of civil disenfranchisement and revolt with governance by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, in general, believe that civil resistance was created gradually throughout the years and grew in proportion to enhanced nationalism and brutality of the regime. In the opinion of some, the beginning of civil resistance's serious political articulation dates back in 2009, with the Citizens for European Macedonia and Freedom Square, while others believe actual articulation started with the movement against police brutality, the civic platform AJDE!, the student movement, the protests from May 5, and, of course, the Colourful Revolution.

### **Vladimir Milchin**

In the first months of 2009, in February, Citizens for European Macedonia (CEM) issued their press-release, and in March, students from the ArchiBrigade were forcefully prevented to protest on the Skopje square. Soon after, the six founders of CEM were prevented to hold the announced public debate in Struga by brutes dispatched from the authorities. CEM members were people of certain age, known in the public for their engaged political stances, while students from the ArchiBrigade were young people facing the dark side of politics for the first time. This diapason of age and experience had a symbolic significance. Two generations, without any connections between them, raised their voice almost on the same day.

### **Marjan Zabrchanec**

The first more serious articulation of civil resistance happened in 2009, immediately after the attack on students protesting against religious building on the city square. Several days later, thousands of citizens stood in defence of the right to protest. It was a political demand backed by large number of citizens. Other ground-breaking articulations of protest voices included the caravan of public debates organized by CEM, as well as youth mobilization against police brutality, after Martin Neshkoski's death.

The peak of civil political articulation came later, with the movement AJDEI, the plenums, "Citizens for Macedonia", and the Colourful Revolution.

### **Petrit Sarachini**

Beginnings of the civil resistance might be traced back in 2009 with protests of architecture students and the attack against them on the square, while more significant gathering of masses happened during the protests against police brutality, "Together for Peace", protests after December 24, 2012, the movement AMAN [...] Ultimately, all these initiatives culminated in one massive, more organized and more powerful articulation during the student protests and the plenums, and the protests triggered by the "bombs" in the spring of 2015, and, of course, the Colourful Revolution in 2016.

### **Vladimir Vangelov**

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment; there were many and various movements that articulated true civil resistance.

### **Misha Popovikj**

Well, I don't think one could indicate a particular date. It depends on what we understand by articulation, but it is much more important to know in which sense we speak when we attempt to assess whether something is "true" or not. In Macedonia, civil resistance could be found at all times. But if I am asked when the resistance was created towards policies of nationalism (for the first time), then I have to say it was the moment of actions against the campaign that revoked the right to abortion. The protest against construction of a church on the Macedonia Square emerged around the same time. That is the conditional start of more active groupings among leftist organizations, which existed and operated before, but this event enhanced the overall story. I say this mainly because, at that point in time, people from these initiatives gathered force and became, more or less, the hub for a number of protests that followed.

260

### **Rumena Buzharovska**

For years, civil resistance was in the making, first in the form of small protests which people were afraid to attend, and later in the form of major protests which reached culmination with the student protests. During VMRO-DPMNE's tenure in government, civil resistance was growing slowly, but surely, and peaked with the Colourful Revolution.

### **Mirjana Najchevska**

It cannot be correlated to one specific moment. It was a process of gradual awakening of the citizens. It is a matter of culminating disenfranchisement, but also awareness building that citizens have the right to protest, to demand and to criticize. The final articulation could be linked with the Professor Plenum and the Student Plenum.

### **Ljumi Bekiri**

The start of civil resistance articulation is linked to the student protests in 2014, organized against higher education reforms at the time. It could be said that it served as form of encouragement for other categories of citizens to start joining different movements and articulate their resistance against the then-incumbent oppressive government. Awakening of resistance among the students gave way to other, bigger movements in Macedonia. The student movement was the beginning of healthy supra-partisan and supra-ethnic resistance.

### **Pavle Bogoevski**

In my opinion, the actual articulation of civil resistance started with formation of platforms focused on more than one specific issue. To my knowledge, the civic platform AJDE! was the first such case. That shouldn't be interpreted to undermine importance of previous protests and movements. The difference lies in the fact that, in their nature, movements like AMAN and "Stop Police Brutality" were reactive and focused on singular issues. AJDE! enabled strategic, proactive positioning of civil resistance to main problems in the society, creating mechanisms for reaction to events even before they happened.

261

### **Simona Spirovska**

For me, the actual political articulation of civil resistance started on May 5, 2015.





### **Uranija Pirovska**

I think the main and most crucial driver of civil resistance and its articulation happened with the disclosure of wiretapped conversations, i.e. “bombs”. The protest from May 5, 2015, in my opinion, represents the start of true civil resistance. Not only because of its massiveness, but due to expression of revolt which, at one moment, erupted into violence, and, later, brutal response by the police. Despite the fact that this protest was preceded by many others, organized for different reasons, I believe this one represents the start of what followed later - “I Protest” and the Colourful Revolution.

### **Jordan Shishovski**

Between May 5 and May 17, 2015, when the movement “I Protest” was born as independent and supra-partisan civic movement.

263

# WHAT DID THE COLOURFUL REVOLUTION ACHIEVED AND WHERE IT FAILED?

IT TUMBLED DOWN THE REGIME, BUT THE MOTTO  
“NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE” REMAINS CURRENT

The question imposed after the regime's fall concerns achievements and possible failures of the Colourful Revolution. While almost all collocutors are unanimous in their position that the Colourful Revolution is the civic movement that “hammered the last nail” for Nikola Gruevski's regime, views and opinions about its failures, i.e. where it failed to deliver expectations of its participants are different, even conflicting. Some believe it did not make any omissions, while others are disappointed and claim it underperformed in its (dis)continuity and did not remain “vigilant” in the period after VMRO-DPMNE's governance.

264

## Mirjana Najchevska

The Colourful Revolution succeeded in overthrowing dictatorship regime and in promoting one of the most important values of democracy – the voice of citizens. Personally, I don't think it underperformed in some important aspects. Simply, those that should implement demands of the Colourful Revolution are not mature for the task at hand.

## Misha Popovikj

First, I don't think it's fair to the term “revolution” to call the “colourful” as such. I think nobody fostered aspirations for a revolution, but somebody attached that name to this movement.

What it achieved? Well, it achieved two things. It showed that different movements, oftentimes harbouring conflicting expectations, could cooperate on particular narrowly-

defined goal. The goal was to tumble down VRMO-DPMNE's regime and it succeeded in that, but was not the single factor in that effort. There were expectations that the regime's fall would automatically deliver other expectations, such as rule of law, but we should be patient, because it's not sufficient for a regime to fall, and it takes times to overthrow all structures and practices that have led to that - sometimes instructed by those in high government positions, other times autonomously.

These are the risks today, i.e. even if the government is truly reformatory, it could also underperform in disassembling such corrosive logic. If the government is not reformatory, the structure of poor governance is already in place and could be easily inherited.

### **Vladimir Milchin**

The Colourful Revolution was continuous, almost daily voice of citizens' revolt against the regime. It was the last phase of civil resistance that forced the regime to use special police units. In the end, brutality of police interventions unmasked the regime. Its downfall became inevitable. The Colourful Revolution united citizens of all ages and of different political affiliations, and managed to attract citizens who were neither members nor supporters of political parties. Where did the Colourful Revolution fail? It subdued to the euphoria and declared its victory prematurely.

265

### **Marjan Zabrcanec**

The Colourful Revolution, as form of civil resistance, made serious contribution to the ultimate defeat of Gruevski's autocratic regime, and that is its greatest achievement. Another important aspect was its unifying role - on the streets, united behind same goals and demands, we saw partisan and non-partisan citizens, left-wingers, right-wingers, and centrists, citizens from different ethnic and other backgrounds. The Colourful Revolution imposed value demands, for example, the fight for justice, as serious topic around which citizens measure behaviour of the government, but also of the opposition.

### **Petrit Sarachini**

The Colourful Revolution attained almost all of its goals. The regime fell, amnesty for the "bombs" was revoked, freedom of citizens was restored, and institutions were given chance to consolidate and push processes for restoration of the rule of law and justice for everybody in the country.

Of course, there were areas of underperformance, but their effect for the Colourful Revolution was minor, and it achieved the maximum effect possible by any movement that operates with non-violent means and legal methods of fight. It would be erroneous to attribute personal failures to the Colourful Revolution, which had ended more than two years ago.

### **Vladimir Vangelov**

The Colourful Revolution contributed to the change of government, i.e. it was an important partner to then-current opposition, but did not manage to affirm the values it advocated for after the change of government. Today the motto "No justice, no peace" sounds equally current.

### **Rumena Buzharovska**

The Colourful Revolution was the peak of liberation from fear and articulation of dissatisfaction in creative ways. It was a massive sight of satisfaction, both unique and unifying. But every revolution comes to its end – I don't know why everybody is so disappointed in events that developed after the end of the Colourful Revolution. It is normal for some people that participated therein to become part of the government, after all, demands were for citizens to join the area that commonly belongs to party politics.

### **Ljumi Bekiri**

In the beginning, and while it lasted, the Colourful Revolution succeeded in reviving hope among citizens of Macedonia for political activism outside party shackles and for activism that unites citizens on different bases and around certain goals. More specifically, the Colourful Revolution managed to change the government. It was the end result of the entire resistance over the last years, manifested through different movements [...] Without the Colourful Revolution and the entire resistance from the previous years, likely is that we would still have the same government and the weak opposition from that time.

It should not be forgotten that the Colourful Revolution, in spite of being a result of the previous resistance, happened at key political moment in the state, i.e. blanket pardons

granted by President Ivanov, and therefore it put forward specific demands, of which only one was realized, i.e. withdrawal of pardon decisions by President Ivanov. The remaining specific demands remained undelivered, such as deliberation by the Constitutional Court on SPO's status, the legal state, discontinuation of persecution against activists, etc. Moreover, the Colourful Revolution did not manage to attain one of its ideals for just and equitable state, and we live the consequences thereof. Finally, the Colourful Revolution did not deliver in terms of being articulation of civil non-partisan voice, because it was abused by the current government and a handful of people from the revolution, who capitalized on this movement for personal goals.

### **Pavle Bogoevski**

Even in hindsight, the Colourful Revolution, in my opinion, was the movement that filled the glass in terms of the regime's rule. Its achievements are numerous, starting from broad unification of citizens behind one shared goal, and ending with the fact that it remains the single form of civil resistance during Gruevski's governance that managed to annul not one, but two major political steps of the previous government – early elections scheduled for June 5, 2016, and blanket pardons for persons suspected and accused by SPO. In addition, the Colourful Revolution opened space for civil participation in policy making, which was unknown before having in mind that Gruevski's government used each and every opportunity to delegitimize the non-governmental sector and to exclude it from decision making and policy creation processes.

267

From today's perspective, the Colourful Revolution's underperformance (if that could be said) is the small post-protest potential. The fact that we did not have clearly defined structure and that the movement was informal in its nature has contributed to the Colourful Revolution's great legitimacy and attractiveness among citizens during the protests, but at the same time it meant reduced possibility for legitimate articulation of its positions after the protests ended.

However, our biggest mistake (again, in conditional terms) was the political naivety and inexperience (here I refer to activists from the Colourful Revolution, with all due respect for exemptions and experienced fighters), which resulted in very high expectations for the post-protest period and even shorter deadlines for those expectations to be delivered.

### **Simona Spirovska**

The Colourful Revolution united and encouraged citizens to confront the criminal government. People of different ideologies protested against the regime.

We underperformed in terms of not being able to keep the Colourful Revolution's demands alive. For too long, we were dealing with insults and disappointment from our representatives in the government. Instead, we could have sustained the promise of permanent vigilance.

### **Jordan Shishovski**

The Colourful Revolution managed to surpass the inability of then-current opposition to mobilize non-partisan citizens for political and social change. The ruling coalition at that time (2015) had perfected a very successful governance system, based on combination of clientelism, propagandist pressure on citizens, broad mobilization of party membership and skilful abuse of state institutions to maintain itself in power. On the other hand, then-current opposition did not even have adequate program, staff or rhetoric to mobilize non-affiliated citizens. It was completely turned inwards, towards its political base. The only way for social change was through political change, and political change was possible only by broad mobilization of all opposition forces from that time. The Colourful Revolution was successful in that.

I would not say that the Colourful Revolution underperformed as movement, but rather it was the combination of unsecure work environment in the civil sector and opportunism on the part of individual civic activists that contributed to their acceptance of indecent proposals by then-current opposition to participate in the elections on party candidate lists.

### **Sasho Velagikj**

First I must say that I never equated myself with the Colourful Revolution, because the fight against the government became entertainment. But, fact is that it managed to gain traction in its form, which also meant beginning of the end of the former regime.

Its biggest underperformance is that the positive energy did not yield results. The motto "No justice, no peace" was not only defeated, but completely "crushed".

### **Angela Ilievska**

What we can all agree is that the Colourful Revolution was not only the finale of previously initiated process in which citizens are always on the opposite side of what could be called an autocratic regime. The Colourful Revolution carried the voice of each and every citizen that was insufficiently articulated in public due to suppressive behaviour on the part of then-current government. Practically, it built upon and united all processes for liberation of the captured society.

The Colourful Revolution should have remained symbol of resistance, resoluteness, non-submission, non-bribery, courage, and uncompromised behaviour - all for the single purpose of witnessing justice for all the injustices done. The Colourful Revolution should have remained a symbol of citizens' victory over the system. It failed. We failed. From today's perspective, I think it was morphed into something that somebody called "the big picture". But today the big picture has multitude of colours, and they are so mixed together that the prime colour had been lost. In this big picture, paint was poured on the slogan "NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE", and often looking at this picture from the outside does not allow us to read what we had been chanting, even in our sleep.

In brief, the Colourful Revolution underperformed in its continuity. Those who perceive themselves as legitimate representatives of this movement and are installed in the system are not an expression of what the protests stood for. In hindsight, I don't know if they got lost in the labyrinths of remains from the former regime or had their vision blurred from staring at the big picture.

Principles and ideals that led us through the years do not stop with the change of one government structure with another; the thing you fought against yesterday cannot be forgotten today, and certainly not tomorrow. The fight continues, even if it is against those with whom you marched the streets yesterday!



Sefer Tahiri

JOURNALISM  
BECAME  
PROPAGANDA

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL  
CONTEXTE IN WHICH  
THE MEDIA OPERATED  
FROM 2006 TO 2018

After the introduction of parliamentary democracy and market economy in the Republic of North Macedonia, the media started to develop at warp

speed. After the declaration of independence in 1991, the state embarked on political and economic reforms, as well as restructuring of the media. The media system at the time was developed without consistent legal-normative and institutional framework, and with limited economic, technical and human resources. Changes, albeit radical, were often improvised and without rules.

Today, the media system functions under a clearly defined institutional framework, whereby the media, especially broadcasting media, operate as autonomous and independent entities in compliance with the legal norms of parliamentary democracy and market economy. All broadcasters, commercial or public, cannot be in the hands of any political entity. In spite of this fact, the actual situation has clearly shown and shows that methods have been designed for political instrumentalization of broadcasters.

This phenomenon was most prominent during VMRO-DPMNE's tenure in government, from 2006 to 2017, although variations of media's political and partisan instrumentalization were present before 2006, at the time when SDSM was in government and after this party returned to power in 2017.

During VMRO-DPMNE's tenure in government, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia complained of strong pressure on journalists by the authorities. "Such aggressive governmental policy against the media and journalists, aimed to control their work, is not found elsewhere. [In Macedonia], the government had managed to institute total control over vast number of media. They were turned into propaganda instruments, praising government policies and fighting anybody that thinks differently from the authorities",<sup>1</sup> stated AJM's former president Naser Selmani on November 9, 2014.

Political pressures are manifested in different forms, sometimes obvious and direct, other times subtle and indirect and hidden from the public's eye. This is a particular

<sup>1</sup> Interview of AJM's president Naser Selmani for the portal *Al Jazeera Balkan*, available at: <https://bit.ly/36TbSLx> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

problem faced by the Republic of North Macedonia, as one of many states undergoing endless transition.

Similar opinion to his predecessor is shared by AJM's current president Mladen Chadikovski, who figuratively refers to the period from Bucharest to Prespa as the bleak era in Macedonian journalism. "The politicians became media bosses, turning journalists and editors into executors of their orders. [Those were] ugly and shameful times. Regretful is the fact that we, as profession, were not more united to prevent that. For many years to come, we will suffer consequences from the period after Bucharest, and before Prespa. It was a traumatic period for the media in Macedonia because of the political crisis that started in Bucharest, on April 3, 2008, and ended in Prespa, on June 17, 2018, and was accompanied by economic downturn that put the media in economically dependent position. This very long period had regressive impact on media development, freedom of speech and economic independence", elaborates Chadikovski.<sup>2</sup>

Goran Gavrilo is general manager of Kanal 77. During VMRO-DPMNE's rule, he was under frequent pressure by this political party on the account of the critical stance upheld by the media outlet he manages. "The media space in Macedonia suffered traumatic events that included direct or indirect pressures on the media and media development. This period is characterized by outright media corruption and direct arrangements pursued through mediators and marketing agencies. All these processes were non-transparent and implied investment in media owners. Contrary to the government from before, which focused on corrupting editors and journalists, media owners proved to be much easier target because the excessive number of media outlets and the small advertising market was not conducive to solvent operation of the media. The corruptive behaviour went in another direction, with editors and journalists being awarded government tenders",<sup>3</sup> explains Gavrilo.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with AJM's president Mladen Chadikovski for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Kanal 77's general manager Goran Gavrilo for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

## THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON THE MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

First private radio and television stations emerged immediately after the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence. From the very start, their programmes were not "spared" of tendencies by political parties to use these media for political purposes or from influences by state bodies and their representatives on their editorial policy. There is almost no media outlet, especially among those broadcasting current affairs programme, that does not demonstrate inclination towards certain political option and some of them do not even attempt to hide that fact. Even common citizens know which group or individual stands behind particular radio or television station. Politicians use the media for their political goals and owners use politicians and their media for personal or corporate interests.

In the period of society pluralization the media were perceived as means of achieving and articulating political and economic interests - a thesis that would be confirmed by numerous media analyses and research conducted in the last period. Hence, in the period after the 90s, when the government, i.e. coalition partners in government, had undisputed influence on the public service broadcaster (MRT and local radio and television stations), big and influential private radio and television stations were often "left" to the interests of economy (business groups) and political parties in government, but also in opposition. In practice, only a small number of private radio and television stations were outside this circle.

Faced with such ambiance, the media and journalists do not hide that censorship and self-censorship are exercised. Censorship is imposed by editors and media owners, but self-censorship is exercised by journalists.

## "BLACK MONDAY": EVIDENCE ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS!

In the period 2008-2017, from the array of institutional and political instruments to influence media editorial policy and in addition to threats and pressures, the government also resorted to direct violence. Such was the event known in the contemporary history

of Macedonia as "Black Monday", which took place on December 24, 2012. Journalists were evicted from the plenary hall together with opposition MPs. The police security evicted journalists from the parliament gallery, i.e. from the place where they regularly follow work in the legislative house. The journalists, including President of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia Naser Selmani, fiercely opposed orders from the authorities to be brutally evicted from the parliament. Journalists were dragged, pushed and expelled from the parliament gallery. The opposition reacted and indicated that the government wants to adopt the state budget by force, without presence of the media. AJM's president Naser Selmani urged the chief of cabinet to parliament speaker Trajko Veljanovski not to expel the journalists because they are only doing their job. Journalists and cameramen were united in their position that nobody has the right to prevent them in doing their job. "Are you aware of the ugly image Macedonia sends with this action? Are you aware that any [demonstration of] force ends ingloriously",<sup>4</sup> stated AJM's president Naser Selmani.

In February 2013, AJM motioned a petition to the Constitutional Court whereby it requested the court to deliberate on the eviction of journalists from the parliament gallery.

274

Believing that the act of violent eviction of journalists from the plenary hall's gallery had amounted to violation of the freedom of expression and the right to public expression of thought, guaranteed under Article 16 of the Constitution and Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights, the Association of Journalists, represented by its president Naser Selmani, Natasha Stojanovska, Frosina Fakova, Snezhana Lupevska, Biljana Bogdanovska and Toni Angelovski motioned the petition to the Constitutional Court, which was rejected. In its decision, the Constitutional Court enlisted: "The physical removal of journalists from the plenary hall's gallery, which had been deemed necessary by the specific situation of escalating chaos and disorder in the plenary hall, was aimed to protect journalists and not to prevent them in doing their job of informing the public and to restrict their freedom of expression".<sup>5</sup>

---

Violence  
against  
journalism  
on "Black  
Monday" and  
"Bloody  
Thursday".

---

<sup>4</sup> Statement by AJM's president Naser Selmani, available at:  
<https://bit.ly/2NrF3xt> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

<sup>5</sup> Constitutional Court, Decision U.no. 27/2013 from 16.4.2014, available at:  
<https://bit.ly/3ac2Lr8> [retrieved on 18.5.2019]

Judge Natasha Gaber-Damjanovska did not agree with the decision taken by majority judges and in her dissenting opinion wrote: "Absurd are any claims that the act in question had been made for the purpose of journalists' security, when it is evident that they were sitting in their chairs and were passive, did not participate in the events by any action, and merely observed the situation, to which they have legitimate right because that is part of their professional reporting duties".<sup>6</sup>

The legal battle did not end with the Constitutional Court. Journalists motioned an application before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. This court took a judgement in the case of journalists who had been physically removed by the parliament security from the session dedicated to adoption of the state budget, held on December 24, 2012, wherein it found violation of Article 10 and Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights.<sup>7</sup>

As elaborated by the Court in Strasbourg, number of journalists complained before ECtHR for their violent eviction. According to journalists, this act was in violation of Article 10 of the European Convention, as well as Article 6 that guarantees the right to fair trial, which in this case concerns the right to oral hearing before court.

The budget adoption, elaborated the Court, had been accompanied by tensions between the ruling majority and the opposition. The strained atmosphere at this plenary meeting culminated with group of opposition MPs surrounding the parliament speaker, which ordered the security personnel to restore order. Acting upon these orders, security officers removed opposition MPs from the hall and journalists from the parliament gallery.

These journalists refused to leave, emphasizing that the public has the right to be informed about what events unfolding in the parliament. They denied being informed that their removal is due to security reasons and for their protection.

<sup>6</sup> The court took this decision with majority votes, residing in the following composition: court president Elena Gosheva and judges Natasha Gaber-Damjanovska, Nikola Ivanovski, Ivan Josifovski, Vangelina Markudova, Sali Murati, Gzime Starova and Vladimir Stojanoski. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3a7blaN> [retrieved on 18.5.2019]

<sup>7</sup> Judgement of the European Court of Human Rights, available at: <https://bit.ly/2tYcnoW> [retrieved on 16.5.2019]

## APRIL 27: ATTACK ON THE STATE AND JOURNALISM!

Another black date is written in the contemporary history of Macedonia. It is April 27, 2017. The parliament's storming by a group of protesters was not only direct attack on the state, legislative house, and democracy, but also attack on journalism and freedom of expression. During this event, also known as "Bloody Thursday", journalists were prevented to do their job, i.e. report events inside and outside the parliament. A day later, BIRN Macedonia's portal Prizma published a comprehensive report on this event. Below is the integral text.

276

Waging verbal and physical attacks, insults and profanities, protesters from the initiative "For Joint Macedonia" faced the journalists who had witnessed incidents inside the parliament and whose statements provide an indisputable conclusion that the police did not react during incidents in the parliament and that there was literally nobody to protect them against the raging gang. They told BIRN what they had faced and what they had seen at the site. Natasha Stojanovska, journalist from TV 24 Vesti, had witnessed her colleague Dushica Mrgja being physically attacked by protesters.

"They were throwing anything that came to their hands: bars, camera poles, while MPs were literally pushed in the corner and protesters were ready to kill them. I tried to record [the event] with my phone, but it was taken from me by a protester and thrown away. Later, a group of them attempted to take mine and Dushica Mrgja's phones, which led to physical contact and she was slapped. There was no police in sight at that moment, and that situation lasted for some time. Inside [the parliament], we were literally left alone to deal with the gang".

This was confirmed by Frosina Dimeska, journalists from Radio Free Europe, who was in the plenary hall during the incidents.





"They were yelling at us: 'don't film; don't call; put the camera down'. We were simply prevented to report about what is happening. We tried to move away from the scene, with security officers saying they are helpless in such situation. When we asked them how to exit the building, they said we should do that at own risk. We didn't know where to go. In those moments, there were no police or security officers to protect us."

Bobi Hristov, editor at TV Telma, was attacked by policeman, his microphone was broken, and he was pushed against the wall.

"A dilemma is raised whether the mass, the people, protesters, call them however you please, managed to enter the parliament on their own or they were simply allowed inside. For me, most shocking is the fact that I was personally attacked by member of the police, i.e. parliament security. Truth be told, I was also saved and evacuated by a person wearing red-and-yellow scarf", says Hristov.

Santa Argirova, editor at Makfax, posted on the social media that their cameraman is hospitalized after being injured in yesterday's events. "Makfax's cameraman Nikola is in hospital. He has a concussion, from being hit. He is only 21 years old and was doing his job", wrote Argirova.

Journalists report they had witnessed female journalists from some media being insulted, with stones thrown at them, both inside and outside the parliament. People from TV 24 say that four journalists from their team had been attacked.

"They said we are 'shqiptar television, funded by Soros'. One protester, consciously, took a chair and threw it at me with the words: 'you should suffer for working at shqiptar television'", says journalist Iskra Opetcheska from TV 24 and adds that three other colleagues had been attacked and they will all motion criminal charges before the police.

"These events are firm evidence of the alarming conditions faced by the media and that attacks on them are attack on democracy, which amounts to crime against the society. If the authorities do not take serious steps to protect the freedom of

expression, they actual continue to encourage those whose purpose is to use violence to silence journalists and other critical voices in the society. Holding politicians accountable is one of key tenants of journalism and the media cannot be blocked in their attempt to investigate all important issues of public interest”, reads the reaction letter published by the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia.

Harsh criticism for yesterday's events was also issued by the Union of Journalists and Media Workers, together with the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM).

“The policy of labelling, hate speech, verbal violence against journalists, which last night culminated in the parliament with attacks on several dozen journalists and media workers has been defeated. It was defeated with the courage demonstrated by our colleagues who, in spite of the present danger, registered the rampage of these brutes and the police's passivity. Hence, there are no dilemmas that today marks the start of the process of not only declarative, but also actual calls for responsibility of all those who had inspired, allowed and carried acts that are shameful for any civilized society”, reads the press-release.

Representatives of the Journalist Union said that the police, the rapid deployment unit (EBR) and all those that commanded their actions are “directly and equally responsible, just as the hooligans hunting down journalist teams in the hallways, battering and insulting them, and destroying their mobile phones and equipment, not by accident, but rather aware that having their rampage caught on tape would be evidence admissible in court”.<sup>8</sup>

Fifteen journalists reporting from the parliament during the organized storming on April 27, 2017, motioned a lawsuit against the state and claimed redress. Journalist Bobi Hristov, who is among this group of plaintiffs, said that at the moment they are consulting a legal team and it is possible for the lawsuit to be expanded and include civil litigation for establishment of responsibility with individuals who, by taking or failing to take action, have contributed to the events that unfolded. “Around fifteen journalists stand behind

<sup>8</sup> News report by BIRN's portal *Prizma*, available at: <https://prizma.mk/novinarite-svedochat-za-verbalni-fizichki-napadi-vo-nadvor-od-sobraniето/> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

this initiative, but it is open to all colleagues, photo-reporters, cameramen and others who wish to join and continue this procedure”,<sup>9</sup> said Hristov.

Journalists are suing the state according to Article 166 of the Law on Obligations, i.e. liability due to terrorist act, public demonstrations and manifestations. In particular, the Law on Obligations stipulates that the state shall bear liability for damages caused by acts of violence or terror, but also public demonstrations, irrespective of the establishment of guilt, while the state shall have the right and obligation to request compensation for the amount paid as redress from the person that had caused such damages.

April 27 or “Bloody Thursday” is a parable of democracy in Macedonia, a scenario for suspension of the democratic system and the will of majority citizens expressed through election of their deputies, but also an event in which certain political circles at VMRO-DPMNE attempted to silence journalists and the media and, by association, to declare war against freedom of expression and the public’s right to be informed about the scandalous storming by a group of citizens in the highest state institution.

Macedonia is also known for the fact that the government had intercepted the media. Namely, in addition to the 2001 affair “Big Ear”, in 2015 then-current opposition leader Zoran Zaev revealed that more than 100 journalists had been wiretapped. In its own right, this fact speaks about the government’s attitude towards “the fourth estate”.

280

## **HATE SPEECH IN THE MEDIA: ENEMY OF THE FREEDOM!**

In the last two and a half decades, numerous examples have been noted in Macedonia of unintentional or intentional reporting that lacks sensitivity for interethnic, intercultural and interreligious relations in the society.<sup>10</sup>

Prevention or restriction of hate speech, i.e. control or self-control of the media and actors involved in media production in regard to dissemination of such messages does

<sup>9</sup> Statement by lawsuit plaintiffs, available at: <https://bit.ly/2QQpwc0> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

<sup>10</sup> International Federation of Journalists, *IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists*, [Bordeaux: International Federation of Journalists, 1954], available at: <https://bit.ly/2t8MW4a> [retrieved on 3.5.2019]

not mean restriction of the freedom of expression. There is a well-known quote that says: "No freedom for the enemies of freedom". It means that freedom of expression is not absolute, i.e. it could be limited when somebody abuses this freedom to violate rights of others in the society or when it could endanger the legitimate goals of public interest. Having in mind that hate speech could incite violence, but could also lead to discrimination, it could incite or justify homophobia, antisemitism and other forms of intolerance, it is believed that the need for restricting hate speech is legitimate and justified in order to prevent abuse of the freedom of speech and violation of the rights of others.

---

Hate speech is not freedom of speech.

---

Do the media create hate speech? In some situations they could be qualified as such, but they rather serve as channel or instrument for dissemination of hate speech and discrimination created by political parties, authorities, institutions and radical groups in the society. Hence, it is often stressed that the media hold such responsibility and should be careful not to produce and disseminate messages that imply hate speech

and discrimination. If the media fail in that, they would contribute to dissemination of hate speech and create favourable climate for this phenomenon to gain intensity. Journalists, editors, and especially executive editors who design the editorial policy at the media and are responsible for contents published, hold great responsibility before the public because hate speech and expressions that contain elements thereof are harmful when they are disseminated in the media.

Journalists continuously write about differences based on ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social background, etc. Starting from this fact, when they write about sensitive topics in society, the media might intentionally or unintentionally instigate hatred. The International Federation of Journalists, under separate Code of Conduct, has tasked journalists to care for humanity and protection of human rights. This means that journalists and editors are expected to be aware about their responsibility. Journalists should have moral, and should be motivated to serve their readers, listeners, viewers, and the democracy.

## WHAT DOES THE JOURNALIST CODE OF ETHICS IN MACEDONIA STIPULATE?

According to Article 10 of the Journalist Code of Ethics in Macedonia, journalists are not allowed to use the language of hate or incite violence and discrimination on any grounds. The Manual on Journalism Ethics provides additional interpretation and guidelines for application of this article. It is even said that journalists should be careful when hate speech comes from public persons or from representatives of public institutions and that, in these cases, hate speech should be disputed or criticized, instead of being covered in their reports. Moreover, it is said that hate speech appears in different forms and genres (information, photo, opinion, comment). Irrespective of the form or genre, journalists must assess whether publication of such materials implies high probability of "causing enmity or hatred against somebody on the grounds of their race, ethnic origin, gender, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, physical disability, etc."<sup>11</sup>

The media, in general, should refrain from publishing any form of hate speech, i.e. journalists and editors must not appear as authors of such messages. Also, they are not allowed to reproduce hate speech, which does not mean they should not cover situations in which hate speech comes from the mouth of various actors in the society. In such situations, it is especially important for them to identify hate speech and to inform the audience about possible implications from use of such speech. This primarily refers to politicians, their statements and interviews, and in particular to direct messages that contain hate speech.

Journalists and editors should be very careful and selective in cases of messages that imply direct hate speech due to the ethnic and religious specificities in Macedonia. This was evidenced in the cases related to construction of museum-church on the Skopje Fortress, an event that happened on the night of February 10, 2011; the protests from July 11, 2014, against statements made by politicians in regard to the multiple homicide near the Smilkovo Lake; the vocabulary applied by former interior minister Jankuloska in

<sup>11</sup> Tamara Chausidis and Zoran Bojarovski, Manual on Journalism Ethics, [Skopje: 2012], available at: <https://bit.ly/2QSm5IX> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

wiretapped conversations disclosed by the opposition; the paroles and messages sent at political rallies and counter-protests, etc. These examples were frequently noted in pro-governmental media during VMRO-DPMNE's tenure in government: "Traitors that have attacked Macedonia and could lead to fratricide wars"<sup>12</sup> or "Parasites [that should be buried] under concrete plate", etc.

Editors should also be careful in cases when such speech comes from the audience. This primarily concerns comments posted by readers and published in online media, which abound in hatred. Namely, online media, but also traditional media, are responsible not to publish comments that exceed the boundaries of public criticism and that contain explicit messages of hate speech.

A specific example thereof is the statement by Milenko Nedelkovski, author of "Milenko Nedelkovski Show" aired on TV Kanal 5, given as member of the non-governmental organization GDOM, in direct conversation for TV Sitel. In this case, the grave omission is attributed to the news editor at TV Sitel who only apologized after his collocutor had poured a barrage of insults in front of the camera. In cases of live reports from the site aired in television and radio programmes, editors or anchors of these programmes must immediately distance from such messages and warn collocutors disseminating hate speech to immediately stop using that vocabulary.

283

The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia took a decision in this case.

### **THE COMMISSION'S DECISION**

The Council of Media Ethics' press complaints commission had decided that the complaint lodged by the OSCE Mission is admissible and grounded. In particular, the commission found violation of Articles 10 and 11 of the Macedonian Journalist Code of Ethics.

<sup>12</sup> Mkdnews, "Pandov: Republic of Macedonia is attacked by domestic traitors and spies, in cooperation with foreign service", available at: <https://bit.ly/2FNHg23> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

## **MACEDONIA'S MEDIA FREEDOM INDEX IN FREE FALL!**

In 12 years, Macedonia had dropped very low under Media Freedom Index. In 2006, Macedonia was ranked 98<sup>th</sup> in the world and was categorized as country with “partially free” media. This piece of information is noted in the Freedom House’s research published on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day. On the list of countries in Central and East Europe, Macedonia was ranked 14<sup>th</sup>, together with Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>13</sup> The report notes that, in 2006, the situation with media freedoms in Macedonia has improved as a result of positive developments in the legal system, i.e. adoption of the Law on Free Access to Public Information and suspension of imprisonment sanctions for defamation.

Macedonia remained partially free country in Freedom House’s 2018 Report on Freedom in the World. According to its number of points, Macedonia is ranked 113<sup>th</sup> among 209 states and territories in the world, with an accumulative score of 58 on the scale from 0 to 100.<sup>14</sup> Compared to its surrounding, our country is better ranked only from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while all other countries in the region are ranked with higher level of freedom according to the index published by this non-governmental organization from the United States.

According to the World Press Freedom Index published by the Reporters without Borders, in 2007 Macedonia was ranked 36<sup>th</sup> among 175 states in the world.<sup>15</sup> This year, Macedonia is marked by improved ranking by eight positions, unlike the situation in 2008 when it was ranked 42<sup>nd</sup>, which makes it best rank among countries in the region under the report of this organization.

Under 2018 World Press Freedom Index, Macedonia is ranked 95<sup>th</sup>.<sup>16</sup> Compared to its 2017 rank, it has improved its ranking by 14 places on the Index published by Reporters without Borders. However, in spite of this improved rank, Macedonia is still among the last countries in the region. It is better ranked only from Montenegro (104<sup>th</sup> rank) and

13 Freedom House, 2006 Report, available at: <https://bit.ly/36ULNLV>, [last retrieved on 17.5.2019]

14 Freedom House, 2018 Report, available at: <https://bit.ly/3a9GZV5> [last retrieved on 26.5.2019]

15 Reporters without Borders, World Press Freedom Index, available at: <https://bit.ly/2Rj4dzl>, [last retrieved on 18.5.2019]

16 Reporters without Borders, World Press Freedom Index, available at: [https://rsf.org/en/ranking\\_table](https://rsf.org/en/ranking_table), last retrieved on [18.5.2019]

Bulgaria (111<sup>th</sup> rank). Serbia is ranked several places above Macedonia, i.e. holds the 90<sup>th</sup> rank position. Albania is ranked 82<sup>nd</sup> under this index, Kosovo is ranked 75<sup>th</sup>, Greece – 65<sup>th</sup>, Croatia – 64<sup>th</sup>, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is ranked 63<sup>rd</sup>. Reporters without Borders criticized Macedonia for non-implementation of broadcast media reforms.

As indicated in annual reports, factors contributing to the poor media situation in Macedonia include closure of media outlets, use of advertising space as instrument to “educate” the media, high number of lawsuits against journalists and change of editors for political reasons.

Weaknesses and disrespect for democratic standards in the media sphere were duly noted in the European Commission’s reports. Namely, EC’s 2008 Progress Report for Macedonia<sup>17</sup> notes that full implementation of the Broadcasting Law has not been ensured: “Despite legal provisions regulating the independence of the Broadcasting Council and the public service broadcaster, both remain vulnerable to political interference, largely because their financial stability has not been ensured. Selection of replacements for three out of nine members of the Broadcasting Council whose mandate has expired has been delayed. The financial situation of the Broadcasting Council and the public service broadcaster is not secured. The funding system of the public service broadcaster and the Broadcasting Council (collection of public broadcasting fees) should have been operational since 1 June 2006. Reports show that the system has almost completely failed since very few people actually pay the public broadcasting fee”.

285

On the other hand, the European Commission’s report for the year 2017, which was published on April 18, 2018, notes that the climate for media freedom and freedom of expression has improved, with more open political debate and critical media reporting. “There has been a decrease in pressure on journalists. Reporting on both recent electoral campaigns has been more balanced than before. Government advertising has ended. It is essential that the authorities demonstrate zero tolerance for all incidents of physical and verbal abuse or threats against journalists”, reads the European Commission’s 2018 Country

<sup>17</sup> European Commission’s Report, available at: <https://bit.ly/2spKyWj> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

Report for Macedonia.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the report noted that the legislative framework is broadly aligned with the EU acquis and international standards. "Amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were prepared in consultations with relevant stakeholders. There is an improved climate for media and journalists are more ready to criticize misbehaviours of officials and censorship. Challenges remain in the sector, and there must be zero tolerance for physical and verbal abuse of threats against journalists. The public service broadcaster in particular needs to be reformed and its independence strengthened. The country has partly addressed the recommendations from the 2016 Report, notably by abolishing government advertising and decreased pressure on journalists and media outlets, which allowed for more balanced reporting", analyses the European Commission.

At the same time, the European Commission recommends continued reforms at the public service broadcaster and strengthening its independence. Moreover, it recommends the country to take measures to support the promotion of objective reporting and diversity of viewpoints in the mainstream media, as well as to encourage professional conduct of all media stakeholders. As regards the freedom of speech, Macedonia is considered to have some level of preparation and has achieved good progress..

286

## **MACEDONIA: THE COUNTRY THAT CONVICTED A JOURNALIST TO IMPRISONMENT!**

Namely, it could not be expected for Macedonia to have better ranks under the press freedom index when it is known as the single country in Europe to have convicted a journalist to imprisonment sentence.

The fact that the former government was prepared to send journalists to prison and threaten them in various ways was also noted by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, which fought against the government's narrative targeting the media. "The authorities in Macedonia abuse their power to establish full control over the media. There cannot be media freedom in the country where journalists are sentenced to imprisonment due to their journalist work. Moreover, the courts issue high and disproportional

<sup>18</sup> European Commission's Report, available at: <https://bit.ly/2FLdPhf> [last retrieved on 17.5.2019]

sanctions to journalists and the media that critically observe performance of state institutions. The goal is evident: to defer journalists and the media from criticizing work of the institutions. In that, the authorities have practically annulled the mission of the media which, in democratic countries, serve the public interest", decisively stressed AJM's former president Naser Selmani.<sup>19</sup>

Tomislav Kezharovski (born 1965 in village Oreshe, Veles), journalist at *Nova Makedonija*, was convicted to four and a half years imprisonment for having revealed the identity of protected witness.

Kezharovski was accused that, in a journalist article from 2008, he has revealed the identity of protected witness in the case "Oreshe", i.e. court process for the murder of Lazo Miloshevski from Veles.

Protesting outside the court in Skopje, journalists demanded their colleague to be released from detention.

The Skopje Court of Appeals convicted Kezharovski and reduced his sentence from four and a half years to two years imprisonment. He was in detention for more than one year and nine months. The Court of Appeals also reduced sentences to other five people convicted in the case "Liquidation".<sup>20</sup>

Under the motto "I'm Kezharovski" journalists protested outside the Court of Appeals and expressed dissatisfaction with the verdict whereby the journalist was sentenced to two years in prison.<sup>21</sup> Journalist associations believed that Kezharovski is innocent and demanded an acquittal verdict. A conviction for Kezharovski is conviction for the entire journalism. "Absurd verdict, unbecoming of a candidate for EU membership", stated Director of Reporters without Borders in Germany, Christian Mihr.<sup>22</sup>

Declarative commitments are made by the new government of SDSM and DUI that media reforms will be given priority. Hence, several steps were taken in this regard, including cancellation of the broadcasting fee, although there are dilemmas about this steps, and

19 Interview with AJM's president Naser Selmani, available at: <https://bit.ly/2tklvU0> [retrieved on 17.5.2019]

20 News report by Voice of America, available at: <https://bit.ly/2TiP8Rc> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

21 News report by the portal MKD, available at: <http://bit.ly/30lcffv> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

22 News report by Deutsche Welle, available at: <https://bit.ly/2RgOm4o> [retrieved on 17.5.2015]

discontinuation of government advertising that “corrupted” a portion of media outlets. New legislative solutions for reforms at the public service broadcaster and the Media Agency provide transparent process for appointment of new members to MRT’s Council and AVMS’s Council, which is the media regulatory body. In particular, the concept for selection of members in these bodies by authorized proposing entities is abandoned and new model is introduced, based on open call and organization of public hearing for candidates. According to the law,<sup>23</sup> candidates for the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services are obliged to submit at least two support letters from competent organizations, as follows:

- ▶ two civil society organizations that have been active for more than five years and have achieved results in the area of media and human rights; or
- ▶ association of journalists; or
- ▶ Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers; or
- ▶ two higher education institutions with study programs in the field of communications, journalism, culture, economy or law.

288

The parliamentary committee on elections and appointments is obliged, within a deadline of one month after completion of the open call, to organize public hearing for the candidates that fulfil eligibility criteria established under article 16 of this law, and to invite the organizations that supported these candidates, other media and professional journalistic organizations, non-governmental organizations profiled in the field of media and other relevant entities. After the public hearing, the committee on elections and appointments compiles the list of proposed candidates for council members. The final list of proposed candidates for council members is adopted by the committee by means of two-third majority vote. Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia appoints members to the council with two-third majority vote. “After the change of government, there is strong commitment for reducing political control and for greater accountability, and matters in this regard have been improved, as shown by the ratings of Reporters without Borders,

<sup>23</sup> Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, no. 184/13, available at: <http://bit.ly/2QSyT8> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]



where some progress is visible. Progress is also visible in terms of media freedom, but more work is needed on systemic changes for the media to be financially independent and to feel free from power centres”, says Mladen Chadikovski.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, TV Shenja’s general manager Ismail Sinani confirms that in North Macedonia supporters of “Gruevski’s regime” had overnight become “supporters of the new political government”. “This is done with approval from several international organizations that sponsor programmes in the former regime media. The double yardstick brings certain benefits in the short run, but in the long run it has detrimental effect on the fragile democratic processes in the state. Nowadays, nobody speaks of political control, but at the same time it is almost impossible to have alternative ideas to those propagated as public good”, says Sinani.<sup>25</sup>

## **NORMATIVE PRECONDITIONS FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA**

290

In Macedonia, the legal framework on media independence is secured by the Constitution and several laws. Article 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia establishes and guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms in the field of public information:

The freedom of personal conviction, conscience, thought and public expression of thought is guaranteed.

The freedom of speech, public address, public information and the establishment of institutions for public information is guaranteed.

Free access to information and the freedom of reception and transmission of information are guaranteed.

The right to correction in the mass media is guaranteed.<sup>26</sup>

The right to protect a source of information in the mass media is guaranteed.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with AJM’s president Mladen Chadikovski for the publication “From Bucharest to Prespa”.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with TV Shenja’s general manager Ismail Sinani for the publication “From Bucharest to Prespa”.

<sup>26</sup> Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, available at: <https://bit.ly/2Nr0ehz> [retrieved on 17.5.2019]

Censorship is prohibited.

Starting from 2013, the terms and conditions for performance of broadcasting activity are regulated by the Law on Media and the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. In normative and legal terms, media laws regulate and “defend” independence of the broadcasting activity in Macedonia. The laws expressly prohibit political entities, state administration or public enterprises to appear as founders of broadcasting media.

As regards programme standards, individual media are obliged to open their programmes to different viewpoints and opinions that circulate in the society. The laws prevent media concentration, i.e. monopoly by individuals or groups in broadcasting.

Media representation during elections and election campaigns is also regulated under the Electoral Code of the Republic of Macedonia.

Undoubtedly, laws in the media sphere and the Electoral Code implement international democratic standards on editorial independence of the media, however, knowledge from the practice warns about discrepancy between legal norms and the actual situation.

## **IMPACT OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP ON EDITORIAL (IN)DEPENDENCE**

291

A key factor in establishing the impact of political parties on commercial televisions and their editorial policy is their ownership structure, but also their managerial and editorial structure. Fact is that, in the last decade, ownership of private media was non-transparent and circumvented the law, while the public did not have insight about the people who actually owned the media. This fact was a direct barrier for creation of politically correct, objective and credible media.

In the period from Bucharest to Prespa, the media and journalists in Macedonia were under unprecedented pressure from politicians and media owners. Politicians and media owners influenced the public opinion with the aim of protecting their personal interests. Most often it was a matter of combined political and financial interests. Hence, journalists that previously acted as social and political activists or “societal and political workers” in the period of pluralism became propagators, especially in the period from 2006 to 2017.

Political control exercised by the government, but also by the opposition, is still present, especially among the media with high viewer ratings and print circulation. "I do not have details how this control is pursued, but it is clear that it comes through the ownership structure. However, there is a difference from before. For example, although the two highest-rated televisions have positive approach to coverage of government activities, there is no classical propagandism represented by combination of commentaries, lies, defamation and false constructions. It is interesting to note that the main pro-opposition television has maintained all attributes from the media gruevism and relatively freely continues its utterly unprofessional, propagandist coverage", says news editor at TV 24 Sead Rizvanovikj.<sup>27</sup>

---

The public service broadcaster continues to be political service.

---

"Compared to VMRO and DUI, there is no formal pressure on the media by the new government of SDSM and DUI, but there are strange media constructions of new media that are not transparent and these media are actual enigma for the media community in terms of their ownership structure and funding sources. These are 24 Vesti, 1TV, *Sloboden pecat*, etc. The biggest problems are transparency of media ownership and media financing. The current government has not made any breakthrough in researching media ownership from the past, which prompts me to ask whether that is done in political solidarity with the previous government", shares TV Shenja's general manager Ismail Sinani.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of influence from politics and political parties on the media in the last years, the entire media landscape in Macedonia has been turned upside-down. It would be difficult to count the number of journalist and editorial transfers and replacements, although some claim that over the period of 10 years there had been more than 100 changes and departures of executive editors, but also news editors at televisions and newspapers, due to pressures from media owners.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Sead Rizvanovikj, former journalist at A1 television and editor at TV 24, for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

<sup>28</sup> Interview with TV Shenja's general manager Ismail Sinani for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

The actual situation in terms of ownership structure at private television stations with national concessions in the Republic of Macedonia is elaborated below.

## **A1 TELEVISION**

The first private television station with national concession was established in 1993 and owned by Velija Ramkovski, known businessman and owner of major retail company that traded in different commodities. Velija Ramkovski also appeared as founder of two other companies: company for film activity, mediation and marketing B1 Production LPP Skopje and company for production, trade and services Stratus LPP Skopje. In the first case, it was a matter of ownership concentration concerning TV station and company for media production, which was contrary to provisions from the 2005 Law on Broadcasting Activity (art. 13)

Ramkovski's spouse appeared as his co-founder in the company B1 Production. She also appeared as founder of the company Uniprokom vemaks export-import LLP, together with Amdi Ramkovski (brother of Velia Ramkovski). In the case of Stratus, it is a matter of company whose products were largely advertised on A1 television.

293

The fact that the owner of this television was politically engaged, i.e. was leader of political party, clearly speaks of direct links between the media and politics. In that, the 2005 Law on Broadcasting Activity stressed that political parties cannot appear as founders and cannot perform the broadcasting activity (art. 11).<sup>29</sup> However, that does not refer to leaders of political parties. Hence, in the practice, it was a matter of "legal" political influence on the media outlet, which was in direct contrast to efforts for democratization of the media and the media space.

## **CLOSING OF TV A1: PRELUDE TO THE MEDIA DARKNESS UNDER VMRO-DPMNE'S INFLUENCE**

Prior to its closure, A1 television was the most influential media outlet in the Republic of Macedonia, with great influence on political processes and, on the account of its

<sup>29</sup> Law on Broadcasting Activity, available at: <https://bit.ly/35N04Hr> [retrieved on 16.4.2019]

high viewer ratings, it was considered one of the main factors with decisive influence on election results. In the period 2006-2008, this television supported the former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his hardline policy against change of the constitutional name. However, after the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, this television's critical observation of Gruevski's government became more prominent. It also criticized economic policies implemented by Gruevski and his government, as well as poor results in agriculture, which was one of key issues for its owner Velija Ramkovski. Criticism was no longer subtle and it gradually grew into evident conflict between this television and VMRO-DPMNE. Representatives of the government did not appear in current affairs programmes, especially not in debate shows that treated political topics. Then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski called: "All citizens of RM to take information coming from A1 television and newspapers *Vreme*, *Spic* and *Koha e re* with serious reserves".<sup>30</sup> In response, A1 television waged a "political war" against Gruevski!

On December 25, 2010, the police raided the biggest private television in Macedonia, A1 television. "A1 is under siege by the police. Late in the afternoon, police vehicles and jeeps blocked the television. All journalists and cameramen at TV A1 are prevented to do their jobs and their freedom of movement is restricted. Police officers are still outside the doors of A1 television. Stay with us this night [...]", reported the television with the highest ratings.

The process for closure of this television station was completed seven months later, although then-incumbent government of VMRO-DPMNE claimed that the television is not the target of attacks. In the court process dubbed "Cobweb", owner of A1 television and 22 other persons were convicted of criminal association, money laundering, tax evasion in the amount of 4,200,000 euros and abuse of office and authorizations. In particular, they were found to have earned millions of euros and to have damaged state treasury. The indictment enlisted 24 companies whose managers have been frequently changed and, according to allegations, formed a management network. According to the Public Revenue Office (PRO), the companies have not reported revenue in the amount of 17.5 million euros for which they evaded payment of taxes in the amount of more than 4 million euros. Tax authorities had established this after having reviewed financial

30 Statement by former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski from 4.5.2011, available at: <http://bit.ly/2uGE3Ps> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

transactions of 11 companies registered on Street Pero Nakov, in the period 2005-2010. Legal entities that evaded tax payment also included A1 television. However, at the time, the public rightfully raised the question why the tax authorities had tolerated, in their words, illegal operations of companies on Street Pero Nakov for five years!

Furthermore, it was found that salaries paid to employees at broadcasting media were later recorded in minimal amounts to avoid payment of taxes and social contributions.

The indictment follows movement of advertising money which, according to allegations, were directly transferred to bank accounts of Ramkovski's family members, some of whom have no relations with the media.

Handcuffed and shouting "dictatorship at work", "democracy according to Gruevski", owner of A1 television Velija Ramkovski and several others were taken into custody and brought before investigative judge at the Basic Court 1.

One month after the police raid at TV A1, owner Velija Ramkovski was sentenced to 13-year imprisonment. Several members of his family were also convicted, including his daughter Emel Ramkovska, and number of company managers and close associates. Journalists were exposed to enormous pressure in their work. Under political pressure from the government, the editorial team at TV A1 decided to broadcast news programme outside the government building in sign of disagreement with pressures waged at this television. In addition to media community members and opposition members, i.e. leaders of opposition political parties, news programme also invited the former Prime Minister and leader of VMRO-DPMNE Nikola Gruevski. He appeared in the news edition aired on February 4, 2011, and attempted to absolve himself from having influenced the judiciary to take decisions that have led to the closure of one of the democratic hubs in the society, A1 television.<sup>31</sup>

On August 31, 2011, the Agency for Electronic Communications, referring to Article 62, paragraph 1, item 4 of the Law on Broadcasting Activity from 2005, took a decision to revoke A1's broadcasting license.

"The Public Revenue Office requested receivership to be opened for A1 television. Decision taken by the Basic Court Skopje 2 opened receivership for the broadcasting company A1

<sup>31</sup> Interview with former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in central news at A1 television, available on *YouTube*: <http://bit.ly/2u1Fgkk> [retrieved on 17.5.2019]

Television LTD Skopje with seat on Street Pero Nakov no. 60, Skopje. Article 62, paragraph 1, item 4 of the Law on Broadcasting Activity stipulates that the broadcasting license shall cease to be valid by the effect of law in case of receivership or liquidation”, read the press-release issued by the Agency for Electronic Communications.

Mladen Chadikovski, executive editor at TV A1, believes that the raid at this television was not only politically motivated, but also politically orchestrated. “Evidence for that is the fact that A1 was brutally closed. If there were no political motives, A1 could have continued to operate, even if the judiciary continued their investigations. That is why I cannot say whether there were any irregularities in its operation. That is not even relevant, because the goal of the action was evident: to close the strongest critical media outlet. I had knowledge that the initial goal of then-incumbent authorities had been change of editorial policy in favour of then-current ‘antiquization’ and shift of the editorial policy that promoted European values. After this effort failed, A1 was raided and later closed”, says Chadikovski and recalls that journalists and editors, including himself, were under great pressure at that time. “That was sometimes pursued in the form of telephone calls and ‘friendly’ warnings, sometimes as high pitched conversations, and other times the overall pressure in the society made us feel unsafe on the streets. The worst came after A1 was closed. That is when we felt surrounded by a pack of wolves”, says Chadikovski.<sup>32</sup>

His colleague Sead Rizvanovikj, who was journalist at A1 television, says that the raid at this television might have had legal grounds related to irregularities in its operation, but the circumstances under which it was conducted and the political context, analysed in hindsight and from 8-year perspective, absolutely show that it was a matter of classical political confrontation with the most powerful media outlet, which at that time was the biggest threat to Gruevski’s government. “Actually, that was confirmed by the court process, and all irregularities, unnecessary and irregular detention orders, and draconian sanctions. Personally, I cannot say anything specific about then-current relations between the authorities and Velija Ramkovski, but from public testimonies of some actors, for example, columns written by Branko Geroski, it is clear that the raid was a consequence of political confrontation between Ramkovski and Gruevski”, is the view shared by Rizvanovikj.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Interview with former executive editor at A1 television for the publication “From Bucharest to Prespa”.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Sead Rizvanovikj, former journalist at A1 television and editor at TV 24, for the publication “From Bucharest to Prespa”.

On November 15, 2018, appearing in the debate magazine "Click Plus" aired on TV 21, former Deputy Prime Minister and member of VMRO-DPMNE's presidency Vladimir Peshevski assessed that closure of A1 television served as the breaking point which announced VMRO-DPMNE's fall from power. "There was a particular moment of breaking, i.e. the action to close A1 television. In the case of VMRO-DPMNE and the first years of their governance, A1 served as strong corrective mechanism. Once such mechanism is not in place, the system strays from the normal and becomes unstable. I think that happened to VMRO-DPMNE".<sup>34</sup>

After the change of government, i.e. on August 21, 2017, Ramkovski was released to freedom after having spent almost seven years in prison.

## **SITEL TELEVISION**

According to official data from the Court Registry of Companies, TV Sitel is founded by the mining and industrial complex Sileks from Kratovo (comprised of 11 companies operating in different industries), organized as joint stock company with dominant shares owned by Ljubisav Ivanov-Zjingo who serves as chair of the management board and the company's general manager. He is president of the Socialist Party of Macedonia, a coalition partner in the government led by Nikola Gruevski from 2006 to 2016, but also in the government led by Ljubcho Georgievski from 1998 to 2002.

Ivanov-Zjingo is among MPs with longest tenure in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. His MP tenure was uninterrupted from 1990 to 2012. In 2012, when the Law on Broadcasting Activity was finally enforced, he resigned from his parliamentary office due to non-compliance with article 11 of this law, which prohibited public officials or members of their families to be media owners.

In the period from 1990 until the local elections in 1996, SPM was in coalition with SDSM and other left-wing parties, but starting from the elections in 1998 it entered the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE.

Ljubisav Ivanov's son, Goran Ivanov, is general manager at TV Sitel. Although he is not "directly" linked to politics and influence of political parties, being high-ranking member

<sup>34</sup> News report by TV 21, aired in the debate magazine "Click Plus", available at: <http://bit.ly/2Tu7MFA> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

in SPM presidency, the general manager directed the television's editorial policy towards undeniable support to SPM and its coalition partners in government, i.e. VMRO-DPMNE. Dragan Pavlovikj-Latas served as long-term editor at TV Sitel until March 28, 2019, and he also served as editor-in-chief at daily newspaper *Vecer* for a period of time. His editor position was then given to Ivona Talevska, who previously served as news editor at TV Sitel. Talevska withdrew from TV screens while she still worked at TV Sitel after the affair in which her mother's company Visaris was awarded tender in the value of million euros by the Ministry of Health during Nikola Todorov's tenure as minister.

The opposition revealed that Latas is featured in number of wiretapped conversations it has disclosed in the public. According to claims waged by Zaev, Latas and former chief of the secret police Sasho Mijalkov are discussing the arrest of Ljube Boshkoski, leader of the party United for Macedonia.<sup>35</sup>

In practice, TV Sitel was an example of media outlet that fails to respect professional standards on balanced and objective reporting, especially due to the fact that it openly declared itself as supporter of parties in government: VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition partners, Socialist Party of Macedonia included. That was often done by purposeful interchangeable use of genres, such as news report and commentary.



sitel

СЪСТАВИТЕ МИ ПЕНСИОН

ПОСМАНИТЕ НАШИТЕ  
1990

## KANAL 5 TELEVISION

This television station was founded by the graphic company for occupational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities Printing House BS from Skopje, whose founder is the joint stock company for consulting, media, commerce and manufacturing BS Holding. It is managed by Emil Stojmenov, son to Boris Stojmenov who owns BS Holding and was former leader of VMRO Macedonian and former finance minister in the government led by Ljubcho Georgievski in the period 1998-2000. At 2006 parliamentary elections, his party was a coalition partner to SDSM.

As was the case with TV Sitel, the media law is imprecise in relation to ownership of TV Kanal 5 because it did not stipulate that son of political party leader cannot own broadcasting entity. Nowadays, official documents do not indicate Emil Stojmenov as television owner, which was the case by the end of 2012. Currently enlisted owner is Vanja Gavrilovski, general manager of Printing House "11 October", whom media reports indicate as close associate to Stojmenov.

300 According to documents published by *Mediapedia* and *NovaTV*, in 1999, when Boris Stojmenov was the finance minister, his son Marjan, his daughter-in-law and Vanja Gavrilovski established their joint company in the offshore destination Panama, Central America. *Mediapedia* also reported that after Gavrilovski took over TV Kanal 5 he left the position of general manager at Printing House "11 October", but kept his position as member of the board of directors. Another board member in this company is Jelica Psaltirova. *Mediapedia* reveals that Psaltirova is general manager of Economic Bureau, a company owned by Marjan Stojmenov, and that she had been working at companies founded and operated by the family Stojmenovi since 1996.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the fact that founder of BS Holding was politically oriented towards SDSM and having in mind that, at 2006 parliamentary elections, his party VMRO Macedonian was member of SDSM's coalition "Together for Macedonia", indicates to connections between this television and the named "political option". But soon afterwards, Stojmenov changed the political side. On April 30, 2008, Prime Minister and leader of VMRO-DPMNE Nikola Gruevski announced they would form a coalition with VMRO Macedonian, led by Boris Stojmenov, on the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

Gruevski indicated that cooperation with VMRO Macedonian will start at the parliamentary election and will be deepened in the future. "Cooperation will start at the parliamentary elections and will be reflected by inclusion of Mr. Stojmenov on the candidate lists and with his participation in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia", stated Gruevski. "Macedonia finds itself in the moment of time when its present and its future are decided. That necessitates courageous people and courageous decisions, and the person who can make them is Nikola Gruevski. That is why I stand behind him, willing to contribute to such historical decisions",<sup>37</sup> stressed Stojmenov. On January 21, 2012, VMRO Macedonian was merged into the structure of VMRO-DPMNE.

Ivan Mirchevski, former journalist at MRT, is general manager at TV Kanal 5. Aco Kabranov was editor-in-chief until 2009, when he was replaced by Lidija Bogatinova, former editor at MRT. She stayed in this position by March 22, 2017, when journalist and news editor Maja Damjanovska was appointed to this position.

TV Kanal 5's general manager Ivan Mirchevski, in conversation with Robert Popovski, minister of communications in Zaev's government, during the edition of "Only Truth" aired on May 22, 2018, apologized for manipulations and misreporting on the part of TV Kanal 5 during the previous government's tenure. "Those were the times of regime. Work conditions were not as pink as you might think. I had my authorizations taken away. I apologize for that on behalf of the media outlet. To those that we might have done injustice, I apologize on behalf of all employees. Nowadays, Kanal 5 is centrally positioned. The time is right and we said enough; from now and in the future we would report from central positions", said Mirchevski, but did not reveal who had taken away his authorizations.<sup>38</sup>

TV Kanal 5 was part and parcel of the propaganda machinery that defended Nikola Gruevski's governance, and in return, it was awarded funds to broadcast government advertisements.

<sup>37</sup> News report by the Macedonian Information Agency MIA, available at: <http://bit.ly/2FLb7s3> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

<sup>38</sup> Interview with minister Robert Popovski, available at: <http://bit.ly/3750goA> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

## **TELMA TELEVISION**

This television is founded by the joint stock company Makpetrol, whose primary business activity is import and trade in oil derivatives and has no direct links or relations to any political party in Macedonia.

Due to the fact that it is founded and owned by Makpetrol, TV Telma often appears as spokesperson for this company. Hence, this television station confirms that editorial independence of commercial televisions is not influenced only by political parties, but also by businesses.

Throughout its operation, TV Telma was characterized by neutral position in its editorial policy from 2008 to 2014, when writer Risto Lazarov was appointed general manager and Emilija Lazarevska was appointed editor-in-chief. On June 30, 2014, journalist Atanas Kirovski was appointed general manager at TV Telma, while Snezhana Lupevska became executive editor, having previously worked as journalist and editor at TV A1 and TV Kanal 5. Lupevska is known in the public as the author of investigative reporting show "Code". Change of management at this media outlet has led to TV Telma's proactive attitude toward political events and developments. Hence, in addition to critical and analytical approach applied by news journalists and editors, the debate show "Top Topic" aired on TV Telma became a debating arena between the government and the opposition, and also featured experts and non-governmental representatives who deconstructed undemocratic politics of VMRO-DPMNE's governance.

## **ALSAT-M TELEVISION**

In the period 2006-2009 this television that aired programme in Albanian and Macedonian language was owned by businessman Vebi Velija, citizen of the Republic of Macedonia and owner of BE-BE Group which, in addition to media also deals with other businesses. The owner of Alsat-M also owns ALSAT television in Albania. Velija died on May 16, 2009, at the age of 61 years, and ownership was transferred to his son, Ferik Velija.

Alsat-M was not directly related to any political subject in Macedonia, although the Democratic Party of Albanians, especially in the period when it was in government, from 2006 to 2008, often indicated that current affairs programme at this television is inclined towards the Democratic Union for Integration. Muhamed Zekiri served as executive editor at TV Alsat-M from its establishment until 2015. On October 14, 2015, Muhamed Zekiri, who hosted and edited the show "The Road To", announced his departure from TV Alsat-M on his *Facebook* profile. "Any departure is painful, especially when you leave something that was close to your heart and something you have grown and built up. But every beginning has its own end. That is the way of life. Ten years is a whole decade. I was here when the television was born and have contributed at least a fraction to its growth and to what it became today. Of course, I did not do that on my own. I had you, my colleagues, and all employees at TV Alsat-M, who gave me support to succeed and make Alsat-M an example for everybody here and broader", was written in his *Facebook post*. However, on October 21, in interview for *Fokus*, Zekiri revealed that his departure from TV Alsat-M was due to political pressure by television owner Ferik Velija. In his interview for weekly *Fokus*, Zekiri claimed that pressure on him by the owner is result of pressures from DUI on the first person at this television, i.e. "due to his relations and friendship with the leadership of integrators". He indicated Bekim Neziri, former economy minister who at the 2016 parliamentary elections managed DUI's election headquarters, as the main culprit for that. For the first time, he revealed that attempts had been made to silence him before, but he managed to deal with them. "I will not allow to be used for execution of policies that I disapprove. I will not allow to be turned into servant to the evil", Zekiri explained his decision to leave TV Alsat-M.<sup>39</sup>

For short period of several months, Zekiri was news editor and editor of the show "New Road" aired on the newly-opened cable television Shenja with national concession. Zekiri left the journalist profession and transferred to politics. At the 2016 elections, he was elected Member of the Parliament of Republic of Macedonia. On June 18, 2017, he became vice president of SDSM and was dismissed from this office on May 26, 2019. During the

<sup>39</sup> Zekiri's interview for weekly *Fokus*, available at: <http://bit.ly/384f9YA> [retrieved on 17.5.2019]

period when Zoran Zaev was disclosing the opposition's "bombs", Zekiri took a decision for central news at TV Alsat-M to broadcast entire press-conferences or at least provide broad coverage thereof, which made this television one of the rare media outlets that informed citizens about indications on wrongdoing by Nikola Gruevski's government.

## ALFA TELEVISION

TV Alfa is private television station with national concession that started to broadcast programme on June 3, 2008 in Skopje and across Europe, North Africa and parts of Asia, via satellite. After the closure of A1 television, in 2013, TV Alfa became television channel with national terrestrial concession. Renowned businessman and owner of Fershped, Shterjo Nakov is the owner of this television. At the time when Nakov owned this media outlet, and when Aco Kabranov, Iskra Novakovska and Zoran Ivanov acted as executive editors, respectively, TV Alfa had critical stance towards Nikola Gruevski's governance, and the television employed top-notch journalists.

304

However, in September 2013, businessman Veselin Jevrosimovikj from Serbia bought 56 percent of shares in this television through his CHS Invest Group. Kole Chashule, former journalist at A1, became new executive editor at TV Alfa, and for short period before this position was held by journalist Kostadin Delimigov. From that moment, TV Alfa became one of the main propagandist means in the hands of the government, used to manipulate the public.

In the summer of 2017, certain Peter Shaz from Budapest became one of owners at this television with national concession. In addition to the Hungarian national, ownership structure in 2017 also included a relatively unknown Goran Balakj from Zemun, Serbia. These two hold the biggest shares in the television, together with several other companies.<sup>40</sup> In the beginning, general manager of the television was Ljupcho Zikov, owner of weekly *Kapital*, and later this position was held by sports journalist Ljubomir Nikolovski. On April 23, 2018, Vasko Eftov was appointed general manager. He is known in the public as author

<sup>40</sup> News report by BIRN's portal Prizma, available at: <http://bit.ly/2tXeFVI> [retrieved on 18.5.2019]

of the show “In the Target” and for his hardline negative positions towards policies of SDSM and Zoran Zaev’s government, but also for his anti-Albanian views.<sup>41</sup>

## TELEVISION 24

TV 24 (formerly known as TV 24 Vesti) is television channel from Skopje carried by cable operators. This television is specialized in current affairs programme, but it also broadcasts other contents, including debate shows on political topics. Robert Dimitrov owns TV 24 Vesti and also appears as owner of the cable operator Telekabel. By August 30, 2016, several editors-in-chief were changed at TV 24, as follows: Anita Petrovska-Rajkovikj, Bobi Hristov, Bogdanka Kuzevska, Goce Mihajlovski, and Sead Rizvanovikj. From that date, this position was held by Mladen Chadikovski, former editor-in-chief at TV A1. After his election as President of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia on December 21, 2018, the position of editor-in-chief at TV 24 was assumed by journalist Ognen Janevski. From its beginning, this television fosters analytical and investigative approach to government’s work and performance, but also towards other institutions, with frequent critical overview of Nikola Gruevski’s government.

305

## TELEVISION 21

TV 21 symbolically started its operation in Macedonia at 21:00 hours, on September 22, 2015. It is part of RTV 21, Kosovo-based media group owned by the Sarachini family from Skopje, and broadcasts programme in Albanian and Macedonian language. In the beginning, journalist Eugen Sarachini was executive editor and shortly afterwards this position was given to Fatmir Aliu, journalist and editor at TV 21 in Pristina. The general manager of this television is Valjon Sarachini, former minister of economy from the ranks of DUI.

TV 21 has national concession and is carried as cable television on the territory of Macedonia. In political terms, this television is characterized by neutral and balanced position towards political entities in the country. Analyses show that its neutrality is reflected in current affairs and news programmes, but also in debate shows.

<sup>41</sup> Link to the official channel of *YouTube* for the show “In the Target”, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/vocentar> [retrieved on 18.5.2019]

## TELEVISION SHENJA

TV Shenja is national cable television and was opened after purchase of TV ERA, which was regional television channel from Skopje. It started broadcasting programme in November 2015 and for short period of time Muhamed Zekiri, former executive editor at ALSAT-M, was part of its team. In the beginning, the television aired programme in Albanian and Macedonian language, but from December 1, 2018, and due to cost cutting reconsiderations, the management has decided to cancel the central news in Macedonian language.

Analyses show that current affairs and debate programmes are inclined towards the political party BESA led by Bilal Kasami, after its departure from the political party Alternative led by Afrim Gashi, although it could be noted that other political parties are also given air-time in current affairs programmes.

Ismail Sinani, former editor at TV Alsat-M, is general manager of this television and had previously served as executive editor at the namesake magazine *Shenja*.

306 "Economic, but also political pressures, are horrifying. It must be noted that TV Shenja feels these pressures from the first day it started broadcasting programme, four and a half years ago. They came from DUI, which was part of VMRO-DPMNE's government, but is also partner in the current government. Threats received from this entity were publicly condemned by several non-governmental organizations and by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia. To give you clear image of matters, government officials from this political party have not appeared in any debate show at TV Shenja. That sends signals to large number of companies 'not to cooperate' with this television. On the other hand, everybody knows that media outlets earn their revenue from advertising", says general manager Ismail Sinani.<sup>42</sup>

## TV KLAN MACEDONIA

TV Klan Macedonia started to operate in May 2018, after the media group Klan from Albania bought TV ART from Tetovo, which until recently was national cable television based in Tetovo. This television broadcasts programme only in Albanian language, with its current affairs and debate programmes attempting to uphold balanced treatment of

<sup>42</sup> Interview with TV Shenja's general manager Ismail Sinani for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

political entities in the Republic of North Macedonia. TV Klan is in process of consolidation and, from 2019, will start broadcasting programme from its new studio in Skopje.

## RADIO KANAL 77

Radio Kanal 77 started its operation on October 4, 1991. After several months of experimental programme in Shtip, Kanal 77 officially started airing its programme. Until 1995, Kanal 77 worked as local radio, and in the period 1995-1997 it started to build its network to cover eastern Macedonia, and later worked on national coverage. In 1997, after adoption of the Law on Broadcasting Activity, Kanal 77 became the first national radio concessioner. Radio Kanal 77 airs news and current affairs programme. Goran Gavrilov is general manager of Kanal 77, his son Viktor Gavrilov is the radio's owner, and Vesna Krsteva is the radio station's executive editor. In the contemporary media and political history of Macedonia, Kanal 77 would be remembered as free democratic space that was not controlled by Gruevski's government, although there were tendencies to have this media outlet closed. "The national radio station was a problem for [ruling authorities], because there were not many new frequencies and direct negotiations were opened to buy Kanal 77. These talks lasted for one year and the authorities knew nothing would come of that. I was warned that unless an agreement is reached they have plan B, i.e. opening a new radio station. The proposal for Kanal 77's buyout was indecent because, among others, it implied dismissal of all employees as being infected by other journalists that are unsuitable for the new age, while I – in the capacity of radio founder and manager – was required not to work in the media sphere in Macedonia. This tendency for hostile takeover amounted to sufficient reason to reject their offer", assesses Gavrilov.<sup>43</sup>

In his opinion, the government immediately launched fast action, in coordination with Director of the Broadcasting Council Zoran Trajchevski, who in the words of Gavrilov: "closed local radio stations with national concession and together with the Ministry of Economy created a quasi-national network".

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Kanal 77's general manager Goran Gavrilov for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

Gavrilov reiterates that establishment of Radio Free Macedonia by VMRO-DPMNE's government had direct consequences for Kanal 77 on several grounds:

- ▶ takeover of marketing staff, radio hosts and technicians, by offering them higher salaries, which proved unsuccessful in the case of journalist staff;
- ▶ procedure against Kanal 77 initiated by the financial police, which lasted for three years and requested one-year imprisonment sentence for me;
- ▶ three years of attempts to have Kanal 77's radio broadcasting license revoked;
- ▶ orchestrated process for fight at the disco, with special police unit "Alfa" and police custody for current founder of Kanal 77, Viktor Gavrilov.

"The process, orchestrated by the government, broadcasting council, financial police, Mol, courts and the prosecution shows the authoritarian rule of then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and members of his government. It did not prevent us to continue our work and not a single journalist left Kanal 77, although they might have had justified reasons to fear for their lives and repercussions for their families, including the fact that these employees were not welcomed in environments dominated by government officials. The motive to continue with our professional work was the understanding and support from the international community, which could not have directly influenced the processes, but indirectly brought about certain preventive actions. After only 120 days of operation, Radio Free Macedonia bankrupted and left many debts and unpaid salaries to pro-government journalists. I hope this will never be repeated in Macedonia" says Goran Gavrilov in interview for this publication.<sup>44</sup>

## **PUBLIC BROADCASTER IN SERVICE OF THE GOVERNMENT, NOT THE PUBLIC!**

### **Respect for general principles of public service broadcasters in the Republic of North Macedonia**

Universality, diversity and independence were and remain the goals of public service broadcasters. These functions are mutually intertwined and should be viewed as unity.

(1) Universality: all citizens in the state must have access to the public service broadcaster.

According to the Analysis of Public Broadcasting in Macedonia in Context of the European Media Policy, the public service broadcaster, Macedonia Radio-Television, fulfils the function of universality in terms of technical coverage, but in regard to contents, for many years, MRT fails to secure universality, especially having in mind the indicators on total audience reached by its programmes.

309

According to publicly available data on audience shares, published by the Broadcasting Council, all relevant analysis of the broadcasting market indicate that MTV's share in total viewership is lower than 10 percent. It seems that audience's interest for programmes aired on MTV is due to several reasons: lack of quality programming; poor offer of genres; lack of programmes intended for specific audience segments; political influence in news and current affairs programmes, etc.

(2) Diversity: the public service broadcaster's offer must be diverse in at least three ways: genres, programmes offered and audiences targeted, and topics covered.

Macedonian Radio-Television has faced and is still facing serious problems in attaining diversity of genres in television programming, primarily due to lack of air-time. In order to be able to fulfil the function of programme diversity, all public service broadcasters in Europe dispose with several TV channels.

On the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, MRT airs three television and four radio channels.

The first television channel (MTV1) broadcasts 24-hour programme in Macedonian language, and in terms of genres, it covers current affairs, education, documentary, cultural, entertainment and sports contents.

---

The public broadcaster continues to be political service.

---

MRT's second television channel (MTV2) pays special attention to foresting cultural and linguistic specificities of all ethnic communities, with special emphasis on the Albanian community. According to the new amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the second channel will broadcast 24-hour programme in Albanian language.

Third is the parliament channel, intended to broadcast activities from the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia and responsibility for broadcasted contents lies with the legislative house. In the absence of parliament activities, programme is supplemented with other contents, primarily feature and documentary films. In addition, MRT hosts one satellite channel intended for expatriates and citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia living in Europe and other continents.

310

Inevitable is the impression that the public service broadcaster pursues at least two or more parallel editorial policies, although it should advocate for social cohesion and integration. What is the reason for that? One reason should be sought in lack of coordination among editors of current affairs programmes on both (and other) channels, which is a result of absence of joint meetings to review news stories produced by MRT. Hence, it often happened for one news report to be aired on the Macedonian channel, but not to be included in the central news in Albanian language, which should not be practiced by any public service broadcaster. Also, no efforts were made to organize programmes on topics that are of interest to both channels.

[3] Independence: the public service broadcaster is the place where ideas are freely expression and where information, views and criticism are uninterruptedly circulated.

Objectivity and impartiality are important factor for the public service broadcaster's independence, because only by ensuring these principles the current affairs programmes

will articulate different opinions, views and positions. All these years, current affairs programme on MRT was dominated by politicians, not citizens. "You know there is a problem when 100 percent of news programme cover politicians assuring the audience that our life is good or bad. [The public broadcaster] failed to respect the most basic principles of journalism, which is to advocate for people affected. I think that should be changed, because currently MRT covers only politicians, not citizens", underlines Erdem Ahmet.<sup>45</sup>

The public service broadcaster should ensure balance in terms of access for all political and social entities in its current affairs programmes. The public service broadcaster cannot be used for propaganda, which is common for state-owned televisions in totalitarian systems.

Unfortunately, for many years, MRT's news and current affairs programmes are influenced by political structures in government, which resulted in continuous decrease of audience trust in their independence and impartiality and hindered their ratings, as shown in the Analysis of Public Broadcasting in Macedonia in Context of the European Media Policy.<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, it could be said that today MRT does not fulfil its obligation to serve as forum for public debate, nor to secure sufficient space for free expression of ideas, opinions and criticism. Former general managers say this is due to the fact that MRT was tasked to affirm ideas of political parties in government. "We know how to do our work. We do not need instructions [for that]. Unfortunately, the problem with the public service broadcaster is the fact that it gives primacy to interests of its employers, i.e. owners, which in my time was the parliament, i.e. the ruling majority", admits Ljupcho Jakimovski.<sup>47</sup>

45 Interview with Erden Ahmed, Turkish language desk editor at MRT, conducted as part of the research for doctoral dissertation on the topic "Influence of political parties on editorial policy at the public service broadcaster - MRT", defended by Sefer Tahiri on 11.9.2011

46 The analysis is available at: <http://bit.ly/389yZk> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

47 Interview with Ljupcho Jakimovski conducted as part of the research for doctoral dissertation on the topic "Influence of political parties on editorial policy at the public service broadcaster - MRT", defended by Sefer Tahiri on 11.9.2011

## Discrepancy between normative legislation on the public service broadcaster and the practice

The operation, legal status, financing and overall obligations of the public service broadcaster in Macedonia are regulated under the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services adopted in 2013.

Laws that regulate the media clearly define that the public service broadcaster should be completely independent from political parties. However, these legal provisions are not enforced in the practice, especially during election campaigns and election processes, when they were flagrantly violated.

According to media laws, the public service broadcaster should provide equal access for different groups in the society.

Judging on the basis of what has been done from 2006 to 2017, when VMRO-DPMNE came into power, and from 2017 onwards, when SDSM came into power, in terms of transformation processes at the Macedonian Radio-Television, it could be said that such efforts were more focused on the form rather than contents. Under such circumstances and pressed by strong competition from the commercial sector, the Macedonian Radio-Television hardly deserves the status of public service broadcaster, because it often violated the most democratic principles of multiethnic and multicultural society in its programmes.

## Financing model for the public service broadcaster : Macedonian Radio-Television

Independent and public financing sources for the public service broadcaster are precondition for its institutional and editorial independence. Collection of broadcasting fees is the main financing method for public service broadcasters in European countries, given that budget financing could threaten their editorial independence, especially in countries with fragile democracy such as North Macedonia.

Logically, the issue concerning the public service broadcaster's financing is of key importance for its performance and its models of realization in the society.

Documents of the European Broadcasting Union underline that “amount of the broadcasting fee should not correspond to what politicians regard as being more or less acceptable to their electorate” and that “money actually needed to fulfil the public service mission, in all areas and in every aspect, is therefore the starting point for calculating the amount of the broadcasting fee”.<sup>48</sup>

Under the old Law on Broadcasting Activity from 1997, the basis for setting the obligation for payment of broadcasting fee in the amount of 275 MKD implied ownership of radio or television set. Unlike the previous Law on Broadcasting Activity, the new law gave the broadcasting fee the status of public charge that should be paid by all, irrespective of the fact whether they view or listen to programmes of the public service broadcaster.

The financing model under the Law on Broadcasting Activity from 2005 established that the broadcasting fee should be paid by all: households, legal entities, hotels and motels, catering businesses and others (art. 145 and art. 146).

Amendments to the Law on Broadcasting Activity adopted in August 2008 reduced the fee rate to only 130 MKD monthly (around two euros). Although this amount seems sufficiently motivating for citizens to pay the broadcasting fee, it was set in very low amount to fulfil the needs for regular operation of the public service broadcast, let alone plans on MRT’s development and digitalization.

However, new amendments to the Media Law,<sup>49</sup> adopted by the parliament, revoked the broadcasting fee. Hence, the public service broadcaster in Macedonia which, after the new constitutional amendments will be renamed National Public Broadcaster, is financed by the state budget. The share allocated for its operation, and for the Media Agency and PE Macedonian Broadcasting, is set at 0.7 percent of the budget or around 20 million euros. MRT is entitled to 74.5 percent of that amount, PE Macedonian Broadcasting – 19.5 percent, and the remaining funds of 6 percent are earmarked for the Media Agency (AVMS).

The Association of Journalists of Macedonia disagreed with this legal solution and proposed final resolution of the issue related to the public service broadcaster’s financing as precondition for political neutrality.

<sup>48</sup> Analysis of Public Broadcasting in Macedonia in Context of the European Media Policy, available at: <http://bit.ly/389yiZk> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

<sup>49</sup> Law on Media, available at: <http://bit.ly/389yiZk> [retrieved on 17.5.2019]

Introduction of this solution for the public radio and television service in itself is not sufficient to ensure financial independence of the public service broadcaster. As long as the amount of the broadcasting budget is set by the government that could become another means for the state to control broadcasters. Financial independence of the public service broadcaster should be secured by creating stable and sufficient source of independent financing, linked to economic indicators.

In addition to the fact that the state has not secured sustainable financing model, which is a precondition to prevent political abuse of the public service broadcaster, its management has not demonstrated "prudent and responsible" operation. The state auditor noted a series of irregularities in operation of the Macedonian Radio-Television. In particular, 2017 audit report shows that MRT has significant amount of debt in collectable liabilities, credits, loans, unpaid taxes, lost court processes. MRT's general manager Marjan Cvetkovski has authorized one head of sector to sign documents on his behalf. According to the audit report, this letter of proxy authorization does not include precise authorizations and had not been recorded in the archive. In 2016, MRT took a bank credit. Auditors have found that MRT's programme council had green-lighted this action, but was actually not competent to decide on such matters. MRT's supervisory board presented the bank with business plan that elaborates anticipated investments. Therein, it was stressed that the television will invest 12 million euros from own revenue and 2 million euros of credit funds. The bank approved the credit in the amount of more than 2 million euros. MRT started using these funds to settle liabilities instead of capital investments, whereby development of the business plan had been unnecessary because there were no investments. This manner and procedure on credit borrowing, which included mortgaging MRT's property and assets, with decisions taken by its programme council and supervisory board on matters beyond their decision-making powers is contrary to the legislation in effect. Auditors have found that the television had earned revenue from advertising in the amount of more than 400,000 euros, but were unable to find evidence on advertisements broadcasted because there was no plan on funds from advertisements.

The audit effort also reviewed MRT's production of documentary programmes. Funds in the amounts of 100,000 to 400,000 euros have been spent per documentary series, or more than 2.2 million euros in total. It should be noted that, in 2013 and 2014, only for the series titled "Adamant People" MRT had paid the production company a total of 398,000

euros. The audit has found that accounting records on projects are not kept according to the actual costs incurred. Auditors were unable to establish equipment disposed and owned by MRT. Portion of the equipment was not found at its premises, portion of the equipment was assigned to employees, but it remains unknown who, where and for which purpose uses the remaining equipment. According to the audit report, general manager Marjan Cvetkovski was responsible person for such reports.<sup>50</sup>

Otherwise, at its session, the government adopted negative opinion on MRT's operation in 2018. They have established financial loss in the amount of 26 million MKD and that the public service broadcaster had failed to comply with professional and ethical standards to guarantee editorial independence.<sup>51</sup>

### **Model of management and supervision at MRT: condition for political neutrality of the public service broadcaster**

An important segment that guarantees the public service broadcaster's independence is the selection method for members of its management and supervisory bodies.

315

Institutional autonomy of the public service broadcaster concerns the right of management bodies to freely organize and administer all activities arising from competences stipulated by the law and other internal rules (statutes, rulebooks, etc.). Of course, institutional autonomy does not mean that performance of the public service broadcaster's management bodies should not be controlled by competent authorities in terms of lawfulness of their financial operations and cost-effective management of public funds. Actually, the public service broadcaster's management model must equally rely on the principles of independence and accountability. On one side, that means securing full independence from state control, and on the other side, adequate level of accountability. Balancing these two principles underlines the public service broadcaster's organization and its relations with the authorities.

<sup>50</sup> News report by TV Alsat-M, available at: <http://bit.ly/2RfJNav> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

<sup>51</sup> Press release by the Government of North Macedonia, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Nn2EiH> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

According to the new law, members of MRT's programme council are selected in transparent and democratic procedure upon previously organized open call and public hearing for candidates (art. 117)<sup>52</sup>, which is very similar to the procedure for selection of members in the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.

Accountability is an important segment in guaranteeing institutional independence and editorial autonomy. The public service broadcaster is held accountable before the legislative branch of government, i.e. Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, by presenting annual reports, usually by the year's end. However, the parliament took negative decision on the public service broadcaster's operation and performance in 2018.

Accountability of MRT's first people includes assessment of results achieved and public funds spent in the reporting period. However, in the last years, media reports and analyses show that even after formation of new bodies at MRT, the public service broadcaster did not discontinue the practice of direct communication and giving account to representatives from the executive government. MRT's financial dependence from budget funds has greatly contributed to this practice.

316

Although the law stipulated that the office of MRT's general manager is irreconcilable with performance of any function in political parties, the research conducted for this publication shows that, in the period 1998-2006, people close to political parties in the government have been appointed to this position. For illustration, Ljupcho Jakimovski was appointed general manager in 1998, but he previously held the office of MP from VMRO-DPMNE under the 1991-1994 composition. In the period 2005-2008, Nazif Bushi was MRT's deputy general manager. Previously he was MP from the ranks of DUI. According to his work biography on the parliament's website, previously he had worked as Director of the State Labour Inspectorate from 2002 to 2004, appointed by the government of SDSM and DUI.<sup>53</sup>

However, the greatest influence on MRT's editorial policy is pursued through recruitment of partisan staff.

According to previous practices, deputy general manager is appointed from the Albanian community. This is in line with securing equitable representation of all ethnic

<sup>52</sup> Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, available at: <http://bit.ly/2QSzFpk> [retrieved on 19.5.2019]

<sup>53</sup> Nazif Bushi's biography is available at: <http://bit.ly/2QSzFpk> [retrieved on 26.5.2019]

communities in Macedonia. This practice was operational since 1990, when the general manager and his deputy were appointed and dismissed by the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

Since the first parliamentary elections in 1990, Macedonia has a Macedonian-Albanian coalition government, which means that MRT's general manager is proposed by the ruling Macedonian party and his deputy by the Albanian coalition partner. That is how matters worked in the practice. An exception was made in 2006, when the deputy general manager of Albanian ethnicity was reappointed in regular procedure and upon open call, who was previously appointed on proposal by DUI, Albanian political party that was in opposition in 2006 when Nazif Bushi was reappointed.

Appointment of people from the ranks of governing parties shows that MRT had failed to secure independence of its management bodies, which are politically liaised, and such relations are reflected down the chain, with partisan appointments of executive editors at the Macedonian Television and the Macedonian Radio, news editors and journalists.

After experienced journalist Petar Zjalev was dismissed as executive editor of current affairs programme at MTV, in 2012 this position was given to Goran Petrevski, former news editor at TV A1. Hence, current affairs programme at the public service broadcaster was turned into apologetic machinery of the government and VMRO-DPMNE. Often, central news included reports in which three analysts defend the government and "demonized" the opposition. MTV did not differ from radical media supporters of VMRO-DPMNE operating in the commercial sector. MRT, albeit being the public service broadcaster, took decision not to publish the opposition's "bombs", referring to the public prosecutor's decision. The public would long remember the statement made by MTV1 executive editor Dime Ratajkovski at the debate organized by AJM wherein he indicated that should the public prosecutor takes such decision he is prepared to shut down MRT's current affairs programme.<sup>54</sup>

According to the Przhino Agreement, brokered among the four biggest political parties VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA, hundred days before the parliamentary elections held on December 11, 2016, executive editor of MRT's current affairs programme should be appointed on proposal from the opposition. Hence, this position was entrusted to

<sup>54</sup> News report by TV Alsat-M on the debate "What type of public service broadcaster Macedonia needs", available at: <http://bit.ly/30hHSqe> [retrieved on 25.5.2019]

experienced journalist Santa Argirova who had spent part of her carrier at the public service broadcaster and later worked at commercial televisions Telma and Alfa. "I find great motivation in making MRT true public service for all citizens, professional and objective. I want people to trust the public service. After all, which media services should they trust, if not those of the public broadcaster", stated Argirova.<sup>55</sup>

She took this office on September 2, 2016, transforming the central news at MRT from "propagandist pamphlets" from the time of the previous management into balanced current affairs programme where all political actors were given equal access.

### Employment at the public service broadcaster – Macedonian Radio-Television

According to recommendations from the Council of Europe and the European Union, selection, promotion and re-assignment of employees at the public service broadcaster should not depend on their origin, gender, opinions or political, philosophical and religious affiliation, or membership in trade unions. Staff members at this institution are not allowed to receive instructions from individuals or bodies outside the entity that employs them.

The main problem faced by MRT throughout these years is its overemployment and recruitment of staff according to political affiliation. Finding a model for painful downsizing is the main preoccupation of MRT's management bodies.

According to last data, the public service broadcaster employs a total of 852 people, of which 500 work in the television, 213 in the radio and 139 people work at joint services. According to data from the State Statistical Office, MRT has more employees than all 10 private televisions together.<sup>56</sup>

55 Katerina Blazhevska's interview with journalist Santa Argirova, available at: <http://bit.ly/2spMBJZ> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

56 Data from the State Statistical Office on the number of employees at MRT, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Nr5Cmv>, [retrieved on 15.5.2019]



## PRINTED MEDIA: INSTRUMENT IN THE HANDS OF POLITICS

The Goebbels-like propaganda of VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevski's government did not target only broadcasting media, i.e. radios and televisions, but also the printed media. High number of daily newspapers did not serve as media in the true meaning of this word, but were used as advertising outlets for promotion of political messages. A dilemma is often raised whether some communication channels deserve to be called media, because the media have a mission in the society, i.e. to perform the function of criticism. Instead, we had printed media on mission, not professional, but ideological and political one. These media did not practice journalism, but pursued other functions through journalism, such as: propaganda, public relations, political communications or economic marketing.

In circumstances when the media system and the media, whose primary function and goal was to promote the political agenda and serve the interests of authorities, not the public, i.e. not pursue the media and public agenda, it is very easy to answer the question whether we had balanced reporting in the printed media. Unfortunately, part of the media found it sufficient to have a single source of information, i.e. the government, with a number of them using the opposition as information source. Today, what has been written in the Journalist Code of Ethics remains letter on paper, especially the principle that when treating an issue or problem journalists should consult at least two sources, mutually independent, which is not only ethical, but also professional imperative in journalism. What we had in the past and what we currently have, albeit in milder form, is utterly unprofessional.

Too often, analysis of media contents provides the conclusion about absence of the second side, not due to lack of time or non-transparency of sources, but because of political instrumentalization. The public has the right to know who wages accusations, but it also has to be informed about the opinion of those accused, or in figurative terms, it has to learn about both, executor and victim.

Many newspaper articles produced in Macedonia, including radio and television stories and reports published in online media, would not have been published by the media in democratically developed countries on the account of their bias, i.e. one-sided presentation of information.

Daily newspaper *Vecer* is among media outlets known for its political and partisan instrumentalization. This newspaper is owned by Bojo Andrevski, who also owns the European University in Skopje. The executive editor at this printed media, Dragan Pavlovikj-Latas, served as one of key media apologists for VMRO-DPMNE's policies. That was most prominently visible in his newspaper columns. The same editorial and political line was pursued by newspaper *Nova Makedonija*, owned by businessman Mincho Jordanov who also holds shares in several companies and who, according to the magazine *Forbes*, is the richest man in Macedonia. For a period of time, this newspaper printed columns by another apologist of Gruevski's policies, journalist Mirka Velinovska. Darko Janevski was deputy executive editor and is known for his right-conservative views on politics and society. The history of *Nova Makedonija* would remember resignation by journalist Zoran Dimitrovski from the position of executive editor. He was fired from the newspaper in February 2014. According to him, the newspaper owner had told him that he is dismissed for having distorted journalist standards and for having engaged in political manipulations. Dimitrovski's resignation came after Nikola Mladenov's death and persistence of this executive editor to defend, at any cost, journalist Tomislav Kezharovski who was sentenced to imprisonment.

3 2 1

In 2009, magazine *Globus*, edited by Branko Trichkovski, was closed. A dozen journalists lost their jobs, including several former employees from *Utrinski vesnik*, which MPM's management had redirected to the *Globus* project.

In 2011, three newspapers from another media group, i.e. Velija Ramkovski's empire, were closed. They included *Spic*, where Branko Geroski was editor-in-chief, *Vreme*, edited by Kole Chashule, and *Koha e re*, where Fami Bajmari worked as editor-in-chief. All three newspapers were closed at the time when A1 television was closed. Tens of journalists from this media group lost their jobs.

The weekly *Forum* (founded by Sasho Ordanovski and Gjuner Ismal) went out of print in 2011, when it was edited by Atanas Kirovski who became the new general manager at TV Telma in 2014. *Forum* was printed by Seavus, an information technology company. The decision for its closure was taken without prior announcement. On August 31, 2011, journalists were told that this newspaper will stop its print from September 1, 2011. Only the news agency *Makfax* remained to operate within Seavus's media component.

The weekly *Gragjanski* started its print in 2012, with Mile Jovanovski as editor-in-chief and Katerina Blazhevaska as executive editor. Previously, she was executive editor at newspaper *Dnevnik*. This weekly newspaper was closed in 2013. Vasko Popetreski worked at this weekly magazine, having previously served as editor at TV Kanal 5 and newspaper *Dnevnik*, and is nowadays known in the public as manager of the media project "360 Degrees" aired on TV Alsat-M.<sup>57</sup>

Daily newspaper *Den*, edited by Kole Chashule, was closed in 2012.

Daily newspaper *Kapital*, edited by Spasijka Jovanovska and owned by Ljupcho Zikov, was closed in 2013. A dozen journalists were fired.<sup>58</sup>

Daily newspaper *Dnevnik*, printed by the media group Media Print Macedonia, served as one of the main propagandist media kitchens. The first issue of this newspaper was printed on March 20, 1996. *Utrinski vesnik* first went into print on June 23, 1999, and one year later, on July 5, 2000, the first issue of *Vest* was printed. All three newspapers were established and managed by former journalists from NIP Nova Makedonija.

From July 29, 2003, *Dnevnik*, together with *Utrinski vesnik* and *Vest* were printed by MPM, seated in Skopje, with majority capital owned by the German media group WAZ. Unlike *Utrinski vesnik* and *Vest*, newspaper *Dnevnik* had more transparent editorial policy, inclined to VMRO-DPMNE. WAZ remained in Macedonia until 2012, which overlapped with VMRO-DPMNE's increased intensity in exercising political influence on the media, with special emphasis on newspapers printed by MPM. On January 10, 2012, Orka Holding became the new owner of *Dnevnik*, *Utrinski vesnik* and *Vest*. This company is owned by Orce Kamchev, businessman from Macedonia who during VMRO-DPMNE's governance was known for his close business and personal relations with VMRO-DPMNE's leadership, and especially with Sasho Mijalkov, former chief of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence at the Ministry of Interior.

Ownership takeover of these three newspapers was part of VMRO-DPMNE's political strategy for direct and unquestionable control and dictate over the media. Officially, this venture was explained as part of WAZ's strategy, announced in August 2010, on alienation of company shares in Southeast Europe.

57 Media project "360 Degrees", available at: <http://360stepeni.mk/> [retrieved on 26.5.2019]

58 Analysis by the news portal Meta, available at: <http://bit.ly/2tkRPqP>, [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

Editorial staff at the three daily newspapers changed in parallel to the change of its political orientation.

In 2011, Zoran Dimitrovski was removed from the position executive editor at *Dnevnik* and was replaced by Sasho Kokalanov, who later became editor of this newspaper's electronic edition. Several months later he left MPM.

In November 2012, Zoran Andonovski resigned as executive editor at *Dnevnik* due to professional reasons, as reported by some media. "I have resigned from professional reasons, because I was unable to manage the newspaper as I deemed necessary", stated Andonovski for the media at that time.<sup>59</sup> Andonovski was replaced by Darko Janevski, who was deputy editor-in-chief at *Nova Makedonija*. After *Utrinski vesnik* was taken by WAZ in 2012, three editors-in-chief were changed. Ljupcho Popovski was succeeded by Nina Nineska-Fidanovska. Several months later she was replaced by Sonja Kramarska, who remained on this position until the newspaper's closure. Goran Mihajlovski who managed daily newspaper *Vest* stayed the longest on the position editor-in-chief at MPM media. He is author of the historical series of columns "Sakam da kazam" (Let Me Say), and had left newspaper *Vecer* in 2000, together with a group of journalists, to form *Vest*, which became a daily newspaper with the highest print circulation. He was replaced on December 18, 2015. Less in the newspaper, and more frequently in his column, he critically observed all daily political events in Macedonia and did not spare of criticism both government and opposition politicians, and their actions. Mihajlovski is known as fierce critic of any governing structure, and often expressed public support for his colleague journalists, especially amidst turmoil events at MPM concerning salary reductions and dismissals, for which company representatives had claimed are intended to mitigate poor financial standing of the company printing all three newspapers. His position was given to Goran Petrevski, former journalist and editor at A1 television. His appointment marked the start of vmroization at *Vest*, which led to dropped ratings, confidence and, consequently, significant reduction of reader audience. To this position Petrevski came from the post of editor-in-chief of current affairs programme at MTV1.

MPM launched an initiative for multimedia and digital project, i.e. design of web-portal that would serve as platform for integration of all media printed by MPM. Instead of this ambitious project, MPM launched the online portal *Telegraf*. Editor-in-chief at this portal

59 Media statement by journalist Andonovski, available at: <http://bit.ly/36SKEVr> [retrieved on 17.5.2019]

was Zoran Richliev, who was replaced shortly afterwards and later left MPM. In February 2015, Ivana Kostovska also resigned from the position executive editor at *Telegraf*. According to media reports, she had resigned due to management pressures.

The history of *Utrinski vesnik* and *Vest* lasted by April 29, 2017, when all printed versions were officially closed due to financial crisis at the company printing these newspapers. On June 14, 2017, newspaper *Dnevnik* also went to the history, together with online portals *Vest*, *Utrinski vesnik* and *Telegraf*. With this decision of the management, around hundred people from MPM lost their jobs. Their closure served as metaphor for the end of media totalitarianism that had ruled in Macedonia for years and heralded new beginning of democracy and media freedom.

Unlike MPM media that were under full control by VMRO-DPMNE, weekly *Fokus* whose first issue was printed on June 23, 1995, remained the shining star of free and critical journalism. For long period of time, *Fokus* was printed under the motto "Weekly of the internal, but also external enemy". In 2013, the namesake daily newspaper started its print, but was quickly closed. In that period, Branko Geroski, who was among founders of *Dnevnik*, served as executive editor of daily *Fokus*. Journalist Nikola Mladenov was the owner of newspaper *Fokus*. He tragically lost his life on March 27, 2013, in a traffic accident. Late in the night, the Mercedes driven by this famous journalist derailed from the motorway Veles-Skopje, near the junction in Hipodrom.<sup>60</sup> Due to the fact that citizens had lost faith in institutions and the former government, which exerted maximum pressure on the media, especially on *Fokus* for its critical undertones, speculations surfaced that Mladenov's death had been planned by then-incumbent government led by Gruevski. These allegations were never proven. This case, which is very suspicious and contradictory, is still not fully clarified, but it is believed that the reason for this accident was excessive speed and there are no other suspicions. "Knowledge in my possession do not change the previously established factual status that Nikola died in traffic accident due to unadjusted speed to road conditions", stated Biljana Mladenova, spouse of Nikola Mladenov and owner of *Fokus*, in interview for 1TV,<sup>61</sup> hosted by journalist Jadranka Kostova, who in addition to her engagement at this television is also executive editor at *Fokus* since 2003.

60 News report on death of Nikola Mladenov, available at: <http://bit.ly/2uQAvKR> [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

61 Interview with Biljana Mladenova on 1TV, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Rf4406> [retrieved on 24.5.2019]

After the death of owner Nikola Mladenov, *Fokus* assumed one of his statements as its motto. The statement is titled "How much does freedom cost?" and reads: "We want a society of free people, they want a bunch of spineless servants. There can be no compromise."

Daily newspapers in Albanian language, *Koha* and *Lajm*, would be remembered as media that served as platform for new political ideas, including those for tumbling down Nikola Gruevski's regime. The fact that these newspapers are owned by journalists proves that they reflect freedom-loving and democratic spirit, intertwined with a journalistic nerve. *Koha* is managed by journalists Lirim Dulovi and Arben Ratkoceri, while *Lajm* is in the hands of Fejzi Ajdari. While *Koha* always pursued a more balanced treatment of political parties, including those in the Albanian block, from its beginnings and especially after 2008, *Lajm* became fierce critic of policies pursued by Ali Ahmeti's DUI, and other Albanian parties.

## GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING AND PROGRAMME SUBSIDIES: A MEASURE OF POLITICAL BRIBERY AT COMMERCIAL MEDIA

325

In the last decade, the media in Macedonia were kept under strict control through the system of public funds, i.e. taxpayer money, and through appointment of "fitting" editors and journalists in editorial desks. Such control was all-encompassing and targeted all media: printed, broadcasting, online, national and local media.

Direct award of public funds to media groups that included several outlets in their composition could have brought them in conflict with legal restrictions stipulated under the Law on State Aid Control and Law on Protection of Competition.

In such cases, it would be extremely difficult to monitor and establish where and for what purposes were these funds spent, i.e. whether they are used for the intended media outlet and purposes.

Often, media groups in the country are part of consortia or holdings with complex ownership structures. These businesses have interests in different economic activities unrelated to media. In addition to economic, they also have political interests, pursued through lobbying and connections with political parties.

In such situation, direct award of public funds puts the media in position that leads to undermining their editorial independence and media freedoms, distorting their integrity and increasing the political influence. It is important to note risks and consequences that might arise from direct subsidies to the media, by awarding them public funds.<sup>62</sup>

Which television outlets are hidden behind codes 11, 22 and 33, indicated to have received more than 15 million euros from the budget for government advertisements? The new government published data according to which at least 38 million euros had been spent by previous authorities on campaigns and propaganda in broadcasting and printed media in Macedonia, from 2008 to 2015, with one television benefiting from astounding 7 million euros.

Money had been disbursed from the government's advertising budget, which included campaigns such those against abortion, third child and healthy food, "Explore Macedonia, "Day of the Thee", etc. This calculation does not include funds for the years 2006, 2007 and 2016, because, according to the government, "documents for these years were not found". These figures do not include campaigns commissioned by ministries in the government of Nikola Gruevski.<sup>63</sup> "The consequence of this practice was not bribery, but much more than that. The media had 'paid' their price with direct servitude to particular interests, clientelism. That, in turn, had divided the public, threatened broadcasting activity, and degraded journalism. Damages of such practices are suffered to present day", says Marina Tuneva, executive director of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia.<sup>64</sup>

62 Metamorphosis Foundation's position on state financial support for the media, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Tu5dDP> [retrieved on 18.5.2019]

63 The text is developed as part of the project "Media Reform Observatory", implemented by Metamorphosis Foundation for Internet and Society, Agora – Centre for Promotion of Civic Values and Platform for Investigative Journalism and Analyses (PINA), with financial support from the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Rit3PY>, [retrieved on 18.5.2019]

64 Interview with executive director of the Council of Media Ethic of Macedonia for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

Although the government did not reveal names of television stations that were awarded funds for government advertisements, by elimination it could be seen which of them benefited the most and which of them benefited the least from the advertising budget. The table containing commercial televisions with national concessions includes a total of six media outlets. One of them, coded TV 44, disappears in 2012, and it could be easily concluded this was A1 television, which stopped to operate in 2011. Another television, coded 33, has several empty fields in the table, i.e. has not benefited from funds for government advertisements from 2008 to 2011, and therefore it could be assumed that it was TV Alfa, which in that period changed its editorial policy and started to support the previous government of VMRO-DPMNE.

According to data published in the media, and provided by the government, in the past years and prior to the moratorium declared for state-funded advertisements, the previous government had awarded 7 to 9 million euros per year to the media, with vast portion of these funds ending up at pro-government media and handful of exceptions. In that, it should be noted that figures concern only funds disbursed by the government, while funds awarded to pro-government media by municipalities, state agencies and public enterprises, would further increase these numbers.

327

The proposed Law on Public Institutions' Information and Advertising Campaigns, which is the actual full name of this legislation, legitimized the present situation at the media and created in the past years when pro-government media were awarded funds in order to secure their sustenance and to continue corruptive practices on awarding loads of money to these media so they would continue to serve the governing party, which we were able to hear from the wiretapped conversations.<sup>65</sup>

Government advertising was also indicated in reports that resulted in definition of state's reform priorities. "In the meantime, then-current government, in addition to bribing pro-government media, also engaged in establishment of broadcasting media with party ownership, both directly and indirectly. In my opinion, the intention was to replace existing pro-government media that would be closed with partisan media owned directly by them and to change the structure of media ownership from the early 90s. This investment cycle resulted in establishment of several national televisions, terrestrial and cable, eight

65 Analysis by Vladimir Petrevski, available at: <http://bit.ly/36TjjiX>, [retrieved on 15.5.2019]

regional media, one national radio, web portals, weekly and daily newspapers. All these media were connected in terms of editorial policy and formed an informal network that distributed contents. This system operated for four years, but was exclusively dependent on revenue from government advertisements, public enterprises and municipalities. Their economic performance was on the low end, because advertisers knew they have a formal audience and nobody found their economic interest in these media, except for the companies contracted under the megalomaniac project 'Skopje 2014'. After the change of government, and before the Prespa Agreement, this system collapsed within 120 days, with the exception of one national television, which changed its ownership, i.e. was bought by foreign investor, and others went into receivership, bankruptcy or their equipment was stolen. Damages to the media market are enormous because unrealistic revenue increased prices of quasi-journalists, while the media operating on economic bases were faced with disloyal competition in the marketing segment. It would take several years for the media landscape to resume normal operation", says Gavrilov.<sup>66</sup>

In compliance with recommendations from the media community, and AJM in particular, the Government of Macedonia took decision to terminate government advertising. "The government adopted a measure under the Plan 3-6-9 that concerns termination of government advertisements in commercial broadcasting and printed media, billboards, internet portals (with the exception of social media) and communications with the citizens through the public service broadcaster. According to this measure, the Government of RM adopted the conclusion whereby it tasks all state administration bodies, advises the institutions that do not have the status of state administration bodies, and recommends local governments to stop broadcasting advertising campaigns/videos as part of paid marketing in commercial media, i.e. televisions and radios, daily and weekly newspapers, billboards, internet portals, with the exception of social media, in compliance with the measure adopted under the Plan 3-6-9", read the decision taken by Zaev's government.<sup>67</sup>

"In its two years of work until the Prespa Agreement, the new government prohibited state advertising under great discount, but mayors and directors of public enterprises

66 Interview with Kanal 77's general manager Goran Gavrilov for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

67 The government's decision is available at: <https://vlada.mk/node/13272> [retrieved on 27.5.2019]

from the previous government continued, in hidden form, to indirectly finance old pro-government media, confirming the old saying 'once pro-government always pro-government'", reveals Kanal 77's general manager Goran Gavrilov.<sup>68</sup>

AJM will continue to advocate against government advertisements. "AJM's main task is to create an ambiance for liberation from political pressures, which would also mean liberation of the market instead of having government funds return to this sector. In the middle term, this strategy is expected to establish market-based mechanisms for media work. Success would be determined by the market, not closeness or distance from political elites. To achieve that, we will need businessmen to understand the need for critically-oriented media. We have a plan and we work according to that plan", says Chadikovski.<sup>69</sup>

While the government prohibited government advertisements in the media, it also decided to support printing and distribution of printed media in the country with 50 million MKD, i.e. around 180.000 euros. These funds will be disbursed to printed media in Macedonian language, in the amount of 50 percent of printing costs and 50 percent of distribution costs. Media printed in languages spoken by ethnic communities will be entitled to funds in the amount of at least 50 percent, but not exceeding 70 percent of printing and distribution costs.

Subsidies will be awarded to printed media of general news character printing contents aimed at information distribution in the public about current political, economic, social and cultural matters. The media that will be awarded government funding would have to provide evidence on settled liabilities towards the state and their employees.

The Association of Printed Media participated in the negotiations process, while AJM also came forward with proposals.<sup>70</sup>

68 Interview with Kanal 77's general manager Goran Gavrilov for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".

69 Interview with AJM's president Mladen Chadikovski for the publication "Form Bucharest to Prespa".

70 News report by TV Telma, available at: <http://bit.ly/36TjBjz> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

Below is the list of approved subsidies for newspaper printing and distribution costs:

1. Nova Makedonija: 6,183,000 MKD (100,000 euros)
2. Sloboden pecat: 14,280,000 MKD (238,000 euros)
3. Bitolski vesnik: 244,500 MKD (4,000 euros)
4. Zenit, Prilep: 288,000 MKD (4,500 euros)
5. Kapital: 2,115,000 MKD (35,000 euros)
6. Koha: 4,930,000 MKD (82,000 euros)
7. Vecer: 7,255,000 MKD (120,000 euros)
8. Lajm: 1,045,000 MKD (17,000 euros)
9. Fokus: 4,625,000 MKD (75,000 euros)
10. Ekonomija & biznis: 748,000 MKD(12,500 euros)

## NON-REGULATION OF ONLINE MEDIA OPENED THE WAY FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCES

### Online media between self-regulation and legal regulation!

In Macedonia, the online media are not covered by the media laws, i.e. the Law on Media and the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. This imprecise and undefined regulation is abused by vast number of online media, known and popularized on the Balkan as news portals. (Non)regulation was sufficient for these media to be abused for political and party goals, not only by governing, but also by opposition parties. While VMRO-DPMNE was in power, large number of so-called courier-portals (*Kurir*, *Republika*, *Infomaks*, *Press24*, *Plus24*, etc.) were not only propagandist machinery, but also served as information sources for other media outlets, including the public service broadcaster. In Macedonia, high number of news portals that support VMRO-DPMNE were founded by companies based in tax heavens, mainly Belize, an independent constitutional monarchy

in Central America with coastline on the Caribbean Sea. It takes 650 dollars to open a company within 24 hours.

On the other hand, large number of portals supported the policies of SDSM (*Plusinfo*, *Aton*, *Makfax*, *Sakam da kazam*, etc.) After SDSM came into power, online portals, just as the parties, changed roles, although some of them, e.g. *Plusinfo* or *Makfax*, are characterized by critical stance towards ZaeV's government.

In spite of these phenomena in online journalism, it does not mean that this media sector is not defined in normative and legal terms, because many other laws not pertaining to the media sphere include stipulations that indirectly regulate these media, their operation and conduct, contents production and distribution to online audiences.<sup>71</sup>

Namely, online media are not regulated, but are subject of specific laws that govern different matters related to media practices and operation, such as the Criminal Code, which sanctions hate speech, the Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and Libel, copyright legislation, legislation on protection of juveniles and the Law on Labour Relations, all of which are valid not only for traditional, but also for online media, and this is also standard in Europe.

3 3 1

Media Development Centre of Macedonia, non-governmental organization seated in Skopje (<http://www.mdc.org.mk>) and profiled in media research, recommends regulation of online media to be pursued according to the principle "what is implemented offline, should be implemented online as well". This means that those engaged in journalism on the internet enjoy all rights, but also professional and ethical obligations towards the audience just like journalists in the traditional media.<sup>72</sup>

In Macedonia, online portals are not exempted from legal obligations, especially not in regard to registration, but also transparency of media ownership.

In this regard, the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia initiated creation of voluntary register of online media for their members. "Having in mind the consequences from opaque media ownership, i.e. non-professionalism in operation of the media and loss of public's trust in general, SEMM adopted the principle for admission of online media as

71 Marina Tuneva, *Self-regulation or Regulation for Online Media*, Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia, Skopje, 2017. Available at: <http://bit.ly/36XkINK> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

72 *Policy Paper: Professional Standards between Regulation and Self-Regulation*, Media Development Centre, 2007, available at: <http://bit.ly/2RhkZir> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

members of this self-regulation body. Actually, this implies some form of ‘filtration’ in the media space and developing a baseline for work with the media that advocate for professionalism, but ‘isolation’ of those that only harm journalism [as profession]”, is the position upheld by SEMM’s executive director Marina Tuneva.

According to the principles on membership in SEEM (<http://www.seem.mk>), internet portals that wish to become members have to fulfil certain criteria, such as: to have a published impressum (editor, editorial desk), founder and contact data, i.e. address; to agree to comply with the Journalist Code of Conduct and to host hyperlinks to this document on their website; while all texts published must indicate relevant authors, etc.

In practice, however, there is an evident culture of impunity for violations made by online media. Sometimes due to institutions’ inertia, but other times due to misunderstanding of this relatively new sphere, and due to already indicated harmful misconception that the online space is not subject to legal regulations and that online media are not “regulated”. Everything that is valid offline is also valid online.<sup>73</sup>

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia explicitly stipulates imprisonment sentences for those using the media to promote and disseminate hate speech (art. 394 and art. 407).

The fact that, thus far, the Public Prosecution Office had not acted in such cases due to political motives does not mean that dissemination of hate speech is allowed. The same is valid for discrimination, although the competent State Commission for Prevention of Discrimination is in place, but its failure to take action in many cases should be examined, while the media and media workers should be careful about these two delicate issues.

Online portals, in addition to plagiarized information, often feature contents that include defamation and libel. The Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and Libel (art.18) stipulates that: “The court cannot award redress for non-pecuniary damages caused by defamation or libel on the part of journalists when performing their reporting profession in the amount exceeding 2,000 euros in MKD counter-value. The court cannot award redress for non-pecuniary damages caused by defamation or libel on the part of editors or their deputies in the amount exceeding 10,000 euros in MKD counter-value. The court cannot

<sup>73</sup> Zoran Richliev, *Recommendations for Responsible Online Media*, Association of Journalists of Macedonia, Skopje, 2017, available at: <http://www.znm.org.mk> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

award redress for non-pecuniary damages caused by defamation or libel on the part of legal entities in the amount exceeding 15,000 euros in MKD counter-value". In sum, the amount of redress paid by an editorial desk cannot exceed 27,000 euros.

Courts in the country do not have a harmonized position towards internet portals. Some courts consider them as media outlets pursuant to the Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and Libel, while others believe they are media outlets pursuant to the Law on Media.

An urgent intervention in the media legislation is needed to introduce precise definition whether online portals are media outlets, because the current non-alignment of laws, due to political pressure on the courts, is used against those of different mind from the government, but also because journalists are not held legally responsible in cases when they engage in defamation and libel.

Often, this non-alignment is seen on television, because certain outlets, as explained above, publish news taken from online portals, which can sometimes be sensationalized and can include elements of defamation and libel, are not signed by journalists who authored them and are taken as such by some televisions. In such cases, persons targeted by defamation and libel request televisions to be fined, to which editors-in-chief refer to the fact that the news report had been taken from another media outlet, which ultimately results in some courts failing to hold accountable the source of such reports, as witnessed in the practice. Therefore, journalists must have in mind that they could be sued for defamation and libel also on the basis of legislation in effect, but on the other hand, judges lack capacity for competent decision-making in such lawsuits.

A particularly important law in the internet sphere is the Law on Copyright and Related Rights, according to which, legal entities, in this case online portals, could be liable for copyright infringement. That is why they are obliged to enlist authors when reproducing materials from other sources.<sup>74</sup> This means that copying other's work, in addition to being prohibited under the standards from the Code of Ethics, is also prohibited by law.

<sup>74</sup> Petrit Sarachini (ed.) and others, *Macedonia in the Digital Era: Between Rights and Responsibilities in Communicating on the internet*, MIM, Skopje, 2015, available at: <http://bit.ly/35Wgcsa> [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

Then we have the Law on Personal Data Protection and the competent Administration for Protection of Personal Data which acts upon complaints lodged by citizens when their photos had been published without their consent or when third party personal data had been disclosed.

According to this law, publication of photos by internet portals is prohibited without previous consent from concerned persons, including photos from *Facebook* and their publication on internet portals, while publication of photos of minor children requires permission from their parents.

This administration holds competences to delete false profiles on the social networks. It acts upon complaints from citizens, majority of which concern abuse of personal data on social networks and internet portals.<sup>75</sup>

Research of laws and internet media leads to the conclusion that: "Macedonia has sufficiently good legislation in place, which can be enforced in the internet sphere and there is no need for additional regulation of internet communications. The internet had resulted in de-monopolization of traditional media; it dramatically reduced costs for information production; in short period of time, media concentration (vertical, horizontal, diagonal) became secondary topic among democracy theoreticians; it allowed new forms of quality reporting, with emergence of new genres such as blogging, mobile journalism, civil journalism, journalism for portals, etc. Human rights defenders and activists particularly benefited from advantages of these new platforms, where they were able to freely express their opinions and views. Hence, they believe that regulation of online media would destroy free speech in the online sphere".<sup>76</sup>

The Council of Media Ethics insists that self-regulation is the most adequate mechanism in the media sphere. In the media sphere, journalists should regulate their own system, because otherwise that might be done by other actors (state, i.e. government, media agency, media laws). "I absolutely believe in the power of self-regulation, but it would take time for this mechanism to find its rightful place. It is important to understand that this

75 Ibid, pg. 24

76 Jasna Bachovska, *Strengthening Professional Standards or Eroding the Freedom of Speech: Regulation of Online Media in Macedonia*, Institute for Communication Studies and School of Journalism, Skopje, 2017, pg. 11, [retrieved on 20.5.2019]

should be pursued in parallel to ensuring functionality of the system, enforcing the laws, criticising non-professionalism and, of course, educating citizens so they would know what to demand and what to expect from journalism and the media. Self-regulation is a powerful method for journalism to find its right place [in the society] as vigilant observer of government actions, protector of the public interest and as alternative to dispute resolution in courts", says Marina Tuneva from SEMM.<sup>77</sup>

Online media do not need legal regulation, because they do not use public goods and public frequencies. The institutions should enforce the laws in effect, while the media community, comprised of true journalists, should fight to distinguish actual media from propagandistic megaphones, journalists from political spokespersons, reporters from those that engage in defamation, because, ultimately, the freedom of expression does not make much sense when it is not balanced with editorial responsibility. Supporters of the concept "freedom without responsibility" are enemies of the freedom of expression and of the media!

<sup>77</sup> Interview with SEMM's executive director Marina Tuneva for the publication "From Bucharest to Prespa".



Meri Jordanovska and  
Sashka Cvetkovska

## CORRUPTION AND WRONGDOINGS IN THE ELECTION CYCLES

### INTRODUCTION

It is highly unlikely for an important judge who keeps friends with mafia “bosses” and high-ranking politicians to take judgments that are contrary to their interest or for this judge and the politician to exert pressure for adoption of legal reforms that are contrary to the interests of organized crime and corruptive businesses.

The same is valid in the case of public prosecutor. How likely it would be for him/her, under such constellation, to pressure for opening cases on major corruption scandals. To great extent, liaisons between judiciary, police, mafia and politics are of pure financial nature. Most often they are manifested as bribe and corruption: justice is served in the measure that benefits the criminal financial muscle and human greed.

In political relations, power is always at stake. Organized crime uses its power to inject black money in election campaigns and, accordingly, in votes for political parties at the elections, which are source of life for any politics. In return, it expects and receives services by those it helped to be elected. They are given everything: from tax benefits to tax evasion, and even privileges in state-organized tenders.

It is difficult and painstaking for the society to understand relations between the authorities and criminal groups, because the latter, in the stage of transformation, aspire to enter politics and to compete at elections.

The most dangerous form of organized crime and corruption is the critical phase when both groups join forces at elections and have their power confirmed, while abusing the system not to lobby for changes that would improve matters, but to create ways, by adopting and enforcing laws, that allow them to smoothly expand their power and to avoid being held responsible.

## CHAPTER 1

### TO BUCHAREST WITH ELECTORAL BUTCHERY

Absence of transparent political party financing became key challenge for the small country on the Balkan. This was noted in the first report of the European Commission published after the country was granted candidate status in 2005, at the time when the government was led by the Social Democratic Alliance (SDSM).

The fragile, post-conflict, and traumatized Macedonia found it difficult to address the challenge on demonstrating preparedness to engage in rule-of-law reforms. There was growing dissatisfaction with clientelism of the two strongest political entities – the national right represented by VMRO-DPMNE and the social-democrats (SDSM) whom the public still identified as extension of the communist rule from the time of former Yugoslavia.

Then-incumbent government led by SDSM was accused of having created the Macedonian oligarchy and nurturing relations with criminal organizations, and therefore, in 2006, voters opted for VMRO-DPMNE's new management led by Nikola Gruevski. In that, Gruevski used tangible weaknesses in delivery of reforms and stable economy to win over the constituency with promises that the young technocrats from reconstructed DPMNE would address the actual problems.

Two years after coming into power in 2006, he did not miss any chance to present himself in the public as person of the people who had opposed oligarchs and power-players and that he, and his people, work tirelessly on improving matters in the society.

That was the case until 2008, when blood-shedding and non-democratic early parliamentary elections were held and heralded the governance by new and dangerously clientelistic party elites that would violate even the most fundamental principles from the Macedonian constitution, including the most sacred, i.e. the right to vote at democratic and free elections. All future elections in Macedonia organized by the administration under Nikola Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE were marked by irregularities, violence, bribe and pressure on voters, spreading fear and nationalism, and inciting ethnic conflicts.

Then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his administration organized the first elections during their tenure, i.e. the early parliamentary elections held on June 1, 2008. Events at these elections, and political developments in that year, undoubtedly announced the bleak decade for democracy in the state, which started to abandon its freshly acquired optimism after the 2006 elections.

---

Since 2008, all elections implemented by Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE are characterized by falsification, violence, bribed voters, sowing fear, spreading nationalism and inciting ethnic conflicts.

---

The early parliamentary elections, won by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, were preceded by the Summit in Bucharest where the name talks with Greece ended in failure. Macedonia was not invited to join NATO and Nikola Gruevski formally started to distance the country from Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

In its progress report, the European Commission concluded: "key international standards were not met in the conduct of the elections".

These elections, in addition to pressures and threats on voters and stuffing of ballot boxes, were also accompanied by violence throughout the election campaign and on the Election Day. One person was killed in shootout, fires were shot at several polling stations, including in the capital, and there were evidence of police involvement in intimidation of voters and attacks on election

headquarters during the campaign. All these violations are recorded in OSCE/ODIHR final monitoring report for the elections.

The media reported on new revelations which additionally complicated government efforts to defend integrity of the election process. Daily newspaper *Nova Makedonija* published a series of articles which, for the first time, included serious indications about falsification of election campaign financial reports and abuse of state resources for that purpose. The topic of black money in politics is not novelty in Macedonia, but it was the first time for dirty money to originate from the budget.

"The lists of party donations show that many names of donors to the governing party's campaign overlap with those of farmers who had benefited from state-awarded subsidies", read the article in *Nova Makedonija*.

A number of party officials from this list later claimed they had never donated funds to the campaign, for example, former high-ranking party official Samoil Malchevski, who spoke to weekly *Fokus* about the party lists of alleged financiers. Asked how, as young man of modest background, he and his mother and sister came up with 10.000 euros in 2006 and donated them to his political party's campaign, he negated and publicly asked the party to respond who had actually donated said funds and had used his name to hide the real identity.

In addition to violence, threats and pressures at the elections, electoral corruption became new burning topic in the media, and was followed by full-scale "purge" of critical voices, instituted by Gruevski's government.

In 2008, the European Commission requested election violence to be resolved, but already in 2011 it had to face the reality that electoral corruption remains the basic mechanism for all the election cycles organized by Nikola Gruevski's government, and instrument for serious illegal and unconstitutional interference in the election process.

## **CORRUPTION IN THE ELECTION PROCESS**

340

By 2010 VMRO-DPMNE had already amassed absolute power. It was no secret that they controlled the judiciary. At the regular presidential and local elections in 2009, the state chose its president from the ranks of this party and granted it control in almost all local governments. From 84 municipalities, SDSM won only 6 mayor offices. VMRO-DPMNE won almost two times more seats in municipal councils (460 versus 282).

Together with their coalition partner from the Albanian block, DUI, they held more than two thirds of all seats in municipal councils. Although these elections went by without physical violence, OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission noted serious violations of the election process by the governing party. It was the type of electoral sins that announced what would happen from 2010 until the downfall of Gruevski: aggressive party clientelism and ruthless political revanchism against critical thought in the country.

Macedonia still had political pluralism, but the right to vote was burdened with suspicion of pressures, threats and bribes.

“The public sector employees appeared to be particularly vulnerable to threats that their jobs would be in danger if they did not support the governing party; such claims were linked to politicization of the public service. Other frequent allegations included threats that social services or pensions would be withheld from those not supporting the governing party and that businesses would be subject to tax inspections if their owners did not support the party. These ongoing allegations contributed to continued lack of trust among many citizens that they could cast their votes freely and without fear of retribution”, was noted by OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission in their final report for the local and presidential elections.

State resources were mobilized for political party needs in all aspects of the election process. Electoral corruption became the new political norm at VMRO-DPMNE - noted analysts for the elections organized by the administration under this political party.

“We were faced with massive clientelism that kept parties in power under conditions of unequal rules for political competition. VMRO-DPMNE, but also DUI, disposed with public resources and allocated them to obedient citizens – employment, medical treatment, social allowance. At the elections, the party machines use these ‘leverages’ to secure votes. Parties ‘buy’ votes or voter turnout to secure the desired outcome on the elections. Those benefiting from the political party return the favour with 15 secured votes, for example. All that is well documented in the bombs”, says analyst Misha Popovikj from the Institute of Democracy “Societas Civilis”.

341

The party evidently spent lots of money of suspicious origins in their campaign. They secured central, longest and most expensive advertising space in all influential media, with international reports and the European Commission noting that independent institutions, e.g. State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), are not essentially independent to prevent electoral fraud.

“At almost all past elections, we had witnessed major abuse of state resources (material and human). For example, premises of an important line ministry accommodated the governing party’s election headquarters; official vehicles and buses of public transportation enterprises were abused for party purposes; there was notable increase in partisan employments whose tasks during elections were focused on electoral activities; budget funds were used to buy votes with payment of various subsidies

and one-time monetary assistance; and similar electoral irregularities”, says Biljana Ivanovska, President of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption.

Ivanovska indicates that SCPC's new composition, appointed in February 2019, has inherited more than 200 cases on electoral corruption which the previous commission has not even opened.

“Having in mind that former commissioners were connected to government structures in power at the time, it could be expected that there would be evasion of responsibility to initiate procedures in major corruption scandals that are well-known in the public”, says Ivanovska.

As it could be expected, VMRO-DPMNE negated allegations of having waged threats or giving bribe, but in 2011 the case named “Lists of Secured Voters” and disclosed by A1 television had confirmed all previous suspicions and provided new and insightful look in the governing party's non-democratic, but well-organized system to secure victory at elections which, in their opinion, did not need to be fair or democratic, let alone free.

The next parliamentary elections were organized in 2012. This time around, the serious political crisis, enhanced by the police raid at the biggest media outlet in the country, A1 television, and several influential newspapers run by the same owner, animated the opposition that was already criticized of being “asleep and preoccupied with internal problems”.

In the late hours on December 25, 2010, tax inspectors, financial police and strong police security raided the pro-opposition and critical-minded media. Sixteen individuals were taken into police custody, including owner Velija Ramkovski. Even before this raid, for long period of time the government representatives, including Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, did not hide their animosity towards pro-European and especially towards critically-minded media.

In 2010, and the next 2011, high number of media outlets was closed and equally high number of them was subdued under full control by persons and organizations closely connected to the governing party. Media pluralism and the right to freedom of speech were under attack. In his public addresses Nikola Gruevski often called for distrust in critically-oriented media. He and number of high government officials started labelling critical voices as “traitors”, “hirelings” and “sorosoids”, in reference to the Foundation

Open Society Institute which advocates for liberal values. Soon after, the authorities promoted this civil society organization into archetype enemy, while ideological divisions tailored by Gruevski and his followers created civic and ideological divisions of worrying proportions.

---

In 2010 and 2011, high number of media outlets was closed and even higher number of them was subdued under full control by persons and organization close to governing party VMRO-DPMNE

---

In 2010, the opposition led by SDSM left the parliament and demanded early parliamentary elections, fearing that Gruevski is determined to close and to suppress all critical voices in the media. Many among the observing and rightminded voices in the academic and political arena realized that the state is not moving in democratic and European direction, having in mind that the government had dared to close the first independent television and the most power media outlet in the state.

In spite of civil pressure on authorities, A1 television was brought to bankruptcy and it stopped broadcasting programme on July 15, 2011.

Pressured by the possibility of losing absolute majority in parliament, but also the elections, due to its unpopular action with the investigations against A1 television that were marked by selectiveness, Gruevski's government engaged in electoral massacre, thus prompting domestic and foreign media to use the phrase "authoritarian government" for the first time.

343

## LISTS OF SECURED VOTERS

On May 9, 2011, i.e. around 20 days before the early parliamentary elections scheduled for June 5, central news on A1 television revealed an investigation that would become known as "Lists of Secured Voters" and would shake the political scene. The chief state prosecutor Ljupcho Shvrgovski, known for his inertia and biased action, had to open investigation into this matter as he was faced with serious questions from the international community. This investigation was closed soon afterward, but was reopened in October 2016, after the launch of the first major investigation by the Special Prosecution Office (SPO) into electoral frauds codenamed "Titanic".

The investigative story "Lists of Secured Voters" provided indisputable evidence that the ruling party violates the right to vote with bribery, pressure and threats, including abuse of the entire state machinery for their purposes.

An anonymous source had secured A1 television with hundred lists of secured voters that have been compiled under directive from VMRO-DPMNE by employees at state and public institutions. They were expected to bring lists of persons that would certainly vote for their party on the elections. These lists included names and surnames, telephones, addresses, and electoral district of individuals, as well as their signatures. In that, people holding managerial posts in the public administration were obliged to secure 30 voters, while other employees had to secure 15 voters from their close relatives and friends.

In the attempt to verify credibility of these lists, journalists Sashka Cvetkovska and Natasha Stojanovska called the phone numbers and introduced themselves as employees at VMRO-DPMNE's communications centre tasked to verify data from the lists. In that, A1 television secured tens of documented testimonies from administration employees, but also their relatives, neighbours and friends that were indicated as secured voters.

Testimonies revealed that employees must secure these voters if they want to keep their public service jobs. Other citizens witnessed they would vote under promises of employment for their children and grandchildren, and there were cases in which voters had been blackmailed with free in vitro fertilization granted by the state.

Additional journalist research and reports from the Election Day revealed that polling stations are packed with party members making sure that secured voters, who had been given precise time in the day to vote, have appeared and have photographed their ballots.

"Testimonies we heard might seem frightening to many, but equally frightening is the thought that somebody's job, paid by citizens, depends on party tasks these people were pressured to deliver. Unfortunately, thousands of citizens that work for the state had lived through this psychological terror. The question is whether this undermines legality of the overall electoral process", reads the final quotation in this award-winning journalist report by A1 television. Exactly this formulation from the journalist report hinted formalization of the autocracy in Macedonia, i.e. government that wins elections with illegal means and citizens that are terrified by authorities and are consequently obedient.

"In spite of being evidently wrong and illegal, this practice is indicative of the phenomenon which, in theory, Suzan Stokes calls 'perverse accountability'. In democratic systems, elections provide the mechanism for political parties to be held accountable before citizens for what they have or have not delivered. In clientelistic systems, it is the voters that give account before the political party, thus amounting to reversed, i.e. perverse accountability". This is how Misha Popovikj from the Institute for Democracy describes the effects of electoral corruption.

The investigation case opened by the Public Prosecution Office was expressly closed by the end of that year. Previously, chief state prosecutor Ljupcho Shvrgovski called several people for interviews. Although in their report for the 2011 elections, OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission indicated that allegations made by journalists from A1 television amount to credible evidence for intimidation and pressures on civil servants, the case was closed with the justification that there is insufficient evidence. That situation was perpetuated until 2016, when the Special Prosecution Office called journalists from former A1 television to make a deposition because the lists of secured voters had become part of their investigation for electoral fraud called "Titanic".

"Although, in our opinion, it is a matter of the second most important case, after the interception scandal that implied attack on the entire constitutional and legal order, and especially on the most important human rights, criminal offences against elections and voting and the legitimacy acquired at such elections are matters which, according to this prosecution and in criminal and legal terms, represent the start of criminalization of the entire institutional system", said prosecutor Fatime Fetaj at the press-conference organized for the case "Titanic" in which dozen former state and current party officials later found themselves on defence benches in the courtroom.

SPO chief Katica Janeva announced they have evidence and witnesses confirming that such lists had been compiled, how they were developed, to whom they were presented, and how they were used on the Election Day. SPO's investigation went deeper and revealed that even the police had been deployed to polling stations and tasked to prevent opposition voters to exercise their right to vote. This court process, filed by SPO, concerns the electoral processes in 2011, 2013 and 2014.

"Having in mind the previously obtained lists of secured votes that were developed unlawfully, people were prevented to exercise their right to vote by making assessments which individuals, employed in public administration and state bodies, would not vote for VMRO-DPMNE, and in order to pressure them not to vote their superiors gave them such orders via telephone, all for the purpose of realizing the plan to influence the election results and to secure the victory of VMRO-DPMNE's nominated candidate. A large number of officers employed at the Ministry of Interior were made available for that purpose, while the election campaign used state resources, such as official vehicles, fuel, official phones, offices, and civil servants were relieved of work duties in order to engage in party activities. Most specific example of such influence on the election process by engagement of the entire state system is the enlistment of new voters in electoral districts where there is need for additional votes, in order to secure VMRO-DPMNE's victory in 2013 and 2014", says SPO chief Katica Janeva.

In 2011, the news story "Lists of Secured Voters" by A1 television was considered as political earthquake; an earthquake of such magnitude that no political party could recover from. . But Gruevski and the small clique of loyal and powerful people around him undoubtedly demonstrated their decisiveness to defend their position in government, even with use of force.

"During VMRO-DPMNE's tenure in government, everybody was on some list or another; everybody was blackmailed and threatened; everybody's name was on the lists: those who voted and those who did not vote; who voted for which party; and what the party repaid them in return for their vote. Every single matter implied 'compilation of lists' and they were strictly followed", says Natasha Stojanovska, co-author of this investigative story.

On June 5, VMRO-DPMNE celebrated its election victory, but this celebration was marred by two politically traumatic incidents, i.e. murder of young Martin Neshkoski by Nikola Gruevski's security guard at the party celebration on the city square and the authorities' attempt to cover this event, while the second event concerns brutal apprehension of Ljube Boshkoski, loud critic and leader of the party United for Macedonia. That year the state found itself on the United States' list of non-democratic regimes with political prisoners, like Ljube Boshkoski, Velija Ramkovski. In the years that followed, this list would be expanded to add Vane Cvetanov, Tomislav Kezharovski, and many others.

## IMPORTING VOTERS

The next regular local elections were scheduled for March 24, 2013, with the second round organized on April 7. This was the fourth election cycle organized by VMRO-DPMNE's administration and at these elections, in addition to brutal intentions to win local government with legal and illegal means, this governing party showed the inhumane side of its rule by forceful bringing citizens from the impoverished village Pustec, located on the other side of the Albanian border and populated with Macedonian minority citizens. They were issued identification cards with residential addresses in Skopje, but also in municipalities (Centar, Skopje, Kichevo, Ohrid, Resen) where VMRO-DPMNE feared their victory is uncertain.

Many journalists covering events around citizens from Pustec described these scenes as "sad and traumatic images that speak of the government's vulture-like passions".

OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission again noted pressures from authorities on voters from the administration and their families, farmers benefiting from state subsidies, threats on businesses with inspections, and numerous abuses of state resources for campaign purposes. Critical media, mainly in the online space, reported on mass mobilization of the police during the campaign and on the Election Day, which was used to pressure or prevent voters to exercise their right to vote.

347

Imported voters from the neighbouring state, who were issued citizenships and personal documents beyond all procedures, had finally awoken the international community which had turned its blind eye to Gruevski's behaviour in the name of peace and stability in the country, primarily in the sphere of ethnic relations.

The post-2010 years brought series of civil and youth protests, unrests and brutal confrontations on the street, often of ethnic character, and the feeling of constant fear and uncertainty among citizens.

OSCE/ODIHR noted that these activities "raise concerns about the possibility for voters to cast their votes without fear of retribution".

Major television outlets and, in general, influential media demonstrated cheering attitude to VMRO-DPMNE. Most of them, for the first time in the history of the state, appeared as donors to political parties. The government already held the highest market share of media marketing with its hyper-production of government advertisements. Free-of-

charge election airtime was already viewed as paid advertisements with the award of government contracts to private media for public campaigns which appeared to have been designed solely for this purpose.

"Numerous media outlets in the country are divided along ethnic and political lines. Since the last elections, the closure of two broadcasters and several printed media significantly reduced the number of media outlets that are critical towards the government. Although the media monitored by OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission provided extensive campaign coverage in the news, the public service broadcaster and most private broadcasters displayed significant bias in favour of the governing parties. Broadcast media regularly covered government activities but failed to distinguish between state activities and party campaigning", was noted in OSCE/ODIHR report for both election cycles.

Leaked audio recordings from intercepted conversations, presented in 2018 as evidence in the court process "Titanic", revealed that interior minister Gordana Jankuloska, together with government's secretary general Kiril Bozhinovski and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, have spent the entire 2012 in preparations for inserting people from Pustec in the voters register, unbeknownst to them.

SPO chief Katica Janeva believed that voters from Pustec are the most specific example of influence on the election process by using the entire state apparatus and by enlisting new voters in election districts where there is need for additional voters to secure VMRO-DPMNE's victory in 2013 and 2014.

"Nikola Gruevski requested that from Gordana Jankuloska as the minister whose competences include the services on general records, i.e. she was asked to organize persons from Kosovo and Albania who would be given residence and identification cards and would be inserted in the voters register. Employees at Mol holding managerial offices personally produced IDs and logged in the information system at Mol to insert them on adequate addresses", says Janeva.

These elections ended with VMRO-DPMNE's victory. Nervousness created from disclosure of the fraud with voters from Pustec did not prevent them to use the same methods for the presidential elections in 2014. Journalist reports revealed that addresses on which these voters are registered were either owned by state institutions or the state enterprise for management of residential and commercial property.

Faced with growing dissatisfaction from autocratic methods of governance and increased number of media reports in the small, but vivid and critically-oriented world of online media and the numerous protests which the government attempted to subdue with all methods, in 2016, Gruevski decided to hold new early parliamentary elections. This time, the elections were not organized on his request and initiative.

### **INFORMATION WAR: LIFE OR DEATH ELECTIONS**

In February 2015, the Republic of Macedonia entered a political crisis when then-current leader of opposition SDSM Zoran Zaev released audio recordings according to which Gruevski had allegedly issued orders to intercept communications of more than 20,000 citizens. They include journalists, diplomats, civic activists, opposition members, but also MPs, directors and ministers, and the entire government cabinet, but not Gruevski himself.

Under strong pressure from daily protests on the streets organized for months, the European Union and the United States mediated in brokering agreement (known as Przhino or June Agreement), according to which Gruevski resigned and caretaker government was formed, in which SDSM would have the interior minister, labour minister and several deputy ministers. The new elections were scheduled for December 2016. Moreover, the agreement anticipated appointment of new, independent special prosecutor. From its establishment in September 2015, the Special Prosecution Office started investigating indications of criminal activity by Gruevski and other key people at VMRO-DPMNE that arise from audio recordings of wiretapped conversations.

The December elections ended with hung results and initial inability of parties to secure parliamentary majority and to form government. The country was left without appointed government for entire five months until Zaev finally managed to form coalition government with two Albanian parties on May 31, 2017. The period leading to government formation was tense, with daily protests and storming the parliament on April 27 by nationalist protesters who had attacked and battered Zaev and other MPs.

First let's see what happened before the 2016 elections.

"If they lose power, all of them risk ending up in prison. That is why, this time around, their black campaign is focused on reducing each and every accusation of criminal wrongdoings to patriotism, and foreign interference", says Florian Bieber, professor at the Centre for Southeast European Studies in Graz.

Although it was already evident that Gruevski is not a fan of EU integrations, in the period before and after the 2016 elections, the government launched open confrontation with NATO and the EU. The private crusade launched by the autocratic government mobilized all state mechanisms – investigation bodies, but also security services, all of which initiated series of financial investigations targeting the media and terrorism investigations targeting civil society organizations which the government perceived as its enemy.

In 2016, the country faced tense elections and even tenser post-election period when, in attempt to save a small group from criminal prosecution, Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE turned to Moscow, but also to ultraconservative politicians from the United States. Actually, he managed to return the major global powers on the Balkan where the last round of great wars happened in the 90s and had threatened the peace and stability of the entire region. Macedonia feared the prospects of civil war.

Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and *NovaTV*, in cooperation with the newspaper *Guardian*, published a series of investigative stories titled "Spooks and Spins: Information War in the Balkans", which revealed involvement of Russian and Serbian secret services in efforts to destabilize Macedonia, with wholehearted support from authorities in the country.

During the crisis in 2016 and 2017, VMRO-DPMNE and their supporters were focused on the campaign against Soros, viewing powerful philanthropist George Soros as the "boss" of their political left-wing opponents. In December, Gruevski called for "desorosozation" of the country, while protesters marched against U.S. Ambassador Jess Bailey, accusing him of collusion with non-governmental organizations linked to Soros. Soon after, VMRO-DPMNE supporters formed the "global initiative" called "Stop Operation Soros", whose website also featured an English version. All this was accompanied with continuous press-releases and speeches delivered by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even the Government of Russia.

## SECRET FOUNDATIONS AND HIDDEN LOBBYISTS ON MISSION TO RESCUE THE FAMILY

At the same time, the global political scene was shaken by a series of events. In the United Kingdom, populists had managed to convince citizens to vote “leave” on the referendum organized for EU membership (Brexit), while the United States elected a new controversial president, supported by ultraconservatives and probably by the government in Russia. Macedonia gained global infamy after revelations that fake news targeting and bombarding voters in the United States with denigrating contents about democratic candidate Hillary Clinton had been created in the small town of Veles, Macedonia.

“Until late last year, a mention of Macedonia in the halls of power in Washington D.C. would most likely elicit only shrugs. But things have changed. In recent months, America’s right has become fervently interested in what was termed ‘battle royal’ within this tiny Balkan country. On one side is Macedonia’s conservative former ruling party, portrayed by its newfound U.S. supporters as staunch defender of free markets and traditional morality. On the other, as they claim, are nefarious left-wing opponents backed by billionaire George Soros”, wrote authors of the introduction piece in the investigative report titled “How VMRO-DPMNE Pulled the United States into an Anti-Soros Crusade”.

351

This research revealed that, through the newly-formed Libertas Foundation seated in Brooklyn, New York, with unknown founders hidden on offshore locations, VMRO-DPMNE had hired a powerful lobbying firm that would engage in unlawful lobbying with the American government and even reach Trump’s cabinet and his closest advisors. All that, as the journalists revealed, was paid with funds from Macedonia’s budget.

In July 2016, the Macedonian government hired the pro-republican lobbying firm *Mercury Public Affairs* for work that may have been for party interests of VMRO-DPMNE. It appears that the lobby group wanted to obscure its engagement on behalf of the party and paid by the Macedonian government by using so-called front organization, which amounts to likely violation of U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

All this has pushed Macedonia onto Washington's agenda and prompted U.S. conservatives to join the anti-Soros line of attack favoured by Russia and Europe's authoritarian nationalists. In turn, this friendly attention by conservative media in America has been picked up Macedonian media loyal to VMRO-DPMNE, but also by Russian state media.

Tensions and fear peddled with this tarnishing campaign led to the parliament's storming on April 27, in which MPs and opposition leader Zaev were battered.

Journalists found that only in the period from 2015 to 2017, the party had spent more than 1 million dollars on lobbying in the United States and Germany. Portion of these funds were disbursed under contracts signed by the state, with services delivered for the party.

This does not surprise having in mind that, at the time, the party leadership was under investigation and SPO filed indictment against opaque financing of party activities.

## **FILTHY ACCOUNTS : POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING**

352

In Macedonia, financing of political parties has always been, to put it mildly, enigmatic and problematic.

Public Revenue Office (PRO), which already operates under limited competences, does not review donations to political parties. State Audit Office motioned request for misdemeanour procedures against several political parties, but they were not processed by the judiciary.

SPO also formed the case "Talir" related to VMRO-DPMNE's property, which is the first case of this type. Two indictments were filed in this case. The first covered six natural persons and the political party, while the second indictment concerns construction of the party headquarters and covered former Prime Minister and party leader Nikola Gruevski, who has fled the country, and Kiril Bozhinovski, former secretary general of the government and of the party.

Property in possession of this party is comprised of 90 tenure deeds for apartments, houses, land and fields, with total area of 30,000 square meters.

---

State-owned companies and natural persons that were awarded tenders repaid the party bringing money in cash, known in the public as “cash in suitcases” or “black money”.

---

State-owned companies and natural persons that were awarded tenders repaid the party by bringing money in cash, known in the public as “cash in suitcases” or “black money”. First, they are awarded tenders, but in order to arrive to that stage, companies had to pay commissions to the party.

This is when they encountered the problem of “legalizing” (laundering) such money, i.e. depositing it as “clean funds” on the party’s bank account. Of course, methods for that are easy to be designed, especially when they control all institutions and enjoy support from vast membership that found it difficult to say “no” to party leadership. Hence, money was deposited on the party’s bank account by means of payment slips, known as P30 forms, which had been previously completed with relevant amounts and indication that money is paid as donation or membership fee.

Party members were only required to sign payment slips, unaware of money’s origins. Carrying thousands of payment slips from different individuals and cash money, designated party members went to the bank and deposited funds as donations or membership fees. Thereafter the money is clean and is used to buy property, but also to settle operational needs of the governing party.

The indictment, written on fifteen pages, provides detailed description of actions taken by defendants in this case, including all payments from 2009 to 2015. According to the indictment, Gruevski had secured money with assistance from former transport minister Mile Janakieski and Kiril Bozhinovski who exerted pressure on companies that had been awarded state tenders.

The Law on Political Party Financing is decisive and this money should be returned in the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia or reimbursed to respective companies. Instead, money was deposited on the bank account, while high-ranking party officials who were authorized signatories for the party’s account put the money into circulation by signing payment orders for party operation and by purchasing property on behalf of VMRO-DPMNE.

In this manner, a total of 283,432,656.00 MKD, i.e. 4,608,661 euros, had settled on VMRO-DPMNE’s bank account from 2009 to 2015.

"One of the most sensitive issues in operation of political parties is securing finances for their activities. This challenge becomes prominent when a particular party is in government and its leadership encounters various temptations for illegal financing. In the case 'Talir', the investigation showed that management structures at the governing party had secured funds to finance the party by abuse of power, and funds came from anonymous sources and from legal entities contracted to perform services on behalf of the state by means of public procurements, which is prohibited by law. Hence, money was secured in cash by exerting pressure on private businesses and was later deposited to the political party's account through fictitious donations. These funds were later used for promotion and support of party activities and for buying property. The biggest challenge in this investigation was to secure credible and firm evidence on criminal offences committed and to comprehend the mere volume of the evidence material. Although there is no final outcome for this case, i.e. the court process is underway, it has detected several systemic weaknesses and the space for abuse, which indicates to the need for intervention in relevant legislation on political party financing", says chief special prosecutor Katica Janeva.

3 5 4

The issue of political party financing was also raised by special prosecutor Lenche Ristoska, who leads the case "Talir". In interview for BIRN, in December 2017, she complained about lack of institutional cooperation.

"I'm disappointed that, in spite of the change of government, a debate is not initiated about the method of political party financing and how the state will fight corruption in the long run if relevant reforms on party financing, transparency and entities involved in this process are not implemented", she said.

The case "Talir" does not end here. The second indictment filed by SPO includes suspicions and evidence about the manner in which governing structures disposed with all possible ways to acquire property on valuable locations in state ownership at knockdown prices, which was actually enabled by absence of protection and control mechanisms.

## THE WHITE PALACE

The second indictment in the court process “Talir” concerns construction of VMRO-DPMNE’s headquarters, better known as the “white palace”, which was erected in Skopje’s central areas, symbolizing the magnitude and power of the political party that was equated with the state for long period of time.

In 2012, and the next several years, the construction company Beton earned its greatest revenue from state-awarded tenders. In 2012, VMRO-DPMNE selected this company as its co-investor in building the party seat. According to the contract signed, the structure should include two buildings: party headquarters according to the “turn-key principle”, and hotel to be constructed by Beton on the same plot. Within a period of one year, the detailed urban plan was changed three times for implementation of this plan and agreement to be pursued without having to violate the laws.

In 2009, VMRO-DPMNE brought this plot from the Ministry of Transport and Communications at prices much lower than its market value, i.e. it paid 130,000 euros for a construction plot in Skopje downtown that would later be the site of a truly white-kitsch palace with total area of 4,000 square meters. Beton did not only build this construction, but also paid the party 2 million euros on the grounds of erroneously calculated excessive square meters for the company. Hence, they built the party headquarters and paid 2 million euros, i.e. 3,400 euros per square meter.

355

What was the interest of Beton to enter such business venture remains unknown. However, the Law on Political Party Financing prohibits companies that work for the state to enter business deals with the political party in government.

Defendants in this case include Nikola Gruevski and Kiril Bozhinovski and the court process is underway. The party’s property was frozen, but the “white palace” stands as testament of times when party interests were equated to those of the state, and when the lines between the state and party were blurred, which ended in individuals and influential companies bending to the will of party interests.



ВМРО-ДПМНЕ



VMRO-  
DPMNE's  
White  
Palace

## UNITED WE STAND IN CRIME

The two biggest political parties in Macedonia, SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, were known as fierce rivals. From Macedonia's independence to present day there are only few cases in which these two parties shook hands in agreement. One of them concerns the independence referendum in 1991 and the other concerns operation of political parties. In the last decade they quietly cooperated on many legal changes to the detriment of transparency and accountability. For example, travel costs reimbursed to MPs from the budget, more money for political parties from the budget for their regular and electoral activities, the right to possess fields and construction plots (changes from 2018), the right to more advertising space in broadcast media for smaller parties and other changes that are beneficial only for political parties. All these changes can hardly be justified with the public interest.

One such situation was observed in the summer of 2018. In late July, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev sat down with the leader of opposition VMRO-DPMNE at the Club of Parliamentarians to discuss details about caretaker government before any election cycles pursuant to the "Przhino Model", and this meeting accidentally resulted in agreement on the new Law on Political Party Financing. Hence, instead of the current 0.06 percent catchment from budget funds, consensus was reached to increase party financing to 0.15 percent. At this important meeting it was also agreed that political parties should be allowed to own land. This possibility was not allowed by law, but was practiced in reality.

## CHAPTER 2

### MONEY AND FRIENDS

In addition to electoral corruption as instrument for coming into power, high state officials are faced with another challenge, i.e. how to make absolute use of such power by shaping laws like they are dough and by creating a circle of trusted individuals, purchasing property and accumulating funds on their accounts with well-developed schemes and methods that often involve threats, blackmail, pressure and inextricable corruptive links between business and politics.

When a political party comes in power and when it has not fully developed trust in people around, it primarily relies on family relations. Two of his cousins are the shoulders on which Nikola Gruevski relied after VMRO-DPMNE came into power in 2006. He appointed Sasho Mijalkov as Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK) popularly known as the "secret police", while Vlatko Mijalkov was appointed to important office at the Customs Administration. In 2007, Gruevski appointed Zoran Stavreski who was his wedding best-man as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, which further strengthened their personal relation and cooperation.

In the case of "commander" Mijalkov, it had been widely commented that after the elections in 2006 he already popped champagne in celebration of his ministerial office, but several diplomatic advices changed the mind of his cousin Gruevski to place him inside the fortress at UBK. This propelled the myth of the cruel cousin whose voice was not heard for an entire decade and whose name was said in fear, both in the media and restaurants, and even at home gatherings.

At the time when Mijalkov was appointed chief of the secret police, Transparency International was among rare organizations that raised the voice and warned about evident conflict of interests, claiming that nepotism among high-ranking government officials would later enable control over all branches of government with use of state budget funds and the secret police. In 2007, interviewed by weekly *Fokus*, Slagjana Taseva from Transparency International was right in saying that:

“These links are very strong and in the course of time they generate enormous financial power, personal power, but also party power. That gives them complete power to control the mechanisms of democracy”.

---

The trio comprised of Gruevski, Stavreski and Mijalkov was named “the family”, a small clique of people who slowly assumed control over the entire political, social and economic life.

---

Soon after, the trio comprised of Gruevski, Stavreski and Mijalkov was named “the family”, a small clique of people who slowly, but certainly, started to control the entire political, social and economic life in the country. This practice had proved useful also in relations between politics and businesses, with the addition of businessman Jordan (Orce) Kamchev joining the game of power. That forged a lasting liaison of friendship and businesses, and later served as solid basis for building partnership relations to be benefit of all parties involved.

Kamchev had already built his reputation as general manager of Orka Holding, a company which his father Ilija Kamchev founded in the early 90s. Immediately before VMRO-DPMNE came into power,

i.e. between 2004 and 2006, several investigations were opened about this company's operation and Kamchev was suspected of tax evasion, illegal employments and tax frauds. He fled to Bulgaria, and after his return, he reported to the authorities, spent 12 hours in police custody and was released on bail in the amount of 70,000 euros.

In August 2006, Nikola Gruevski formed the new government and it seemed that Kamchev's problems disappeared at once, leaving the public to wonder about the type of investigations led against him and his businesses until the launch of SPO's investigation called “Empire”, in late 2018.

Kamchev was often seen in the company of Mijalkov, MPs and ministers, and his companies were growing and expanding at warp speed.

In 2012, Orka Holding bought companies that printed newspapers *Dnevnik*, *Vest*, *Utrinski vesnik* and *Tea Modena*, and the printing house Graficki centar. Later, ownership structure at these media included former diplomat Srgjan Kerim and businessman Veselin Jevrosimovikj from Serbia, who purchased shares in the printing house. That is how three power-players became owners of *Dnevnik*, *Vest*, *Utrinski vesnik*, portal





*Telegraf, Tea Moderna* and *Makedonski sport*. After their ownership was changed, these respectable and oldest media in Macedonia were turned into an instrument for government propaganda.

Through Orka Holding, Kamchev became owner of hotels, construction companies, dairy factories, mills, agriculture holdings, textile factories, restaurants and hospitals. Some of these companies were awarded tenders in the value of tens of million euros. In many of them, he shared ownership with Eksiko, a mysterious offshore company from Lugano, Switzerland, which was indirectly linked to his friend Mijalkov. Business deals of these companies were correlated to abuse of power, trade in influence, and corruption.

On the other hand, Mijalkov had started his public service carrier back in 1998, following the steps of his powerful father Jordan Mijalkov, who was Macedonia's first interior minister after the independence. He died in traffic accident in 1991, when travelling to Belgrade.

Mijalkov Jr. also followed the business steps of his father Jordan Mijalkov, who in the 80s represented then state-owned company Makoteks in Prague. The family Mijalkov spent a lot of time in the capital of the Czech Republic on the account of father Jordan's work posting. The first government job held by Mijalkov Jr. was assistant to defence minister on security and intelligence matters, and this was his first post-graduation job. As he advanced in his carrier, his businesses in Prague were expanding.

In 2003, Mijalkov took a break from public service and returned in 2006 as the Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK).

In the meantime, under his leadership, the secret police was heavily criticized for unlawful surveillance and failure to comply with standards of the European Union.

All the way to 2012, only a few were aware that this carrier public servant is very wealthy.

At that time, independent portal *NovaTV*, together with its partners from the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) in the Czech Republic published the award-winning investigative story from 2014 on Sasho Mijalkov's business in the Czech Republic and his connections with mafia clans across Southeast Europe.

This investigation story, inter alia, for the first time revealed that Mijalkov, failing to comply with law-stipulated obligation on declaring increase of assets and the fact that he is company manager in Prague, had acquired new companies, apartments and thousands of square meters in land on attractive locations in Prague.

362

This case ended up before the Anticorruption Commission which in non-transparent procedure and at closed session defended this public official, claiming he had declared increase of property and assets, but they have forgotten to publish relevant changes. Many did not believe this story from obvious reasons.

Namely, his name was brought in relation to takeovers of many local businesses with offshore companies whose ownership cannot be proven, and by proxy managers and owners.

The second reason is straightforward: how did he acquired property worth several million dollars within one year and whether he used his position as chief of the secret police for shady and secretive deals that would not serve only his personal enrichment, but the quietude of an entire organized crime network.

"Even his nickname used in conversations with journalist Dragan Pavlovikj-Latas, the famous moniker 'commander', is connected to sentiments from the time of communism when the secret police assumed the role of judge, jury and executor, and literally decided about human destinies", wrote research journalist Vlado Apostolov, describing the power

of Mijalkov, which citizens were able to learn about from released audio recordings when the “commander’s voice” was first heard in the public.

“If the scheme, by 2008, operated under the radar of institutions, later, after VMRO-DPMNE and Gruevski fortified their power, it started to grow and expand with support or at least with approval of the state, thanks to close friendship between Sasho Mijalkov, then-current chief of secret police and first cousin of Gruevski, and Jordan Kamchev”, says Apostolov.

Gruevski and his cousin did not stoop to abuse resources of the secret police in pursuit of party and personal goals. Nine years after Mijalkov was appointed chief of the secret police, the opposition revealed that, upon orders from Gruevski and Mijalkov, politicians and journalists were wiretapped, stock markets were rigged, and businessmen were blackmailed. The scope of wrongdoings is enormous, with some of the biggest affairs opened during their period in government when well-trained teams of journalists offered indisputable evidence about their involvement in corruption, trade in influence and cross-border organized crime, including suspicions of trading with weapons and drugs in Europe.

363

The name of Mijalkov was connected to many business deals together with businessman Orce Kamchev. The story is rather complex and only small segment thereof was unveiled when SPO launched its investigation in the case “Empire”, but it could be definitely said that the myth about almighty Mijalkov was shattered on the night of November 20, 2018, when news came that the police had taken him in handcuffs from “his hotel *Marriott*” to the detention prison in Shuto Orizari.

He did not stay long in detention, just as Kamchev, but reasons that have led to his arrest will be subject of interest for long time, i.e. until the labyrinth of “almightiness” is untangled in which the two friends became synonym for the transition period in the state, using all mechanisms at their disposal.

## SESIKO AND BELIZE: SYMBOLS OF AN OFFSHORE ERA

Similarly to Mijalkov and Kamchev, Belize and Eksiko became landmarks of the decade-long governance by VMRO-DPMNE and textbook example for offshore companies, money laundering and powerful associations between politicians in government and businessmen. Power, privileges and money always find ways to bring together those whose primary goal is to accumulate more funds and those who do not chose methods in doing that. And many methods are possible. One of them is to hide company ownership, to open companies in Belize, Cyprus, the Seychelles or the British Virgin Islands, to avoid payment of taxes in home countries and later reinvest clean money in the country, followed by ribbon-cutting ceremonies for these "new" investments.

Although this wise method of operation is not designed by VMRO-DPMNE, before the name Eksiko was first disclosed the Macedonian public was unaware of all possible activities that could be done through companies whose ownership is hidden in Belize, through the United States, and all the way to Lugano, Switzerland. It all began back in 2001 when the company was established and lasted until 2018, when SPO launched its investigation codenamed "Empire". Already in 2019, from most successful offshore company Eksiko became debtor to the Public Revenue Office on the grounds of unsettled tax payments in the amount of more than 50,000 euros and its property was frozen due to the ongoing investigation.

Seven years earlier, in 2012, the Euro-Business Centre listed Eksiko on the 29th rank position among the most successful companies, with gross profits of almost 3 million MKD. A year later, it climbed to the 14th rank position, with profits of more than 540 million MKD or around 9 million euros.

This mysterious company is just one among hundreds of offshore companies, but it serves as textbook example how business power-players, high public officials and numerous enablers join forces and operate together, buy property and companies, resell them, rename them, change their seats and thus create an empire that is difficult to be fully untangled.

---

Belize and Eksiko became landmarks of the governance by VMRO-DPMNE and example for offshore companies, money laundering and associations between politicians and businessmen.

---

“To do that, they relied on several system weaknesses, but mainly the operation method at PRO, National Bank, Central Depository of Securities and Central Register. The National Bank, in spite of its legal obligation, has still not established which persons are actual owners of these offshore companies”, says chief special prosecutor Katica Janeva.

For the first time in 2014, then-opposition SDSM accused Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his cousin Mijalkov of holding shares in Eksiko and of “keeping the entire Macedonian economy hostage”.

Follow-up journalist research unearthed links between this company with capital from Switzerland and Kamchev’s Orka Holding, both of which appear as shareholders in other big companies. Together they appear in ownership structure of EK-KOR, a company which through series of transactions, also involving companies from tax havens, purchased land plot on the Skopje square and built the 8-storey hotel IBIS in city downtown.

Business deals that include Orka Holding and Eksiko do not end here. These two companies own shares in the construction company Beton from Shtip, dairy factory Zdravje – Radovo, Zito Polog, agriculture holding Pelagonija JSC Bitola, and others.

365

Beton from Shtip was awarded seven tenders in the value of almost 55 million euros under the megalomaniac and controversial project “Skopje 2014”, while by 2016, the agriculture holding Pelagonija was awarded 6.5 million euros in state subsidies over a period of four years and immediately after Eksiko and Orka Holding became shareholders.

In Macedonia, Kamchev’s company and the mysterious Eksiko founded the company for hotelier business and tourism called Arhi LPP Skopje which, in 2014, had earned revenue of more than 8 million euros.

In 2015, the public learned about the scandal related to sales of valuable land on Vodno comprised of six plots with total area of 17.000 square meters, owned by Eksiko, KARA and Sirah Engineering. Each of these companies bought two plots, with majority of them owned by Sirah, with total area of more than 11.000 square meters. This company, founded in Belize, was owned by Risto Novachevski, who served as best-man in the first marriage of then-incumbent Prime Minister Gruevski.

Audio recordings presented by SDSM feature conversations between Gruevski and then-current transport minister Mile Janakieski about plans to purchase land on Vodno and to construct support wall that would shield them from views of local residents, as well as discussions about illegal procurement of plots that would be later transformed into construction land. Already in 2018, the investigation launched by SPO in the case "Empire" provided revelations that final owner of valuable land on Vodno is Nenad Josifovikj, a close associate to Kamchev, and that the entire land is owned by Sirah, which was renamed Sistina Life Care.

Mijalkov's possible involvement in Eksiko remained speculation, although his connections through third parties could be sensed. Namely, Eksiko is owned by T&MJ Investments LTD from Lugano and, in the past, this company was managed by two appointees by this company, Emilio Binda and Umberto Caprani. These people also appear as managers of another company based in Panama, Tasiga Corp, which bought Mijalkov's company Myrtlanis s.r.o., registered in Prague, the Czech Republic. At one point, Emilio Binda was non-executive board member in the company currently known under the name KARA JSC, owned by Orka Holding and the family Kamchev.

366

Myrtlanis s.r.o., founded in March 2014, owns a land plot of 15,280 square meters in the expensive Prague district Veleslavin. Later, Mijalkov transferred ownership of Tasiga Corp. At the same time, he was chief of the secret police and was obliged by law to report property in the Anticorruption Commission. He claimed that he had not declared this property because of its insignificant value. Also, he transferred tenure of the valuable land on his name. Goran Gacov, long-term manager at Mijalkov's companies, remained at that position even after transfer of ownership titles.

Eksiko was linked to Mijalkov through Security Group Services (SGS), a private security agency which, according to uncorroborated claims, is owned by him, but no official document featured his name until disclosure of the so-called "bombs", when the public was able to hear Mijalkov's voice arranging employments and tenders for SGS. For some period of time, SGS and Eksiko shared the same address on Street Ivan Milutinovikj in downtown Skopje. This was the only information known about these connections until the case "Empire" was opened in 2018, which raised only part of questions about the path of money and actual owners.

At that time, investigation found that the first mother-company to Eksiko, Delta Investment from Belize, was initially owned by Orce Kamchev's father Ilija. For a period of time, manager of this company was Zharko Lukovski, former general manager at Macedonia Telecom (whose wedding best-man was Mijalkov). After company ownership was moved to Amerika, i.e. when Calvus LLC bought Eksiko, Orce Kamchev became its final owner.

This company from the United States injected 1.6 million euros to Eksiko, with portion of these funds ending on Kamchev's private account, while the remaining funds were used to buy property and land in Gevgelija, intended for casinos.

Later, and to present day, Eksiko's owner is T&MJ Investments from Lugano, Switzerland, for which operational knowledge at the prosecution show it is owned by member of the family Mijalkov.

The entire criminal association, for which Kamchev, Mijalkov and ten other associates are suspected, is intertwined with large number of offshore companies, which makes it difficult to be fully untangled.

Another company, Finzi, has central place in the investigation "Empire". It is the same company which in the so-called "bombs" revealed by SDSM was indicated to have been used for procurement of internet communications interception equipment intended for the Ministry of Interior.

367

Mol, when Mijalkov was UBK's chief, instead of directly purchasing the Israeli interception equipment, pursued this matter through Finzi. During the investigation for this case, Finzi's general manager Kosta Krpach committed suicide in April 2016.

Macedonian Finzi is founded by Finzi LLC from the United States and, according to SPO, the company's final owner is Orce Kamchev.

On several occasions, Finzi LLC paid 650.000 euros to the Macedonian Finzi through Cyprian banks. At that time, i.e. in 2009, Finzi's general manager was Vladislav Stojkovikj, brother to Nebojsha Stojkovikj, who is former assistant minister for information technology at Mol.

This money was then channelled as equity capital in Sistina Cardiology, a company that was later renamed Si-Fi-Kar (Sistina, Finzi, Kara). According to SPO, in 2012, when the money was laundered, the American mother-company was closed and new company was established, followed by appointment of Krpach as general manager, and money

from the Israeli donation for interception equipment settled on this company's bank account.

"They did not buy companies to do business, but to pump out as much company assets as possible", elaborated SPO representatives after having shared details from their investigation.

For the time being, evidence has been secured that 2.3 million euros were laundered through Eksiko and Finzi, and activities are underway to establish how much money entered and exited Macedonia through companies from Israel, Switzerland, America, the Bahamas, and Cyprus. The total sum for which this investigation has secured evidence amounts to 10.3 million euros laundered over eight years. Since 2009, companies were opened and closed, owners were changed, property was purchased, single-use companies were opened, money was transferred through Cyprian banks, and money laundered were finally invested as equity capital for establishment of new companies in Macedonia.

"Companies that comprise the network from the case 'Empire' had never had any serious economic activity. They did not manufacture goods or provide services. Practically, they had not engaged in any business, but still disposed with lots of money used to build and takeover profitable businesses. They built hotels and residential buildings, staged takeovers of construction companies and biggest dairy and agricultural holdings, but also entered the lucrative business of security services, and ultimately financed propagandist media. To the best knowledge of the public in Macedonia, none of the people behind these companies had struck oil or found diamonds in their backyard, nor did they found *Facebook* or *Microsoft*. Hence, the million dollar question is where do all these millions of euros come from? The Special Prosecution Office (SPO) claims they have only part of the answer. In their opinion, budget money had been pumped through the infamous Finzi, but in the case of 'Treasury', this amount is merely a drop in the sea", says journalist Apostolov.

Reports of international organizations show that developing countries like the Republic of North Macedonia cumulatively lose up to 160 billion dollars annually as result of tax evasion by companies. They rely on false invoices and shady transfers so that money, instead of being paid as taxes, ends up in countries known as tax havens. According to the analysis by Christian Aid, if this money had been given to developing and third world countries, it would have been sufficient to save 1,000 children every day.

## CHAPTER 3

### EFFECTS OF THE CORRUPTION

#### "Skopje 2014": Materialization of the essence behind Gruevski's governance

Asked to single one thing that would forever remind us of gruevist VMRO-DPMNE, it would undoubtedly be the project "Skopje 2014" – the most expensive and most luxurious project of baroque buildings that would be forever planted in front of our eyes as testament of the effect created by this decade-long governance.

---

"Skopje 2014" is Gruevski's legacy and clear message that he should never be forgotten. This project is materialization of the essence behind his governance.

---

Corruption, organized crime, money on bank accounts, electoral corruption and strong ties between politics and business are not visible to all citizens. But the project "Skopje 2014" is visible and will probably stay forever. In doing that, Gruevski had achieved the goal and had left legacy and clear message that he should never be forgotten.

This project was build with people's money, hundreds of million euros, numerous suspicions of criminal activities that changed the city's image, replaced greenery with concrete, antique pillars, horses, lions and bridges over the draining river, with remaining waters flooding the new baroque buildings and endangering the archive fund. Actually, "Skopje 2014" is the best example for the effect of Gruevski's governance, because this project embodies all

aspects of crime, corruption and the era of divisions.

That is why it is said that "Skopje 2014" is materialization of the essence behind Gruevski's governance. On the visible side we have antiquization, i.e. the attempt to change the identity and create the new nationalistic profile that would heavily rely on antique instead of the Slavic origin and past. On the material and apparently invisible side, the

project was used to pump out money from the budget whose flow is later practically impossible to trace. And finally, all that was used to politicize and put into party service the institutions, companies and even citizens, because people's relation towards "Skopje 2104" was indicator of "which side they support", whether they are "loyal" or "enemy", and served as basis for the party's treatment and behaviour towards them. "Skopje 2014" is the idea through which Gruevski's government was realized, but also the cause for its downfall.

Equally difficult to location of funds pumped out from the state budget for rigged tenders and criminal activities in the period 2008-2018 is the calculation of the exact sum of money consumed by the project that should reflect grandiosity of the governance that had brought crucial divisions in the society. Nobody had any idea how the project "Skopje 2014" would look, with the exception of a short video which the government proudly presented before the citizens in 2010, but whose contents was greatly changed with the project's realization.

Journalists from the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) were the only ones able to arrive to the total sum of costs for this project, by designing the database "Skopje 2014 Uncovered". According to them, at least 684 million euros had been spent on buildings, monuments, sculptures, squares, multilevel garages, and façades. Their research includes indications of criminal activity and corruption that nobody managed to fully uncover, not even the pre-investigation launched by the Special Prosecution Office in which almost all prosecutors were engaged, but there is still no information on specific results achieved. For the time being SPO had brought only one case before the court related to this project, "Tenders", where former culture minister Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska is first defendant and is suspected of wrongdoings in tender procedure organized for construction works at the Museum of VMRO which, according to SPO findings, damaged the state budget by around 54 million euros.

"Indications of corruption were the actual motive to investigate 'Skopje 2014'. First, it was plainly visible that there is discrepancy between the amount reported for its construction (80 million) compared to facilities and money actually invested [in this project]. The second indication was non-transparency of the overall effort and visible attempt of then-incumbent government to implement this project in spite of legitimate questions raised in the public. Third indication was the relatively small 'circle of trust' in terms

of contractors and implementers and their clientelistic relations. All that resulted in suspicions that the project 'Skopje 2014' is a corruption scheme, backed by then-current government. Information that we found after long months of research confirmed these indications: 'Skopje 2014' costs almost 9 times more than what it was presented in the public, its implementation was purposefully hidden and opaque (later, this was confirmed by wiretapped conversations from the 'bombs') and implied participation of companies, artists and partisan institutions which, in turn, had been awarded tenders, new contracts and access to decision-making centres", says Tamara Chausidis, editor at BIRN and one of several authors of this database.

BIRN's research resulted in specific findings, such as the price tag, abuse of institutions and procedures for implementation of this project and individual contractors that took part in this corruptive network.

Presentation of several facts is sufficient to understand how Skopje's new look was built and how money was pumped out from the budget by circumventing laws, which raises serious dilemmas whether they ended up only with contractors.

Almost one third of this project is constructed by the company Beton, i.e. every third euro spent on this projects ended in this company which, accidentally or not, was later contracted to build and equip VMRO-DPMNE's "white palace" according to the "turn-key principle". Companies were awarded tenders on the basis of lowest price, but this price, by rule, was later inflated by means of additional annex contracts which, in compliance with legal procedures, could amount up to 30 percent of the primary contract's value. And, by rule, all annexes for unforeseen works are signed exactly in the amount of 30 percent or, in most cases, 29.9 percent of the primary contract.

371

According to records from the electronic system of public procurements, seven primary contacts were signed only for construction of the Old Theatre, followed by two dozen annex contracts and more than 50 contracts with authors, construction and project design companies. The high number of additional contracts signed for completion of the project continuously increased the amount for its realization which, only in the case of the Old Theatre, exceeded 37 million euros. Additional contracts anticipated items for which the public commented that they must be planned in advance especially knowing that it would be unimaginable to build a theatre without stage curtain, chairs or even doors.





Hotel **Bridge** ★★★★★

Hotel

City of ...

Contracts signed with authors remain the biggest mystery. Calculations made by authors often indicated lump sums, without details on how many or which workers and sculptors were engaged, which studios were rented or what is implied under budget items "other small costs" which they invoiced, sometimes in the amount of 5,000 euros. Budget items "royalty fee" included engagement of labourers, purchase of materials and rent of studios, and no author provided precise details on how this money was spent.

"These are costs invoiced by authors and we do not verify them. However, during negotiations the commission always attempted to reduce and not recognize such expenditure items", stated then-incumbent Mayor of Centar Vladimir Todorovikj in 2013 when he gave account for the project "Skopje 2014".

"I hope all authors were honest", he added.

Obviously, the entire project was hinged on honesty of authors, companies, and, of course, VMRO-DPMNE, but this honesty will be tested for much longer than the period of time needed for this project to be constructed. Questions about the mastermind behind this project, how it was designed, whether it was developed over long period of time, at night-time party meetings or with detailed analyses, how many and which people were involved, how were decisions made that the Triumph Arch should be placed on the entrance to the main square and that the financial police's building should be near Vardar, remained without answers for long time.

And then, the audio recordings echoed in the public and all theses about precise and sustained analyses and plans for the new look of the capital collapsed like a house of cards.

"There's a fountain here, in Rome, with an obelisk. Very pretty. That's how we want it built, but how should we do it? Should we first have design project or what? [...] Both, fountain and obelisk", says Gruevski to then-incumbent minister of transport and communications Mile Janakieski, who briefly responds: "Yes. OK".

Audio recordings also feature their conversation about the look of multilevel garage in the central area, followed by confusion whether it should be built in "baroque" or "classicism". Then-incumbent Prime Minister, inter alia, proposes baroque designs like those in Vienna, Prague, Paris...

"Which [style] Mile? Baroque or classicism?", Gruevski asks.

"I think they're baroque", responds Janakieski.

"Baroque is one [thing], classicism is another, Mile. [Buildings] in Washington are classicism. They have pillars, like the building of the Constitutional Court [...]", says then-incumbent Prime Minister.

"Yes, that's how they look", confirms Janakieski.

"That's classicism, but you should have baroque as well. I just don't know how we should do that", says Gruevski in one of these conversations.

That is how the mystery of who came up with the idea for "Skopje 2014" was finally resolved. Gruevski revealed himself as self-declared architect, leaving it to future generations to find ways to deal with Frankenstein-like structures in city downtown, and leaving it to prosecution bodies to possibly clarify all criminal activities hidden behind this pompous grandiosity.

In the words of Chausidis: "'Skopje 2014' is personification of corruption as corrosive factor for the society, institutions and citizens. 'Skopje 2014' is the product, but also the medium by which corruption has captured the state, but also the society, its citizens, their mentality and free spirit".

375

For this spirit to be released and for the entire society to be liberated from the claws of partisanship and from the hands of people who believe governance is forever and behave like landlords of their voters, it would take long period of time to first change their mindset, and to also adopt legislation that would liberate businesses and institutions from those holding on to power till their last breath.

## **CHALLENGES: FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION WITH STRENGTHENED INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS**

Mechanisms to fight electoral corruption and corruption at all levels in society, partisanship and nepotism, did exist on paper, but were not enforced, at least not during the decade-long governance by VMRO-DPMNE.

State Commission for Prevention of Corruption is one of these mechanisms and institutions that should have dealt with organized crime and corruption, but this institution was regularly criticized in country progress reports of the European Commission, wherein it was noted that legal frameworks are in place, but they are not functional

in practice. Numerous affairs and suspicions for illegal spending of budget funds and illegal enrichment went by unnoticed in spite of many reports and reactions in the public. There was almost no investigations opened "upon publicly learned information" by the institution that should have operated independently, irrespective of the party in government.

"Claims of selective enforcement and political influence in this area persist, and more proactive stance is needed to eliminate these serious concerns. Public trust in anticorruption bodies remains low. As is the case elsewhere in the region, corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem", was noted in the 2014 Progress Report for Macedonia, and two years later, in 2016, the rhetoric is enhanced and includes stricter wording: "The structural shortcoming of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption and political interference in its work have minimized the impact of past efforts. There is still a need to establish convincing track record, especially in high level corruption cases".

In one of the most turbulent years when the wiretapped recordings were first released, in 2015, the Anticorruption Commission was remembered for two events: appointment of new commission president Goran Milenkov in April 2015 and the press-conference held by the commission in July, when he avoided journalist questions related to the so-called "political bombs".

By the end of 2015, the commission had issued a total of nine press-releases, most of which concerned workshops and seminars held.

The commission did not make any announcements about the wiretapped conversations and did not open cases upon publicly learned information. This fact is sufficient to depict the role of this institution in fight against crime and corruption, but there were series of cases which the public expected to be resolved, and instead there was total darkness. In addition to keeping silent about the "bombs", the commission did not open any major corruption case, which could be verified on its website where throughout the entire period of ten years they published only information about meetings, public debates, cooperation memoranda signed and occasional cases related to conflict of interests. The commission was completely closed in terms of public communications and journalists often reacted that the institution's spokesperson does not respond to calls and does not answer journalist questions.

"The matters you inquire about are in court procedure and I will not comment, there is no point", answered Goran Milenkov, President of the Anticorruption Commission, in July 2015 to journalist questions whether the commission would take any action against possible corruptive activities by government officials indicated in the "bombs" released by the opposition.

At the time, he stated that by inviting journalists to the press-conference he had demonstrated "[the commission's] method of work and transparency".

"Everything else is your perception", he said, after having elaborated the Anticorruption Commission's program on prevention of corruption for almost half an hour.

The public did not learn of anticorruption commissioners' opinion about suspicions on the manner in which budget funds were spent for the project "Skopje 2014" or the affairs like "Aktor" and "Secret Factory of Passports".

"Anticorruption Corruption was among institution that acted as 'guardian of the government' instead of 'guardians from the government'. In that, I refer to its composition for the period around 2010, and its composition that resigned in 2018. It was evident that those commissioners did not have 'the nose to smell corruption' or 'ears to hear' when, for example, the media alarmed about possible corruption scandals. Their behaviour seemed to have implied 'we're not from here'", says Misha Popovikj from the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis".

SCPC members did not even publish their own asset declarations. In 2016, several attempts were made by journalists to obtain information on salary brackets for commissioners and to gain insight in their asset declarations, but the commission concluded that their asset declarations are not of public interest. Only after intervention from the Commission on Free Access to Public Information, anticorruption commissioners published their asset declarations on the official website.

The public would long remember the statement by commission president Milenkov in April 2016 and related to Nikola Gruevski's assets declaration after he had left the public office. "I kindly ask you to close this matter once and for all. Amin!" he said.

In 2017, Transparency International – Macedonia and Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation held a press-conference dedicated to advancement of work performed by

the Anticorruption Commission and raised serious questions about future performance of this institution.

"First, mechanisms need to be place to guarantee that people working at the commission have integrity and are free of any influences, including political. Furthermore, there is a problem with enforcement of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and lack of capacity at this institution to implement provisions from laws on prevention of conflict of interests. The commission's performance is marked by selectiveness and insufficient independence, whereby its cases need to be reviewed", stated Slagjana Taseva, President of Transparency International in Macedonia.

In 2018, for the first time, the state started to implement new mechanisms and standards for appointment of new anticorruption commissioners, after the commission had operated with only two members for an entire year in the aftermath of resignations by five members and disclosure of the scandal that they have approved reimbursement of travel costs based on falsified documents. Some of them indicated they are resigning from office due to health reasons, while others indicated their resignations are result of political pressures. Appointment of new commission members was pursued under new conditions and they were selected on open call and public hearing before a committee which, inter alia, included representatives from non-governmental organizations.

"I think the situation already started to change. The new Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests defines new transparent method for appointment of commission members, which resulted in appointment of professionals without political baggage. Within two months from their appointment, the commission held eight open and public sessions at which it opened more than 360 procedures, in non-selective manner. Professionalism, responsibility, commitment, transparency and accountability are the basic principles underlying work of this commission, and they will strengthen its resistance to any form of influence. Our ultimate goal is to reduce corruption (active and passive) as way of life in our state, but mainly to increase citizens' trust in state institutions", promises Biljana Ivanovska in April 2019, as the new president of this commission.

But, there are still valid risks.

"Guarantees that the wrongdoings from the past would not be repeated do not come by those that are in government, but from the capacity of independent institutions to act

in cases when somebody attempts to abuse power. Just look at the example from the United States. Donald Trump arrived with completely different method of running politics, which even implied subversive means against the system in place, but the system started to defend itself. Hence, prosecutors and attorney generals, or independent bodies, are already in place to raise charges against any possible wrongdoing on his behalf. That is why we need to continue work on enhancing independence of SCPC, SEC, PPO, SAO, etc. Selection of new anticorruption commissioners was good example of that, but our appetites must be bigger. Independent bodies should not be financially controlled by the Ministry of Finance. That should be the next step in reforms at these bodies. They need to freely dispose with their budgets", says Misha Popovikj from the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis".

Limited hopes in the fight against corruption are justified, especially having in mind that Macedonian citizens live on the line of economic freedom and trust in institutions.

"Independent citizens are needed to support these institutions when they close the hoop around most powerful and corrupted people in the state", believes Popovikj.



Menche Atanasova-Tochi

HEALTHCARE  
AND SOCIAL  
PROTECTION AS  
CHARITY

In the last decade, Macedonian healthcare and social protection systems have undergone a period of devastation whereby, instead of moving towards serious reforms and alignment with the EU system, they are lagging behind European countries, but also behind countries in the region. This is the time period from 2008, when the country's

NATO invitation was blocked by Greece at the Bucharest Summit, until the Prespa Agreement, signed on June 17, 2018, which included final solution to the name dispute and start of efforts to count damages from the past. In this period of wonderment and search for the state's identity, serious efforts on strengthening the public healthcare sector were needed. Announcements that "money will follow the patient" remained nothing but demagoguery throughout the decade-long governance by VMRO-DPMNE and their coalition partner DUI. Citizens had great expectations on the account of many promises made by then-incumbent government, which was already in place for two years and was announcing breakthrough reforms. However, turbulences that occurred in the period that followed did not only fail to bring better healthcare and better living conditions for social risk families, but also caused irreparable damages. The rise of gruevism was marked by populism and self-promotion, which later proved to be fatal for the government. Reforms (if they could be called such) were often misdirected; at times, the decisions made caused dissatisfaction and revolt, and were later cancelled or pushed under the carpet due to public pressure. Lots of funds were spent, but without tangible results. Throughout all these years, high amounts of funds were shed on engagement of foreign experts that should have provided instructions on how to make changes, and borrowed funds were spent on construction and reconstruction of hospitals. Works on some of these hospitals was dragged for an entire decade and are still not completed. The government never revealed in public the actual amount of money spent on these projects and there is no detailed analysis on the amount of credit funds the citizens would have to repay, per-capita costs and repayment period for these investments. The unserious behaviour on the part of health authorities, background dealings, and suspicious and overpaid procurements, all have a high price for citizens of this state, but also for future generations. Money is spent, but hospitals remain in destitute conditions; they are old and disintegrating, while their hallways, patient rooms and toilets are in desperate shape. Healthcare, as one of the most important segments of social life which

underwent post-independence transformation from free to market-based system (although, to great extent, it still remains solidarity-based), has suffered major losses in several areas, especially in the area of preventive healthcare. Hence, it was expected that the Health Strategy adopted for the period 2007-2020 will be respected, and will ensure reliable, fair and efficient healthcare system. Instead, we had witnessed years of demolition, when form was more important than essence, ribbon-cutting ceremonies were organized for non-functional facilities, same medical equipment was put in official use several times; hospitals were neglected, medicines for seriously ill patients were out of stock. The influence of politics was visible and the situation deteriorated so much that hospital patients had to buy their own pain medicines. Citizens, revolted, demanded dignified medical treatment, regular supply of safe medicines at pharmacies and hospitals, examinations by medical doctors who pay attention, reduced corruption in the healthcare sector, and shorter waiting lists for surgeries. As regards the social protection system, the needs concerned new care centres for elderly people, more personnel, higher social allowance, and regular allowance for persons with disabilities. Instead, this sector was marked by complete and utter politicization, high centralization and government control, but extremely poor efficiency of public healthcare institutions. Hospitals and clinics had generated major debts by managing own costs for procurement of medicines and, instead of finding a model to address this problem, the Health Insurance Fund of Macedonia had their debts written-off several times. The management policy of two directors, one medical specialist and another economist, did not yield expected results, and instead of cancelling these positions altogether, new partisan staff was recruited. Strategic goals in the healthcare sector should have been focused on improving matters related to shortage of medicines, prevention of non-communicable and communicable diseases, better access to health services, enhanced primary healthcare as the health system's pillar, reorganization and promotion of secondary and tertiary healthcare, delivery of basic health services package, modernization of the health insurance fund that manages citizens' money, and possibilities for medical treatment abroad. Instead, we had witnessed re-emergence

---

Citizens had great expectations on the account of many promises made by then-incumbent government, which was already in place for two years and was announcing reforms. However, turbulences that occurred in the period that followed did not only fail to bring better healthcare and better living conditions for families at social risk, but also caused irreparable damages.

---

of communicable diseases like measles, scarlet fever, and mumps, primarily due to continuous decrease in regular immunization and lack of strategy that would integrate education and campaigns for mandatory vaccination. What actually happened in that decade amounts to complete devastation of the healthcare system, destruction of state hospitals, failure to care for health of patients, seriously ill people dying due to lack of medicines, import of suspicious and falsified medicines, death of mothers and newborns at hospitals. Although state budget funds are never sufficient, it must be admitted that the health policy had led to loss of ten years in which, with good strategy in place, we could have developed solid healthcare and social welfare systems that are in service of citizens.

---

Although state budget funds are never sufficient, it must be admitted that under such policy we had irreversibly lost ten years in which, with good strategy in place, we could have developed solid healthcare and social welfare systems that are in service of citizens.

---

### DESTROYING THE PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEM FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO PROFIT

In this period, somewhere before 2010, the first private hospitals were established and offered better salaries and working conditions for medical personnel. This marked the start of commercialization in the healthcare sector, followed by loss of doctors and nurses who transferred to private hospitals, with increased dynamics every year. Hence, the double healthcare system was created. On one side, we have overtly politicized and inefficient state-run healthcare facilities that are falling apart, and on the other side are private hospitals that offer services for those who can pay from their pocket. The misguided policy that resulted in poor working conditions for doctors and other medical personnel, low salary brackets, the front created by the health minister against medical doctors during VMRO-DPMNE's governance, but also internal conflicts

among doctors as a result of bad reforms, have all led to doctors and nurses massive transfers to private hospitals. Was that done on purpose, in order to develop the private healthcare on the detriment of public healthcare? Tendencies on stimulation of private

hospitals to the detriment of state hospitals have their roots many years in the past... And they were no secret for connoisseurs of state-of-affairs in the healthcare sector. Permanent destruction of the public healthcare sector, neglected hospitals without air-conditioning and hot water, unkind medical personnel employed at hospitals, lack of medicines and reagents, have all contributed to patients' slow gravitation towards private hospitals. In that well-designed move, aware they are unable to obtain timely and quality health services, people started to take credits to undergo surgery or receive treatment at private hospitals. There was and still is tacit agreement for patients to be referred to private hospitals for scans and examinations by some employees at state-run hospitals. Contributing factors also include long waiting lists for surgeries and scans, as well as frequent non-functioning of medical equipment. An analysis from 2013 shows that citizens annually spend 100 to 120 million euros for medical treatment, procurement of medicines, medical devices and medical analyses, which accounts for around 30 percent of funds designated for services covered by the health insurance fund. Crude calculations indicate that half of these funds are spent on medical treatment, and the other half is spent on non-prescription medicines which they are forced to pay from their pocket. At the same time, despite announcements for contemporary equipment at hospitals, medical doctors have the impression that the healthcare system is being purposefully destroyed. Hence, from healthcare system declaratively based on solidarity, it was transformed into system where patients pay three times more. First they pay for health insurance under HIFM, the second payment concerns participation fee for health services and the third payment is made for services at private hospitals. The fact that they buy medicines from pharmacies because they are not available on prescription (the positive list of medicines has not added any new drugs for an entire decade) is also indicative of purposeful efforts behind such practices. In that, the healthcare system became profitable business, and after the first few, new private hospitals started emerging, but also diagnostic centres, roentgen centres, and laboratories.

Main players (first two-three hospitals), which are entitled portion of funds from HIFM, receive increasingly greater support, but started to increase prices for number of services. Recently, information appeared in the public that one or two private hospitals had issued multiple invoices for same services, i.e. they had charged the insurance fund and private patients, but there are no details and no investigation was initiated into this matter. The continuous support for private hospitals on the part of high-ranking people

in the public healthcare sector, which started more than one decade ago, continues to present day. On the other hand, the public healthcare sector was in ever more disastrous shape. This is confirmed by the European Commission's last country report, where it is noted that one third of all health services are paid for out of pocket and that no progress is made in terms of health protection. It remains to be seen how the health policy will be developed in the future and whether announcements of public-private partnerships will bring salvation or further deterioration of public healthcare. Below is the overview of events and projects in the healthcare and social protection systems from the last decade.

## **SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS AND EVENTS THAT MARKED THIS DECADE**

- ▶ The positive list of medicines has not been changed for an entire decade. That has led to citizens being treated with obsolete prescription medicines and paying from their pocket for everything else, i.e. services that had become commercialized. Medical doctors are unable to fully apply evidence-based medicine because not all patients can afford to pay for medicines from their pocket.
- ▶ 2011 introduced the era of parallel import of medicines, under the veil that medicines are becoming cheaper, i.e. more affordable. Actually, this effort served to line the pockets of certain pharmaceutical companies and tender contracts were awarded for medicines whose safety was not guaranteed by foreign manufacturers, notably because they came from other countries, without manufacture certificates and nobody knew how they were stored and transported. The Public Prosecution Office launched an investigation into falsified medicines, and another investigation, upon publicly learned information, into parallel import of medicines.
- ▶ Partization took roots in the public healthcare sector. Party members were appointed as health managers, and all new employments of doctors and other medical personnel were exclusively pursued on the basis of party affiliation. That had led to decline in quality, medical errors, intolerance among doctors, and lack of interest for the patient's wellbeing. This trend continues to present day.

- ▶ The state-sponsored medical residencies were stopped for long time, with paediatric residencies fully suspended. Today, the state has almost no paediatricians, while waiting rooms at general practitioners are swarmed by healthy and ill children, newborns and elderly people. There is insufficient number of anaesthesiologists and resident doctors in many important fields of medicine.
- ▶ For many years, the state was first-ranked in the EU according to infant mortality. Mothers were dying at gynaecology wards from haemorrhage and sepsis. The situation started to stabilize, but it is still far from good.
- ▶ Kidney transplantation was stopped, especially from cadaveric (deceased) donors. The disastrously poor management at the national coordination centre for transplantation, coupled with populist measures and empty promises, deferred people from donating body organs to their closest relatives whose lives were coming to end.
- ▶ Medical doctors started to leave the public sector, and the biggest transfers happened in 2010 with the emergence of first private hospitals. Dissatisfaction, bad working conditions, low salary brackets, and lack of prosperity, are just some of many reasons behind their decisions to leave abroad.
- ▶ The government designed the project on "importing" doctors from abroad, who came to the country for period of one or two weeks, in attempt to mitigate the overall situation. These doctors provided their services free-of-charge and, in return, they were allowed to propagate their "religion". There is no analysis on this project's success, but several medical errors were noted with patients operated by foreign doctors, some of which resulted in loss of lives.
- ▶ Another major project that consumed enormous funds concerns video-surveillance cameras installed at medical practices. Due to considerations related to illegal surveillance, the Administration for Personal Data Protection issued an order for cameras to be removed.
- ▶ The procurement of defibrillators for all public and private institutions, hotels and ministries is another failed project that "wasted" enormous sums of money. They are not used due to lack of personnel trained to operate defibrillators.
- ▶ No effects were created by legal advisors that should be engaged at all clinics. Also, information and referral desks remain empty, i.e. without personnel.

- ▶ The big tender procedure for medical equipment worth 120 million euros was several times overpaid. Some health facilities received necessary medical equipment, but due to unplanned procurements many devices are still unpacked and stored in underground warehouses, with expired warranty period and without trained personnel to operate them.
- ▶ Construction of a number of hospitals was postponed for more than a decade, and works on some of them are still unfinished. Construction and reconstruction works are still managed by the Ministry of Health's project unit and are financed with loan funds taken from the Council of Europe's Development Bank.
- ▶ Announcements for definition of the health services package according to population's needs and available funds never came to fruition.

The chaos in public healthcare culminated in the last years of VMRO-DPMNE's governance. Hospitals were drowning in debts and medicine shortages were permanent, including shortage of linen and pyjamas for patients. Large sums of funds were invested in construction of several health facilities which did not bring expected results. They include:

- ▶ Failed plan for new clinical centre, which then-current government announced would start in 2014 and implied construction on the location of the old Gynaecology Clinic. A loan contract in the amount of 70 million euros was signed with the Council of Europe's Development Bank. Total of 1.5 million euros were spent on the project design, but the plan fell through.
- ▶ Start of the project "My Term", which was designed to institute order in medical examinations, but instead created major chaos, confusing both doctors and entire medical personnel.
- ▶ Centre for Positronic Emission Tomography (PET) was opened, previously announced as major project by the former government, including the fact that it would attract patients from the entire region. Nowadays, this centre does not operate in full capacity, lacks personnel, the equipment warranty period has expired and there are no possibilities for this health facility to be maintained.
- ▶ After 20 years of struggles and various announcements, the state cardio surgical institute was opened at the Clinic of Cardiology. There are no details whether this centre operates in full capacity, what is the share of surgeries performed, and whether complicated cardio surgeries are performed.

- ▶ Construction of the hospital in Ohrid was dragged for years, while several people from the Ministry of Health were charged for alleged illegal tender procedures, including one of then-incumbent ministers from the ranks of DUI. This case is investigated by SPO.
- ▶ Changes in the social protection system were mainly of promotional character, and some implied change of legislation. Most notable among them is the project "Third Child", which was cancelled after the change of government because "stimulations" had not yielded expected results..

## WHO ARE THE "CREATORS" BEHIND HEALTHCARE REFORMS?

The fact that healthcare projects and reforms implied disorientation and were pursued without plan and vision is best described by the Association of Doctors in Primary Healthcare from Kumanovo and their letter to the Chamber of Medical Doctors from 2009. Inter alia, primary health practitioners had written: "Our healthcare reforms resemble the journey of seafarer Christopher Columbus. When embarking on his journey he did not know where he was going, when he arrived he did not know where, and when he returned he did not know where he had been. Healthcare is one of the main pillars of any contemporary society. Every modern state has national health strategy, but we depend on daily political relations and events. In such situation, we do not know what tomorrow will bring." This is what doctors from Kumanovo wrote back in 2009. And they were right. Matters changed on daily basis, while the national strategy was grossly undermined. Decisions made were not made in the interest of citizens. Projects implemented did not enhance the healthcare system. Citizens and health sector employees grew tired of all that. Fear nested even among eminent doctors. Total darkness ascended in the years that followed, especially the last couple of years before the government's fall. In order to know who made the most important decisions, first we need to see who served as health minister during that period. In July 2008, Imer Selmani left the office of health minister to which he came as MP from the ranks of DPA. During his tenure as the head of the public healthcare system, doctor and businessman Selmani would be remembered for the transformation, i.e. the division of the Clinical Centre into 31 separate clinics. The decision for such transformation came from VMRO-DPMNE, but he did not object it and endorsed the project. Hence, in spite of his charisma he did not win the sympathies of

employees at the Clinical Centre. Another decision was made during his tenure as health minister and implied that each clinic should be managed by two directors, one medical and another economic director, which proved to be total fiasco. His successor was young and hopeful abdominal surgeon Bujar Osmani from DUI, who came to this office at the age of 29 years. A common effort for these two ministers concerns procurement of video-surveillance cameras for hospitals, which should have been used 24 hours. Selmani started this project, but Osmani completed it, albeit infamously, after having spent 1 million euros on procurement of surveillance equipment. Bujar Osmani served as health minister from July 2008 until 2011, when he handed over this public office to Nikola Todorov, lawyer by profession and member of then-governing VMRO-DPMNE, who previously managed the education sector. Developments, more important events and projects during the tenures of Osmani and Todorov are elaborated below. Nikola Todorov would be remembered for disastrous health policies and the overall devastation he left behind, which had earned him the title “minister of death” among citizens.

### THE PROJECT “ELECTRONIC HEALTH CARD” (EHC)

389

The project “Electronic Health Card” formally started in 2009 and implied plans for procurement of 2,000,000 electronic cards for insurance beneficiaries under HIFM. Plans also included personalization of health cards with digital certificate, information system, hardware and software, training for employees at the Health Insurance Fund, 10,000 card readers, and promises from competent authorities that this system would open the door to full implementation of electronic healthcare in the state. At that time Bujar Osmani served as minister of health, while HIFM was managed by Gjorgji Trenkovski and Janez Jelnikar from Slovenia. In August 2009, after Trenkovski resigned, he was replaced by Maja Parnadjjeva-Zmejtkova. Operational implementation of the project was entrusted to HIFM. After a number of delays, its realization started in February 2013 against implementation deadline set in April the same year. Competent authorities entered this incomplete project unprepared, and the first batch of 500,000 cards was printed by the company AKD from Croatia, with validity period of 3 to 5 years. EHC did not deliver its expectations. They did not contain medical files of health insurance beneficiaries because the integrated information system was not installed. The project that was announced for more than a decade ended in fiasco. Money for this purpose was gone and new funds were not

anticipated. Although these cards should be free-of-charge, then-incumbent health minister Nikola Todorov decided citizens to pay 250 MKD from their pocket. According to rough estimates, the budget collected 6 to 8 million euros on the basis of citizens' charges for EHC. In spite of that, not all citizens received their cards. The next year, 2014, a total of 310,000 citizens were left without health cards, although they had paid for them. In July 2016, another problem emerged with issuance of cards whose validity period had expired. Around 46,000 employees in the healthcare sector and their families were left without cards although they were deducted 250 MKD per card from their salaries. Problems emerged because the Ministry of Health had not made regular payment of instalments to the Croatian company AKD for the cards already printed and issued. In November 2016 the truth could not be hidden anymore, and the company Indicium (daughter-company of AKD) packed its machines, stopped printing electronic health cards and closed its facilities. This meant the end of EHC. Although both Todorov and Sasho Stefanovski, who in the meantime became director at HIFM, made promises that new tender for EHC would be announced, that never happened. It remained unknown where millions of funds anticipated for the entire information system had disappeared. More than 10,000 initially procured card readers and around 5-6 thousand readers procured additionally are now left to collect dust. This failed project had consumed millions of euros to the detriment of citizens and the Macedonian healthcare.

## **VIDEO SURVEILLANCE AT HOSPITALS**

The project for procurement of video-surveillance cameras that should operate 24 hours at hospitals was started by Selmani and completed by Osmani, but Todorov attempted to revive and upgrade this effort, in spite of the fact that the Administration for Personal Data Protection assessed this venture as illegal. In 2008, a multitude of issues plagued both citizens and healthcare practitioners. Hospitals lacked medicines and medical supplies, prompting directors to take medicines on reverse from pharmaceutical companies. Once debts started accumulating, pharmaceutical companies stopped delivery of medicines until payment of their receivables. Patients with carcinoma and rare diseases were dying because of lack of medicines needed. In such conditions, instead of investing in the most essential matters, the ministry purchased 1,200 video-surveillance cameras. They were intended to be installed at practices and hallways, and should be monitored by personnel at separate premises within the sector on common matters. Justification

offered by the Ministry of Health implied that this is done for greater efficiency and performance of medical personnel. Then-incumbent minister Bujar Osmani who finalized the procurement procedure stated he had not allowed the system to be put into operation until relevant rulebook is designed to stipulate the method and procedure for use of video-surveillance footage, and that the premises under surveillance would be duly designated. The cameras covered entrance doors at hospitals, space around registration and record desks, hallways and central facilities where medicines are stored. Six months later, the Administration for Personal Data Protection had found that video-surveillance of patients is illegal and that such footage could be abused, due to which cameras should be removed within a deadline of two weeks. Although he agreed with this decision, Osmani did not believe that privacy of patients had been threatened. After this decision, surveillance headquarters at the sector for common matters was closed, and cameras and passwords were handed over to the clinics. It remained mystery which cameras were removed and which remained in operation, and whether patients and medical personnel are still under surveillance. Later, in 2012, Todorov made another attempt to restore cameras, for which decision was taken at the government session. Nobody is able to say whether this project, for which Todorov announced would be integrated in the Law on Healthcare, had been realized or remained on paper. But one thing is certain – more than 1 million euros were spent to no avail and nobody assumed responsibility for the purposeless procurement of surveillance cameras.

391

## **MASSIVE TRANSFER OF DOCTORS ABROAD**

The year 2010, when doctors and nurses started massively leaving to private hospitals also marked the start of their transfers abroad. According to estimates of the Chamber of Medical Doctors, in the period from 2010 to 2018, around 1,207 doctors had left the country, i.e. an average of 120 doctors were leaving the state every year, but it is assumed that their number is much higher because those already studying abroad have an open path to the EU. The research conducted by international organization HealthGrouper showed that doctors are dissatisfied with salaries and work conditions and that high 90 percent of surveyed doctors have responded they do not wish to return back to the state. Total of 70 percent of doctors that have remained in the state reported they would like to follow their example. According to HealthGrouper's 2016 research, another reason for young doctors leaving abroad concerns political situation in the state. Around 70

percent of doctors that have left abroad indicated they were offered employment in the state only if they are members of particular party. Individual education for each of them costs the state around 60,000 euros. The research also showed that majority doctors are highly dissatisfied with their status in society, believe their profession is unappreciated, and they work under difficult conditions, great pressures and stress. All of them are under impression that the state does not appreciate and does not adequately value the profession of medical doctors. Healthcare reforms are generator of dissatisfaction with more than 70 percent of doctors in the public healthcare sector (77 percent) and the private healthcare sector (72 percent). Doctors, as holders of healthcare activity, are key factors in the healthcare sector that produces health services. Success of reform implementation depends on acceptance and satisfaction with reforms among medical doctors. Should this phenomenon continue in the future, there will be no doctors left in the state, especially specialists, and that would have negative effect on the overall healthcare system. Even medical nurses leave Macedonia, which is most felt by patients and other practitioners in the public healthcare sector who are forced to take night shifts due to lack of personnel. Tiredness and lack of concentration is then reflected on the quality of health services. In such conditions of insufficient number of specialists, omissions and medical errors happen more frequently. A dark period befell on the healthcare system in Macedonia.

392

## **LACK OF SPECIALISTS RESULTED IN DEATH OF MOTHERS**

In the years that followed there were frequent cases of deaths among mothers who had recently given birth. Young, healthy women were dying at neonatal wards around the state just at the time when they were supposed to become mothers. In almost all cases, reasons indicated include haemorrhage or sepsis. Their families demanded answers about what is happening, but also responsibility. In 2010, when seven mothers had died in a period of only three months, inspectors from the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate and members of the special commission at the Ministry of Health started inspection supervisions at all 32 delivery wards in the state. They inspected working conditions at gynaecological and obstetric wards. The Ministry of Health decided to introduce extraordinary measures, one of which included closure of the delivery ward in Prilep



HealthGrouper Summit on survey findings related to dissatisfaction of medical doctors



were two mothers had died within ten days. After so many death cases, then-incumbent minister Bujar Osmani went public with a scandalous statement: "Now that we have seen [actual] conditions, we will take measures". This is what Osmani said on March 6, 2010, but media reports abounded in information about new cases. In October 2015, the public was shaken by the death of 32-year old Maja Kadieva from Dojran, who died together with her baby during a caesarean section at the hospital in Gevgelija. Autopsy report showed that the young woman had suffocated on a tube when she was administered anaesthesia and the baby died due to lack of air. The investigation showed that the anaesthesiologists had come in the surgery theatre inebriated. In December 2018, one anaesthesiologist was convicted to 4-year imprisonment and prohibition to perform his profession, while the two gynaecologists were acquitted. This case brought to the surface all shortcomings in the state-run healthcare system. More specifically, it showed that the hospital in Gevgelija fails to earn the status of hospital for many years, both in terms of conditions at this facility and mainly because of shortage of medical personnel. For two years, the hospital did not have gynaecologist because the only one employed before had resigned on the basis of mobbing and psychological pressures from the hospital director and found employment at the hospital in Strumica. Since then, the hospital in Gevgelija had engaged the same and another gynaecologist under contracts, both of whom came from Strumica to intervene in Gevgelija. To make matters worse, the entire region is serviced by only two anaesthesiologists (one of whom died after this case). The town does not have paediatric practices because the only paediatrician reached retirement age and manages his private practice, but is called to the hospital when needed. The children ward has no nurses and employs only one caregiver, whereby nurses from other wards are taken on temporary secondment. The decade-long termination of state-sponsored specialization residencies had led to shortage of specialists everywhere in the country. Shortage of medical personnel includes gynaecologists, anaesthesiologists, paediatricians and other specialists. Most delivery wards in small towns had been closed, especially in places where the situation was critical; pregnant women had to travel to the nearest town to deliver their babies. In the last years and to mitigate this situation, specialists from Skopje, mainly gynaecologists and anaesthesiologists, were dispatched to other towns on rotation basis. Likely is that these measures will continue until future specialists complete their residency. The overall situation is among the main reasons for numerous omissions, medical errors and deaths of mothers in the healthcare system.

**MACEDONIA HOLDS TOP-RANK****ACCORDING TO INFANT MORTALITY IN EUROPE**

One of most terrifying things that could happen to any state is death of newborns. Gynaecologists allocate the main reasons thereof in poor health policy, shortage of gynaecologists in the state and lack of funds for implementation of programs intended for pregnant women. Macedonia holds primacy in being the state with the highest mortality rate in Europe for almost entire decade. For illustration, according to data of the State Statistical Office, in 2015, the mortality rate among newborns in their first week of life accounted for 14.3 and is the highest among all EU member states, i.e. it is three times higher than the European average standing at 5.2. Defeating is the fact that infant mortality was increased from 7.5 in 2011 to 9.9 in 2014, which overlaps with implementation of the Strategy on Safe Motherhood adopted in 2010. In the period 2010-2015, the highest increase in infant mortality is recorded in 2012 when the number of deceased newborns has increased by 25.2 percent compared to the previous year, while the number of liveborns has increased by only 3.4 percent. The Platform for Gender Equality identifies reasons for this disastrous situation in shortage of gynaecologists in provincial towns and absence of delivery wards in smaller areas, as well as illegal charges for examinations by registered gynaecologists. Most dramatic example thereof is the Municipality of Shuto Orizari where local women do not have resident gynaecologist for 10 years. Outside the municipality, gynaecologists illegally charge them for PAP tests, ultrasound and other examinations, although they should be free-of-charge. Illegal charges levied by gynaecologists are just one reason why women from socially vulnerable categories do not visit gynaecologists, especially during their pregnancy. This problem was recognized by the UN Human Rights Council, demanding the state to answer how it plans to address this problem, especially in the case of poor and marginalized population groups. Todorov replied that, in spite of fines imposed by the Health Insurance Fund, solution could not be found to this problem. Later, after the change of government in 2017, horrific images surfaced in the public depicting conditions at the Clinic of Gynaecology, revealed by the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate. Insufficient number of respirators, incubators that sometimes accommodates two newborns at the same time, lack of space for intensive care, in-hospital infections, bad conditions, distorted interpersonal relations among doctors - were among reasons indicated for increased infant mortality at this

healthcare facility. "Everything should be thoroughly examined and recommendations need to be made. [This facility] is projected for 3,500 to 4,000 births, but we actually have 6,000 births annually. Inter-hospital infections are present, and we have prematurely born children without developed immunity, all of which affect the situation. We have 10 respirators and no place for incubators. We lack personnel; people are tired; there are no instrument nurses and anaesthesiologists; and we have to borrow them from KARIL; there are no paediatricians", stated Director of the Clinic of Gynaecology Viktorija Jovanovska in October 2017. When the Clinic of Gynaecology opened its doors, the public was able to see that the most critical situation affects the intensive care unit where, due to low number of respirators, doctors are forced to choose which newborn should be disconnected from the apparatus prematurely. Incubators are in shortage, and there is no space for them. Disturbed interpersonal relations among doctors, pressures and fear from the previous government to speak about problems have utterly destroyed this important segment of the healthcare system. In order to decrease infant mortality, a year later, in 2018, training was delivered at this clinic for multidisciplinary teams, comprised of gynaecologists/obstetricians, neonatologists and midwives, and concerned effective perinatal care pursuant to most recent protocols and standards of the World Health Organization, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Twenty four new incubators were procured, some intended for the Clinic of Gynaecology and others for hospitals in several towns. This marked the start of small, but still visible decrease in infant mortality. According to Eurostat, in 2008, the state held the second place according to infant mortality, which is still high, but in the opinion of gynaecologists, it would take time for this situation to recede. According to data from the Clinic of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, in 2017, the number of deaths among premature newborns accounted for 167 from the total of 781 liveborns, or 21 percent of those treated at the intensive care unit, while in 2018, for the same period of 10 months, 96 from total of 595 prematurely born babies died, accounting for 16 percent of those treated. In that, the clinic emphasized that the mortality rate concerns premature babies who were not carried to term and high-risk newborns, and demanded mortality records to be kept only for newborns after 15 weeks of gestation, because extremely premature newborns have very small odds of survival. The trend on decreased infant mortality continues and is primarily due to several factors: renewal and modernization of equipment, personnel enhancement at this ward, including recruitment of new nurses and doctors, all of which positively affect quality of work at this ward. Modern and new work protocols are implemented, followed

by strict compliance, and emphasis is put on less invasive approach when possible, in line with global trends.

## THE STRIKE OF MEDICAL DOCTORS AT THE CLINICAL CENTRE

Now let's go back to the situation and reasons that had led to the biggest strike staged by doctors at the Clinical Centre, which went down in the history of Macedonian healthcare system as one of the most courageous moves made during the time of gruevism. The strike that was long announced took place on November 14, 2012, and was supported by 90 percent of doctors at the Clinical Centre, who were later joined by doctors from clinical hospitals in Bitola and Shtip, and doctors from other towns around the state. Doctors demanded salary increase and equation of their profession to public office, cancellation of the project on performance-based payments, and representatives from the Ministry of Health and HIFM to address them with the respect deserved by medical doctors. The last demand was actually triggered by Todorov, who opened a front against doctors and treated them with disrespect, undermining their opinion and turning patients against them. One of main reasons for the strike, however, concerned the project "performance-based payments". This project was based on awards and punishments, whereby under the same budget some doctors were fined with salary deductions so that others would be awarded (who allegedly demonstrated better performance according to the system of points), which doctors perceived as unrealistic and that it does not reflect actual performance. "What bothered doctors the most is the fact that this method of rewards implied serious attack on peer relations and attempt to disband medical teams by introducing fines and disputably earned awards. That system was reflected in doctors' behaviour towards patients. The shortened examination time turned patients into numbers, because only numbers were used to show our performance. We tried to indicate the numerous disadvantages from the very start when this insufficiently planned and designed project was implemented. All efforts were to no avail. That is why we did something that nobody expected would ever happen - we went on strike", recalls Kalina Grivcheva-Stardelova, President of the Chamber of Medical Doctors. For entire month the strike was invisible to the institutions. In that time, union members met with all foreign embassies and received support from diplomatic representatives in the country. Around 1,400 doctors went on strike, but in retaliation Todorov decided to deny

payment of salaries to doctors who would not sign statements that they do not support the strike. Another paradoxical measure taken by Todorov concerned termination of negotiations and formation of new union, which attempted to oppose the existing. This brought to the surface links with judicial authorities, which were abused and forced to take scandalous decision that had led to the temporary measure on prohibiting strike activities. On December 8, when the “white coats” gathered on massive strike outside the government building, a counter-protest was staged in front of the Ministry of Health. In the aftermath of this event, the Ministry of Health managed to end the strike that lasted for entire 44 days through the branch union of health and pharmaceutical workers.

**Oculoplastic surgeon Dejan Stavrikj:**  
**“We went on strike because the public  
healthcare was being destroyed”**

“The doctors’ strike from 2012 was an ultimate expression of dissatisfaction among medical doctors and the entire healthcare sector with so-called ‘health reforms’ implemented by the government. These ‘reforms’ had actually devastated the public healthcare sector and were introduced by the regime government in the form of laws, i.e. numerous amendments to the Law on Healthcare from its coming into power in 2006. The modified model of ‘performance-based payments’ started as pilot project during Bujar Osmani’s tenure as health minister and was fully implemented by Nikola Todorov. Instead of improving the quality of care, this project served the authorities as tool to discipline doctors and exert pressure for partization of this profession, but was abandoned near VMRO-DPMNE’s end of government tenure. Notably, when available budget funds remain on same level, some doctors are awarded to the detriment of others from the same clinic without defined norms and standards on quality of health services. Such efforts stimulated quantity, which is contrary to all ethical and legal norms. In that period, the work of medical doctors, in addition to this project, was additionally burdened with enormous administrative activities that were previously assigned to administrative personnel. This administrative horror was crowned with the model called ‘My Term’, which caused additional chaos and, instead of shortening, it actually increased waiting lists. All these so-called ‘reforms’ further deteriorated doctor-patient relations and the quality of health services, which directly affects the health of citizens, and amounts to planned, systematic genocide. Today, it is evident that so-called ‘reforms’ had been pursued to devastate the public healthcare sector. Minister of Health Todorov and then-current

Strike staged by  
medical doctors  
from the Clinical  
Centre



directors inflicted costs on Macedonia in the value of hundreds of million euros, not to speak of damages in terms of dead, ill and disabled persons, which cannot be expressed in monetary terms", says Dejan Stavrikj who fronted the strike and served as president of the doctors' union at the Clinical Centre.

## PARALLEL IMPORT OF MEDICINES

The previous government amended the Law on Medicines in order to be able to import cheap medicines from third countries for which no information was available in terms of transport and storage. The parallel import of medicines in Macedonia was enforced from 2013 under auspices that it would significantly reduce the price of medicines. Then-current health minister Nikola Todorov announced that under this import regime all pharmaceutical companies can import medicines already registered in the country, irrespective of the fact whether they have been imported and registered by another pharmaceutical company. The cheapest medicines were imported from Turkey, a country where parallel import of medicines is prohibited and which has no legislation in place that regulates this matter. The pharmacies importing these medicines did not have insight whether they are safe, because they did not have direct contact with foreign manufacturers, but only with exporting pharmaceutical companies from Turkey, and no information was available how these medicines had been stored and transported, including compliance with the cold chain of supply. Citizens often complained that some medicines have no effect, while diabetics fiercely reacted to imported insulin. These concerns were quieted with assurances that all aspects are in order and that the panic created is unnecessary. Through parallel import of medicines, certain pharmaceutical companies accumulated millions of euros on their bank accounts, but citizens received unsafe medicines. The Association of Foreign Innovative Pharmaceuticals Manufacturers Representatives - Farmabrend expressed concerns that 40 percent of medicines imported in the state are falsified and claimed that, in spite of reports from patients, doctors and pharmacies, the Agency of Medicines has failed to react. "There are reports of side effects caused by medicines imported from Turkey, while the additional analyses established they are falsified", claimed people from Farmabrend in 2017. At that time, the series of investigative stories published by the portal *NovaTV* revealed shocking data that had been hidden for years. They include circulation of falsified medicines causing

side effects with patients; medicines bearing labels of the Turkish Health Fund being discovered with names of patients from Turkey; crumbled packaging of medicine; boxes bearing the name of one medicine, but containing another, etc. At the Clinic of Children Diseases it was discovered that one series of rare disease medicine included 11 vials of falsified medicine containing powder substance for which analyses conducted at foreign laboratory revealed is actually substance used against ferrous and aluminium poisoning. Two young patients almost lost their lives after having this medicine administered intravenously. Todorov confirmed he had been informed of this case and said it was reported, followed with investigation launched by the public prosecution, but claimed that “the journalist research amounts to tarnishing campaign that plays with the feelings of citizens”. The tender organized by the Ministry of Health also resulted in procurement of medicine for which 40 death cases had been reported in the United States, but its import was timely prevented by the Director of the Oncology Clinic. Suspicious breast-cancer medicines whose barcode was covered with a label of the Turkish Health Fund were also detected at the Oncology Clinic. In spite of that, the parallel import continued unhindered and uncontrolled. After *NovaTV* published its research, in November 2017, the Public Prosecution Office opened investigation into parallel import of medicines. Actually, the series of reports revealed how power had been abused, how citizen had been manipulated, how certain pharmaceutical power-players had lined their pockets, how the laws had been adopted to the liking of previous authorities with explanation that parallel import will actually reduce the price of medicines. Finally, in June 2018, MPs adopted amendments to the Law on Medicines according to which pharmaceutical distributors are obliged to provide quality certificates issued by relevant manufacturers, but also quality analysis certificates from laboratories authorized by competent bodies in the country where the medicine is manufactured or the country from which the medicine is exported. Although parallel import remained in effect, these two certificates provide guarantees on the quality and safety of medicines.

## THE PROJECT “MY TERM”

The national e-health system (known as “my term”) started in 2011 as the system for management of waiting lists, first as pilot-project for internal use at three health facilities: the Clinic of Radiology, the Clinic of Surgical Diseases and the City General Hospital “8 September”. The project “My Term” was designed to introduce order in scheduling examinations and medical tests. In that period, there were long and non-transparent

waiting lists for magnet resonance, computerized tomography, mammography and surgeries, with average waiting time of several months. "After its implementation at these three public health facilities, decision was taken to expand the project, but also modify it, i.e. to start functioning as system for scheduling all examinations, accompanied with introduction of electronic records and establishment of work modules for medical doctors. Additionally, wherever the patient is forwarded, all doctors will have insight in their medical records and the list of medicines they are prescribed, allowing them to make adequate decisions about the change of therapy", says Zhaklina Chagoroska from the e-Health Administration. She believes that introduction of the new system had dramatically reduced waiting time for medical examinations. "The reason for that is elimination of double entries and unrealistic patients, which allowed definition of minimum work time per medical equipment and per doctor. In 2013, the new upgraded system on health records was put into operation, known in the public as 'My Term'; since then, the system is upgraded every year with new modules, expanding its implementation in areas of healthcare, preventive healthcare and public health. Today, 'My Term' is centralized e-health system that creates and stores data and information related to healthcare", says Chagoroska. Nevertheless, in addition to benefits, the system 'My Term' also brought problems, especially in the first several years from its introduction. It often happened for the system to "collapse", creating chaos at reception desks and outside medical practices. Examination time per patient was often underlined as one of major shortfalls under this system, as well as the fact that the system does not allow medical doctors to pay sufficient attention to patients on the account of lengthy administrative procedures.

## **CONSTRUCTION OF NEW CLINICAL CENTRE: FAILED PROJECT OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT**

One of the biggest projects, i.e. construction of the new Clinical Centre which should have been located on the entry location to the Clinical Complex "Mother Theresa", was not implemented and no account was given for money spent. The building's foundation was placed on January 2, 2014, when cameras filmed Gruevski and Todorov on the official ceremony for launch of construction works, but that was all. Since then, there were no machines or workers present in the space designed for this grandiose building, whose construction was planned with a loan of 70 million euros from the Council of Europe's

Development Bank. The then-incumbent authorities announced that this major investment in the public healthcare sector will be completed in early 2017. Instead, nowadays its location includes only the big hole that had been dug with machines. The design solution was developed by the Italian company Aren SRL, which was paid 1.3 million euros. In 2015, it was revealed (in investigative story published on the portal *NovaTV*) that the architect from the Italian company Aren SRL which was awarded the tender for project design had been involved in corruption scandals in Italy one decade ago and was arrested twice in his country for matters related to hospital project designs in Italy. The authorities never answered how and why the project design contract was awarded to this company. In October 2016, new tender procedure was announced for construction of the Clinical Centre, but the public opening of bids, scheduled for December 5, never happened and the Ministry of Health postponed selection of the best contractor. The new deadline set by then-current government implied that construction works would be finished in the next five years. Then it became clear that nothing would come of the new Clinical Centre. After the change of government, priorities in the health sector included decision on the location for the new Clinical Centre. In March 2018, the government decided on location near Zlokukjani, but due to unsettled tenure issues related to the construction land the decision was changed in February 2019 and it was announced that construction works on the new building would start next year on state-owned location in the Municipality of Gjorche Petrov.

## TAMARA: THE GIRL WHOSE DEATH TOOK CITIZENS TO THE STREETS

The overall situation in healthcare, populism and politicization reached their breaking point. Matters were out of control, especially in terms of uncompromised use of power, including despotic and arrogant behaviour of ministers. It should be noted that the government wanted to use the disease of one child for self-promotion. And it created system that killed a child. Young Tamara Dimovska died on February 9, 2015, while waiting for competent authorities to decide where she would undergo surgery to correct her severe spinal deformation that pressed her heart and lungs. She was only nine years old. Her treatment had been postponed for an entire year. In truth, this was a matter



ГОСПОДИН!

УБИЦИ  
ОДЕБИВАЊЕ  
БАРАЊЕТО ЗА  
ЛЕКОВАЊЕ  
САДИСТИ  
ОД  
ЛЕКОВИ  
ТОЈИ  
2 ден  
ЊЕ

ОСИГУРНОСТ ЗА ТАМАРАКОЛ

**ПРОФ. Д-Р ГОРАН КОЕВСКИ**  
претставник на осигурениците,  
вонреден професор на Правниот  
факултет „Јустинијан Први“ во Скопје

**ПРОФ. Д-Р ВЛАДИМИР ПОПОВСКИ**  
претседател на Стоматолошката  
комора на Македонија

**ЕЛЕНА ТРПКОВСКА**  
претставничка од  
Министерството за  
финансии

ОС  
ТО



ДИПЕТАНТИ

ЈА УБИВТ  
ТАМАРА

ДЕДОТО МИМ  
ЉУБИШЕ ДЕДОВ  
НЕ АДЗВОУИ

САМО МОИСТ  
КАЛКУЛИРААТ  
ЧОВЕК ЖИВОТ  
ОКА

ЧЕКААТ  
ВАШИТЕ  
ОПЕ

ЖИВОТОТ  
РЕДИ ПОМА  
НИТЕ ТР  
СИЛВАНЕВА

## ОДГОВОРНОСТ ЗА ТАМАРА ОД

**ПРОФ. Д-Р АСПАЗИЈА  
СОФИЈАНОВА**  
директорка на Клиниката  
за детски болести

**ПРОФ. Д-Р  
АНАСТАСИКА ПОПОСКА**  
специјалист-ортопед.

**Д-Р ЉУБИША  
КАРАНФИЛОВСКИ**  
доктор на стоматологија, член на  
Советот на Самостојниот синдикат  
за здравство, фармација и  
социјална заштита на Р. М.

**ЏЕМАИЛИ  
МЕХАЗИ**  
директор на ФЗО

**Д-Р ЈОСИФ  
ТРАЈКОВСКИ**  
претставник на  
Стоматолошката комора  
на Македонија

**ПРИМ. М-Р Д-Р  
ИЛИЈА ГЛИГОР**  
претставник од Сојузот  
здруженијата на  
пензионерите на М

# ТАВКА ОД ДОДОРОВ

ОДИ СИ  
ТА КТОТИ МЕ УБИ МЕ  
ТИ ЈА УБИ ТАМ  
КОЛКУ УБИДИ ИНАТЕ ВО СЕНЕ

of only 30,000 euros, i.e. the cost for her surgery abroad. Donations collected by means of humanitarian concerts were discontinued when Todorov promised her parents that the girl would undergo surgery abroad because all possibilities in the country had been exhausted. This opened the door to manipulations. Allegedly, institutions were unable to agree whether and where Tamara will received the medical treatment needed, while the Ministry of Health, HIFM and committees at this fund came in the public with contradictory information. After lengthy anguish, during which Tamara's situation was deteriorating, the parents were told that authorities are waiting for the surgeon from Turkey to come back from abroad and to schedule the surgery. Actually, it turned out that the second-instance health committee, where Aspazija Sofijanova as then-incumbent Director of the Children's Clinic put her signature, had not approved the opinion provided by panel of orthopaedic doctors and indicated that possibilities for treatment in Macedonia have not been exhausted, i.e. "it is possible for the medical treatment to be performed at TORAUC (clinic of thoracic and vascular surgeries)". Then it became clear the parents had been manipulated and lied to. Later, Sofijanova revealed that the decision for young Tamara not to be treated abroad had come from "above", i.e. higher instances in the healthcare system. The plan was to open the new Centre of Spinal Diseases and to have the surgery performed in the country, which could also serve the purpose of official promotion for this centre. "The decision came from the higher level; [the authorities] were waiting for the new spinal centre to be opened and to have Tamara treated there. At that time I was not in the state; the decision was made over phone", stated at that time Sofijanova. Four months before the death of young Tamara Dimovska, the Health Insurance Fund had stopped all surgeries for children with spinal deformities that should be sent abroad. The Health Insurance Fund had notified, via document, all medical panels at the clinics and the two commissions that "proposals should not be made for medical treatment abroad in cases of spinal deformities because this condition does not imply urgency, i.e. is not acute". Evident is that the decision was politically motivated. Todorov declared he does not feel responsible for young Tamara's death and that he had done everything for this girl to be afforded surgery abroad. He shifted responsibility to the team of foreign doctors that should have scheduled the surgery. On February 24, massive protests were organized, first before the Ministry of Health and later outside HIFM, with marches on the streets in Skopje. Citizens demanded resignations and chanted "Murderers, murderers", "We are Tamara", "You will not be forgiven", "You spend money on bronze and dead idols". A heartbeat sound was played on speakers. Participants in the protests included

pensioners, students, and parents. They resulted in two resignations, by both directors at HIFM, Maja Parnadjieva and Djemail Mehazi, but Todorov did not resign from public office. After this, prosecution authorities launched investigation, but the indictment was filed almost three years later. Three and a half years later, the Public Prosecution Office filed an indictment before the Basic Court Skopje 1 against 12 people for having committed the criminal offence of unconscious performance of office and duties in the case related to medical treatment of Tamara Dimovska. Charges were filed against members of both, first and second instance committees, both HIFM directors, but Todorov was not charged. The court process is still in early stages, but is already entangled in court labyrinths. The case of young Tamara implied start of civil protests against the regime, which continued in the next years until Nikola Gruevski's fall from government.

## HOW DID THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM OPERATE?

In the last decade, as the links of social life were becoming weaker, poverty was proportionally growing, hence increasing scope of work for the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. This ministry, responsible to design policies for the most fragile population, had brought momentary benefits in some areas, but most of its projects did not yield any effect. People without sustenance means, people at social risk and persons with disabilities are first on the list of those in need of assistance. In 2011, poverty rate in the country stood at 30.4 percent. According to data from the World Bank published in 2012, more than 37,000 households are social allowance beneficiaries, i.e. each household member lives with less than 2 dollars per day. In such situation, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should have played a crucial role in assisting and alleviating hardships of citizens living on the poverty line, persons with disabilities, elderly persons, unemployed, children. However, official data from the State Statistical Office show that the number of monetary social allowance beneficiaries in the period 2010-2015 is almost halved, with this reduction culminating in 2015 when the new legal solutions entered in effect and implied stricter eligibility criteria for monetary assistance. This ministry was already more focused on administrative and legal changes, instead of addressing the actual problems. Changes in this regard mainly concerned legislative actions, for example, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, establishment of the national coordination body for implementation of the Convention on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities in 2012, and 2013 amendments to the Construction Law in order to introduce new provisions that oblige municipalities to ensure access paths for free movement of persons with disabilities. Actual compliance with this policy is completely different matter. Practices that implied campaign work and self-promotion had negative effect on citizens who benefited or should have benefited from these services. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy encompasses policies on employment, labour relations, social protection, rights and protection of children and their families, social security of pensioners, protection against discrimination, and the like. In spite of these goals, the social protection system in the state could not meet the vast and varied social needs of the population, primarily due to creation of poor policies, but also the system's limited institutional, human and financial capacity. This cumbersome and enormous apparatus was also plagued by inadequate organization and distribution of work tasks among its staff members. In the period of ten years, a total of six, i.e. seven ministers had been changed, including Ljupcho Meshkov from LDP, who left this office in July 2008. He was succeeded by Dzeljalj Bajrami from DUI, who stayed in office by July 2011, i.e., for entire three years. Afterwards, Spiro Ristovski from VMRO-DPMNE was appointed labour minister and remained in this office by May 2013, when then-governing parties appointed young Dime Spasov to serve as the new minister. Spasov became minister at the age of 28 years and his tenure was plagued with several scandals. In the period November 2015 - May 2016, this office was performed by Frosina Remenski from SDSM as part of the caretaker government. After the Przhino Agreement, Remenski left the office and was replaced by Ibrahim Ibraimi, who previously served as deputy minister under her and stayed in office for entire year, i.e. until the new government was formed. As of June 1, 2017, the office of labour and social policy minister is performed by Mila Carovska from the ranks of SDSM, who came to this position with previous experience in the non-governmental sector.

**Carovska: "We inherited a completely non-functional system"**

"At the start of my mandate, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy employed 329 persons. I asked the Ministry of Information Society and Administration to conduct functional analysis of employees so that we could see how many people are actually

needed. My goal was to create a team that would be able to efficiently lead all sectors, but at the same time we needed people at [social work] centres, institutions, to work in the interest of citizens. We organized work at the centres in two shifts. In that, we made sure employees are not fired, but assigned to positions where they would serve citizens. As was the case with other line ministries, the one I manage was also plagued by many irregularities and abuse of funds. I was surprised to learn about high royalty fees paid to employees for participation in various commissions and working groups. In addition to salaries entitled to them as ministry employees, they were awarded royalties in the amount of their salary for serving as commission members, which they performed during working hours nonetheless. The amounts paid were as high as 50,000 MKD. Although it is a matter of public department competent for socially vulnerable groups, that fact did not prevent them to use their privileged positions for personal gains. New rulebook on payments was adopted whereby commission members engaged during working hours are paid 500 MKD per month, to cover coffee costs. I will not allow somebody's pockets to be lined, but nothing to be functional", says Minister of Labour and Social Policy Mila Carovska.

Carovska explains that the decade-long unplanned management at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has left serious consequences on the system and its beneficiaries.

"To me, it seems the previous leadership had completely forgotten the role that should be played by this ministry in the society, i.e. to create measures that would actually help citizens overcome poverty, earn higher salaries, leave the state labyrinth and terminate their dependence from the system. The point of assistance offered by the state is to ensure social security for all, but also help citizens become productive members of the society. That is how there will be functional system and strong state. To achieve that, we need to conduct continuous analyses to see which measures have proved good and which measures should be adapted or transformed. We need to have clear goal and vision, and to work strategically and continuously. Unfortunately, none of this was applied in the previous ten years. As consequence thereof we had numerous harmful projects that exhausted the state budget, but did not deliver desired outcomes. The labour sector suffered greatest damages from the project 'Macedonia Employs', notably because

mandatory social insurance contributions for workers employed under this project, around 26,000 in total, had not been paid, which caused additional financial problems at relevant funds, in particular the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund. Also, ad-hoc increase of pensions outside the legal framework thoroughly shook the pension system. Without the reforms taken [after the change of government], both current and future pensioners would not have their pensions, because in 2016 PDIF's gap was increased to 17.2 billion MKD or by almost 28% of its total revenue. In the sector on social protection and child protection, instead of rescuing the most vulnerable from poverty and leading them to activation on the labour market, the law turned them into permanent users of social welfare, and reduced the amount of monetary allowance paid. Investments were not made in children protection and early childhood development or in creation of quality human capital. Experiences showed that manipulations had been made with many services offered to socially vulnerable families, especially before the elections, and included offer of social allowance to those that are actually entitled to them by law, be it in the form of wellness treatments, social housing or social allowance", says Carovska.

## **PROJECTS OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY IN THE LAST DECADE**

- ▶ The first strategic document on deinstitutionalization was adopted in 2008, with focus on the Special Institute in Demir Kapija, but implementation of this project started ten years later.
- ▶ In 2009, spectacular announcements were made for the project "SOS Markets", where social allowance beneficiaries could shop free-of-charge in total amount of 5,000 MKD per month. This project was never realized.
- ▶ The year 2010 marked the start of the project for free wellness treatments. In that, concerns were raised that this benefit is approved only to party supporters, but mostly that those who had used this possibility were later deducted a particular sum from their funeral solidary fund.
- ▶ The electronic register of adoptions was introduced in 2011, but problems with children adoption remained.

- ▶ Free summer vacation for children from social risk families started in 2012.
- ▶ In 2013, licenses for caregivers and directors of institutions competent to provide care, upbringing and education of preschool children were introduced.
- ▶ In 2013, four new benefits were introduced under the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Children Protection, as follows: allowance for completely deaf people in the amount of 4,000 MKD; mobility allowance for persons with quadriplegia and blindness in the amount of 7,000 MKD; monetary allowance of 8,000 MKD for single parents who care for their disabled children in the next 15 years, but do not fulfil criteria for age-mandated pension.
- ▶ In 2013, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy promoted the project "Care for Warm Homes", calling citizens to donate clothes, furniture and linens for families at social risk.
- ▶ The project "Free Tourist Weekend for Pensioners" was announced in 2014 and is one of many projects that never came to fruition.
- ▶ In 2015, the project "Macedonia Employs" resulted in unpaid salary contributions for 26.000 workers, on the account of which incumbent minister Carovska had filed charges before the Public Prosecution Office.
- ▶ To finance most of these projects, in 2009, the government signed loan contract with the World Bank in the amount of 19,300,000 euros. The loan was taken to finance the project "Conditional Cash Allowance" and was intended to strengthen the public administration, conduct analysis of social work centres, equip and refurbish them, procure software for administration of cash allowances, and to implement the program on cash allowance for pupils from families at social risk.

## MORE IMPORTANT PROJECTS AND EVENTS

### The action “Metastasis”

The public would remember the action “Metastasis” from April 19, 2010, when 37 people were arrested and charged for criminal actions and malpractices with disability pensions, including medical doctors who served as members in disability pension committees, hospital personnel and other involved parties. The court process that was extended for two and a half years resulted in probation sentences for some defendants, medical doctors were sentenced with imprisonment of two and a half years, and some of them were prohibited to serve as members of disability committees. Although this action triggered public hopes that corruption would be suppressed and disability pensions would be approved more easily, the court process brought to the surface many issues that overshadowed guilt of medical doctors and enablers who mediated in approval of such pensions. At court hearings, evidence was presented that disability pensions had amounted to state-wide crime known to and directly instructed by ministers, deputy ministers, party officials, none of whom was held responsible. People that ended behind bars included party members and employees who followed orders and granted disability pensions, and sometimes engaged in such activity for personal financial benefit. According to the statement by one of doctors accused, 700 disability pensions were approved under direct order from the governing party to members of VMRO-DPMNE and to 77 other individuals. After this action and disclosure of this chain of command, almost nothing changed in terms of performance of medical committees. Disability pensions are rarely approved and possible changes and reforms in that regard remain in the hands of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

412

### Allowance for third child

The parental allowance for third child is the social right introduced in 2009 and awarded to every third liveborn child. According to official statistics, the number of beneficiaries is continuously increased, from 1,898 in 2009 to 23,915 in 2016. In terms of the amount of funds paid under this monetary allowance (around 8,000 MKD) and due to the fact that this allowance is awarded to people with high income, questions were raised about

legitimacy of goals pursued with social allowances paid under the system on children protection. According to analyses, key challenges with this social right include: failure to attain the desired effect of this measure in terms of increased natality (in spite of factual increase in the number of third-born children in the state); program costs and benefits show negative net value, which gives raise to the need for this program to be re-examined and redesigned. On this account, legal changes were proposed for third child allowance to be transformed, i.e. to be cancelled in its current form and replaced with one-time payment for every newborn child. In addition to one-time payments, families with minimum income and social allowance beneficiaries will have access to child and education allowance, whose ultimate goal is to reduce child poverty, while families that already benefit from this allowance will not be affected by legal changes because they will apply only in the case of newborn children. Representatives of the ministry say that, although the existing law aimed to increase population natality, this result was not achieved because the natality rate had dropped from 13.3 in 2001 to 11.1 in 2016. Otherwise, in 2017, a total of 38.7 million euros were disbursed from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy's budget for payment of parental allowance for third child. In 2017, third child allowance was paid to 26,126 mothers and fourth child allowance was paid to 803 mothers. Law amendments on revoking this allowance were approved on May 21, 2019, which means that the same will be paid only to families with monthly income up to 12,000 MKD.

### Project for construction of social housing

The project for construction of apartments for persons at social risk and other vulnerable groups started in 2009 and is partially financed by the Council of Europe's Development Bank. This project anticipated construction of 32 buildings with 1,754 residential units and total area of 72,643.70 square meters. Although it should have been completed by the end of 2018, social housing buildings in Strumica and Gostivar are still under construction, while buildings in Gevgelija, Pehchevo, Vinica, Kumanovo, Sveti Nikole, Probishtip, Negotino, Tetovo, Debar, Veles and three locations in Skopje were not

constructed. In 2016, former labour minister Frosina Remenski revealed that the Minister of Transport and Communications and Director of the Public Enterprise for Management of Residential and Business Property (JPSSDP) had awarded social housing units to fellow party members from VMRO-DPMNE who held public offices at that time. Some of them collected rents, while others used these residential units for "other purposes". To make the scandal worse, award of social housing units depended on previously obtained opinion from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which was forwarded to the commission responsible to approve these decisions. "To make the tragedy greater, the ruling party had registered phantom voters on addresses of state-owned social housing units. After the change of both ministers and three deputy ministers from the opposition, the social housing commission at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy expressly awarded housing units in Resen to citizens from the region of Mala Prespa. In Prilep, social housing was awarded to persons who did not meet application criteria and do not qualify for social housing", said Remenski at that time. Otherwise, a number of social housing units in Skopje's settlement Gyorche Petrov remain empty to present day, while social risk families do not have where to live.

414

### Free wellness treatment for pensioners

The project "Wellness Treatment for Pensioners" was introduced in 2010, together with free use of city public transportation, both being populist and marketing tricks to win over pensioners as voters. The service called "wellness and climate recreation" is still valid and can be used once in duration of seven days. It includes six full boards, wellness therapy, mandatory health check and transport costs in the amount of return bus ticket after the service is used, under the condition that pensioners who benefited from this service in the previous three years do not qualify for second. In 2010, 25,940 pensioners applied for wellness recreation, of which only 7,400 were granted this benefit. In 2018, from the total of 15,678 pensions who applied, wellness treatment was approved to only 4,240. Both wellness treatment and free bus rides were populist measures of the previous government, and together with free vacation for pupils from families at social risk, they should be understood as something people under social risk and those with low pensions are entitled to. Moreover, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy pursued these measures with loans that would be repaid by citizens.

## Incentives for private care centres for elderly people, while the state-run centres are collapsing

There are only five state-run care centres for elderly people, located in Skopje, Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep and Berovo (with only 29 beds). According to official statistics, in 2016, services at these centres were used by 508 persons, and care was provided by more than 143 employees. Also, official statistics show that more elderly people are accommodated at private compared to state facilities, because waiting lists for the latter run up to five or six years. This is indicative of insufficient public offer in terms of institutional support for provision of services to elderly people, which is a major problem. In the last decade, no new state-run care centres were constructed, while the existing facilities were collapsing. Instead, priority was given to construction of private care centres that charge around 500 euros for monthly accommodation. This sum is very high for pensioners in Macedonia and they cannot afford this type of care and accommodation with average pensions. Unlike private centres, state-run centres for elderly people are much cheaper, but they are collapsing and new centres are not built. Opening of private care centres in the last ten years was stimulated by the state and has become profitable business. One stimulation measures for construction of private centres implied sales of state land at the price of 1 euro per square meter, reduced amount of municipal fees and taxes, favourable credit lines approved by Makedonska Banka, and entrepreneurship advantages. Decisions about which legal entities/natural persons would be given chance to open care centres for elderly people were taken by the government, upon previous recommendation from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

415

## CONCLUSIONS

The past decade was marked by governance of one political party that abused institutions to manipulate the citizens. Although the government was changed one year before the Prespa Agreement, "ruins" of the past period remain and consequences thereof are still felt. Such abuse of institutions was present in all spheres of the society, but citizens mainly felt their effects in healthcare and social protection. Experiences, but also many of the projects, show that citizens at social risk were used for manipulations, especially before

---

The decade-long period was marked by governance of one political party that abused institutions to manipulate the citizens. Although the government was changed one year before the Prespa Agreement, "ruins" of the past period remained and consequences thereof are still felt. Such abuse of institutions was present in all sphere of the society, but the citizens mostly felt it on their backs in the areas of healthcare and social protection.

---

416

the elections. In that, they were offered "services" to which they are entitled under the legislation in effect, such as wellness treatment, social housing or social allowance. These categories of people, including pensioners with low pensions, are highly vulnerable and often abused under various projects that served the purpose of collecting votes before the elections. Meaningful reforms were not implemented. In the future, better strategy is needed to strengthen this sector in all four segments: labour, social protection, child protection and pension system. A lot needs to be done for the purpose of removing children panhandling on the streets, but also to strengthen the social services. After the change of government, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy detected weaknesses and, in their words, efforts are underway to build relevant capacity, in spite of being faced with certain injustices inflicted by the previous government, for example, damages to 12,000 persons whose pension contributions were paid only under the first insurance pillar. It is evident that work-able people do not need social assistance, but jobs, and that requires serious engagement aimed to reduce high unemployment in

the state. The process on deinstitutionalization should continue as practice that is pursued in all developed countries. There are no more children accommodated in Demir Kapija, and in institutions such as "25 May" and "11 October", all of whom have been transferred to small community-based group homes. This process should serve as example and should be followed by psychiatric hospitals, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, because living conditions at these facilities are below any human dignity, which is duly noted in all international reports. Priority should be given to more trained personnel, but also construction and reconstruction of new kindergartens. All steps should be designed on the basis of detailed analysis and transparent operation, because that is the only way to achieve progress. Reasons for the Macedonian healthcare system's collapse are identified

in erroneous policies, absence of strategic goals, deeply rooted partization of this sector, populist methods and lack of interest to implement meaningful reforms. That method of operation should serve as lesson for the current leadership at the Ministry of Health. Strategic goals should be geared towards prevention of diseases, because little attention is paid to this area. Certainly, vaccination education and campaigns are needed due to re-emergence of previously eradicated communicable diseases, and given that measles epidemic had already taken the lives of several children. Prevention and reduced risk of diseases would not bring benefits only for citizens, but also for the state, on the account of lower costs for treatment. All countries have turned on red lights in their respective healthcare sectors, the population has longer life expectancy, health costs are increasing and therefore the health policy needs to be changed. Partization in the healthcare sector should be stopped and citizens must know how their money is spent. Although the healthcare sector disposes with limited resources, there should be fair distribution of funds and the entire process should be transparent. The medical commission approving treatment abroad should be completely independent from HIFM. They should not include the same doctors sitting in medical panels that issue opinions in order to avoid influence on final decisions. The positive list of medicines must be immediately reviewed to eliminate all obsolete and introduce new medicines. At the same time, HIFM should find solution to the problem of prescription medicines that are out of stock in the first several days of the month. Evidently the quota system is non-functional solution and announcements have been made that this system will be revoked. Reorganization of primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare is needed. This effort does not require funds, but solid strategy. In order to survive, the public healthcare sector must offer better conditions for treatment and accommodation of patients, because otherwise they would turn to private hospitals or would die on the streets. In such conditions, matters in the public healthcare sector would backslide, but would also lose its role, including the risk of becoming fully non-functional.



Dejan Azeski

**TEN YEARS  
OF HEAVILY  
PAID ECONOMY**

*The expert public consulted and the detailed analysis of available data conducted both indicate to the same thing: economic consequences from the country's delayed NATO membership cannot be calculated directly, but assumptions could be made on how much the Macedonian economy would have gained if there were no "Divo Naselje", December 24, April 27, and series of other*

*security incidents that deferred not only foreign, but domestic investments as well. Additionally, the scope of criminal activity during VMRO-DPMNE's government and the length of this governance would have been much smaller, i.e. shorter. Direct positive economic implications would have been much greater if, ten years ago, the country had started accession negotiations with the European Union.*

"Savage spending of the people's money, enormous state borrowing, propaganda, shady tenders worth hundreds of million euros, more propaganda, use of the budget to service narrow party interests, even more propaganda, enormous accumulation of wealth by companies and individuals close to the authorities...", these notions are the first association among average citizens in the state in reference to the economy and economic policy in the post-2008 period.

Only after having started this research, I was able to realize how many weaknesses, omissions, wrongdoings, acts of crime and purposeful undermining of key state interests we had forgotten in these eleven years. I do not say that many of them are not remembered, but I claim they were so many in number that the mere scope had contributed to their gradual deletion from the collective memory, probably under the pressure of their enormous specific massiveness.

Nobody could prophesize and claim that some of these developments would not have happened even if Macedonia joined NATO back in 2008, but experiences in the region (for example, events around former Prime Minister of Croatia Ivo Sanader) confirm that, in the countries that are already integrated in the developed world, any crime is ultimately sanctioned.

Hence, this should be the starting point for analysis of economic effects caused by the unwarranted delay of the country's Euro-Atlantic integration processes for entire eleven years.

It is known that the link between business and political instability is unbreakable, literally. Realizing this fact does not necessitate a reference to the Second World War's devastating effect on the global economy. It takes a quick look at *Google's* chart on Macedonian GDP growth over the last 20 years to see how it reacted to the war in Kosovo, 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia, and 2015/2016 political crisis, and instantly things become clear.

Simply nobody, including ourselves, would gamble their arduously acquired capital in a place and under conditions that imply possible risk of wars. It is known that back in 2001 the value of real estate in Tetovo almost fell to zero. It is also known that Switzerland has the highest value of real estate due to the fact that, for more than two centuries, it has not faced any security crisis.

It is known that, to great extent, investment activities in the United States are based on state guarantees for the inviolability and literal sanctity of private ownership.

Everybody has already seen 1958 footage of American investors leaving Cuba, who swam the channel to escape the newly emerged political uncertainty.

At micro level, this situation is reflected in the microeconomic policy. It is known that interest rates of international financing institutions vary depending on the country that applies for loans. When a country with high risk of conflict (like Macedonia in the period 2008-2017) knocks on their doors, it would be levied higher interest unlike Sweden or Norway which, truth to be told, do not even need loans.

Hence, even before the start of this research it could be said that we (as direct or indirect participants in economy) have paid the price of political instability that emerged as consequence of the unnaturally long and completely unnecessary delay of the country's NATO membership.

## WHICH LOGIC GUIDED THE MACEDONIAN RECIPE FOR ECONOMIC POLICY?

Many years before Nikola Gruevski came into power, at informal gathering with renowned intellectuals, I heard a rather interesting comparison. It went like this:

“Difference between SDSM and DPMNE is that the former do not believe Macedonia could sustain on its own (which was recently officially acknowledged by Branko Crvenkovski) and always sought refuge in foreign alliances. Given that Belgrade is not there [as power centre], they are dreaming of replacing it with Brussels. On the other side,, DPMNE is hundred percent (and without reasonable grounds) convinced that Macedonia is a biblical country and could therefore stand on its own in the world, and they attempt to emphasize that concept in all possible occasions”.

After the disastrous outcome of the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, DPMNE's leader and then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski had an opportunity to prove this hypothesis, purported by his fellow party members, and invested all his enthusiasm in that endeavour.

His economic mission and vision (definitely entertained by Gruevski in his complex mind) to prove Macedonia's self-sustainability was based on several pillars, which are analysed below.

4 2 1

### PILLAR#1: STATE BORROWING

As former finance minister, from the very start of his governance and especially after 2008, Nikola Gruevski offered new model of economy, much bolder in state borrowing compared to his predecessors.

For clarification purposes, the previous government led by SDSM, in which Nikola Popovski served as finance minister, was known for its policy of restrictions, i.e. policy of minimum borrowing and minimum spending. Their philosophy proved to be pernicious at the next parliamentary elections which brought Nikola Gruevski to power.

Probably advised from SDSM's practices and consequences thereof, Gruevski decided to fully ignore such policy, or more precisely, pursued the exact opposite policy that implied maximalist spending.

From people close to him (although he never stated that in person) it could be learned that he had hoped for increased consumption power and habits among Macedonians and, consequently, fast economic results.

That is how the process of massive state borrowing started, which is not discontinued to present day, despite the change of government.

According to official statistics, from the record low level of borrowing after the independence observed in 2008 and amounting to 2 billion and 45 million dollars, i.e. 20.64 percent of GDP, already in 2009 the public debt was increased to 2.2 billion dollars, i.e. 23.57 percent of GDP. Every next year under VMRO-DPMNE's governance state borrowing continued to increase at proportional rate. Hence, in 2010 the public debt accounted for 24.06 percent of GDP (2.3 billion dollars) and in 2011 it rose to 27.73 percent of GDP, i.e. amounted to 3 billion dollars. 2012 saw a more rapid increase by whole 6 percentile points, with the public debt reaching 33.66 percent of GDP (3.3 billion dollars), and the next 2013 it accounted for 3.7 billion dollars or 33.97 percent of GDP. In the next years (2014, 2015 and 2016) and during Nikola Gruevski's last government cabinet, the public debt increased to 38.02 percent, 38.10 percent and 39.54 percent respectively, and finally Nikola Gruevski left the public office with a total debt of 4.3 billion dollars.

In the same period, the public debt per capita increased from 998 dollars in 2008 to the record-breaking rate of 2,052 dollars per capita in 2016, unprecedented from the country's independence to present.

Hence, Macedonia holds the high 63<sup>rd</sup> rank position on the list of most indebted countries in the world.

---

After 2008, Gruevski offered new model of economy, much bolder in state borrowing compared to his predecessors. Hence, he left the public office with a total public debt of 4.3 billion dollars or twice the amount of 2 billion and 45 million dollars, which was the rate of public debt in 2008.

---

During his tenure, Macedonia did not borrow only on the foreign capital markets. Domestic banks, especially in the late years of his mandate, were regularly addressed by the state with loan requests. State bonds became regular instrument for compensation of budget gaps. The government found yet another method of interest-free crediting in delayed payment of VAT refund. This directly threatened the business sector, but on the other hand, it served the purpose of buying social peace by regular disbursement of salaries and pensions.

In the meantime, Gruevski achieved his primary goal of staying in power for more than ten years. These “borrowed” funds afforded him to raise salaries of civil servants and to recruit hundreds of thousand new employees, to raise pension benefits, to bribe artists and public figures with fictitious imaginary projects, such as the statutes from “Skopje 2014” and, of course, to maintain the domestic construction industry by means of rigged tenders for companies close to the authorities. Once central and municipal administrations were overcrowded, those remaining outside the system were quieted with introduction of agriculture subsidies and subsidized attraction of foreign investments for mass creation of new jobs.

In summary, thanks to this policy, Gruevski managed to buy voters with state funds and declare incredulous ten consecutive victories on elections.

423

Most terrifying of all is that the country has just started to repay these debts. Hence, SDSM's new government led by Zoran Zaev, by inertia, continued the practice of state borrowing with unremitting dynamics. Although the 2018 fiscal strategy clearly stipulates that vast portion of new borrowing is intended to repay old arrears incurred by the previous government, that practice does not mitigate the state's bad image and poor rating in the domestic public, but also with international creditors.

More specifically, over the next three years, the fiscal strategy anticipates state borrowing in the amount of more than 2.1 billion euros. Most of these funds, i.e. 1.38 billion euros, are planned to be borrowed from the foreign capital markets, while borrowing on the domestic market by issuing securities and bonds is planned in the amount of 753.4 million euros.

More than half of funds to be borrowed by the state should be used to repay old maturing debts, i.e. 1.2 billion euros by 2020. Of these funds, 800 million euros are payable to foreign creditors and around 400 million euros to domestic creditors.

The sum planned to cover the budget deficit in the next three years amounts to 862.4 million euros and there is evident decrease in terms of planned deficit at annual level.

In 2018 and 2019, the authorities plan to accumulate portion of state borrowing, i.e. around 352 million euros, on the state deposit account, but already in 2020 more than 280 million euros will be withdrawn from this account due to rapid increase of the sum owed to foreign creditors, because repayment of one Eurobond will mature.

When all is added and detracted, it turns out that net borrowing by 2020 will amount to 930 million euros.

In that, the public debt, which also includes the state debt and guarantees for borrowing by public enterprises and companies fully or dominantly owned by the state and/or municipalities, is planned to reach 55.9 percent in 2019, followed by mild decrease to 53.5 percent of GDP in 2020, which would be equal to around 6.5 billion euros.

It seems that these figures postpone the deadline for recovery from damages inflicted by the already mentioned short-sighted economic policy in the period 2008-2016.

4 2 4

In sum, the era of Nikola Gruevski and his several government cabinets can absolutely be called the era of state borrowing. Experiences which the Prime Minister had accumulated during his previous term as finance minister was put to maximum use to walk the line of biggest possible borrowing the state could bear on its shoulders. And he did that with obvious intention of buying social peace and pursuing utterly populist goals.

It is true that majority of projects built with this money will remain for the posterity. But the fact remains that this poor country was additionally impoverished by building most expensive motorways and most expensive theatres in the world.

## PILLAR#2: MASSIVE STATE INVESTMENTS TO STIMULATE THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

According to many, the practice of state borrowing is not the single problem as concerns were also raised with how these funds were spent.

---

In the period 2008-2015, barely eight kilometres motorway were put into use in Macedonia. Instead, public spending was mainly funnelled into the megalomaniac project "Skopje 2014", which managed to burn nearly half billion dollars of taxpayers money. The exact price tag for this project would probably never be revealed nor possible positive effects therefrom.

---

In the period 2008-2015, barely eight kilometres motorway were put into use in Macedonia, from Kumanovo to the state border, plus the Skopje ring-road, which was an old project from the time of SDSM's government.

Instead, public spending was mainly funnelled into the megalomaniac project "Skopje 2014", which managed to "burn" nearly half billion dollars of taxpayer money. The exact price tag of this project would probably never be revealed, but what is known for certain is that its long-term effects are slim to none.

Except in ideological terms, the project "Skopje 2014" perfectly matched the previously referred economic concept pursued by VMRO-DPMNE's government, giving primacy to instantaneous results instead of long-term goals and the entrapments of uncontrolled borrowing.

425

Hence, for most part, this project engaged domestic construction companies which boosted GDP in the years after the global economic crisis. The country's gross domestic product continued to grow throughout all these years under dynamics of around three percent.

More specifically, in 2008, when the first efforts under this intensive construction activity started, domestic economy grew by 5.5 percent. The next 2009, due to the global economic downturn, it fell into negative rate of -0.04 percent. In 2010, Macedonia saw GDP growth of 34 percent, in 2011 - 2.3 percent. In 2012, despite stimulations for the domestic construction industry, the economy was in recession by 0.5 percent, and already in 2013

it achieved average growth of 2.9 percent. Over the next years (2014, 2015 and 2016) GDP growth accounted for 2.9 percent, 3.6 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively.

Hence, Gruevski and his VMRO-DPMNE achieved their primary goal of ensuring that the country would not be swept by the economic tsunami which, given the business sector's fragility at times of global crisis, was very likely to happen.

Although the Macedonian economy weathered the global economic crisis relatively easy, it cannot be said that, under such rapid borrowing and spending, the government has at least achieved its short-term goal.

Because, according to experts and connoisseurs of Macedonian economy, for that to be reflected on the population's standard, GDP needs to grow at rate higher than 6 percent, which the country, in spite of its unconventional spending, did not manage to achieve.

4 2 6

As regards long-term effects of the project "Skopje 2014", except for tourism boost in Skopje, which is not confirmed as direct result of this project (and certainly has minor share in the economy's added value), and opening new thousands square meters as office space mainly intended for partisan recruitments in the administration, no other positive effects could be seen.

Moreover, it should be noted that investigations into criminal wrongdoings directly related to "Skopje 2014" are still not completed, although they had inflicted damages on the Macedonian economy, but according to what is known thus far, the figures are immeasurable just like the project.

From today's objective perspective, it is not known whether "Skopje 2014" was politically more favourable for VMRO-DPMNE or for SDSM. Given that construction works were in progress over six years, the opposition, day in and day out, had at least several topics at their numerous press-conferences to attack the government.

Protest against the expensive bridge fence near Holliday Inn hotel





Not even the hundreds of pages planned for this publication would suffice to enlist absolutely all omissions, wrongdoings and criminal activity under this project, but some of them are elaborated below.

The annals of world construction industry would remember that the bridge fence (and only the fence) in vicinity of hotel Holiday Inn costed more than the entirely new bridge connecting Gjorche Petrov to Saraj.

A hundred meters north of this marvellous bridge fence, three willow trees were planted in the river, with a price tag of astonishing 400,000 euros.

As for the uncounted statues, monuments and other bronze figures, any effort to calculate their cost would be futile, but it is worth sharing the comment of fellow journalists from Florence, Italy, who noted that the artistic foundry working on the project "Skopje 2014" would have to cast the name Macedonia in golden letters as the country that had ensured them highest profits in the history of this renowned town of arts.

Costs for the old-new Macedonian National Theatre (demolished in the earthquake) were multiplied by several times under annex contracts (additions) compared to the primary contract. As for the museum of wax figures, a single painting by artists from Ukraine was paid up to several hundreds of thousand euros.

To make matters worse, even if at one point in time the actual cost of criminal activity under "Skopje 2014" is calculated to the last penny, it would still not be the full amount paid by the Macedonian economy. It was this project that buried all and any chances to reach an agreement with Greece, resulting in the country's delayed Euro-Atlantic integrations by a whole decade, and most likely paid by entire generation with its low standard of living.

And finally, after a literally 6-year cannonade against unscrupulous and utterly illogic spending of taxpayer money, Nikola Gruevski and his government decided to listen to criticism and to engage in construction of infrastructural or other projects that should bring long-term benefits.

## Criminal activity with motorways seriously harmed the state and economy

As incredulous as it may sound, wrongdoings and imprudent spending on construction of motorways have surpassed, by multiple times, the record criminal rate of “Skopje 2014”. What had been done with the three motorway sections whose construction started in the era of VMRO is unknown in the world history of construction. For illustration, single kilometre of the motorway Ohrid-Kichevo costs incredible 15 million euros.

Construction experts rightfully comment that if the entire motorway of 40 kilometres in length was constructed as straight-line tunnel the cost per kilometre would probably be much lower.

Let’s start from the beginning, i.e. the motorway section Demir Kapija-Smokvica. Construction works had not started yet and this major investment was turned into corruption affair of international proportions. In 2014, the scandal “erupted” and was revealed by opposition SDSM, which claimed that government officials are involved in alleged crimes related to construction of this motorway section.

According to then-current opposition members, who also disclosed documents, in 2013 and 2014, as many as 95 people, majority of them Greek citizens, had withdrawn 3.5 million euros in cash from Aktor’s bank accounts over a period of nine months and under total of 278 transactions. According to their information, Greek citizens had arrived to Negotino with organized bus transport and, in the presence of Aktor’s manager Atina Zioga, who is also Greek citizen, withdrew cash and later, according to SDSM, left that cash in the country, because they crossed the borders emptyhanded.

Blagoj Bochvarski, then-current chair of SDSM’s committee on transport and communications, claimed that by the time this corruption scandal resonated in the public a total of 3.5 million euros from 32 million euros disbursed, i.e. 11 percent, had been withdrawn from one bank in Macedonia.

“This piece of information shows that money might have been used as kickback payment for the tender award for construction of the motorway section Demir Kapija-Smokvica. The mere fact that Greek Aktor was awarded the tender although it submitted more expensive bid by 40 million euros compared to the second-ranked company ‘screams’ scandal of great proportions. This mega-scandal needs to be seriously investigated by state institutions”, stressed Bochvarski.

Former anticorruption commissioner Malinovski stated that withdrawal of cash in such great amounts from Aktor's bank account inevitably refers to the conclusion that background dealings might have been in play.

"At first thought, such acts refer to money laundering and raise suspicions of corruption, but they must be fully investigated. Public Prosecution Office is the most competent authority to investigate this case, in cooperation with the Financial Intelligence Administration, Ministry of Interior and other competent institutions, and it had to provide the public answers for all doubts", says Malinovski.

Under public pressure, the public prosecutors opened pre-criminal investigation, but three years have passed and the docket "Aktor" is still locked in drawers at the Public Prosecution Office. In that period, chief state prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski believed there is low level of doubt, but claimed they would continue to "investigate".

This case also involved the National Bank of Macedonia, with then-incumbent governor Dimitar Bogov claiming their professional services had examined the case "Aktor" but did not find information on suspicious transactions.

430

Claims by the opposition that Greek nationals have withdrawn 3.5 million euros from Aktor's bank accounts triggered fierce reactions in Europe, having in mind that 85 percent of funds were disbursed from EU funds, and only 15 percent were invested by Macedonia. This affair has shaken the international scene for years.

According to information disposed by weekly *Fokus*, investigation was launched to verify whether government officials had taken kickback to award the tender to Greek company Aktor, knowing that the Italian company Toto had been eliminated in the last moment, in spite of its much cheaper bid.

After the affair "Aktor" was revealed, Greece opened its investigation into this matter. At the same time, OLAF's investigators were combing through documents to establish whether criminal activity was committed and what actually happened.

Even construction of the motorway section Miladinovci-Sveti Nikole-Shtip was not spared of complications that raised doubts about criminal activity.

As early as 2017, journalist Vlatko Stojanovski from newspaper *Fokus* published a voluminous investigative story wherein he claimed that according to the feasibility study developed in 2009 by French consultancy company Louis Berger and commissioned by the

Macedonian government this motorway section was planned in length of 50 kilometres and was estimated to cost 104.6 million euros, which is twice as cheaper compared to money actually spent for its construction.

At that time, the government justified its action by explaining that when this study was developed it did not take into consideration junctions in the amount of 23.5 million euros under current prices, bridges in the amount of 8 million euros, deviations worth 3 million euros, drainage system and protection worth 1.7 million euros. However, the government's crown argument behind the doubled price tag for these construction works implied enormous increase of prices for oil, metal and energy on the global stock markets in the period 2009-2013.

Although it supported adoption of laws in the parliament for construction and financing of these projects as principled support for investments in capital infrastructure projects, in 2013 the opposition fiercely attacked the government that the total cost for this motorway is too expensive. Such accusations of corruption were cemented by SDSM's leader Zoran Zaev who, in 2015, released wiretapped conversations among high state officials and leveraged accusations that the government had taken bribe of 5 percent or 25 million euros for the entire project!

4 3 1

In 2013, Macedonia's Public Enterprise for State Roads, as investor, and the Exim Bank of China, as creditor, signed the credit agreement in the amount of 206 million euros to finance construction of motorway section Miladinovci-Shtip, which included a provision whereby in case possible costs for this project exceed the indicated amount, whose upper threshold is set at 10 percent or around 20 million euros, such expenses would be covered from the Macedonian budget.

This credit was approved under fixed annual interest rate of 2 percent and 5-year grace period, which, at first glance, seemed favourable, but a thorough analysis reveals details that the credit is not as favourable as presented, especially having in mind that the creditor defined special terms and conditions for the Macedonian side in terms of how funds are spend beyond rules stipulated in the Law on Public Procurements, most notably those related to transparency and competition.

First, the credit is conditioned with the recipient's obligation not to organize open procurement procedure for selection of contractor, but directly invite a number of preselected companies from the creditor's country, i.e. China, to present their bids,

whereby the government practically signs the contract under direct negotiations, which dramatically decreases transparency of the overall process and limits competition. This does not ensure obtaining the lowest price possible.

"It is bad policy to borrow millions and select the contractor in non-transparent procedure instead of public and open procedure, and also fail to project market prices that would be attained by means of competitive bidding. For the authorities it is more important to enlist projects as number, without due consideration of justifiability and cost-effectiveness in public spending. A project like this should not be pursued without serious cost-benefit analysis", stated on this topic Izet Zeqiri who is university professor, MASA member and former MP.

Moreover, the contractor was awarded a series of budget benefits, including VAT exemption for money transactions with the investor, exemption from excise duties when purchasing motor vehicles and mineral oils for this project, and exemption from payment of custom duties, VAT and excise on imported goods and products intended for these motorway sections... Finally, the contract includes provision on preferred procurement of goods, services and technologies from China, with funds from this credit.

432

"Terms and conditions under this credit are not more favourable than those offered by other institutions. The credit interest rate is set at 2 percent, similar to the interest rate approved by the World Bank for credits with repayment period of 15 years at fixed rate of 6-months LIBOR + 1.3 percent, coming to around 2 percent. Hence, the interest rate charged for the motorway section Miladinovci-Shtip is somewhat higher than nominal 2 percent, because the state had exempted the main contractor from payment of VAT and had assumed payment of costs for land expropriation", says Branimir Jovanovikj from the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities in Skopje.

Pursuant to this credit agreement signed by the domestic investor and foreign creditor, the Public Enterprise for State Roads signed a commercial contract with Sinohydro Corporation Limited, state-owned construction company from China, selected as the main contractor in competition with another, also state-owned company from China, China International Water and Electric Corporation, on the grounds of having submitted much better technical and financial bid.

As regards the Chinese contractor's background, it would suffice to say this company is featured on the World Bank's "black list" which recommends avoidance of cooperation with Sinohydro, especially on projects financed by the World Bank. Namely, in June 2016, the World Bank published a letter of warning in duration of one year, which is still in effect, after its sanctions board had announced that this company was involved in "fraudulent practices".

That, however, was no obstacle for this company to operate on the Macedonian market after having registered its branch office for motorway construction works in Skopje, in 2013. According to the company's 2014 financial report, Sinohydro's branch office in Skopje has earned total income of 18.3 million euros from motorway construction works, but finished the fiscal year with financial loss of 3.7 million euros. The next 2015, when construction works were intensified, the company reported profits of more than 6 million euros, having earned income of around 79,506,500 euros and incurring expenditure of around 73,173,000 euros.

How much from this profit is actually unrealized revenue for Macedonia the state has declined in favour of the foreign company is best seen from Montenegro's case. Notably, the Tax Administration of Montenegro has determined that their 2015 state budget is short by more than 42 million euros only on grounds of VAT exemptions granted to the Chinese contractor for construction of motorway section Smokovac-Mateshevo, in the amount of more than 809 million euros!

If these peripheral costs are isolated and the credit amount is taken as reference value for the motorway construction, a single kilometre from this motorway costs 4.3 million euros. Experts say it is impossible to assess whether this price tag is too high or too low because each motorway is specific and implies unique landscape and geological configuration. But they all agree the sum is conspicuous when compared to other states that are constructing much cheaper highways.

Now we come to the motorway section Kichevo-Ohrid which is the most problematic of all above mentioned projects from its very beginning. This infrastructural miracle with a world record-breaking price tag of 15 million euros per kilometre opened the mega-affair with serious indications that money laundromat had been integrated in financial breakdown for construction of this motorway. Serious smear on this grandiose project was casted by "bomb" no.14 disclosed by SDSM's leader Zoran Zaev two years

ago, which featured wiretapped conversation between former Prime Minister Gruevski and former transport minister Mile Janakieski. This scandalous exchange between Gruevski and Janakieski prompted action by the Special Prosecution Office, which entered premises of the Public Enterprise for State Roads and left with new investigation, claiming that Gruevski, Janakieski, Peshevski and Ljupcho Georgievski, former director of this public enterprise, had “melted” 155 million euros in the motorway asphalt of Miladinovci–Shtip and Kichevo–Ohrid.

This case was qualified as the biggest financial scandal on the Balkan two years ago when Zaev warned that construction works on the motorway Kichevo–Ohrid include a surcharge of 103 million euros above the estimated value calculated by the Agency for State Roads.

In summary, if the country had joined NATO in 2008 and, more importantly, if several years later it had opened negotiations with the European Union with all reforms implied by this process, VMRO-DPMNE’s government would not have had such great space for manoeuvres, first to borrow funds and then to use such funds to engage in evident criminal activity of gigantic proportions. In particular, it would not have been able to implement the megalomaniac project “Skopje 2104” whose architecture and visual appeal directly target one neighbouring state.

Based on examples in the region, matters would absolutely not have taken such course and the government in Macedonia would have been changed sooner, most probably following the example of Ivo Sanader’s change from office immediately after the Republic of Croatia joined NATO.





**ГРУЕВСКИ**

**PILLAR#3: NEARLY ONE BILLION  
EUROS DISBURSED AS AGRICULTURE  
SUBSIDIES WITHOUT ADEQUATE CRITERIA**

Agriculture subsidies are most definitely another landmark policy that would forever remind people of Nikola Gruevski and his governance.

It is statistically confirmed that, in the period from 2008 to 2015, a total of 623 million euros were disbursed as agriculture subsidies. As (counter) result thereof, food import in 2016 amounted to 592.8 million euros or twice as much compared to 2006, as the year when Gruevski came into power.

In parallel, agriculture production was decimated and literal plague befell on cattle, poultry and the entire fund of farm animals in Macedonia, which currently stand at their statistical minimum.

If this is not the biggest indicator that money spent on subsidies was, to great extent, wasted to no effect, then nothing could prove this atrocity.

In respect to subsidies, the broad public remembers revelation of several large-scale manipulations which at that time raised the bitter question of how hundreds of million euros of people's money had been spent. If it was possible for person not in possession of any lamb to be awarded subsidies for hundreds of sheep and cows, one could only imagine the various manipulations pursued by ten thousands other beneficiaries of agriculture subsidies in the country. Experts and connoisseurs are decisive that, even if the state wants to institute control, that would be impossible under this model of subsidies.

At that time, this topic was addressed with probably the most logical question, i.e. not who and why they manipulate subsidies, but who allowed such comfortable position to individual farmers to benefit from subsidies in unscrupulous manners.

---

Agriculture subsidies are most definitely another landmark policy that would remind us of that period. From 2008 to 2015, a total of 623 million euros were disbursed as agriculture subsidies. As (counter) result thereof, food import in 2016 amounted to 592.8 million euros or twice as much compared to 2006, the year when Gruevski came into power.

---

Once the knot started untangling, it revealed a much bigger affair that did not include only individual abuses, but implied criminal association among landowners in direct correlation to competent institutions. To date, unfortunately, these affairs remain without final court epilogue, while experts warn that only an insignificant share of subsidy abuses had actually been discovered.

The second aspect is justification of subsidies awarded in the years when most agriculture and cattle breeding sectors were marked by rapid decrease of production, including decrease of livestock.

Third, nobody took into consideration the experts' warning that the policy of subsidizing small farms is counterproductive and highly detrimental for efforts to consolidate agriculture land, also promoted by then-incumbent agriculture ministry and then-incumbent government.

In 2014, magazine *Kapital* published my op-ed on this topic where I wrote that:

"After all, it remains unclear why, given that the government already made an effort and, truth be told, succeeded to secure voluminous and significant funds to assist farmers, these funds are not used where they are most needed? Instead of planted lands, why not accept to subsidize produce grown on this land or final products from farm animals, according to the principle applied in the entire region? Why quality is not introduced as separate element in the algorithm formula for calculation of the amount of individual subsidies awarded? When something is being done and efforts are made, why not pursue that in the best manner possible and, thereby, forever shut down chatters by malicious and libel mouths? Is it in the best interest of the government, which under most difficult economic conditions possible managed to secure almost one billion euros for farmers, to be remembered by filthy manipulations of individuals and crime-prone deflected power centres and lobby groups, instead of being remembered for positive effects of this grandiose project?"

Nowadays, I definitely know why this method of subsidies had been intentionally chosen - because agriculture subsidies were intended to support another goal of daily politics and not their primary purpose.

## What was the key weakness of subsidies?

In simple terms, the model of subsidies was not and is still not good because it subsidizes plot area instead of yield per quality or class. Hence, instead of stimulating quality that would be improved and make the country competitive after it starts the EU accession negotiations, it leads to total collapse.

Another problem is the gradual scale of subsidies, i.e. large companies received the least amount. They are the driving machine, the locomotive, and they should get the same amounts as small companies. Actually, they are always connected to small companies/producers (buy and process their produce in bulk, serve as export points, and the like).

In parallel to that, subsidies were abused and there was no transparency in the award process. There are indicators that some companies benefited from subsidies higher than their yield, i.e. production. Although, as indicated before, not even slightest percentage of malpractices had been investigated, indisputable is the fact that good share of subsidy funds were channelled in the wrong direction.

It should be noted that, in the absence of budget support for the agriculture sector, results would have been much unfavourable than those achieved. Budget support maintained production at the presented level. Subsidies compensated the unfavourable price disparities in this sector.

But they were not focused on profitable, market-oriented farmers and agricultural holdings engaged in this activity from purely economic reasons, i.e. profits, leaving other competent bodies to deal with the country's social policy. Quite the opposite, subsidies were intended to buy social peace.

After nearly one billion euros spent on subsidies in Macedonia, today there are still sheepfolds without sheep, beehives without bees, falsely planted lands, and local power-players that have nothing in common with agriculture.

In all likelihood, if the country had become member of the European Union in the past ten years or at least started the accession negotiations, this model of subsidies would not have remained in its current form. And it would not have been allowed to cruelly waste such amount of funds for ten consecutive years without any effects. It goes without saying that efforts would have been made to sanction criminal activity.

## How were abuses pursued?

First, it should be said that the model of subsidies was intentionally designed with loopholes that could be used by local power-players from rural areas, representing an award for their unquestionable loyalty to the party and its leader. The second category of privileged beneficiaries includes agricultural holdings controlled by businessmen close to the authorities, who literally abused millions of funds awarded as subsidies for partially or unplanted lands.

Except for these two privileged categories, abuses were literally made in every step of the process.

Very often subsidy applications were made for fictitious lands. When such lands were detected by agriculture inspectors, instead of leveraging fines to perpetrators, inconsistencies were eliminated and they were awarded subsidies for what was legally registered.

In 2011, newspaper *Dnevnik* revealed the infamous case of oilseed rape that were not planted, albeit being graciously subsidized:

“There were several cases that involved registration of 10 hectares planted with wheat and 10 hectares planted with oilseed rape. When the inspectors went out in the field to verify the situation, they saw wheat had already grown, but no traces of oilseed rape. According to regulations, this is treated as criminal offence and farmers should be sanctioned. Not only with a fine. Legally, they lose the right to benefit from subsidies in duration of two years on the grounds of false registration. But, farmers know the scheme. They go to the local ‘sheriffs’ and plea with them to be absolved of false registration. The final result is known, i.e. farmers were then awarded subsidies for what they have planted”.

This was just one small, minor case.

The public also learned about cases in which subsidies, except for apartments and houses, were also used for summer vacations. Only small number of farmers invested funds in “additional outputs” in the form of tractors or other agricultural machinery, while others preferred to use them for buying jeeps or new cars.

Even at that time experts warned that high amounts of state funds could not be given away easily or left to the consciousness of individuals.

“Nowhere in the world would you find cases where farmers are awarded 30,000 euros in subsidies without being ordered by the Public Revenue Office to register some form

of agricultural holding. It is impossible for single person to plough 100 hectares of land with old tractors or to keep 50 cows or 500 sheep", were just some of the comments at the time.

All and any such appeals landed on deaf ears, as was the case with many other matters in that period.

Local sheriffs continued to abuse subsidies which they perceived as state award for well executed party duties.

The result was full and utter devastation..

#### **PILLAR#4: SUBSIDIZED ATTRACTING OF FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENTS**

Immediately after the change of power, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia announced that 225 million euros had been spent to attract a total of 25 foreign investments, employing around 20,000 people. According to these statistics, one job created according to the principle of subsidized foreign investments has costed the state exactly 11,000 euros.

However, the mere fact that even the new government, led by SDSM, continued to support the old and to pursue new foreign investments under almost identical conditions as those offered by their predecessors, shows that this segment of the general economic policy was not that bad after all.

In his last interviews from Budapest, Nikola Gruevski stressed this segment of his governance as fully successful and something he is particularly proud of.

And, truly, total funds that entered Macedonia as foreign direct investments in that period amounted to more than 1.5 billion euros, with the following distribution per year (in million euros): 2009 - 144, 2010 - 160, 2011 - 344, 2012 - 111, 2013 - 252, 2014 - 205, 2015 - 216, and 2016 - 338.

But not all is pink as Gruevski would like to present matters.

Although his government maintained that terms and conditions for foreign investments in Macedonia are secret information, it was publicly known that they are exempted

from payment of various taxes and that the state covered salary contributions for their employees. Given that terms and conditions varied from company to company, accurate generalizations cannot be inferred, but it would not be erroneous to conclude that Macedonia's single benefit from foreign investments implied tens of thousands jobs at free economic zones and beyond them.

Additional problem is the fact that foreign investors came to the country mainly due to the need of qualified labour. Hence, these 20,000 employments were mostly people taken from domestic companies, not unemployed workers.

The various forms of abuses made in this regard included:

Cash grants, i.e. money directly transferred to foreign investors' accounts, exemption from payment of taxes and custom duties, costs for attracting foreign investors.

It is known for certain that there were no documents or guides with clear criteria for negotiations, which means there were no criteria in place.

Negotiations were led by ministers, advisors, promoters, without any criteria in place, and after negotiations were completed, Nikola Gruevski's government granted these contracts the status of classified documents, thus ensuring their secrecy.

4 4 1

Given the secrecy of contracts signed after negotiations without criteria, some foreign investment companies received more, others received less.

The Agency for Foreign Investments, the Directorate for Technology and Industry Development Zones and Ministers without Portfolio in the former government had spent cash funds from non-refundable grants in the amount of almost 26 million euros, distributed as follows:

14 million euros were awarded to foreign direct investors for job creation whereby, according to the classified contracts, some received 1,000 euros and others 11,000 euros per job created.

5 million euros were paid for training of employees.

Again, these 5 million euros were distributed without clear criteria: some companies received 100 euros and others up to 3,000 euros per employee.

The three institutions named above paid foreign investors 10 million euros for construction works.

According to official data, it is known that in that 10-year period total benefits granted to foreign investors on the basis of tax and custom duty exemptions amounted to 69 million euros.

These funds could have, but were not collected in the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia.

The biggest problem in all this, according to the government's analysis, is the fact that only 1 percent of procurements made by foreign investor companies were signed with domestic companies.

However, it would be correct to say that for small towns that were literally empty this input (from additional salaries) in local community's economy allowed sustenance of small businesses like shops or at least contributed to slowing down mass migration to Skopje.

Additionally, foreign investors engaged in cooperation with Macedonian companies, but from the onset it was noted that it would be difficult for average domestic company to become supplier for major global corporations that manage foreign investments in the country.

Year after year, the share of Macedonian companies that cooperated with these investors was increasing, which also resulted in indirect education of managements at domestic companies about global market operations.

Despite these positive aspects, many economic experts in Macedonia are sceptical about foreign direct investments.

They claim that more jobs would have been created and greater effects would have been achieved if the same amount of funds was invested in the domestic economy.

However, it cannot be confirmed with certainty whether that would have actually happened.

In any case, and in this regard as well, if the country had progressed under its EU integration process the government would not have space for non-transparent and discretionary behaviour in terms of wasteful public spending.

## “FRONTAL PROPAGANDA” AS CHERRY ON THE CAKE

This research would not be complete if it does not address the key feature of governments and despots that governed Macedonia throughout the analysed period, i.e. propaganda.

Actually, the propaganda concept had started in the period 1998-2002 when the first round of purposeful advertisements were aired and glorified the country's economic achievements.

It continued after 2006 and reached its peak in the period 2008–2016.

Other chapters from this publication provide detailed description of the impact of then-incumbent government on 90 percent of media outlets in the country and, therefore, the discussion here will focus on the economic propaganda.

Namely, in that period, Macedonia was presented as the number one destination in the world according to various business parameters, i.e. country with booming economy, literally. Every single step and every single decision of the government was glorified. Ministers appeared in the media more often than rock stars, while the government's president managed to lay foundations and cut ribbons for literally every single building whose construction started or was completed during these eleven years.

This propaganda machinery, in addition to the domestic "loyal" media that annually consumed ten millions of euros, also included countless elite media in the world.

Hence, the campaign "Invest in Macedonia" promoted doing business in the country on *CNN* and *Bloomberg*, and in other prestigious media of global reach.

To present, i.e. by the cut-off date for this publication, there are no official figures on how much money was spent on this campaign, let alone about the effects of its multiannual and expensive implementation.

Probably the new government's biggest mistake and greatest weakness after the political changes in 2017 is the fact that they have failed to present accurate figures on the price paid for the previous government's propaganda segment.

In any case, "Invest in Macedonia" was merely one among many and expensive campaigns which, inter alia, were aimed to pursue party and personal interests with state funds. Most horrifying is that the authorities were rather successful in this endeavour.

The nation truly believed that if *CNN* speaks positively of Macedonia, then it must be true.

## **WHAT DO REGIONAL EXPERIENCES SHOW?**

In 2008, Macedonia was to join NATO together with Albania and Croatia.

These are two countries that, at that moment, had similar level of economic development or lagged behind Macedonia.

Albania had still not fully recovered from the legacy of its 50-year bleak rule of communism, while Croatia was still repaying its debts and was healing after the wars from the 90s.

In spite of that, both countries found ways to make their NATO membership happen.

In 2009, Albania reached record-breaking foreign direct investments of 337 million euros at the time when the country joined NATO. In the years before and after 2009, foreign direct investments in this country averaged at 180 million euros.

However, such connection between NATO membership and that kind of investment record should be taken with caution because 2009 was favourable year for almost all countries in the region that are or are not part of NATO.

Connoisseurs of state-of-affairs in Albania confirm that the country's NATO membership had positive effect on the economy, but also say that the country's economic growth was linked to many other contributing factors.

"Albania has a diaspora of 1.6 million people. These people, by the effect of their investments in tourism, made the economic turn. For that to happen, more than ten years earlier, Sali Berisha's government had to adopt a law whereby almost the entire coastline was sold to investors at the price of one euro per square meter", say our collocutors from Albania.

In statistical terms, however, the country benefits the most from investments coming from countries such as Turkey, the Czech Republic, and Poland, where the Albanian diaspora traditionally resides. Most of these investments were made after the country joined NATO.

Croatia, which joined the Alliance in 2009 together with Albania, is the most specific example for analysis.

In this case comparisons are problematic because Croatia, in addition to becoming NATO member, joined the EU in 2014.

That is why this analysis covers the period 2009-2014, when Croatia, at least in statistical terms, had the lowest level of foreign direct investments, much lower than the period after it joined the EU, but much seriously lower than the period prior to its NATO accession.

This piece of information shows that membership in the Alliance alone cannot annul global economy trends which, albeit delayed, are inevitably and by rule reflected in the region.

Croatia is among rare countries that, except from indirect, also had direct benefits from NATO by means of tenders for maintenance of U.S. military ships at the country's shipyards.

As regards foreign tourists, true is that the number of overnight stays and the amount of revenue they create for Croatia are continuously increasing, but for that to happen the country had to borrow tens of billions euros to invest in infrastructure and, of course, it had to join the European Union.

If it desires any improvement in tourism, Macedonia would have to achieve these two things.

It is a fact that guaranteed security and stability of the country provides basis for future economic development.

**FOREGONE CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES THE EXPERT  
PUBLIC THINK ABOUT THE EFFECTS FROM DELAYED  
MEMBERSHIP IN NATO?**

Everything elaborated above was confirmed to the letter by people who are more directly affected or involved in economic matters.

According to Djemail Dauti, long-time businessman and owner of Dauti Commerce that operates in several Balkan countries, it is absolutely true that NATO membership or more precisely non-membership in the last years had negative effect on the business.

"It's simple, if the country became NATO member in the last ten years, I'm convinced that my company would have been much more successful and more powerful, not only in Macedonia, but in the entire region. It should not be discussed whether or not that would have created positive effects. Effects would have been absolutely positive, for everybody. And it should be acknowledged that a chance had been missed for the business in general, but also for the state. Since it is matter of complex issue, it could be analysed for hours and from many aspects, but the essence lies in what I said", is Dauti's decisive answer.

Legal and business consultant Goran Rafajlovski provided a more direct and illustrative description of this problem matter.

"First and most important: Nikola Gruevski would not have governed for so many years if the country became NATO member in due time. That says a lot and explains many other things. We would not have had programs in 100 steps. We would not have had nationalism in its current form. And public affairs would have entered calm waters. By now, we would have become factor of stability in the Balkan. There would have been faster adoption of European and global ideas, starting from legislation, through education, to business development. We would have benefited from security and stability that would have contributed not only to greater foreign investments, but also to greater courage on the part of domestic investors".

According to Rafajlovski, losses and damages are of all provenances.

He adds that NATO membership, as end in itself, carries a key component for business development, i.e. stability.

"It should be noted that stability is not the only factor for economic development. Other preconditions must be in place. Investors from Germany recently told us they are zero percent satisfied with the government's performance. Hence, the first step, in addition to stabilization, should be complete change of values and norms, starting from secondary and ending with higher education, in order to create capacity and labour force that could work at possible future investments. Second, we need better judicial system. People want to know they enjoy legal security and that laws are not changed in fast-tracked procedures. Republic of Macedonia must make serious efforts in infrastructure and energy, because these two areas should be the government's main focus. And, procedures need to be streamlined".

Although these answers were more than straightforward, a third opinion was sought, this time from a person with experience in security issues and their direct and indirect effect on the economy.

On suggestion by fellow journalists, we contacted Milan Stefanovski, security analyst and person who follows and analyses these issues in scientific terms.

In his opinion, the key problem is that Macedonia lacks knowledge about the fact that NATO, for more than 20 years, has incorporated the economic aspect in its principles and operation. Hence, there is widespread unawareness that it is not only a strict military alliance.

4 4 7

"Since the Washington Preamble, NATO, except for being a military alliance, is also an economic and political alliance. Thus, in the last 10 or 11 years, except for uncertain security, we also suffer economic losses. It should be stressed that, as is the case with any member state, when an agreement is ratified by the parliament, it is ratified by political, but also economic and financial institutions in the country. Thus, our economy was definitely affected".

He also reflects and analyses the particular and very specific case of Macedonia.

"In terms of stability-political circumstances, it would have been good if the country became NATO member ten years ago, because that would have avoided events such as April 27 and December 24, 'Divo Naselje', etc. Extensive postponement of NATO membership, without exception, sends a signal to radical structures, which do exist, to turn against particular country. In turn, the entire society suffers".

According to Stefanovski, a fortunate circumstance is the fact that:

"NATO is already being transformed into economic and political alliance, and provides opportunities to compensate in due course what had been lost in the past years".

Rajko Milikj, economic journalist and analyst from Montenegro, confirms the above elaborated hypotheses in relation to Croatia and Albania.

"Both Albania and Croatia saw increase of investments after their joined the NATO alliance. In truth, it cannot be confirmed whether that was direct effect of their respective accession in NATO or not. Both countries saw economic growth, i.e. increase of foreign direct investments".

According to Milikj, most important is the indirect factor, i.e. overall reforms in terms of state operation, imposed by this organization.

"NATO, in its own right, carries political moves that are later directly reflected on the economy. The best examples thereof are the former Prime Minister of Croatia Ivo Sanader and his corrupted elite, all of whom were arrested immediately after Croatia joined NATO. Certain political stabilization happened in Albania, and therefore it could be said that NATO primarily brings some form of political stability which the states did not have before. More specifically, after its NATO membership, Albania started the effort for radical prosecution of crime and was somewhat successful. Crime brings the biggest direct losses to the economy. From the most closed country in the world, today Albania became factor of stability or at least country that is more open to discussion. That has made doing business much easier in the entire region. Corruption is still present in both Albanian and Croatia, but in lesser extent than before".

According to former finance minister Djevdet Hajredini, there is undeniable link between NATO and the economy in all countries that aspire to become its members.

"Based on experiences of states that became members of the NATO alliance in the last two decades, it could be assumed that one of the main reasons why Macedonia has the lowest economic growth rate and the lowest influx of foreign direct investments for many years is actually its delayed NATO membership".

According to Hajredini, we had seen very little of geopolitical games around Macedonia, but enough to make matters clear.

"It is not by accident that Nikola Gruevski's government enjoyed open support and sympathies from Russia and Serbia, and that these two countries heavily criticize policies pursued by Zoran Zaev's government, before and after coming into power. Their ultimate goal, undoubtedly, was to make Macedonia, in their words, 'Russia's first victory over America', with support from marginal pro-Russian and radical opposition groups".

He believes that only the course of time had brought about this inevitable change in Macedonia's foreign policy.

"In the course of time, it became clearer that Macedonia could not become NATO member without having settled its disputes with neighbouring states, i.e. the name dispute with Greece and some legacy disputes with Bulgaria. On the other hand, it was clear that the country could not become attractive destination for investments from neighbouring states without joining NATO first. In the last ten years, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI's coalition government, instead of developing economic and political relations with neighbouring countries and EU member states, made futile attempts to attract investors from Sao Paolo, Los Angeles, Calcutta and similar destinations, which the Prime Minister fancied for his business trips. The change of government came under direct pressure and assistance from the EU and the United States, at the early elections in late 2016. Demonstrating unexpected courage and with assistance from the EU and the United States, the government led by Zoran Zaev managed to resolve the name dispute with Greece by negotiations, and had previously done the same with Bulgaria".

4 4 9

The former finance minister, however, also believes that the struggle for better economy is yet to start.

"Unfortunately, after its NATO admission, the country managed, slowly and difficultly, and without stable parliamentary majority, to institute internal political stability and to implement necessary reforms that are precondition for the start of accession negotiations with the EU. Even this situation could be the reason why the government is unable to fully dedicate its efforts to the economy".

From Hajredini's accumulated experience, this analysis turns to youth, education and expertise of university professor Marjan Petrevski as vigilant critic of economic policies in the last ten years.

Having in mind the factual validity of each and every word from his brief analysis, his elaboration is given below verbatim.

4 5 0

"The economic costs of 'postponed' NATO membership for North Macedonia are difficult to be assessed because economic flows are influenced by several factors at the same time, and therefore it is difficult to isolate the NATO factor (or absence thereof) in a hypothetical situation (what could have been). Generally speaking, however, such economic costs do exist. NATO's main effect pertains to perception, which means that the country is considered to be safer and more secure, which sends positive signal to investors. Hence, I would say that efforts to attract foreign investments would have been much easier and, consequently, less costly if the country had joined NATO. Also, conditions for foreign funding would have been more favourable. This, of course, should not be interpreted to mean that NATO would have served as replacement for reforms or qualified workers, which is currently the main problem of companies. But NATO would have added a degree of favourable climate for attracting foreign investments and would have, therefore, had marginal contribution to growth. Also, it would have brought somewhat faster effect of transference on the remaining parts of economy, pressure on the labour market, connections with domestic companies. The second effect, in addition to perception, concerns stability and credibility of institutions. NATO membership would have placed certain reforms on the fast track (both directly and indirectly), which is of crucial importance for growth. When I say stability of institutions, I primarily think of the rule of law and the judicial system's functionality. Without NATO, major chance was missed for these reforms to happen faster and affect the economy. However, having in mind that NATO does not have direct competences in the sphere of reforms, except for defence reforms, this effect is more likely to happen with the start of accession negotiations and actual EU membership. All in all, according to my assessments, non-membership in NATO has led to average annual loss of 0.5 to 1 percentile point in the growth rate. This is not an insignificant loss, having in mind that it is based on blanket assessments. On the other hand, overestimation of these losses above these amounts would be rushed, because NATO membership cannot substitute structural reforms, robustness of economic policies, etc."

Zoran Jovanovski, owner and editor-in-chief at *Economy and Business*, former vice president of SDSM and person who has spent more than 25 years in the banking sector,

says that NATO membership is the first and biggest test for any developing country.

“NATO membership is a strategic issue for any country, especially for countries that aspire or intent to become members of the European Union. NATO membership is practically the first check point on that path. All countries join NATO first and then become members of the European Union. In this context, the earlier one country joins NATO, the more positive signal and input for its EU integration.

In the case of Macedonia, there is the specificity of its dispute with Greece, but Macedonia's NATO membership in 2008, in any form or way, would have opened many doors, would have sent many positive signals along different lines and the Macedonian economy would have been in better shape and on much more positive territory from the one nowadays.

The reason for that is evident. NATO membership eliminates one of key risks for the country that finds itself in the trouble spot on the Balkan. The Balkan has a tradition of conflicts on different grounds, inter-state, inter-ethnic, internal, external, and implies a situation of continuous and latent instability. NATO membership eliminates one important segment of that instability. It increases predictability and stability of the economic ambiance for doing business. All this provides the context for its economic assessment.

4 5 1

Now, stability of the economic ambiance is precondition for increased investments. Investments are precondition for creation of new jobs, and together they are precondition for faster economic growth.

Irrespective whether it is a matter of domestic or foreign investors, the country is sheltered under NATO's umbrella and enters a significantly more stable zone. Certainly, there are examples of countries that have joined NATO, but still demonstrate features that appear to have the effect of destabilization, but here we speak about general case that Macedonia could benefit from.

First, the country's attractiveness for internal and external investments is increased, with all that was enlisted as positive effects.

Second, the lowered risk results in decreased price of borrowing on the international markets. Here I refer to state borrowing. In the case of borrowing, the price at which money is borrowed is actually reflection of the risk attached to the borrower. Hence, if the country is stable and risk-free, the price of borrowing is low. The fact that NATO

membership makes the country prone to stable ambience, less risks and faster economic growth speaks in itself that chances for the country to collect taxes and repay loans are higher. Therefore, in the past period and only on this basis, the country could have borrowed at lower prices.

Third thing enabled by NATO membership is that the country comes in contact with possibilities to be supplier of certain goods or services for NATO.

We might not manufacture weapons, but we could produce clothing, boots or something else for NATO. That is an open opportunity. Whether we are competitive or not for that matter is a completely different issue. But fact is that the door is opened slightly more and provides an extra opportunity.

In summary, conditions for economic growth would have been better, but that effect is unquantifiable. Maybe we would have had more investors. We are seeing that entry of some foreign investors has dramatically changed the country's export structure. It means goods that we had not exported ten years ago are now key export commodities. It would be unintelligent to speculate with numbers, but fact is that the factors I have enlisted would have definitely created better ambience and more companies would have decided to invest. They would have said 'okay', the security issue is closed as risk for the country and its future, and the country enters stable and calm waters, and therefore we can invest because the country's survival and stability are guaranteed from the security aspect. On that account, many more [companies] would have decided to invest".

4 5 2

This analysis started and will be closed with the business community.

President of the General Assembly at the Macedonian Chamber of Commerce Antoni Peshev, who has supported strategic alliance with the West for many years, provides the most extensive analysis of this issue.

"I think problems related to the country's postponed NATO membership are indirect. Primarily because in the last ten years most political crises like 'Divo Naselje' occurred due to the state's non-defined status. Hence, occasional security and political crises that emerged in the country resulted in interrupted focus on the economy. That is a big problem because political elites were preoccupied with destabilizing factors in the state as immediate priority, pushing economy to the bottom of the list of priorities. That had consumed at least one third of the overall time.

Just remember how long ago that happened, Branko Crvenkovski was president in 2008, and now imagine how much we have lost since then.

As regards countries in the region, I think Croatia capitalized more on its EU membership, while in the case of Albania results started becoming tangible only after five or six years. Hence, economic effects were visible after stability was guaranteed in continuity. In the realm of economy, stability is everything and that is the economic logic behind NATO. Otherwise, direct impacts cannot be calculated, except for small countries where presence of so many people would make a difference.

In our case, such indirect effects from NATO membership would have had strong impact on the economy having in mind that, from the independence to present day, the country was perpetually entering one after another crisis. That gives destabilizing factors an active position. Swinging back and forth between the East and the West is dangerous.

Moreover, I think that armed conflicts and incidents that we had witnessed in the last two decades were not heavily based on other factors, but on geopolitical reasons.

Now, Macedonia joining NATO fulfils preconditions for Albanians in the entire region to be calm and to focus on development and economic progress, aware that they now all live together under the same roof. Additional benefits will include borderless system and the so-called Balkan 'Schengen', so everything will turn for the better.

4 5 3

If we had caught step back in 2008, by now the country might have already become EU member.

Instead, we had spent all these years in political instability.

NATO membership implies end to use of arms. That would be impossible once we join the Alliance. Thus far, we were permanently exposed to provocations that had tested the country's strength.

If we had joined NATO in 2008, for certain we would not be waiting until 2030 to join the European Union.

It is known that EU membership has direct implications on the economy. And joining the EU is directly linked to NATO.

Otherwise, it would be wrong to directly measure the effect of NATO membership. That status is valuable only in case of wars in our surrounding, just like the increased consumption and foreign currency influx to Macedonia before the war on Kosovo in 1999 due to the presence of significant number of foreign military troops. But it is better not to have such direct effect”.

## CONCLUSION

Although there are no and probably there will never be precise analyses and figures, after 20-odd pages of analysis it could be said that the Macedonian economy paid an expensive price for the country's delayed NATO membership and, consequently, postponed integration in the EU.

The effect could be measured directly and indirectly.

Direct effects are primarily seen in security risks and instabilities on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia caused by the delayed membership. That had deferred numerous additional foreign investments and had weakened the domestic economy, thus slowing its investment activity.

Indirect effects include postponed start of accession negotiations with the European Union and, accordingly, delayed access to all funds made available under that process.

Also, it should be noted that the vacuum period of ten years was fully abused by criminal elites close to the corrupted government, which are involved in almost all major projects initiated or completed during Nikola Gruevski's governance.

Experts, but also foreign experiences, are decisive that the scope of criminal activity and wrongdoings would have been much lower if Macedonia had at least opened accession negotiations with the European Union.

Apprehension of the corrupt Prime Minister of Croatia Ivo Sanader is the biggest proof about what the European Union is capable of when it holds the rein over the authorities.

Hence, the expert public consulted and the detailed analysis of available data conducted both indicate to the same thing: economic consequences from the country's delayed NATO membership cannot be calculated directly, but assumptions could be made about

how much the Macedonian economy would have gained if there were no "Divo Naselje", December 24, April 27, and series of other security incidents that deferred not only foreign, but domestic investments as well. Additionally, the scope of criminal activity during VMRO-DPMNE's government and the length of this governance would have been much smaller, i.e. shorter.



Gordana Duvnjak

THE LAW IN  
SERVITUDE TO  
POLITICS

1. APPOINTMENT AND  
DISMISSAL OF JUDGES  
FROM THE "PARTY  
NOTEBOOK"

An old and well-known saying, popular among law professionals, reads like this: "When politics enters the courtroom through the door, the law is thrown out the window".

At the time when university professor Vlado Buchkovski was Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia led by SDSM (2003-2006), major constitutional changes were adopted one year before his mandate expired and before their election defeat (2005). They included a set of changes in the justice sector, whereby a new body, the Judicial Council, was created and tasked with appointment and dismissal of judges, which was previously entrusted to the parliament.

The constitutional amendments (28 and 29) from 2005 were focused on major judicial reforms and aimed to fully implement recommendations of the European Commission and the Council of Europe, which had insisted on introduction of “strong” judicial council.

The Republic Council was transformed and renamed into Judicial Council, with its composition expanded from 7 to 15 members, of which 8 are appointed directly from the ranks of judges, 3 are appointed on proposal by the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and the President of State from the ranks of “distinguished law professionals”, while the Minister of Justice and the Supreme Court’s President serve as ex-officio members.

To make this irony greater, it was exactly this body created by the left-wing government (SDSM) that was later put in full servitude to the right-wing government (VMRO-DPMNE). Not only did the Judicial Council fail to perform its mission, but it was also turned in its antipode. Not only in terms of its method of operation and decision-making process, but also in terms of its full subservience to politics, making this body a powerful instrument to wage threats and pressures. On the other hand, the Judicial Council’s members were afforded comfortable position because the legal framework did not stipulate any responsibility or sanctions in case they take unlawful and erroneous decisions.

Disputable is also the broad definition of the notion “distinguished law professionals” without clear and precise criteria, which opened the space for insufficiently qualified and anonymous individuals to be appointed to high offices in the Judicial Council. The new body’s composition allowed selection of judges from first instance courts, who during their 6-year term of office had to decide the destiny of higher-ranking judges, for

example, supreme judges. Such was the example of investigative judge from the Tetovo Basic Court Aleksandra Zafirovska who served as member of this body for entire 12 years and in 2011 replaced President of the Supreme Court Vasil Grchev as the President of the Judicial Council until 2013.

Several years later, Aleksandra Zafirovska would be named in the special report of the Prosecution Office against Criminal Offences Related to and Arising from the Contents of Illegal Interception of Communications, but also in the U.S. Department of State's Report as one of the several judges (Jovan Vangelovski, Vladimir Panchevski, Sofija Lalichikj, Svetlana Kostovska) with close ties to the executive government.

These reports indicate that, by the effect of her actions, Zafirovska did not only enable political influence, but broadly opened the door for politics to interfere in the judiciary, allowing the then-governing party to assume full control over justice institutions. That could be clearly seen from the contents of "bombs" disclosed in the spring of 2015, and especially from the telephone conversation that features Zafirovska's voice in permanent communication with the Cabinet of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, reporting on activities and plans of the Judicial Council.

458

The telephone conversation between Aleksandra Zafirovska as President of the Judicial Council, and Lenche Samardjiska as Secretary to Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, reveals the former informing Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski about upcoming open call for appointment of judges. Zafirovska was one of the main links used to carry orders from the executive government to the judiciary.

#### Transcript of telephone conversation between A. Zafirovska and L. Samardjiska

A.Z.: Hello?

L.S.: Hello! Good afternoon.

A.Z.: Good afternoon.

L.S.: Aleksandra, it's Lenche. You called me. My colleagues told me.

A.Z.: Yes, just a moment. [to another person: Please wait outside and I'll call you in.]

Listen...

L.S.: Yes.

A.Z.: At the last meeting it was agreed for me to inform the Prime Minister when we... well ... about the open call, i.e. before we announce the call for [appointment of] judges.

L.S.: All right.

A.Z.: So, please inform him that I'll announce the call for two judges at the Skopje [Court of] Appeals...

L.S.: All right.

A.Z.: Also, for president of the Basic Court Skopje 1 and for president of the Kratovo Basic Court.

L.S.: ....Skopje 1 and president of...

A.Z.: ....Basic Court in Kratovo.

L.S.: All right.

A.Z.: Well, there will be an open call for these posts.

L.S.: Good. All right, I'll let him know.

A.Z.: Please do.

L.S.: All right. Thank you. Goodbye.

A.Z.: All right. Bye.

"With these legal solutions, the Judicial Council had been turned into monster that devours the entire organizational setup of the judiciary", said Dane Iliev in 2008, then-incumbent President of the Supreme Court and member of the Judicial Council. Iliev's statement was given at expert debate dedicated to judiciary reforms and addressed the issue of appointment of judicial staff that lack expertise and relevant competence.

On that occasion, Iliev complained that he was regularly outvoted in the Judicial Council and that it is not by accident when this body appoints judges against which dismissal procedures are initiated two days after their appointment. Such was the case with promotion of a judge from the Basic Court to the Court of Appeals in Gostivar, for whom the media reported had resided in his mother's court process, which is contrary to the law. Hence, the Judicial Council dismissed him from the office of judge, but several years later the government awarded him another public office.

"Reforms implemented in 2005 were among conditions for the country to be granted the status of candidate country. We had to strengthen the judiciary's independence, free this institution from political influence in appointment of judges, increase its financial independence, and improve the quality through continuous education of judges.

Nowadays, and based on my personal experience with the justice system in Macedonia, I can conclude that reforms had actually deteriorated state-of-affairs in the judiciary", stated Buchkovski for the media.

Several years later, the former Prime Minister Buchkovski unwillingly admitted that state-of-affairs in the judiciary are becoming worse every year. He made this assessment from the position of person who is convicted to two years of imprisonment for procurement of spare parts for military armoured vehicles during his tenure as defence minister back in 2001.

The Minister of Justice's ex-officio membership in the Judicial Council, with voting rights in appointment and dismissal of judges, would later prove to be mistake. In spite of the fact that the line minister's vote is merely "one of fifteen", the example set by Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski had demonstrated devastating effects of the executive government's direct participation in the judiciary. Especially when the head position in the justice sector is entrusted to a person who is prepared to execute even the most outrageous party orders. This solution was changed upon suggestion from the European Commission, whereby the Minister of Justice remained to serve as member in the Judicial Council, but without the right to vote.

460

Retired lawyer Mihajlo Manevski served as Minister of Justice from 2006 to 2011. He is the only minister in VMRO-DPMNE's governments led by Nikola Gruevski who had also held ministerial office during the socialism. The dilemma remains how the Republic's Secretary of Justice and Administration at the time when Macedonia was socialist republic and the person known to be among most rigid prosecutors in the former system could have made such ideological turn and become one of the most trusted associates to Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, and after his retirement nonetheless.

Manevski who became Minister of Justice at the age of 67 years and stayed in office for more than six years was regularly indicated to have exerted great influence in appointment and dismissal of judges. The European Union raised concerns about the Minister of Justice's role in the Judicial Council and in the Council of Public Prosecutors, assessing that the executive government interferes in the judiciary's work. That

---

The European Union raised concerns about the role of Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski in the Judicial Council and in the Council of Public Prosecutors, assessing that it represents the executive government's interference in the judiciary's work.

---

represented direct pointing of finger at representative of the executive government who exerts political influence on the third branch of government.

According to the "bombs", Minister of Justice Manevski had been involved in selection of one member in the Judicial Council, in coordinated effort with the Minister of Interior. The wiretapped conversations feature indications of political influence in appointment of judiciary staff members, but also abuse of public office from the position of power. The Special Prosecution Office, however, did not file any indictments against Mihajlo Manevski.

Perceptions about state-of-affairs in the judiciary were clearly reflected in rhetoric applied in EC's Annual Progress Reports for Macedonia, especially under the section on judiciary reforms, which was becoming harsher and harsher every year. In the early years, i.e. 2007, the focus was on adoption and implementation of laws, but later, and especially after 2010, the rhetoric significantly changed.

The criticism sharpened in 2010, when the European Commission sent an unbiased message that: "Continued efforts are needed to ensure independence of the judiciary in Macedonia". In its report published in the fall of 2011, the European Commission enlisted serious remarks about the method for appointment and dismissal of judges and public prosecutors, independence and efficiency of the courts, (ab)use of detention orders, and insufficient budget of courts and prosecution services. It also raised concerns about the judiciary's independence and politically orchestrated cases.

In 2012, the European Commission repeated its poor assessment for the Macedonian judiciary. Serious remarks from international reports targeted the government's interference in selection of judges through participation of the Minister of Justice in the Judicial Council, which is the body competent for appointment and dismissal of judges.

Indications that matters in the judicial branch of government are not moving in the right direction were noted already in January 2009, when OSCE conducted an anonymous survey among 450 judges and whose results showed that majority of judges report political pressures, distrust in the Judicial Council and fear for their jobs. Results of this survey were denied by Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski, who declared them invalid and non-objective. Association of Judges of Macedonia also negatively assessed OSCE's survey and announced it would conduct their survey, but that never happened.

The Judicial Council never attempted to identify, let alone confront any kind of influence and pressures (on the contrary, it willingly took part in such practices), and pointed the finger to journalists during rare debates organized on this topic. In particular, they saw pressure in the journalist protest outside the court, organized on the occasion of the court process against journalist Tomislav Kezharovski in the case "Liquidation", who was convicted to four and a half years imprisonment for having revealed the identity of protected witness.

During VMRO-DPMNE and DUI's tenure in government, the Judicial Council appointed more than 330 judges in all courts around the country, thus having replaced almost half of the total number of judges. In spite of that, then-current governing structures led by Nikola Gruevski perpetuated the same party line that: "under the general re-election of judges in 1997, SDSM had appointed more than 500 judges in the state" and that the judiciary is controlled by "the communist authorities".

From the total number of newly appointed judges, only around 40 were selected from graduates at the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, while remaining judges were mainly selected from the ranks of attorneys and law professionals at state bodies. Often, these were close relatives to government officials or "deserving party members", whose appointment in the judiciary was their award for what they have done for the party. This was most prominent in recruitment at both administrative courts, but also at the Gostivar Court of Appeals, as newly formed judicial bodies, and at other courts where new judges were appointed.

Most dramatic example is appointment of Jovo Vangelovski as President of the Supreme Court, who served as best-man at the wedding of then-incumbent Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski. From the position of attorney-at-law, on May 20, 2008, Vangelovski was first appointed as judge in the Supreme Court of the Republic of Macedonia, and two months later, on July 17, 2008, he was elected president of the highest court.

The issue related to appointment of the Supreme Court's President was raised again in the summer of 2012, when the media reported about clashes between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. That was confirmed by sources from both political parties, including confirmed information that "political agreement is not reached about President of the Supreme Court" from then-incumbent President of the Judicial Council Aleksandra Zafirovska.

On that occasion, SDSM's vice president Ana Pavlovska-Daneva said that, instead of rising above politics and pursuing expert and professional selection of the Supreme Court's President, the Judicial Council had been turned into "partisan body that fulfils judicial ambitions of loyal friends to the authorities".

In July 2010, one member of the Judicial Council had stated for an analysis published by BIRN: "Politics is deeply infiltrated in selection of judges and unless both ruling parties agree on the person to be appointed we cannot appoint judges and supreme court president".

Due to problems in harmonizing positions among coalition partners, presidents at more than 20 courts were not selected for a period of one to two years, resulting in these courts being managed by so-called acting presidents.

It is a public secret in the judiciary that selection performed by the Judicial Council is formality and that candidates first have to pass party filters and agreements. Some members of the Judicial Council had been candid with aspiring candidates for judicial offices, referring them to the "right address" to find the path to obtaining judicial togas. Namely, the lists were compiled by committees comprised of prominent members from both coalition parties. To make this absurdity greater, the judiciary's recruitment policy was in the hands of the chief of secret police Sasho Mijalkov, interior minister Gordana Jankuloska and deputy prime minister Musa Djaferi.

463

Only after names of judge candidates are agreed at party headquarters, the "harmonized lists" were forwarded for further action to the Judicial Council through the Minister of Justice. Much later, this was confirmed with revelations from the "bombs" disclosed by opposition SDSM, which brought to the surface all combinations, but more importantly, direct influence of politics on the judiciary. Notions such as "Swarovski judiciary" and "party notebooks" are result of the wiretapped conversations that revealed direct connections between the main actors.

One recoding from illegally intercepted communications, which features voices of the police minister and the chef of secret police, revealed that fitted judges come from

Jankuloska's notebook, marked with plus signs and indication who proposed these candidates for carrier advancement.

**Transcript of telephone conversation between  
Gordana Jankuloska and Sasho Mijalkov:**

S.M.: Let me ask you about something. When are we selecting judges in [Basic Court] Skopje 1 ...

G.J.: Aham.

S.M.: I have a note here: number 72, Lidija Petrovska. Who proposed her?

G.J.: Let me check my notebook...

S.M.: Please do.

G.J.: I can't recollect the name... let me just... [the notebook] was here on my table, just a second, sorry... you are asking about Skopje 1?

S.M.: Yes, Skopje 1, and that is where she was appointed. I met her; I liked her. I'm only interested who proposed her to me.

G.J.: Just a moment, I'm listing [the notebook] while we speak...

S.M.: Yes.

G.J.: ...according to these lists.... Skopje 2, Skopje 2, [Court of] Appeals... it's like Murphy law... Skopje 1 is probably near the end... here, I found it, let me check.... I don't have them circled here, and here's another [list]... Lidija Petrovska, Sashka (Aleksandra Zafirovska, n/a) proposed her, number 72.

S.M.: Sashka you say?

G.J.: It's here. Yes.

S.M.: All right.

G.J.: There's a handwritten note, on the top... isn't she the one sending us materials...

S.M.: Yes, yes, yes.

G.J.: She made a handwritten note, after we discussed, so we checked her name and I've added another plus sign, I guess based on what we've discussed among us. But she was proposed by Sashka, and at the top of the list, you have the same [list], it's written 72, Lidija Petrovska.

S.M.: It's written 73. Sorry, it's written 72, and something else is 73.

G.J.: 72, because 73 is something else, it's illegible. Ana Ra-do... something.

S.M.: Ana Rajkova.

G.J.: Well, that Rajkova is illegible. This came from Sashka.

S.M.: OK. Good.

G.J.: That's it.

The Judicial Court had dismissed around 80 judges due to unprofessional and unconscious performance, at least three judges were lustrated, and around ten judges were covered by criminal procedures, half of which were convicted. The Skopje Court of Appeals was under special attack, where several judges were removed from office only few years before their retirement. Eight of them submitted an application against the state before the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds of having their right to fair trial violated. But, none of them was reinstated to the office of judge.

The Court in Strasbourg published its judgement upon application submitted by Violeta Duma, Snezhana Gerovska-Popchevska, Miroslav Trifunovski, Goce Jashkoski and Ivo Popovski vs. the Republic of Macedonia, wherein it had found violation of Article 6 of the Convention, i.e. the right to fair trial, tasking the state to compensate each of them in the amount of 4,000 euros, plus procedural costs.

Snezhana Gerovska-Popchevska was dismissed for the court process "Sheepfold", Jordan Mitrinovski, Violeta Duma and Vlado Djilvidjiev were fired as appellate judges for not changing the identity of somebody convicted under false name, Miroslav Trifunovski from Tetovo for not making crime scene insight in the case involving the drowning incident of journalist Vlado Taneski from Kichevo at the Tetovo Prison. Ivo Popovski and Goce Jashkoski were judges in the Ohrid Court at the time they were dismissed, while Jashkoski previously served as president of the Debar Court.

465

**Zjvonko Davidovikj: Judicial Council as guarantor or obstacle to the judiciary's independence**

Since the Republic of Macedonia's independence, due consideration and efforts were made for greater independence of the judiciary as one of the three branches

of government, in order to reduce i.e. fully eliminate influences from the executive government. Namely, it was thought that autonomous budget, i.e. autonomous and stable financing of courts and judicial authorities would guarantee the judiciary's independence and impartiality. Another precondition for the judiciary's independence, in addition to autonomous financing, was the idea to reduce pressures and dependence of judges from their selection by the parliament, whereby a decision was taken to introduce permanent tenure for judges and their selection to be made by an independent judicial body that was first named Republic Judicial Council.

According to these guarantees, stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, but also in the Law on Judicial Council and the Law on Courts, it was realistic to expect that state-of-affairs in the judiciary would relax and that sound foundations would be in place for the judiciary's independence and autonomy, including marginalized influence from the other two branches of government, especially the executive.

Unfortunately these expectations were not delivered as the secured guarantees or preconditions failed to boost the judiciary's independence and to ensure that judges engage in independent and impartial judgments. Overnight, all possible guarantees and preconditions that were secured in respect to the independence were betrayed with just several decisions.

One of the main reasons behind such betrayal of the good idea and the chance for independent and autonomous judiciary includes lack of responsibility with the Judicial Council's members for their performance. The Law on Judicial Council did not anticipate any instance before which they would be held accountable for their work and performance, which created a feeling of infallibility, irresponsibility and comfortableness among them.

The second reason is that judges who applied and were appointed in the Judicial Council lacked significant years of work experience in the judiciary, as well as meaningful and tangible track records. Applicants, especially in the period of "gruevism", were more occupied with politics than judiciary and the law, and lacked moral and intellectual capacity to resist pressures from the executive government.

The result was disastrous. Selection and promotion of judges to higher courts was not performed by the Judicial Council, but at party headquarters, which was seen in the disclosed “bombs” that feature the voice of then-current President of the Judicial Court Aleksandra Zafirovska, whose courting and obedient behaviour confirms these conclusions.

The Judicial Council's politicization and poltroonery inevitably led to selection of judges according to party wishes, obedience and affiliation, and resulted in destruction of the already fragile and unstable judicial system.

Abuse of ACCMIS and orchestration of court cases, selection of obedient judges for presidents of courts, direct influence by the executive government on outcomes of particular court processes, are just some of the problems identified and revealed in the “bombs” and the Priebe Report.

[Author is attorney-at-law.]

### Natali Petrovska: EU noted concerns about politicization and selective justice

467

The period 2008-2019 was marked by several justice reforms, majority of which concerned different aspects of the judiciary system, including systemic and structural reforms at institutions in this sector, as well as changes to procedural laws that directly impact court processes.

Despite these reforms, Eurobarometer data show high distrust of citizens in the judiciary (65 to 70 percent), which coincides with assessments from the European Commission's reports, which underlined the importance of meaningful reform implementation and the judiciary's efficiency, competence, independence and impartiality. In this period, the European Commission's reports noted certain level of preparedness and implementation of reforms, but also included concerns about judiciary's politicization, pressures and selective justice.

Main problems were indicated in respect to the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors, high number of backlog cases, long and inefficient investigations, and problematic practices in selection, promotion and disciplinary responsibility of judges and prosecutors. This rhetoric was sharpened in 2015 and 2016 when the European Commission established there is no progress, but rather backsliding in some segments related to the judiciary's independence and efficiency.

Based on data from research and monitoring of court cases in this period, the Coalition noted particular problematic practices in terms of law enforcement, but also problems with transparency of courts and other institutions in the justice sector. Due to closed approach to institutions and lack of data, the research show high share of delayed court hearings, i.e. non-adherent application of the right to trial within reasonable deadline, guaranteed under domestic and international law. That is confirmed by statistics from the Supreme Court in terms of redress paid in average amount of 100,000 euros annually on the grounds of violated right to trial within reasonable deadline. It must be stressed that certain media-exposed court processes initiated in that period are still active ("Snake Eye", "Cobblestone", "Monster", "Spare Parts for Armoured Vehicles").

468

Organizational setup of the system for performance assessment of judges and criteria for their career advancement contributed to their interpretation of legal provisions in strict and formalist manner, without due consideration for quality of justice delivered. Additional contributing factor is the frequent change of judge schedules at the courts, but also doubts of high corruption, political influences and executive government's interference in the judiciary which, to great extent, were confirmed with revelations from the "bombs". As a result, in the period 2008-2018, all applications against Macedonia submitted before and approved by the European Court of Human Rights resulted in confirmed violation of at least one article from the European Convention of Human Rights in 89 percent of cases.

This period was also marked by high number of defamation and libel lawsuits against journalists filed by public figures and public officials, which often resulted with rulings in favour of plaintiffs, extensive use of detention measures without adequate justification thereof, extensive use of special investigation measures, especially those related

to interception of communications, poor staff capacity at courts and prosecution services, insufficient funds in the law-stipulated amount, strike of employees in court administration, and formation of the Special Prosecution Office.

Non-functionality and politicization of the regular prosecution, political persecution of different-minded people channelled through the judicial system, and open attacks on the media that were not put in service to then-incumbent government, but also the overall political crisis in Macedonia at that time, were all reasons for establishment of the ad-hoc institution (body), i.e. the Special Prosecution Office. It represented a form of leading principle that was expected to overcome the concept of “state capture”, but also serve as benchmark for further justice reforms and way out from the legal and political crisis.

[Author is executive director of the Coalition “All for Fair Trials”.]

**Jordan Mitrevski: I was dismissed  
for having clashed with Mihajlo Manevski  
and his spouse**

469

After almost 20 years of service as court-martial judge, under the general re-election of judges from 1996 I was appointed in the Skopje Court of Appeals. In 2007, I became President of the Skopje Court of Appeals.

Shortly after assuming this position, due to unprincipled, unrealistic and unlawful requests by Minister of Justice Mihajlo Manevski, his spouse and leadership of then-incumbent government, I had to clash with them in attempt to defend judiciary's independence and professionalism. In the years that followed, I suffered various obstructions and serious threats, although I did not have a single black spot in my carrier.

On two occasions I was personally called by then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski to resign from office. I was called to informal talks with then-current chief of state security services. Five ungrounded disciplinary procedures were initiated against

me upon orders from the Minister of Justice, all of which were unsuccessfully completed before the Judicial Council. My performance was assigned negative assessment. Upon my complaint, the repeated performance assessment resulted in positive score. It should be noted that, in that period, the Skopje Court of Appeals and other courts under its competences were given good performance assessments and were indicated as efficient courts.

Intolerance between me, justice minister and executive government culminated after the retirement of Manevski's spouse, who opposed law-based grounds for retirement and publicly proclaimed political activity to the benefit of one political party. At the time, around ten cases were returned for repeated trial at first instance courts, all of which were of interest to the executive government, and they served as occasion for initiation of the sixth ungrounded disciplinary procedure against me, which had negative outcome.

Direct occasion for that was the Skopje Court of Appeals' decision (KSZ no. 537/10 from 6.12.2010) to accept offered bail in the amount of more than million and four hundred thousand euros and to order house detention for defendant Bajrush Sejdiu. Despite the fact that Article 185, paragraph 2 of the Law on Criminal Proceedings allows such legal possibility, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Macedonia changed the decision at its session and requested disciplinary procedure to be initiated against me to establish unprofessional and unconscious performance. On December 10, 2010, the motion was submitted by then-current President of the Supreme Court Jovo Vangelovski. I was accused of not having applied Article 207 of LCP in the referenced case, although court proceedings did not imply the need to decide upon that article which exclusively concerns detention, and actions pursuant to that article had already been decided by the Court of Appeals earlier that year, on November 16.

As part of disciplinary proceedings and in violation of procedural rules and provisions under Article 6, paragraph 1 of the European Convention, I was dismissed from the office of appellate judge. On April 30, 2015, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg took final judgement upon my application and established violation of Article 6, paragraph 1 of ECHR.

Led by the positive judgment, I motioned for repeated procedure before the Judicial Council of the Republic of Macedonia. This body, with all the remains from its clientelistic composition, engaged in unlawful proceedings and violation of the applicant's right to repeated procedure, ultimately adopting an identical decision to the one taken under the previous procedure.

Namely, the Strasbourg's judgment had found that the party motioning for establishment of unprofessional and unconscious performance of office, i.e. judge Jovo Vangelovski, is not allowed to make such motion on the grounds of his previous involvement in the court process. Therefore, on the grounds of inadmissible motion by unauthorized applicant the Judicial Council should have rejected his motion as inadmissible.

Instead, the Judicial Council allowed his motion, took decision to initiate procedure and later suspended me, although pursuant to Article 32, paragraph 9 of the Rules of Procedure for the Judicial Council, it should have revoked all acts from the previous procedure.

In spite of the fact that the decision for repeated procedure had cancelled the previous decision on the applicant's dismissal and decision of the appeal panel at the Supreme Court, these acts were presented as evidence and were valued in the repeated procedure, which is inadmissible.

This procedure fully ignored findings and orders from ECtHR's judgement, the applicant's procedural rights and included series of violation of the privacy, immediacy, and the right to fair and just trial, which amounted to repeated violation of Article 6, paragraph 1 of the Convention.

Most importantly, the judge's right to free conviction and decision-making was also violated. A judicial decision can be legally examined only in the manner anticipated by the Constitution and the laws. A judge cannot be held responsible for his/her decision, unless such decision implies criminal offence, which is not the case here. It should not be

forgotten that ECtHR judgements are binding for domestic authorities and they should be adherently enforced. That guarantees rule of law and fair and just trial.

(Author is dismissed appellate judge.)

## 2. SPECTACULAR ARRESTS, “BROTHER-IN-LAW PROSECUTION”, ORCHESTRATED COURT PROCESSES

Shortly after the failure at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, the authorities attempted to represent this defeat as success at the early parliamentary elections. After the electoral victory, they engaged in spectacular arrests that should have demonstrated the government's decisive fight against organized crime and corruption. Such demonstration of power would not have been so visible if it was not pursued in front of the public's eyes and with assistance from the media.

The scenario was rather simple.

Several days before, the media are briefed and given “unofficial news” about plans and preparations for arrest of “big game”. To capture these arrests for posterity and to secure their place on front pages in newspapers and in central news at televisions, MoI timely notifies the editorial desks to be prepared. They even inform about the exact time when certain incriminated individual would be arraigned in court. Cameramen and photo-reporters immediately take their place outside the court to capture the suspect's arrival. Suspects are brought in handcuffs, unsuccessfully attempting to hide their faces and guarded by special police officers in full gear. Cameras are flashing and filming the suspect's movement until the court's doors are closed behind them. In case influential and “friendly” television stations had missed the spectacle, the suspect's arrival is repeated according to previously scripted frames. Suspects are brought to the court's front door, not the back door which provides for more direct and (more) discrete entrance.

---

After the failure at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, the authorities attempted to present this defeat as success at the early parliamentary elections. After the electoral victory, they engaged in spectacular arrests that should have demonstrated the government's decisive fight against organized crime and corruption.

---

This is followed by snap press-conference at which police officials or spokespersons (depending on the size of the “catch”) elaborate the entire case in details. They do not avoid making serious qualifications, which leaves an impression that suspects had already been convicted. The police would make assurances that their actions are “strictly in compliance with the constitution and the laws” and that they are in possession of undeniable evidence that criminal offence of great proportions had been committed.

To make the irony greater, the police’s newsletters indicate suspects only by their initials, led by the principle on presumption of innocence, but include accurate description of their jobs and incriminated actions. Although previously the police did not only violate this constitutional principle, but shattered it to pieces. Telephone conversations in those situations went like this: “Send cameras. We plan to arrest criminal John Doe. Make sure you are not late. It will be interesting!” Although the operation is still underway, the court had already done its work and had approved detention orders. Evidence seemed to be the least of their concerns, because it is often secured afterwards.

Experts warned that heavy artillery used in the fight against corruption must not undermine the principle on presumption of innocence. To our regret, slowly, but surely, this principle had become an abstract notion. It became increasingly clear that the idea is to tarnish people and label them in the public as criminals, even if later indictments are not raised against them or they are not convicted by the court. The authorities remained deaf and blind to all indications by experts and non-governmental organizations warning that detention must not be used as punishment, but should be issued only in cases when there is actual danger that defendants could flee, repeat the offence or influence witnesses.

Detention orders were even tested before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, where several defendants from the court process “Snake Eye” sued their state. Several violations of the European Convention were established after this court had found that detention orders for all defendants are identical in contents and do not provide rationale.

A specific example of dramatic and spectacular arrest, which was not completed with court process, is apprehension of T-Mobile CEO Rubincho Zarevski, who was suspected of having signed medical procurement contract in 2003, when he managed the Health

Insurance Fund, with unfavourable bidding company and had damaged the Fund by around 25,000 euros. Zarevski was apprehended on the street in the city's centre while taking a stroll with his spouse, after which he was taken to the police station in Avtokomanda. The cameras were already positioned outside the police station and the court, but after 20-hour "informative talks" he was released from police custody. This case ended in pre-investigation stage and single forensic report produced. Zarevski withdrew from his high management position at T-Mobile and never spoke in the public about this case.

Equal treatment was afforded to renowned pulmonologist Dejan Dokikj, who was also spectacularly arrested. He was accused of soliciting and receiving bribe from patient in the amount of 300 euros because, allegedly, three designated banknotes of 100 euros had been found in his possession. The medical professor spent 15 days in detention at the Skopje Prison. The entire case was brought to court, after which the medical doctor was sanctioned with a fine in the amount of 1,400 euros for illegal mediation. Immediately after his arrest, but before his guilt was proven in court, Dokikj was expressly suspended and dismissed as manager of the Clinic of Pulmonology, where he worked for three consecutive mandates and had achieved excellent results.

474

Almost on the same day when professor Dokikj was arrested, then-incumbent Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska organized a press-conference and, disregarding the principle on presumption of innocence, said that "criminal charges raised by Mol are sustained and very serious, while the evidence collected is irrefutable". Later, it was proved that due to lack of evidence the Public Prosecution Office had problems to prove initial classification of his criminal offence and had to requalify the indictment with another offence of lower scope and intensity.

OHIS general manager Jorgo Kukja was apprehended in handcuffs when leaving his work place, although there were no indications that he would flee the country or oppose the police arrest. Also, the police demonstrated brutality when arraigning deputy minister Sasha Andonovski at the airport upon his return to the country. Another spectacle was organized when cardiologist Borche Petrovski was apprehended during attempt to legally cross the border. The arrest of former police minister Ljube Boshkoski was "aired

live" just one day after the elections and was staged as action movie scene. He was arrested outside popular restaurant on charges of illegal election campaign financing. The evidence, i.e. money in plastic bag, was found "on the site".

The list of arrests was long and featured creative names for police actions: "Ashes", "Snake Eye 1 and 2", "Phalanx 1 and 2", "Detonator", "Metastasis", "Liquidation", "Cobblestone", "Spy", "Campaign", "Rover", "Chairman", "Justitia", "Dissenter"...

Late in the night on December 24, 2010, owner of A1 television Velija Ramkovski was arrested at the premises of this media outlet. A major police raid followed and resulted in arrests of his close relatives and associates, including almost all former and current managers of the many companies registered on Street Pero Nakov.

As first defendant in the court process "Cobweb", Velija was brought to the court's front door, followed by his senior daughter Emel, his brother and twenty other people.

With hands raised above his head to show the "handcuffs", Velija Ramkovski entered the Criminal Court exclaiming: "dictatorship at work; democracy according to Gruevski". One day after his apprehension, all bank accounts of A1 television, newspaper *Vreme*, printing house Misirkov, and other companies from Street Pero Nakov were blocked upon PRO orders approved by the court.

Media magnate Velija Ramkovski was convicted to 13-year imprisonment on the grounds of "money laundering", tax evasion, criminal association, and serious sanctions were issued to his son Hedi, who had fled the country, was tried in absence and sentenced to 8-year imprisonment, his daughter Emel and other close associates. The main goal was achieved, i.e. destroy the most popular and critically-oriented television, leaving its employees on the streets.

The annals of the justice system in Macedonia, but also the world collection of bizarre events, would remember the case of the "monster" from Kichevo who had allegedly killed several elderly women in brutal and identical manner. Several years later this case served as inspiration for movie script by the renowned Macedonian director of global glory, Milcho Manchevski, as one in his three-part film. Death of journalist Vlado Tanevski in prison by drowning in bucket of water did not give competent authorities the chance to prove in court how this peaceful family man had ruthlessly raped and killed his senior neighbours, and later reported on their deaths in the media.





Mol representatives claimed to have strong evidence, supported with blood traces that Tanevski had allegedly left on his victims' bodies which, by the way, did not match his blood type. Unlike his arrest, conducted in spectacular and noisy manner with invitations to foreign media outlets to cover the story of this "monster", the competent authorities were not very convincing when they had to explain how it was possible for this inmate to drown in bucket with two litres of water. It was claimed that there are no traces of violence, but the photos that surfaced in the public show injuries on the journalist's body and face. After this there were no press-conference and serious qualifications about the psychological profile of this "murderer" who had suffered childhood traumas.

Special dilemma in the public was raised around the use of special investigation measures, which were often applied by the police. Despite the fact that legal provisions stipulate they should be used to secure evidence that could not be secured otherwise and for criminal offences that are punishable with imprisonment in duration of more than four years, conducted by an organized group, these measures were used in rather non-selective manner. Later, it was learned that these measures were massively used as part of illegal interception of thousands of citizens, majority of which had not even been suspected, but the "big brother" operation was performed to control all those perceived as different-minded and enemies of the regime. Knowledge acquired through illegal interception of communications was used to wage threats and pressures, to make disqualifications, to racketeer, and even to orchestrate court processes.

Since 2004 Jovan Ilievski is Chief of the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime, and is otherwise known as brother-in-law to the chef of secret police Sasho Mijalkov. Although in his rare media appearances Ilievski had claimed he is not bothered with the label

"brother-in-law" and that he had professionally realized himself much before VMRO-DPMNE came into power, he was publicly recognized for his family relations, which casted suspicion on his performance and work. He would be remembered as the person who executed arrests and confronted the regime's opponents upon orders from former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his cousin Mijalkov. He crowned his carrier as the Macedonian judge in the European Court of Human Rights with term of office in duration of nine years. In February 2016, he replaced Mirjana Lazarova-Trajkovska on this position. After his mandate expires, Ilievski could retire, which affords him comfortable position outside the realm of complicated events in Macedonia. Suspicions that his appointment at ECtHR had taken place under strong lobbying remain unproved, including bribe speculations about the vote in the Council of Europe..

During his tenure as Chief of the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime, which has privileged position on the territory of the entire state, Ilievski acted from the shadows, giving the frontal position to Chief State Prosecutor Ljupcho Shvrgovski. Although perceived as "inside man", prosecutor Shvrgovski did not hide his close friendship with Mijalkov from their high-school years, which brought him to the head position in the state prosecution service.

478

In the recent history, Shvrgovski would be remembered as the single chief state prosecutor who managed to complete full term of office in duration of six years without being dismissed, which had happened to his predecessors whenever there was change of government. To great extent, that was due to the fact that his mandate overlapped with the entire duration of VMRO-DPMNE's governance and was not interrupted with change of government.

After his mandate expired, Shvrgovski had no aspiration for another term of office, and Marko Zvrlevski came to the position of chief state prosecutor. He was criticized for failing to demonstrate energy and efficiency in opening investigation into large-scale affairs such as "Skopje 2014", "Aktor", "Makedonska banka", "Magyar Telekom"... He did not react to forceful eviction of MPs and journalists from the legislative house during the plenary session for adoption of the 2013 state budget, which happened on December 24, 2012. However, he was most criticized for political involvement in the case "Coup", in which then-current opposition leader Zoran Zaev was accused, as well as for slackening investigation into blood-shedding events at the parliament from April 27, 2017, which was reduced to charges for participation in crowd raised against several brutes that were



issued probation sentences. His ignorance of the interception affair and release of the "bombs" accelerated the path to formation of the Special Prosecution Office, which was actually a result of the failed operation and blockade at the regular prosecution.

At a press-conference, SDSM president Zoran Zaev presented five telephone conversations among high-ranking state officials which, according to him, amounted to evidence on links between the government and judicial authorities. They included recording of telephone conversation for which it was claimed features voices of interior minister Gordana Jankuloska and finance minister Zoran Stavreski, with reference made to the name Marko. Based on the conversation's contents, it could be learned that the person named is Marko Zvrlevski and that, upon orders from Jankuloska, he had taken prosecutorial decision to reject criminal charges motioned against Stavreski.

After the change of government, the new parliamentary majority raised initiative for dismissal of Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski who had been perceived as the last bastion of Nikola Gruevski's regime. The initiative was raised on July 12, 2017, and for entire 40 days the parliament podium served as battle ground for opposing arguments. He was finally dismissed on August 17, with 64 votes "for" and no votes "against" or abstained. VMRO-DPMNE's parliamentary group did not attend the voting session for his dismissal.

480

### Vane Cvetanov: When and how the judiciary fell down as the last bastion of defence for democracy and statehood

After the electoral victory in 2008 that secured him parliamentary majority with 63 MPs, Nikola Gruevski completely changed the policy towards fellow party members that had brought him into power and whom he had convinced that he works to build a better future. This marked the start of their de-installation and marginalization; while key positions were given to people that do not have 10 percent of qualities necessary for party or state offices. Newcomers, aware of their lack of qualification, had nothing else to offer in return except for their blind obedience and loyalty.

At times of absolute power, especially after the 2009 local and presidential elections, and having installed blind party servants, they started a process for creation of parallel state apparatus. This also implied start of efforts for capture of the institutions by Gruevski and the political party. He was already powerful enough to install parallel systems and started this operation.

The principles of parallel institutions are simple: nothing can move forward without the party's approval, not even matters that are legally and morally binding. As for party orders that had to be implemented by institutions, the party machinery was already in place and prepared to execute them.

The main operation to capture the judicial system with partisan influence was led by Mihajlo and Filimena Manevski in respect to judges, and by brother-in-law Jovo Ilievski at the prosecution service. Orders came directly from Nikola Gruevski, with logistic support provided by Gordana Jankuloska, Sasho Mijalkov and Mitko Chavkov. After "Crvenkovski's fall" in 2011 and recognition of the utterly dubious elections, even the most ardent judges and prosecutors had to subside to pressures.

The dictatorship started only after relevant conditions and support were in place, including secured influence and obedience from prosecutorial and court services. Hence, massive arrests started in 2011.

This is when public, brutal and unscrupulous confrontations with political opponents started, without blink of an eye, because they had secured control over EVERYTHING! Absolutely EVERYTHING!

There are numerous testimonies for this bleak period and they include many cases which, if analysed, would bring to the surface many irregularities. As part of the project led by Transparency International, the association "Green Magnifier" conducted analysis of 12 enforceable court decisions, while the report clearly outlines findings of the experts.

As part of another project, the association "Green Magnifier" submitted 50 motions for establishment of responsibility with judges, of which 28 were admitted by then-current Commission for Establishment of Facts, which was later cancelled. To present, the Judicial Council had not gathered the courage to take decision upon the initiative for establishing responsibility with President of the Supreme Court Jovo Vangelovski.

The regime did not show an ounce of conscience, virtue, humanity and emotion. It stomped on human dignity. The judicial system is abounding in examples of indictments and court verdicts that are not based on evidence.

"Green Magnifier" started its fight for the rights of citizens who feel as victims of the regime. And it achieved a lot in that regard. Unfortunately, this non-governmental organization no longer works on that issue, because the civil society sector is occupied and usurped by organizations that view the fight for justice as business venture and have become factories for production of nice projects.

(Author is former Director of the Administration for Prevention of Money Laundering and president of non-governmental organization "Green Magnifier".)

### 3. LUSTRATION AS INSTRUMENT FOR POLITICAL CONFRONTATION WITH THOSE OF DIFFERENT MIND

482

Following the steps of many former communist states that had initiated lustration processes to address injustices from the past and resolve politically staged court cases, after more than 15 years from its independence Macedonia decided to adopt legislation that would prevent former collaborators to the secret services to hold public office. The law was adopted with consensus and on behalf of victims of the former regime, but in practice no attempts were made to identify these victims, let alone rehabilitate them.

From the very start of its operation in 2009, the Commission for Verification of Facts (Lustration Commission) was plagued with numerous controversies and illogical actions.

The opposition claimed that the lustration process is abused against critics of the government, especially in 2012 when the new law was adopted and fully shifted the initial idea, followed by its caricaturist enforcement. In sign of protest, the two opposition-nominated members in this commission withdrew from their positions. Almost without any exception and without due verification, lustration commissioners awarded credibility and accuracy to documents from state security services, handwritten or machine typed, which the inspectors often compiled in political cases and not on the basis of collaborative

---

Implementation of the lustration process did not provide any guarantees in the public about the type of documents presented by the security services, but also the State Archive of Macedonia, and about their truthfulness, completeness and accuracy. In that, lustration commissioners assumed the role of judge, jury and executioner.

---

relations. As regards implementation of the lustration process, the public had no guarantees about the type of documents presented by the security services, but also by the State Archive of Macedonia, and about their truthfulness, completeness and accuracy. In that, lustration commissioners assumed the role of judge, jury and executioner.

According to prof. Vladimir Pivovarov, work of the security services "included cases in which particular persons, i.e. operational links, in order to prove quality of their work had to compile operational notes for particular security events, but were also obliged to indicate the source of such information".

The new law, which "expanded and upgraded" the law from 2008, brought major changes. It even changed the title into Law on Setting Additional Criteria for Performance of Public Office. However, it also brought multitude of novelties compared to the previous law, the most important of them being publication of the names of lustrated persons on the commission's website. It also extended the lustration's scope and coverage, and instead of 1991, it was expanded by 2006.

483

Unlike the law from 2008, which defined cooperation as "secretive, conscious, continuous and organized collaboration and activity, based on written document from the state security services", the law from 2012 granted the Commission for Verification of Facts (as the competent body for lustration) authorizations to lustrate persons enlisted in records of the state security services as "secret collaborators, operational links or secret informants in collecting and reporting on operational events, and provision of data that is subject of processing, storage and use by the state security services".

The new law was heavily criticized by the domestic expert public, but also received negative reviews from the Venice Commission, which had assessed that it does not achieve its purpose and is used as political instrument for confrontation with those of different mind.

The Helsinki Committee of Macedonia requested constitutional review and challenged 13 provisions from the new Lustration Law, with one of the main problems being the law's

extended period of coverage, because it was extended until 2006, instead of 1991 when the state became independent and introduced pluralist democracy. Another disputable provision concerned publication of names of alleged former police collaborators without affording them the right to appeal. That was the third time since 2008 for the Lustration Law to be challenged before the Constitutional Court. In the first two occasions, the Constitutional Court revoked several similar provisions, but the parliamentary majority persistently restored them in the legal order and even went further by proposing other nebulous legal solutions.

Based on data from the register of persons for whom the commission had established they fulfil criteria to be denied public office and published on its website, the total number of lustrated persons by September 1, 2015, accounted for 203. Having in mind that the lustration procedure was repeated for 13 persons, their names are doubled in the register, whereby this list included 190 persons. Of these, 10 persons had died by 2012 when the old law was still in effect, and 78 had been lustrated as deceased, identity of 5 persons had not been revealed and no documents were published for them. This provides the conclusion that 106 persons are registered as nameless, which means they are indicated only in terms of public office, but were lustrated after they had deceased. Among the remaining 98 persons covered by the lustration process, 32 were treated as persons who issued orders and 66 were collaborators.

4 8 4

The commission claimed that during its term of office they have checked records of 30,000 individuals. Persons who were lustrated include former interior ministers and other high-ranking police officials such as Ljubomir Frchkoski, Dobri Velichkovski, Jovan Trpenovski, Stevan Pavleski, president of constitutional court Trendafil Ivanovski, public figures like Vladimir Milchin, Gjuner Ismail, Gjorgi Spasov, professors, academics, journalists, and even judges. Several of them, after having lost the legal battle at domestic courts, turned to the Court in Strasbourg for justice. Majority of them claimed they have never signed collaboration documents and have not received monetary awards. Few of them made public announcements and organized press-conferences at which they disclosed documents that do not only prove they were not collaborators to the security services, but were actually victims of the past regime and are in possession of dossiers that they had been surveilled for years.

On June 28, 2013, lustration commissioners reached rock bottom when they declared that Slavko Janevski, the most renowned Macedonian writer and author of the first

Macedonian novel, had collaborated with the secret services. Although the name of the long deceased writer who is lustrated was not officially revealed, it became clear that the person in question is Janevski from indications made that the person is academic and writer known for the novel "Village behind the Seven Oaks" and the fact that his dossier is codenamed "Slavjan".

According to the commission, the deceased poet was lustrated for having collaborated with the secret services and having followed writers and artists, snitching on them to authorities and claiming that some of them produce bad literature.

In 2015, based on recommendation from the Priebe Report and as part of efforts to put an end to the political crisis in Macedonia, the lustration process was terminated, but the Commission for Verification of Facts continued its work until completion of court processes initiated by number of lustrated individuals.

After criticism from Brussels, Macedonia discontinued the controversial lustration process whose goal was to discharge former collaborators to the secret services, believing that its mission is completed. In July 2015, MPs from governing parties submitted a proposed law in parliament that cancels the effect of the Lustration Law from September 1.

485

This law noted that the Commission for Verification of Facts as state institution tasked to discharge former collaborators to the secret services had completed its mission, which meant that the law has achieved its goal. Criticism from Brussels came after the opposition disclosed illegally wiretapped conversations that included indications about interference by Gruevski's government in the lustration process.

In spite of that, President of the Lustration Commission Tome Adžiev claimed that its track record is clean and fair, and that the Brussels' report had been based on "narrow scope of data". He claimed that in spite of the campaign led by enemies to lustration, the process was not used for political retaliation against government opponents and that it was completed as "historical benefit for all citizens in the country". The contents of disclosed "bombs" provided the public evidence that MPs from governing parties had commissioned lustration of judges. Such was the case of MP from VMRO-DPMNE Antonio Miloshoski who, in telephone conversation with the chief lustration commissioner, ordered lustration of Dragi Bileski, judge from Kichevo, for "having created problems". After his lustration, the named judge was expressly suspended and later dismissed by the Judicial Council. In 2010, Bileski had passed the lustration test as judge, but two

years later the same Lustration Commission declared him snitch despite lack of UBK documents that register his status as collaborator, with the police inspector who had allegedly compiled the judge's note confirming in notary-certified deposition that the entire case had been constructed. Bilevski had to wait whole nine years for justice to be delivered, i.e. for the Court in Strasbourg to take judgment in his favour and confirm that the entire procedure was unlawful.

### **Trendafil Ivanovski: My lustration launched the attack on the Constitutional Court**

From the very start of my lustration, I publicly indicated that it is a matter of revanchist attack by the regime due to my role in the fight to protect constitutionality and legality. In the years when I was President of the Constitutional Court, every year this body reviewed, cancelled or revoked provisions from around 50 laws, on average. The government could not or did not want to understand the importance of constitutionality. Clashes between the Government and the Constitutional Court were regular topic in the public, while representatives of the international community made numerous indications and reactions in that regard. Actually, my lustration launched the attack on the Constitutional Court and, by association, destruction of the constitutional and legal order. The landscape in terms of protection of the constitutionally was changed after my elimination and follow-up efforts to change the court's composition. In the period from 2010 to 2012, the authorities managed to destroy the state's constitutionality through the Constitutional Court.

In truth, the Constitutional Court was not silenced. There was no need for that because its composition was put in clientelistic relation to then-governing VMRO-DPMNE. This judicial body completely lost its credibility and took no action to protect constitutionality and legality, let alone citizens' rights and freedoms.

It would have been much easier if I was able to prove the truth in my country. Nevertheless, the truth was learned, albeit outside the borders of the state, for which I was repressed on two occasions. In the last years, it was confirmed that the lustration was a complete failure. It was reduced to ideological, political and partisan motives, raising doubts about

its actual goals from the very start. Such goals should not be used as basis for lustration, because stigmatization and discrimination of political opponents are not acceptable means for political fight in the rule of law states.

The desire for confrontation and hatred must not take primacy over protection of the democracy.

[Author was President of the Constitutional Court 2007-2010.]

#### **4. DEFAMATION AND LIBEL LAWSUITS AS MEANS TO EXERT PRESSURE AND TO SILENCE DISSENT**

In addition to criticism for politicisation of judiciary and public administration, during the governance by Nikola Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE serious criticism was also raised about efforts to suppress freedom of speech and expression. Defamation and libel lawsuits motioned by high-ranking party and state officials against opposition members, journalists and the media were used as means to exert pressure and intimidate them.

According to data from SCOOP Macedonia, collected from 22 courts in compliance with the Law on Free Access to Public Information, a total of 1,800 lawsuits had been motioned in the period 2011-2016. Among them, around 1,000 lawsuits were motioned in 2011 and 2012 before defamation and libel were decriminalized, and their number decreased in the later years. The highest number of lawsuits is registered in 2012, i.e. 330 lawsuits. After decriminalization, their number is declining and reached 40 lawsuits in 2016.

The highest number of lawsuits is motioned before Skopje-based courts, whereby only in 2011 and 2012 the Criminal Court was presented with 367 lawsuits. After adoption of the Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and Libel (decriminalization), these lawsuits were transferred under jurisdiction of litigation courts. Defamation lawsuits were filed against politicians and business, but journalists were not spared of such pressures as well. They appear as lawsuit parties in 173 court cases, while "the fourth estate" was subject of defamation lawsuits in 117 cases. Journalists motioned lawsuits in 17 cases, and they levied defamation charges among them in 39 cases.

Most dramatic examples include lawsuits filed by then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski against opposition leaders Zoran Zaev and Tito Petkovski, and the lawsuit filed by the chief of secret police Sasho Mijalkov against newspaper *Fokus*. This critically-oriented weekly newspaper was frequently levied charges by government officials, but also by journalists close to VMRO-DPMNE.

NSDP leader Tito Petkovski was ordered by the court to pay 10,000 euros in redress to then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. In July 2013, the court took a judgment whereby Petkovski was found to have defamed Gruevski. The lawsuit concerned statement made by Petkovski for weekly *Fokus* that Gruevski had agreed to change of the state name, with the latter claiming non-pecuniary damages in the amount of 15,000 euros.

In 2014, the Skopje Civil Court resided in the lawsuit against Zoran Zaev motioned by Nikola Gruevski and concerning accusations for criminal activity in the sales of Makedonska banka. Gruevski claimed that such defamation had caused him grievance and had distorted his and the reputation of his family. He added that intensity of attacks against his personality is of such scope that, in spite of him being person with high tolerance threshold, he had decided to motion lawsuit against SDSM's leader. The initial lawsuit claim was set in the amount of half million euros, but Gruevski's attorney reduced it to 50,000 euros with explanation that money is not the motive behind this lawsuit, but the need to prove the Prime Minister's honour.

Two years after Zoran Zaev was sanctioned with defamation fine in the amount of 50,000 euros payable to then-incumbent Prime Minister Gruevski, the Skopje Court of Appeals decided to return the case for repeated procedure. According to the second instance court, there was no dilemma that Gruevski had been defamed and the defendant's guilt is confirmed, but the court requested repeated procedure in regard to the amount of redress awarded and re-examination of grievances suffered by the Prime Minister.

Macedonia became known as one of the rare countries in Europe that had convicted a journalist with imprisonment sentence. The case of journalist Tomislav Kezharovski is "textbook example" of pressures exerted on media workers. In 2013, he was convicted to imprisonment for having revealed the identity of protected witness in newspaper article published in 2008. In that, concerns were raised by the fact that the entire court process

against him started at the moment when he published an investigative story around the traffic accident that resulted in the death of Nikola Mladenov, owner of weekly *Fokus*.

At that time, i.e. in the critical year 2013, one of the most powerful people in the state, the chief of secret police and the prime minister's cousin Sasho Mijalkov motioned lawsuit against executive editor at this newspaper Jadranka Kostova and against journalist Vlado Apostolov. The occasion for this lawsuit were two articles published and based on statements from former Ambassador to the Czech Republic Igor Ilievski. One year later, the court ruled that already closed newspaper *Fokus* should pay redress in the amount of 9,000 euros to Mijalkov for having smeared his honour and reputation. Executive editor Kostova was fined with 5,000 euros and journalist Apostolov with 1,000 euros. Journalists from this newspaper did not hide the fact that court decisions like this have greatly contributed to self-censorship because they are working under constant fear and uncertainty.

The Association of Journalists of Macedonia also reacted to this dramatic verdict.

"The court missed an opportunity to take fair decision pursuant to the Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and Libel and in compliance with jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights", indicated the Association of Journalists of Macedonia about the decision of the Skopje Court of Appeals that confirmed the first instance decision in the lawsuit motioned by Sasho Mijakov against *Fokus*. AJM called Mijalkov to renounce collection of 9,000 euros, of which 6,000 euros were imposed as fine and 3,000 euros concerned court fees, despite the enforceable effect of the court verdict against journalists.

Skopje-based attorney Filip Medarski was among most frequently engaged defence councillors by journalists and civic activists in court processes led against them.

"Unfortunately, I believe lawsuits are used for pressure, retaliation and as means of intimidation and silencing the critical public, not only journalists from the critically-oriented media, but the entire critical public" stated Medarski for SCOOP.

State-of-affairs in the media were duly addressed in the Priebe Report where it is clearly indicated that: "Defamation actions should not be used as a means to stifle debate

or prevent public figures from being held to account. It is of particular concern when politicians sue journalists for defamation, but also when they sue other political figures, instead of resolving their differences through other means such as public debate”.

## 5. HATE SPEECH WENT UNSANCTIONED BY COMPETENT AUTHORITIES

In Macedonia, hate speech exists and could lead to hate crime, while reasons for its frequent presence are identified in unprecise regulation of hate speech in the laws and almost non-existing practice to sanction this phenomenon. This is the conclusion that could be read in almost all domestic analysis addressing this issue.

While non-government organizations regularly detected and reported cases of hate speech in the social, but also in the traditional media, targeting socially vulnerable groups, as well as political opponents and government critics, hate speech was never sanctioned. The numbers are defeating, i.e. the prosecution services have not raised any indictments based on the two articles of the Criminal Code that regulate this matter.

Article 319 of the Criminal Code covers incitement of hatred, discord or intolerance on the basis of national, racial, religious or other discriminatory basis, while Article 394-d concerns dissemination of racist and xenophobic materials via information systems.

Legal definitions of hate speech and of defamation and libel are similar, although the manner and means by which these acts are manifested are often identical. In essence, hate speech implies dissemination of racist and xenophobic materials that assist, promote or encourage hatred, discrimination or violence against individuals or group of persons... while defamation and libel are defined as presentation of untruthful facts about individuals, their character, their performance and the like.

Although these two definitions might be similar in terms of offence and include overlapping elements, they are treated under different laws. Namely, defamation and libel

are no longer regulated under the Criminal Code and do not represent criminal offences, being transferred to regulations on civil liability. In practice that means that persons who believe they have been targeted by defamation or libel initiate civil lawsuits before the competent courts. On the other hand, hate speech is regulated under the Criminal Code and procedures against hate speech could be initiated by the Public Prosecution Office in ex-officio capacity or upon criminal charges motioned by affected parties.

The Helsinki Committee of Macedonia vigilantly detected, researched and processed with criminal charges all cases of hate speech, but the prosecution service failed to take action upon these motions. Mol is the furthest instance with which they cooperated on this matter, notably by providing help for identification of IP addresses or additional information.

Journalists Milenko Nedelkovski, Janko Ilkovski (Eat Rubbish), Mirka Velinovska, and Dragan Pavlovikj-Latas have been indicated as people using hate speech in prime-time news and talk shows aired on televisions. Most frequent targets of hate speech were LGBTI people, national minorities, but also critically-minded individuals and groups, usually labelled as "sorosoids" and "traitors".

Nevertheless, the criminal charges against them were either ignored or rejected as unfounded, with explanation that there is a thin line between hate speech and freedom of expression. This alibi position of the prosecution service had led to no criminal charges processed.

## **G. SPECIAL PROSECUTION OFFICE (SPO): A NEW RAY OF HOPE FOR GREATER JUSTICE**

The need for formation of ad-hoc prosecution office with limited mandate and precisely defined mission emerged as a result of (non)operation on the part of regular prosecution service led by Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zvrlevski and the Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption, and as direct consequence from the political crisis' escalation when opposition SDSM disclosed

the “bombs”. In that, the unauthorized interception of communications concerned the period from 2008 to 2015.

The Special Prosecution Office was formed on September 15, 2015, with an agreement among the four biggest parties in parliament. Its main mission was to investigate and prosecute criminal offences related to and arising from the contents of illegal interception of communications. The government and opposition reached an agreement on the law and the selection of 50-year old Katica Janeva as Chief Special Prosecutor. In particular, this anonymous prosecutor from Gevgelija was the compromise solution against several more prominent candidates that could not win over the support from VMRO-DPMNE or SDSM.

It is important to note that the Law on Special Prosecution Office was approved in the legislative house with support from 111 MPs from total of 114 MPs in attendance, without any votes against, and that the Council of Public Prosecutors had unanimously selected Janeva as chief special prosecutor.

Lenche Ristoska, Katica Janeva  
and Fatime Fetaj at the Special  
Prosecution Office





"I am pleased [with her selection]. We have the law that guarantees full autonomy and Katica Janeva is prosecutor without political affiliation", said then-current opposition leader Zoran Zaev. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was also content at the time, indicating that the person selected to head the Special Prosecution Office is professional.

In material and legal terms, SPO was completed with appointment of 12 prosecutors by the Council of Public Prosecutors on October 14 and November 4, 2015. It should be noted that SPO was organized according to the principle of autonomy, which means that no prosecutor, including the chief state prosecutor is able to influence its work or demand reports related to specific cases. SPO was given legal right to declare jurisdiction over cases, in any stage of processing and concerning the illegal interception of communications, which had already been formed by the Public Prosecution Office, i.e. it was allowed to independently establish prosecutorial jurisdiction. For its operation, SPO's chief was held responsible before the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and the Council of Public Prosecutors.

The principle of autonomy was also reflected in this prosecution's financing, which means that the Public Prosecution Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Parliament were unable to change the financial plan developed by the Special Prosecution Office and were obliged to integrate its budget in the state prosecutorial budget.

On December 30, 2015, SDSM presented the Special Prosecution Office with evidence materials stored on hard disk and six boxes of hardcopy transcripts, all of which, after their handover,, were kept in safe deposit boxes that comply with all security standards for such materials. The hard disk contained a total of 546,948 files, of which 540,646 are audio files and 6,302 files are of different formats (word, excel, pdf, etc.).

Hardcopy materials included 23 spiral-bind books with total of 18,155 pages that contained 119,088 transcripts from telephone conversations and text messages. Moreover, SPO was presented with 1,828 non-numbered hardcopy pages.

---

The need for formation of the Special Prosecution Office emerged as a result of the (non) operation of the regular prosecution, but also as direct consequence from the political crisis' escalation when opposition SDSM disclosed the "bombs".

---

The first case opened by Katica Janeva's team concerned irregularities at the 2012 elections under the codename "Titanic", followed by series of other cases, all of which were codenamed with words starting with the letter "T". The first round of press-conferences held by the three most exposed prosecutors in the media, i.e. Katica Janeva, Lenche Ristoska and Fatime Fetaj, brought increasing public support for their work. Public surveys conducted in that period showed great support for this prosecution service, while the 2016 public poll conducted by the American International Republican Institute indicated that high 63 percent of citizens support SPO's work.

It took only several months for Nikola Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE to change their perception about the Special Prosecution Office. Already in December 2015, they launched attacks indicating that Janeva operates as extended hand of SDSM and Zaev. Attacks first started in semi-open form, but became more and more direct. High-ranking representatives from VMRO-DPMNE started using all and any opportunity to attack this institution after it opened the first investigations, and this example was followed by all state institutions that were directed to cooperation with SPO. There were visible obstructions in communications with the Council of Public Prosecutors, the Judicial Council, the Criminal Court, but also the Central Register, the Real Estate Cadastre Agency, etc. The international community noted these pressures and requested the authorities not to obstruct justice, after which accredited ambassadors in the country self-initiatively attended press-conferences organized by SPO in order to demonstrate support for its work.

495

On December 14, 2015, SPO took over the first case from the regular prosecution which concerned docket "Coup", formed against opposition leader Zoran Zaev and five other defendants for having waged threats against Prime Minister Gruevski and other state officials for the interest of foreign services. Later, SPO declared jurisdiction in 33 cases.

Main investigations were launched and conducted in 2016 and they concerned unlawful interception of communications, abuse of public office and duties and wrongdoings by former government officials. They resulted in indictments filed for 20 cases, followed-up by court processes. Of them, three cases concern election frauds ("Titanic 1, 2 and 3"), two concern the illegal wiretapping and demolition of interception equipment ("Fortress and Target" and "Fortress 2"), tax evasion, illegal mediation, abuse of public office and

duties in procurement of vehicles, motorway construction, violence, demolition of building, etc.

Several new investigations were launched, including the one about political party financing of VMRO-DPMNE codenamed "Thaler". As part of this investigation SPO suspected then-current party leader Nikola Gruevski and several of his closest associates for money laundering, i.e. illegal financing of VMRO-DPMNE in the period 2009-2015.

From SPO's establishment until 2019, three court processes were completed with imprisonment sentences for defendants, i.e. "Armoured Car", "Trust" and "Tiffany". In the case "Armoured Car", related to procurement of luxury Mercedes vehicle, former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was convicted with 2-year imprisonment sentence, but immediately before the decision for his referral to serve the sentence, he fled to Hungary, most probably with assistance of diplomatic vehicle, and applied for political asylum as form of international protection.

In the same case, former assistant minister of interior Gjoko Popovski was convicted by the Basic Court Skopje 1 to imprisonment in duration of six and a half years on the grounds of abuse of public office, while the Court of Appeals had his sentence reduced to four and a half years. Imprisonment sentence in duration of six years, which was reduced by the higher instance court to four years, was issued to former police minister Gordana Jankuloska. The case "Three Hundred", in which assistant minister Popovski was declared guilty for procurement of 300 vehicles and for which he was convicted to 9-year imprisonment, is now returned for repeated trial.

The verdict in case "Trust" implied 6-year imprisonment for businessman Sead Kochan, while his partner in illegal dealings Vasilie Avirovikj was convicted to three years in prison. The third defendant was issued acquittal verdict. In addition to imprisonment sentences, Kochan and Avirovikj were also prohibited to perform business activity in duration of three years. Their companies Transmet and Sileks nemetali were fined in the amount of 33,000 euros each and are prohibited to participate in tender procedures for a period of three years.





Probation sentence of two years on condition that she does not repeat the offence in the next four years was issued to journalist Ivona Taleska for the case "Tiffany", in which she was accused of tax evasion.

The Special Prosecution Office was brought in delicate position after the deadline of 18 months for filing indictments in cases for which it has established jurisdiction expired, in particular because portion of newly launched investigations were formed after June 30, 2018. The situation was additionally complicated after January 30, 2019, when the Supreme Court adopted a principled position assessing that SPO is not entitled to act in cases after expiration of the deadline, bringing under question further prosecution actions in the case "Empire", which at that moment was in the stage of investigation. This case concerns money laundering, criminal association, illegal takeover of companies, and the suspects include businessman Orce Kamchev, several of his closest associates, and the former chief of secret police Sasho Mijalkov.

Negotiations between government and opposition about the new Law on Public Prosecution Office, which should integrate SPO and whose adoption requires 81 votes in parliament, have not yielded any results. The two parties are still far from reaching agreement because they are on different positions about SPO's destiny and about staff solutions for this prosecution office. Despite its declarative commitment for SPO's continued work, "quiet obstruction" also comes from the Albanian partner in the government, DUI, whose leadership is among suspects under recently launched investigations.

"Yes, it is true that we are against Katica Janeva and this team of prosecutors, from the very simple reason that they have lost their human and professional capacity", stated VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski on several occasions.

That is why, for some period of time, the Special Prosecution Office had urged competent authorities to adopt a legal solution that would allow SPO to be integrated as independent department within the structure of the Public Prosecution Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, thus guaranteeing its autonomy to take actions in cases from its current jurisdiction, but also broadening its scope of work in terms of prosecuting high-profile corruption.

While new legal solution for the Special Prosecution Office to be transformed into the highest body competent to prosecute high-ranking officials who have committed criminal actions is still in the works, it seems that this prosecution office has lot of work on uncompleted cases from its current jurisdiction related to the interception scandal, especially knowing that its mandate will officially end in 2020.

## **7. IVANOV'S AMNESTY OR AMNESIA FOR CRIMINAL ACTIONS?**

On March 18, 2016, the Constitutional Court restored powers to the chief of state to grant abolition (blanket pardons), after which President Gjorge Ivanov stated that he does not intend to pardon persons suspected or convicted of election fraud.

On that occasion, EU Commission Spokesperson Maja Kocijancic stated that possible decision by President Ivanov to pardon persons convicted of election manipulations would be contrary to the role of the special prosecution.

She added: "Such action would also be contrary to decision of the parliament and the political parties on establishment of the special prosecution tasked to review and prosecute wrongdoings, including those related to the previous election cycles".

Less than a month later, on April 12, President Ivanov did declare abolition for 56 persons, which mainly covered politicians affected by SPO's investigations, several politicians from the opposition, and a witness (Kosta Krpach) who was not subject of criminal prosecution. Ivanov's decision landed on fierce reactions in the domestic public and the international community. This move, to great extent, blocked the work of SPO, which was perplexed as to how to further process its cases.

Ivanov maintained that the abolition was intended to protect the state interest and to contribute to resolution of the political crisis.

"The crisis stops here and now", said Ivanov. He explained that the decision he had made "terminates all and any proceedings against politicians and their associates or against supporters from the opposite sides". Ivanov presented his decision at press-conference

organized at his presidential residence. He did not indicate any names or cases covered by the abolition, but said that his decision was taken in the best interest of the state.

Opposition SDSM assessed his decision as coup d'état and protests were staged on the streets by the so-called Colourful Revolution. As part of these protests, one day after the abolition decision was declared Ivanov's people office in Skopje downtown was demolished and set on fire.

Then-governing VMRO-DPMNE did not accept the president's abolition, after which he withdrew number of decisions on May 27, 2016, concerning 22 "politically exposed" individuals, and 10 days later he fully withdrew the abolition, but still maintained his position that the decision was the right action to resolve the political crisis.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn said that Ivanov's decision to withdraw blanket pardons for a number of people is not sufficient. "As it was said many times before, the EU reiterates that comprehensive solution is the key to avoid selective justice", added Hahn.

Although Ivanov withdrew his abolition, the same was still used by two key defendants in SPO cases, Nikola Boshkovski and Goran Grujovski, who had fled the country in order to avoid criminal prosecution. They were caught in Greece with falsified documents when attempting to cross the border. The Supreme Court in Greece rejected Macedonia's request for their extradition and referred to Ivanov's abolition.

Immediately before expiration of his term of office, Ivanov was addressed with request for abolition by defendants in the case "Bloody Thursday", i.e. events at the parliament from





April 27. According to the petitioners, by declaring abolition he would eliminate injustice and selective approach from the Amnesty Law which exempted from prosecution only a number of defendants. In March 2019, sixteen persons were convicted to imprisonment in duration from 7 to 18 years, i.e. total of 211 years.

This petition re-opened old legal dilemmas, but also dissonance.

"There are two reasons why the chief of state cannot open procedure to grant pardons", stated on that occasion Minister of Justice Renata Treneska-Deskoska. She explained that such procedure could be led only through the Ministry of Justice, having in mind that there are no legal grounds to grant pardon without prior procedure completed by the competent ministry. Moreover, she reminded that Article 11 of the Law on Pardons which previously anticipated pardons to be granted by the president of state is now revoked and that the Constitutional Court's revoking decision from 2016 has not "revived" this article, which means it does not exist in the legal system.

Nevertheless, Ivanov did not use this right and did not grant the second abolition, which caused dissatisfaction and reactions in the social media among his supporters and like-minded persons.

## What they said about Ivanov's abolition:

### **Bekim Kadriu, professor of criminal law**

From the legal perspective, Ivanov acted beyond his constitutional and legal authorizations. He granted blanket pardons on the basis of legal provision that does not exist in the legal system of the Republic of Macedonia, i.e. deleted Article 11 of the Law on Pardons. Also, his abstract pardons granted to particular category of individuals, without any explanation, is in direct violation of underlying principles of the law: legal security and legal equality. Furthermore, that allows persons who have committed serious criminal offences to avoid criminal responsibility. Therefore, Ivanov should be held responsible for his action, be it in the form of resignation or responsibility established by the Constitutional Court.

### **Mirjana Lazarova-Trajkovska, former judge from Macedonia in ECtHR**

It is a matter of uncommon decision, very general and covering large group of people. Pardons are not uncommon actions for presidents in states with presidential systems. Here I refer to the case of Hugo vs. President of the Republic of South Africa, which was decided by the Constitutional Court. However, this case implied completely different approach in which President Nelson Mandela pardoned a large group of mothers in prison with minor children under the age of 12 years. In that case, the court's reconsiderations implied discrimination [on the basis of sex].

In our case, many elements need to be reviewed and often there is interchangeable use of the terms abolition, amnesty and pardon. It is a matter of large group of people covered by pre-investigation and investigation actions, and only one person was convicted in court process, and is therefore the single one pardoned. Moreover, this case included a pardon granted to witness, but also other cases that raise questions and discussions about other principles protected by the Convention, such as the principle on presumption of innocence.



Iskra Novakovska and  
Nazim Rashidi

## FROM “BOMBS” TO BUDAPEST

### “BOMB” HARBINGER

Fall of 2014. Rumours that opposition leader **Zoran Zaev** possesses compromising materials for ruling party **VMRO-DPMNE** are picking up volume. Assumptions went as far as indication for more sophisticated

continuation of the affair **Big Ear**,<sup>1</sup> meaning that the same political party is behind interception of communications, this time with different people "eavesdropping" on conversations.

In particular, the first rumours started in June 2014, when Gruevski accepted to engage in dialogue with the opposition after the latter had declared results from the early parliamentary elections to be illegitimate, followed by submission of written resignations by recently elected MPs and their outright refusal to participate in the parliament. The opposition's demands included formation of caretaker government that would organize new round of elections, revision of the voter register, population census and guarantees for media freedom. VMRO-DPMNE agreed to political dialogue, but **SDSM** had another condition, i.e. the **European Union** to mediate this dialogue. According to the opposition, they would not accept "another agreement of toilet-paper value", which was qualification used by the ruling party for previously brokered agreements. Hence, the political dialogue fell through.

In November 2014, speaking at public debate in Bitola, SDSM president and opposition leader Zoran Zaev officially announced he possesses evidence on corruption of then-incumbent government whose publication would "force Prime Minister **Nikola Gruevski** to resign in three-days-time".

In expectation of "materials" to be released, on January 23, 2015, the police conducted an action called "Coup". According to some, this was the first attempt to save Gruevski

<sup>1</sup> The interception affair "Big Ear" started on January 17, 2000, with a press-conference held by SDSM opposition leader Branko Crvenkovski at party headquarters, when he presented transcripts from intercepted conversations among politicians, journalists and diplomats. On January 22, the Public Prosecution Office addressed the Basic Court Skopje 1 with motion to approve investigation measures and interviewed 70 witnesses. Chief State Prosecutor Marko Zrlevski demanded Crvenkovski to disclose identity of the person that has presented him with these transcripts, but he refused to answer. Speculations in the public implied that Crvenkovski had been presented with materials by UBK's former director Zoran Verushevski. In 2001, the forensic analysis showed that such interception equipment is available only at the Ministry of Interior and the operator Macedonian Telecommunications. In 2003, Minister of Interior Dosta Dimovska and Commander of Mol Administration for Operational Technology Aleksandar Cvetkov were convicted for this affair. The Skopje Prosecution Office had charged them in the capacity of parties that issued interception orders. The entire affair "was closed" when then-incumbent President Boris Trajkovski granted pardons to Dosta Dimovska and Aleksandar Cvetkov.

by intercepting the publication of wiretapped materials. UBK's former director **Zoran Verushevski** was arrested under suspicions of illegal possession of firearms and child pornography. Later, Verushevski's detention was extended under suspicions of espionage and having waged threat against high state authorities. Except for Verushevski, the police action resulted in apprehension of his spouse who has allegedly assisted him in perpetration of criminal acts, and official from the Municipality of Strumica. Moreover, opposition leader Zoran Zaev was accused of having waged threat against public officials at high state authorities.

On January 31, 2015, at dramatically announced press-conference, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski accused opposition leader Zoran Zaev of attempted coup d'état. Moreover, the Prime Minister stated that Zaev had blackmailed him with compromising materials in his possession, which included conversations among high-ranking government officials. At this press-conference and in respect to "materials", Gruevski stated: **"[...] the contents of some bombs are truthful, some are semi-truths, while others are untrue [...] they have been cut, edited and assembled"**. According to Gruevski, in exchange for non-release of these materials Zaev had demanded ("blackmailed") formation of caretaker government.

506

On February 2, footage from special investigation measures showing parts of the conversation at the Prime Minister's Cabinet on Str. Ilindenska no. 2 was uploaded on *YouTube*. According to this footage, opposition leader Zaev informs Gruevski that he possesses materials with telephone conversations which he had obtained from foreign services. Later, Zaev would explain that his reference to "foreign services" served the purpose of "buying time" to move "whistleblowers" to safe place and that the footage was made at one of four "meetings" he had with Gruevski.

This "accidental" leak of footage on *YouTube* was interpreted as Gruevski's second attempt to intercept the "bombs" whose disclosure became inevitable. At that point in time, the Public Prosecution Office issued press-release indicating that: "publication of materials that could become subject of future criminal procedures is prohibited and punishable by law". The international community expressed concerns that the media might interpret this statement as indication that they should not fulfil their crucial role in presenting information of public interest.<sup>2</sup>

In such atmosphere, i.e. in expectation of decision by SDSM's central board to release the "bombs", Zaev said he would not be surprised if he is arrested. "I expect anything

<sup>2</sup> The public service broadcaster **MRT** did not report on the "bombs". Their example was followed by media outlets close to then-current government. **Alsats-M** was the first television with national concession that started to air "bombs" in their entirety.

to happen. I might even be arrested when I start disclosing the evidence. We have contingency plan, meaning that there would be another person to continue [disclosing materials], and in case this person is also arrested, there would be a third person. They cannot arrest the entire opposition", stated Zaev on February 5.

VMRO-DPMNE welcomed the decision for disclosure of the "bombs": "At last, Zoran Zaev's despair, greed and lack of capacity are getting a deserving end". Some members of the public described these "welcoming" words to resemble "child shouting out loud he is not afraid while stepping down to the basement".

### DAY WHEN THE INTERNET "WENT DOWN"

On February 9, 2015, the first "bomb" was released from SDSM headquarters, i.e. recordings of wiretapped conversations in which Mayor Zaev talks to journalist, party leader Zaev talks to **Radmila Shekerinska**, and parent Zaev talks to his minor daughter. Several other wiretapped conversations followed and featured ministers **Zoran Stavreski** and **Gordana Jankuloska**, but also **Ali Ahmeti**, **Menduh Tachi**, **Rufi Osmani** and **Ljubcho Georgievski**, all of whom are party leaders, with the first two being coalition partners to VMRO-DPMNE.

507

Zaev accused Prime Minister **Nikola Gruevski** and UBK chief **Sasho Majalkov** of having ordered surveillance for more than 20,000 citizens. In addition to intercepting communications of opposition members, journalists, ministers, party leaders, businessmen, head people at Macedonian Orthodox Church and Islamic Religious Community, and academics, this effort also targeted communications of President **Gjorge Ivanov**.

Standing before journalist teams, party members and supporters of "Truth about Macedonia", SDSM leader Zaev pleaded with the public to be patient and announced revelation of other "bombs" in short period of time.

"The materials are blacker than the blackest expectations. Republic of Macedonia is divided into two worlds: that of Sasho Mijalkov and Nikola Gruevski, and the world of all other people whose rights had been violated", said Zaev.

SDSM announced they would motion criminal charges against Mijalkov, commander of fifth division Goran Grujevski, and other unknown employees at UBK. The motion for criminal charges against Grujevski and Mijalkov included request for forensic expertise in order to establish authenticity of wiretapped materials. A question was raised whether interception of communication is possible without explicit participation of UBK and

mobile operators. SDSM leader said that, based on the scope and coverage of wiretapped materials, such venture could be performed only with use of sophisticated equipment and that only domestic services could intercept these conversations.

## **GRUEVSKI: NO CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, NO EARLY ELECTIONS**

Sixteen days after the first “bomb” was released, Prime Minister Gruevski appeared in the public. On February 25, 2015, he held press-conference and declared he would not agree to caretaker government and another round of elections. As regards the “bombs”, he said they are the doing of foreign intelligence services, with involvement of already detained Zoran Verushevski, whose confiscated laptop hosted transcripts, analyses and description of people from wiretapped conversations in English language.

Also, Gruevski entertained description about the manner in which communications had been intercepted: “According to testimonies, Z.V. recruited two persons who admitted the deed, and one of them is convicted. Namely, Gj.L. is the first associate who, after having faced evidence against him, admitted the crime and indicated he had recruited Z.K. who worked on the equipment [...] materials were intended for foreign service [...] according to testimonies by Gj.L. and Z.K., the surveillance started in 2010 [...] we are not behind the interception”, stated Gruevski. He indicated that: “[...] from several locations, using mobile equipment, high-level professionals intercepted communications between 12 p.m. and 6 p.m., within radius of 2 kilometres from state institutions. Zoran Zaev was informed about existence of these materials by mid-2014”, said Gruevski.

“I had no intention of silencing him; otherwise I would have acceded to his demands for caretaker government; the game is much bigger than him; he is only an instrument, a kamikaze [...] there is no destabilization, the country will secure peace and order”, that is how Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski concluded this section of his press-conference.

## **WHISTLEBLOWERS THAT BROKE THE SILENCE**

Four years later, testifying in court, Z.K. and Gj.L. (**Zvonko Kostovski** and **Gjorgi Lazarevski**), “debunked” facts presented at the press-conference of now former Prime Minister Gruevski. They testified that, in capacity of UBK staff members, they had retrieved less than 5 percent of illegally wiretapped materials. Later, they handed over materials, i.e.

evidence of mass violation of human rights and freedoms by UBK, to Zoran Verushevski, who had given them to SDSM leader Zoran Zaev.

Based on their testimonies, the public learned that communications had been illegally intercepted and translated into transcripts at computers outside UBK.

"Computer equipment was set up in building apartment near the Railway Station known as 'Parliamentarian' and was linked to computers stationed at UBK. This was done on orders by Goran Grujevski so that logistic officer Nikolche Nikolov would not have to often visit the premises and take materials, but also to avoid suspicions among tenants", Kostovski explained in his testimony.

Transcripts from wiretapped materials were compiled and reproduced in that apartment, at the yellow building near the Railway Station in Skopje, known as "building for public officials".

Another interesting revelation from Kostovski's testimony concerns the fact that, unaware that he is actually retrieving wiretapped materials, in October 2014, former Prime Minister Gruevski, Chief of Cabinet Martin Protogjer, UBK former chief Sasho Mijalkov and then-current commander Goran Grujevski summoned him for late-night meeting at UBK. They solicited his opinion about the likelihood that the opposition is in possession of "bombs" and whether there are other technical capabilities for taping such voluminous materials outside state-owned technology. Kostovski had indicated another possibility for communications to be intercepted by small stations on different locations in the city, which could also be installed in vehicles. Most probably this is the origin of the idea about the "yellow van" purported by then-incumbent Prime Minister. Moreover, Kostovski testified that Gruevski, Protogjer, Mijalkov and Grujevski contemplated which foreign services could be responsible for this surveillance, including those in Greece or maybe from bigger countries. Zvonko Kostovski recollected his dialogue with Goran Grujevski from that night: "Commander Grujevski told me that if Gjorgi is involved, he would personally cut his throat. Grujevski started checking people at the sector for operational technology. First people to be checked were those he did not like. This investigation continued with polygraphs. Those who failed the polygraph test were assigned to other job positions", testified Kostovski.

Gjorgi Lazarevski and Zvonko Kostovski spent time in prison as suspects in the case "Coup". They were supposed to serve as "cover for yellow vans and foreign services", but actually became the heroes of democracy. In December 2018, both of them returned to work at Mol.

In June 2019, Sasho Trajkovski, current director of Mol fifth division who was UBK's chief engineer at the time of mass interception, testified in the court process "Target-Fortress". In his testimony, Trajkovski said: "To my knowledge, UBK chief Sasho Mijalkov and commander of fifth division Goran Grujevski had computers linked to the NAIS system. Moreover, we were able to see names of system users logged from offices in fourth building, first floor, and in third building, first floor. Actually, the first office is the cabinet of UBK chief, while the second is the commander's office". Moreover, Trajkovski said he had personally seen that marked numbers i.e. targeted telephone numbers had been written on pieces of paper instead of court orders for surveillance. NAIS system could be accessed from several locations outside Mol premises, said then-current chief engineer in court, indicating he knows several locations for such activities, like the Aero Club across the High School "Josip Broz" in city downtown, premises near the pool in Aerodrom, but was unable to say whether the plan for installing surveillance systems in Peshtani, Ohrid, had been realized or not. Furthermore, Trajkovski testified that then-incumbent minister Gordana Jankuloska signed the decision for destruction of these systems. "Grujevski told us that some company would cut the equipment to be destroyed, first into five-centimetre pieces, and then these pieces would be taken to another company where the equipment would be demolished into smaller pieces", stated Sasho Trajkovski as third witness in this court process.

510

### **WHAT WE HEARD, BUT WAS NOT FOR OUR EARS?!**

In the period February 9 to June 16, 2015, the opposition "fired" a total of 38 "bombs" that featured hundreds of telephone conversations. Throughout that period, according to reports from his associates, opposition leader Zoran Zaev stayed and slept at party headquarters and was guarded by people he trusts. Those who "visited" Zaev in that period say he kept the bible on his desk at all times. Zoran Zaev was surveilled by UBK under the moniker "Zo Za". He is among hundreds of people for whom dossiers had been kept with details of their contacts: whom they met, whom they talked to, what they said, and even what collocutors wanted to tell one another, but did not say aloud.

However, the "bombs" allowed the public to learn what "they" told each other. Although these conversations were not intended for our ears, we were able to learn how "Skopje 2014" was built and who was the main architect, about "coarse baroque", "marble that is not marble", plots on the central square being sold, Grujevski arranging the look of the Officers House with Greek businessman Kondominas, and how much they actually care for green areas in Skopje in spite of "Arbour Day" events that had consumed millions, who wanted to buy GTC, how

the area around hotel Bristol should be "beautified" by hiding "ugly buildings" with "beautiful, baroque-looking building", how Gruevski added balconies to buildings, that administrative buildings from the project "Skopje 2014" are occupied, but constructed illegally, how "[they] buy chocolate, but cannot afford to buy bread".

We were able to hear Gruevski having the final word about "interior design" of new buses and requesting "bus seats to be orange in colour".

Moreover, we learned how the judiciary's "interior" was decorated, i.e. Gruevski had to be informed before any announcement of open calls for appointment of judges. According to the "bombs", the "fight" continued with "Swarovski" bribes, vouchers for cosmetic treatments, "b\*\*w jobs, kissing asses [...]"; Mijalkov promoting UBK employee who arranged his kickback in the Israeli equipment deal to judge; nervous Lina from the Judicial Council whose brother is "VMRO's trump card" and who would be quieted only after her daughter is employed; how then-incumbent minister of justice from DUI blocked selection of VMRO-DPMNE's candidate in the Supreme Court [...].

Authorities' behaviour towards the media resonated with special "boom" in the public. Hence, we heard that "Lile must be given the boot from MTV", and that "Mile asked A1 [television] to express their servitude"; "central news at TV Sitel are nothing but scumbag"; "[news] on TV Kanal 5 are three times better"; Mijalkov saying "he does dirty work in handing Velija, but [competitive media] return this favour by broadcasting entertainment at 9 p.m. to boost ratings in the midst of the election campaign"; how media owner "had solved the problem of tax payment" and humbly waits for an audience with the Prime Minister "this or next Thursday [...]".

The "bombs" confirmed what the public already knew: employments for obedient and deserving party members in ELEM, MEPSO, MEC Bitola, Telecom, Mol, hospitals, and PE Macedonian Forests, but also purging institutions from unfit employees, i.e. "commies seated in first rows at Rada's press-conferences", including orders "to dismiss commies" employed in local administrations; state inspections at businesses run by disobedient managers, including use of "drill hammer" to demolish terraces at coffee bars, compilation of list with companies loyal to VMRO-DPMNE to avoid any mistakes and "catch them by the throat".

The practice of "catching [somebody] by their throat" is also featured in the bomb related to "renegade" Fijat who "is pooping his pants", including preparations for demolition of his building complex Kosmos on Monday, August 1: "perfect day for such venture because the summer hiatus already started". We also heard about authorities' struggle to demolish this building, first because the dredge machine operator refused to complete this work, and later because too much concrete has been laid. In spite of wishes for fast demolition, dynamite was not used due to security concerns for nearby houses.

Furthermore, the "bombs" allowed insight into Gruevski's orders to change DUPs and merge plots in order to form one grand plot on Vodno that should be guarded from people's sight with "6-meter high wall", to avoid peeks from neighbours. Although he worked on building his public image of "prudent spender", Gruevski gives orders for the thing on "M" to be purchased, which he plans to enjoy away from the public's eyes. It concerns procurement of luxurious Mercedes vehicle, which SPO "registered" as "Armoured Car" and on the account of which the former Prime Minister became a political asylant.

According to "bombs", Martin Protogjer intended to fully enjoy life as evidenced from his wishes to build residence on location in Racha, Ohrid, just as Antonio Miloshoski, who in conversation with fellow party members disclosed "secret start of construction works on Mediterranean-style house on the land he had purchased with fraudulent deals".

The "bombs", in particular telephone conversations featuring wedding best-man Stavreski, allowed the public to learn that Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Peshevski was nicknamed "Hippo" and that "he doesn't distinguish between Kumanovo and Strumica", [...] that Peshevski is creating "his network" in addition to "the family network"; we also learned who is "the climacteric female parliamentarian, hillbilly from Strumica"; that PRO director "Goran is certified liar"; "bastard from Bitola, Vladimir Talevski, is corrupted to his core"; Mile Janakieski is "piece of s\*\*t, bastard, bad copy of [...]".

512

The "bombs" registered other "moments of truth" shared by the wedding best-man like the fact that he "has gagging reflex at government sessions", urges "to grab the phone and smash it into the head [of Prime Minister]", and that he "has constant feeling of talking with group of idiots who only spend money".

The public was particularly irritated to learn that Mile Janakieski demanded the Museum of Toshe Proeski to be closed because "his family is against VMRO-DPMNE" and they should not be helped anymore.

Janakieski, dubbed "bad copy", is featured in the "bomb" where Gruevski engages in calculation of kickback of 5 percent to be collected from "yellow people" for construction of motorways in the country. Hence, agreement is made for "bad copy" to request 15 million euros just to test their reaction.

According to wiretapped conversations, "Mile, I was thinking" cannot recall how you call plastic clasps ("you know, that plastic thingy you pull") used to close the bags with ballots in which, according to this "bomb", they had their hands buried deep. Their "sticky fingers" were also involved in organization of "slaps" at the municipal administration in Centar, as witnessed by "bombs", but also in switching off elevators on the Election Day at residential buildings with

"unfit tenants", phantom voters, new identification cards for "little humans" from Pustec (50 people registered on the same address and in same apartment); how they would pull "Tzgany people by their ears and take them to polling stations". According to the "bombs", the list of election frauds is complemented with stuffing boxes with invalid ballots to have the voting annulled; "making ballots disappear"; organizing excursion for pensioners that are suspected of being "communists" on the Election Day, making them late for the polling stations because they would return home after 7 p.m.; rigging elections in Ohrid and "dispatching" bullies to pressure voters; bargaining votes in Tetovo and Gostivar (for DUI) in exchange for votes in Karposh and Veles (for VMRO-DPMNE)...

Among many conversations involving Prime Minister's Cabinet Chief Protogjer, most "impactful" was his reply "he, his wife and children, they all need to be thrown in a ditch", which was intended for the Macedonian Football Federation's president and his family. According to this conversation, the reason for such comments concerned football match tickets.

We also heard the chief of secret police rejoicing Ljube Boshkoski's arrest, although in the past he had been welcomed as hero upon his release from the Scheveningen Prison, but became their political opponent on the 2011 parliamentary elections: "he was pushed on the ground and laid there for 40 minutes; everybody saw him handcuffed from behind, face turned to the toilets [...]; I f\*\*\*\*d him right [...]; he'll serve eight years in prison". For them, brother Ljube had become sister Ljuba: "I'll send somebody well-endowed to f\*\*k him inside [...]; didn't I tell you, come Monday I start with arrests; didn't I tell you, once the elections are over, the next day – boom! [...]". His collocutor had few personal wishes as well: "if only you could arrest Ljupche; I'll be very pleased [...]; that would seal the deal".

513

The "bombs" revealed that the Election Day (June 5, 2011) was the last day for Martin Neshkoski. Mol did not answer questions raised by "talented and idiotic journalists that start rumours" about who killed the boy and why that happened on the city square, because "today should be the day to celebrate our election victory". The "bombs" revealed that this murder was kept under wraps for entire two days although, according to wiretapped conversations, it was known that Igor Spasov from the special police unit, who was deployed as security detail with oral orders, had committed the deed. Moreover, one particular conversation allowed insight in the fact that parallel security structures existed at Mol and were managed by Gruevski's security detail. The "bombs" related to Martin Neshkoski's murder were released on May 5, 2015, and triggered mass protests outside the government building, which ended with unprecedented brutality unleashed on protesters by members of the special police.

The public was privy to listen "bombs" about "ironing" conclusions with the Lustration Commission's President; efforts to release from prison in Greece "problematic son" of then-

incumbent parliament speaker Veljanovski, which Gruevski and Jankuloska qualified to be "outright scandal" in their conversation.

Furthermore, the "bombs" featured "joyful sounds of gunfire" against patriotic music background, i.e. VMRO-DPMNE's anthem. "It's a VMRO thing", says UBK chief Mijalkov in this telephone conversation. Contrary to his department in this conversation, Mijalkov exudes seriousness in the "bomb" related to the country's name, discussing whether it should be Independent or Democratic Republic of Macedonia.

In one telephone exchange, Jankuloska and Protogjer debate interethnic relations: "there's no cohabitation with them [Albanians]..."; "it should be cleared once and for all [...]"; "how about staging a war; if it's a matter of showing strength, we would crush them in one hour [...]".

Zaev did not release the recordings from "bomb" no. 37, but summarized their contents because they concerned interception of an important pillar of democracy, i.e. the civil society. According to Zaev, UBK had intercepted communications of the Metamorphosis Foundation, Foundation Open Society - Macedonia, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, NGO Infocentre, Transparency Macedonia, CIVIL, Platform for Citizen-Oriented Politics AJDEI, Freedom Square, and other CSOs.

After "all 38 bombs were released" comprised of around hundred conversations whose authenticity had been confirmed by several independent experts, and all was said and done, the authorities continued their mantra that recordings had been cut, edited and assembled. SDSM leader was wrong to have assumed that Gruevski would fall from power in just three days, because the opposite happened.

514

## DIVO NASELJE "SHATTERED" GRUEVSKI'S FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

## In between "Divo Naselje" and "Settlement of Heroes"

"Somebody had paid two million euros to ethnic Albanian 'criminals' who should have imitated an armed group that causes an interethnic conflict". That is the summary behind the statement made by former police-general Stojancho Angelov from April 2015 which, in hindsight, could be interpreted as announcement for the events from May 9 and

10, 2015, in Kumanovo, i.e. crossfire between group of armed men and the police, which turned the entire settlement into warzone and resulted in 18 casualties.

It is still unknown who "paid" and who "ordered" such crossfire, but nowadays, when this text is written, visit to this settlement shows everything is peaceful and there are no signs to suggest that it had been the site of armed incident. All one could see are new structures, new houses, but also new residents.

Almost all residents affected by Kumanovo events have moved. But questions still hang in the air. Did somebody order this incident? Were then-current government structures involved in that? This remains unclear to present day.

Some call the settlement "Divo Naselje", but others prefer the name "Settlement of Heroes". Even different names for this suburb in Kumanovo show how complicated it is, even today, to interpret the events from May 9 and 10, 2015, which had inflicted serious blow on the entire society, but also on Nikola Gruevski's government. It cannot be confirmed whether the government had any stake in this event, but it could be certainly said that it shook the state's security pillar headed by Sasho Mijalkov as Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence.

---

Some call it "Divo Naselje", while others prefer "Settlement of Heroes", but the events there had inflicted serious blow to Nikola Gruevski's government.

---

This event, however, showed another thing: although it was an emotionally-charged moment, with all elements of possible interethnic conflict, citizens did not subside to emotions. Civil sector and the media played a major role in that, especially Alsat-M television and their appealing calls.

Today, there are no scenes of completely demolished houses and general image of serious armed incident at this suburb in Kumanovo. At the same time, former residents are also nowhere to be seen. Journalist Adrian Kjerimi, who followed the events when they happened and reflects on them on their anniversaries, says that more than 70 percent of residents had already sold their homes, which the state helped renovate. There are almost no people willing

to mention the incident. People from this settlement still do not know the actual motives and reasons for the group's actions. Some of them had been welcomed as houseguests, with all customs befitting people that are honoured as family or friends, but also because they come from distant place (Kosovo). Nevertheless, residents from

"Divo Naselje" or "Settlement of Heroes" are still unaware why their houseguests had engaged in conflict with the police and other state forces.

The many unanswered questions, but also the trauma caused by the event that resulted in death of eight policemen on one side and ten people from the group on the other side, with several dozens injured and overall chaotic atmosphere in the settlement, have forced many residents to sell their homes, leave this neighbourhood and forget about the incident, to the best of their ability.

Investigation and follow-up court process were conducted after the crossfire and after the last person from the group had turned in.

The Basic Court Skopje 1 issued seven life-imprisonment sentences to defendants, 13 defendants were issued imprisonment sentence of 40 years each, 6 defendants were convicted to 20 years in prison, 1 defendant was convicted to 18 years in prison, 2 defendants received sentences for 14-year imprisonment, two defendants–13-year imprisonment, and due to lack of evidence, four persons were acquitted. The court took exile verdicts for 16 defendants because they are foreign nationals, banning them to ever return on the territory of our state.

The court's official deposition reads: "Evidence offered by the prosecution office had shown that defendants that are declared guilty of having committed criminal acts terrorism and terrorist organization, clearly establish circumstances under which they arrived in Macedonia, how they entered the country, where they found shelter and how they were transferred, in smaller groups, to Divo





Naselje in Kumanovo, where they committed terrorist attack on May 9 and 10, 2015, which resulted in death of eight policemen”.

Based on the facts, it could be said that on May 9, 2015, “Divo Naselje” or “Settlement of Heroes” was turned into warzone. Macedonian antiterrorist police units had surrounded 39 armed Albanians, sheltered in three rented houses on Str. Pero Ilievski. During the court process, it was said that 31 of surrounded armed men had come from the other side of the border, from Kosovo, and that they were veterans from the war against Serbia in the late 90s. According to police records, the gunfight that lasted until 9 p.m. on May 10, 2015, had destroyed the settlement. Explosions had left behind demolished houses, burned cars. Armoured vehicle that had broken through walls, also “demolished” lives of the civilians who, to present day, do not know what had happened.

They are not alone. The court had failed to answer questions raised in the public. What were the motives of this group? Did politics have a background role in this event? Were then-incumbent authorities and institutions ready to do anything to prevent the change of government?

Different theories are still in circulation.

518

Family members of convicted felons, like Ilber Ndrecaj, brother to the group's leader Mirsad, on the second anniversary from this event, stated for BIRN in Pristina: “They didn't go there alone. This case was approved by many politicians in Macedonia”.

In his live address to the nation, then-incumbent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said the police had prevented “a terrorist group”, which had crossed the border and planned “mass killings” at police stations, trade centres and sport events. According to him, one thing is certain: “Their goal was to destabilize Macedonia”.

On the third anniversary of this incident, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) revealed exclusive comments by high-ranking officer from the Intelligence Agency which are contradictory to official statements about the manner in which the armed group had arrived in Kumanovo. According to this intelligence officer, who requested to stay anonymous, Kumanovo fighters were recruited and armed with assistance from the Intelligence Agency that also secured safe corridor for them to reach Kumanovo prior to their clash with the police. “The conflict in Kumanovo was fully organized by the Macedonian Intelligence Agency”, stated an intelligence officer for BIRN. “That was

a poorly organized scenario, which went wrong on the terrain". BIRN presented the Intelligence Agency with these claims which are not supported by firm evidence.

President Ivanov, who holds competences over the Intelligence Agency and leads the National Security Council, negated that the agency or his cabinet had staged the incident in Kumanovo and called such accusations "desperate attempt to distort the truth with fake news and construe negative perception about state institutions".

Many people in Kumanovo, and across the state, hoped that international investigation would be conducted and would establish once and for all how and what had led to the crossfire. In October 2017, Minister of Interior Oliver Spasovski stated he would request such investigation to be conducted.

The public prosecutors insisted that the group had acted independently and in the name of greater rights for ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. All defendants negated charges of terrorism, indicating that they acted in self-defence after the police had attacked them.

Zoran Zaev whose government came into power on June 1, 2017, putting an end to the 11-year governance by Gruevski and his party VMRO-DPMNE, stated that he had personally advocated for repeated court process about Kumanovo events.

519

In case that happens, the authorities announce they might seek assistance from abroad to eliminate all remaining doubts about this case. However, the main doubt about this event concerns the fact that this incident might have been staged to appease overall atmosphere around VMRO-DPMNE's pending fall from power after the "bombs" were disclosed in public.

Let's see what some political actors say about this event from today's perspective.

Artan Grubi, who is currently MP and close associate to DUI leader Ali Ahmeti, entertains different doubts. In his interview for this publication, he says that he had closely followed the events in Kumanovo. He even established a line of communication with members of the group. However, he does not know who had involved them in the incident and that Albanians from the region had no knowledge of their intents.

"I'm eagerly waiting to see the truth about who triggered what happened there and who designed that scenario, because it was not designed by Albanians or factors from

the West that only wish the best for Macedonia and the region. I fear that the event might have been part of broader scenario for Southeast Europe, which we saw in the aftermath of events in Belgrade, and in Podgorica, on the occasion of Montenegro's NATO membership, later in Kosovo, and finally, in Macedonia. As you might know, I was involved in negotiations with participants who entered the 'settlement of heroes' and believed it was possible to at least save the lives of some of them. I regret the fact that somebody had convinced these people to come to Kumanovo and confront the security forces. In all honesty, I want this case to be fully resolved, including the motives, identities of those who ordered the event and reasons for that. I regret what happened and express condolences to all families. Even today, I'm still uncertain why that happened and who needed that to happen; maybe some destructive force that does not want this country to do well", says Grubi.

All who know Ali Ahmeti would remember that his common calmness was replaced by grave concern in those days. Possibly as one of most-called persons, in his interview for this publication DUI's leader admits that those days had brought enormous concern, in humanitarian terms, because the group included people he knew personally, but was also a great burden for him, having in mind that the event could have had unimaginable consequences.

"People I know from before had been surrounded and I found myself in very difficult situation when they requested my assistance. It was a moment that 'caught' me unprepared. The most I could do was to call political structures and people in the police, i.e. deputy interior minister, and ask them to honestly speak with authorities at MoI, but also with Nikola Gruevski and Sasho Mijalkov as statesmen, one of whom is responsible for the process and the other is responsible for the security aspect, in order to make sure that people would not be killed, but would be given space to decide whether they would stay surrounded or they would open negotiations. I talked to OSCE Ambassador to ask for their help. Initially he did not accept my pleas, indicating that the reason for that is the fact that this is sovereign state and it would be an insult for the state for this organization to mediate on behalf of some group whose goals and background are unknown to them. I insisted again, and after my third call they agreed to assist. Also, I spoke with the U.S. Ambassador. I asked him to encourage OSCE Ambassador to assist in establishing contact between the two sides in the clash. I felt very bad. They requested safe path [for withdrawal to their homeland]. I could not give them such guarantees

because somebody might kill them during the extraction. Kumanovo is not close to the border, it is at least 50 km away, and by that moment five policemen were already killed. Who could have guaranteed that one of their colleagues in the police would not retaliate after the group starts its withdrawal. I told them I cannot provide guarantees. I would lose face and integrity if something had happened to them after I would give my besa [word]. I was unable to guarantee such security", recalls Ahmeti.

Albeit in calm tones, but evidently uncomfortable, just like Grubi, Ahmeti does not answer whether, in his opinion, state structures had been involved in the incident in order to maintain VMRO-DPMNE in government. He was directly asked whether these events were staged by VMRO-DPMNE structures, maybe even to pressure him.

"I don't entertain speculations and exaggerations. If you remember, the tragic event was preceded by an incident at the border, near the watch tower, when several policemen were captured and had their weapons taken. In that period, Nikola Gruevski was on official visit to Brussels and opened this topic with the Prime Minister of Kosovo, informing him that several people from Kosovo had been identified [in the border incident] and asking him to reconsider the possibility for joint management of that situation. Mr. Mustafa told him: 'We are not interested and we don't have knowledge about such movements. Kosovo wants Macedonia to be stable country and we don't have interest in its destabilization, because our countries are neighbours and we want to maintain good relations'. In that, Mr. Mustafa ended conversation and turned to another representative of the delegation.

Nikola Gruevski shared his disappointment with me. He said: 'I asked for joint management and mutual assistance to close this topic without consequences and major hurts'. If he had been the mastermind behind that scenario, Nikola Gruevski would not have asked for measures to be taken and for joint meeting of security committees from both countries. In reality, both Nikola Gruevski and Sasho Mijalkov shared their concerns with me multiple times. I want to speak the truth about how these events came to effect without knowing details. I cannot speculate. People from this organization should explain how they were recruited and for what purpose, because I don't want to speculate and say they were organized by this or that person", says Ahmeti.

While Ali Ahmeti is careful and does not want to speculate, VMRO-DPMNE's current leader Hristijan Mickoski shares the same opinion of his former party officials about Kumanovo events. In his interview for this publication, he stated that Kumanovo amounts to "attack

on the constitutional order in Republic of Macedonia by armed criminal group that had been installed in 'Divo Naselje'. Mol units had decided to clean the terrain and restore the state's sovereignty", says Mickoski.

Aware that VMRO-DPMNE's unchanged position on this matter "cements" this party's already infamous standing in the public, especially among the Albanian population, Ahmeti says he does not want to speculate and he would speak only what he knows about this event. In particular, despite purported beliefs that events in Kumanovo had debunked the "myth" of Mijalkov and that they implied beginning of the end for VMRO-DPMNE's governance, he says they, through institutional channels, attempted to communicate the security service's findings to the authorities in Kosovo, but have not received any information from Pristina.

"I will speak about what I had discussed, what I know. In the period before these events, I had planned an official visit to Kosovo. State authorities were duly informed of my agenda, especially my visits abroad, to Kosovo, Albania, Germany, Brussels, Washington, and they were never secret, they were public. Nikola Gruevski invited me to meeting because he had learned of my pending visit to Kosovo. Sasho Mijalkov was also present at the meeting. After the incident in Grushino, he told me: 'Ask the authorities in Kosovo, because we have identified several people, and see if they could take measures and finally close this chapter without consequences'. I said: 'All right, but it would be good for state institutions to open communication on this matter'. Nevertheless, I raised this topic when press-release was circulated on behalf of NLA. In all honesty, the authorities in Kosovo did not have any knowledge. I told them: 'If possible, we should have stable communication between our institutions. We don't have information and facts about some people and for the time being there is no space to react'. At the press-conference, journalists raised the question about the incident in Grushino. Officially, all institutions in Kosovo, the Prime Minister, the Parliament Speaker, and the Minister of Interior said they are interested in stable Macedonia, and not interested in new conflicts that would harm their neighbouring country", says Ahmeti.

Almost all Albanian parties and leaders in the country demanded clarification of Kumanovo events. Pressure for truthful answers "shifted" to the address of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, who had declared on several occasions that all efforts would be made to find the motives and those who ordered such events, that the former government is involved, and

that he would request international investigation into this matter, and repeated court process. But that had not happened thus far.

Kumanovo events caused great distrust in the institutions and even became reason why many Albanians voted for SDSM at the elections. There are fresh memories of residents from "Divo Naselje" welcoming Zaev in the aftermath of the tragic events.

Today, residents of "Divo Naselje" or "Settlement of Heroes" are almost completely changed, but the event from 2015 still triggers emotions and dilemmas about the rule of law, legal state, about the truth.

In search of the truth, the interview with incumbent President Stevo Pendarovski for the show "**360 Degrees**" aired on June 21, 2019, triggered great interests in the public. Below is verbatim quotation from this interview related to events in "Divo Naselje":

**Vasko Popetrevski (host and editor):** For long time now it has been said that employees at the [Intelligence] Agency might have been part of the scenario staged by then-incumbent government structures to cause interethnic tensions in the state, in attempt to overshadow "bombs" revealed by the opposition at that time. Have you discussed this matter with new agency director Musliu and do they conduct internal checks in that regard?

**Stevo Pendarovski (President of the Republic of North Macedonia):** On this matter, I could share very vague information, purposefully, because now I am the president of state. To my knowledge, the ongoing process for "Divo Naselje" does not cover all key actors that have participated in preparation and background management of those events. Hence, the legal actions only target people who worked on the terrain and had caused security problems in Kumanovo's suburb. As far as I know, and I know something, [legal actions] do not cover people who had issued orders because that was pre-arranged event, nobody should have any dilemmas, and people who performed, how should I call them, advance preparations for the event to take place, which happened on the territory of Kosovo and south Serbia.

**Vasko Popetrevski:** Although you say "vague information", I think this would cause attention because, inter alia, in its program 2017-2020 the current government enlisted that it would request international assistance for full clarification of Kumanovo events, but that has not happened?!

**Stevo Pendarovski:** [...] I pleaded with competent authorities in the country to request international legal assistance because [the incident] involves three states: our country, Kosovo and Serbia [...] You said it would cause reaction, but why audio and video tapes on this matter published by the media in Kosovo two or three years ago, did not cause reaction.<sup>3</sup> There are hours and hours of tapes aired by the media in Pristina, which also include employees from the [Intelligence] Agency and other institutions, and there are audio and video recordings that indicate names and surnames.

**Vasko Popetrevski:** Are those people still employed at the agency?

**Stevo Pendarovski:** Yes.

Several days after the crossfire, then-incumbent Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska and Sasho Mijalkov, chief of the secret police and cousin to Prime Minister Gruevski, submitted their resignations. Both declared they have nothing to do with Kumanovo events and that their resignations are intended to facilitate resolution of the political crisis which, according to them, had been created by then-current opposition.

<sup>3</sup> On May 28, 2015, referencing sources from Kosovo secret services, newspaper *Koha Ditore* published that: "former member of NLA and current officer at Mol's UBK had welcomed in Kumanovo the group suspected of terrorism after their crossfire with the police in 'Divo Naselje'. Kosovo's services had been following Kumanovo group members from April 2, i.e. 23 days before the attack in Goshince and 37 days before the battle in 'Divo Naselje'". According to these conversations (recorded on audio and video tapes), which are in possession of the Kosovar Intelligence Agency and newspaper *Koha Ditore*, four members of the Kumanovo group, of which three are Kosovo citizens and one is Macedonian citizen, contacted members of the Macedonian secret services. One of them was former NLA fighter who currently worked in the secret police in Macedonia, served as Kumanovo liaison for members of Ndrecaj's group. Initials of the Macedonian secret agent of Albanian nationality are H.B. The second contact was employee from the Intelligence Agency, Sh.M. The Kosovar Intelligence Agency (KIA) is also in possession of conversations among this Kosovo-Macedonian group, who were harboured at five houses in Kumanovo, connected with underground tunnels, while according to the newspaper, 70 percent of the population in "Divo Naselje", where the crossfire took place, was evacuated on the night when gunfire started. Only four member of this group knew that the mission had been pursued according to previously agreed scenario and that the group is connected with the Macedonian Administration for Security and Counterintelligence. The leader's plan had been for members of the group to be called to meeting in Kumanovo and then handed over to the police, but they opened fire at policemen, after which the situation went out of control, published *Koha*.

## **PRZHINO 1: CARETAKER GOVERNMENT AND EARLY ELECTIONS**

In the aftermath of "bombs" and follow-up events, the political parties started negotiations under auspices of the international community, i.e. the United States and the European Union. In May, two failed leadership meetings were organized. On May 19, Gruevski and Zaev held meeting with several Members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. These negotiations, lasting for several hours, ended without agreement.

Afterwards, inter-party negotiations were "moved" on domestic terrain, in Skopje. In addition to the U.S. Embassy and the EU Delegation, Belgian-born philosopher Peter Vanhoutte was engaged to facilitate these talks.

The political crisis should have ended when the Przhino Agreement was brokered on June 2, and signed on June 15, 2015. According to this agreement, the early parliamentary elections were scheduled for April 24, 2016. Moreover, it anticipated the opposition's return in parliament, appointment of Katica Janeva as special prosecutor, and appointment of two ministers from the opposition: Oliver Spasovski (interior) and Frosina Remenski (labour and social policy), including three deputy ministers from SDSM at the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Information Society and Administration.

Pursuant to the agreement, Nikola Gruevski and his government should formally resign 100 days before the elections and new Prime Minister should be selected from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE. Such caretaker government would have mandate until the elections.

Furthermore, the "bombs" should stop "resonating", while the special prosecutor, granted full autonomy, should start investigations into wiretapped conversations that were previously disclosed by the opposition.

Przhino Agreement was endorsed by leaders of VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA, i.e. Nikola Gruevski, Zoran Zaev, Ali Ahmeti and Menduh Tachi.

## STATE CAPTURE “GOSPEL” ACCORDING TO PRIEBE

In the meantime, the European Commission formed a group of independent, experienced experts in the area of rule of law and tasked them to analyse state-of-affairs and make recommendations. The team included former chief state prosecutor from Ireland and former chief of anti-mafia department in Italy. The group of senior experts was led by Reinhard Priebe, former Director of Western Balkans GD External Relations. Based on their findings, on June 8, 2015, the group issued recommendations aimed to address the crisis with specific measures.

“A constructive political dialogue between the government and the opposition beyond all political difference is indispensable for the proper functioning of parliamentary democracy. The place of elected party is in the Parliament. The interests of politicians and of parties should not be confounded with the public interest of the state. Sensitive information should be handled with care and should not become the plaything of political tactics. Where there are allegations of serious malfunctions of state institutions, there is a legitimate interest in transparent and comprehensive information.”

526

Furthermore, this report found that: “Revelations published recently demonstrate serious incidents of political corruption at various levels and in multiple ways. Fighting this form of corruption will definitely need to become a top priority for the country”.

The interception scandal revealed massive invasion of fundamental rights. The scandal, as indicted in the report, demonstrates disrespect for professional ethics, basic principles of risk management and lack of knowledge about sensitivity of intelligence tasks at hand within UBK. Apparent lack of staff’s familiarity with and respect for fundamental rights and data protection rules is an area of concern. Family ties between high-ranking politicians and senior officials at UBK and the Public Prosecution Office create risk environment for conflict of interests.

UBK should be divested of its intermediary function, in order to prevent its interference in the autonomy of law enforcement agencies (police, customs administration and financial police) when intercepting communications. UBK should not have direct access to technical equipment allowing mirroring of communication signals. In no circumstances should UBK have the practical capability to capture communications directly.

As regards content of interceptions, inter alia, it is indicated that investigations into criminal conduct disclosed by interceptions should be seriously addressed without hesitation and fear, in non-selective manner. Effective investigation may require seizure of data log files and any available log file archives from UBK and telecommunications providers, and their comparison with issued court orders. Where necessary, investigators may consider seeking international support and expertise.

The expert group also said that recently revealed interceptions confirm the existence of unhealthy relationship between mainstream media and top government officials, with the former seemingly taking direct orders from the latter on both basic and fundamental issues of editorial policy. This practice harms the public's right to receive information from variety of sources and expressing variety of views, and reduces the scope for objective and balanced reporting of facts. Media should exercise their task to inform the public without any pressure or direct or indirect interference from public authorities. This precludes selective government financing and arbitrary government advertising according to political preferences.

The report also features detailed elaboration of state-of-affairs in the judiciary and the prosecution, and recommends judiciary and prosecution services to be able to act independently and impartially.

527

The report's recommendations for the elections, inter alia, underline that direct political involvement in election manipulations, as appears from published interceptions, is serious violation of the basic democratic principles and must be properly addressed at judicial and at political level.

**RESIGNATIONS, CARETAKER GOVERNMENT,  
OBSTRUCTIONS, BREACHED DEADLINES  
AND BLANKET PARDONS**

A year after Gruevski's categorical "no", Macedonia did get caretaker government. Pursuant to the Przhino Agreement, on January 18, 2016, Gruevski left the office President of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, and then-current secretary general at VMRO-DPMNE and former defence minister Emil Dimitriev became the new interim Prime Minister.

Although the Przhino Agreement stipulated that “political parties are obliged not to take any steps that would hinder its implementation, especially in regard to organization of the elections scheduled for April 24, 2016”, ever since the agreement was signed, its enforcement was undermined on daily basis. In addition to breached deadlines, matters were further complicated when MPs Talat Dzaferi (DUI) and Krsto Mukovski (VMRO-DPMNE) presented the parliament with proposed law that prohibited publication of the “bombs”. In the public, this legislative motion was commented as negotiation tactic by parties in the government, while the proposed law was qualified as problematic and counterproductive to finding way out of the political crisis.

The “moratorium for bombs” was ultimately withdrawn under public pressure and with mediation on the part of facilitator Peter Vanhoutte, but that did not stop efforts to undermine the agreement.

Several days later, the Council of Public Prosecutors appointed only 7 from 14 candidates proposed by special prosecutor Katica Janeva. SDSM withdrew from inter-party negotiations. According to them, this amounted to violation of crucial point from the agreement, i.e. Janeva to be allowed to freely form her team and the council to verify their appointment.

The public already knew that more likely question would be: what is the next thing that would be sabotaged?

Even Belgian-born facilitator Peter Vanhoutte was sabotaged. Although he had visited Macedonia several times since 2001, he left an impression in the public only after Przhino negotiations and by the effect of his open viewpoints, not attempting to be liked by any side involved. He arrived to negotiation rounds riding a bike, which he “parked” after calls were posted on *Twitter* to run him over on the streets. He actively tweeted “cat memes” with political messages. That is how he “announced” that the elections might not take place on April 24.

At the time, i.e. in early 2016, VMRO-DPMNE announced it would not participate in negotiation meetings organized by Vanhoutte. In their opinion, instead of facilitator he had become “another tourist in Macedonia”.

In January 2016, at the party leadership meeting with EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn, SDSM did not accept the early elections to take place within three months due to “untimely review of the voter register and unrealized media reforms”.



Very soon, the international community realized that elections on April 24, as anticipated under the Przhino Agreement, would not come to anything. Hence, they demanded an agreement for new date. Following extraordinary leadership meetings and acknowledging that conditions are not secured for fair and democratic elections, "foreigners" announced that June 5 is reconsidered as possible date for the elections, but at the same time they called the "diplomatic artillery" for assistance.

German Minister of State for Europe Michael Roth came to Macedonia and expressed utter concerns with the overall state-of-affairs in the country. Soon after, the country was "visited" by U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Hoyt Yee with messages that the United States and the EU closely and vigilantly follow (non)implementation of the Przhino Agreement.

Exactly at that point in time President Ivanov came in the public and announced his blanket pardons.

On April 12, 2016, when the parliament was already dismissed, then-incumbent President Gjorge Ivanov, relying on the right to pardon persons involved in election crime, declared general abolition and thereby cancelled all criminal proceedings against politicians and their associates or supporters. Ivanov stated he had taken this decision on own initiative, for the purpose of protecting state interest and contributing to resolution of the political crisis. The opposition equated his move to coup d'état. They accused Ivanov of having stomped on the constitution, laws and dignity of citizens, and of having "buried" the Przhino Agreement.

SDSM called for the parliament to resume its sessions and demanded Ivanov to resign from office. VMRO-DPMNE was equally "astonished" with Ivanov's decision and declared they do not support his decision. Rarely anybody placed trust in this party press-release, especially the opposition. According to the opposition, it was Gruevski that "had commissioned" these pardons directly from party headquarters known as the "white palace", where he had stayed almost the entire time after having deposited his resignation on January 18, 2016.

On April 13, thousands of citizens took to the street to protest against Ivanov's "blanket pardons". The protests started outside SPO's office building and continued on the streets of Skopje, followed by demolition of Ivanov's office in city downtown, but also the windows on Ministry of Justice's building. A number of protesters were arrested and injured. The

presidential abolition triggered mass protests in several towns around the country, and they implied inception of the Colourful Revolution. Immediately afterwards, the United States and the EU issued fierce reactions. However, Russia viewed these developments as preparation for a so-called Ukraine scenario.

Although he believed abolition was the right decision to make, on May 27, 2016, Ivanov withdrew blanket pardons for 22 "politically exposed" persons, and 10 days later he withdrew all decisions.

---

Presidential pardons had amounted to nuclear explosion that nobody expected and further deteriorated the political crisis which would be remembered and analysed for years to come. – Aivo Orav, EU Ambassador

---

In his public address on June 22, 2016, Ivanov pointed to SDSM and DUI as being the culprits for the political crisis in Macedonia, but also referred to SPO which, in his opinion, had become instrument for selective prosecution. Justifying his controversial pardoning decision, Ivanov said that Macedonia is targeted by special war and that his decision was necessary to restore the order and to avoid deployment of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia. After his address, SDSM, DUI, DS and LDP made another demand for his resignation.

In his last interview as EU Ambassador in Macedonia from August 2016, Aivo Orav stated that the presidential pardons had amounted to nuclear explosion that nobody expected and further deteriorated the political crisis which would be remembered and analysed for years to come.

531

## PRZHINO 2

The international community sounded the "red alarm".

In the midst of protests against blanket pardons and under effervescing political situation, Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski scheduled the early elections for June 5, 2016.

According SDSM, even this date did not provide sufficient time for organization of fair elections. The opposition's proposal for formation of special court department that would reside in cases filed by SPO served as another "stumbling stone". "That is the only way for justice to be delivered by this corrupted judiciary", stated SDSM's Deputy President Radmila Shekerinska in early July 2016. The way out from the political crisis seemed ever more unattainable.

European Union initiated meeting with party leadership from Macedonia in Vienna, but the meeting was cancelled. Germany dispatched Special Envoy Johannes Haindl to mediate in finding solution to the political crisis.

"Due to the government's lack of political will to resolve the crisis", the European Commission de-committed 27 million euros under IPA2 intended for Macedonia.

On July 11, 2016, when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Viktoria Nuland landed in Macedonia it became clear that the international community is losing its patience. She left Skopje "encouraged that an agreement on contentious issues would be reached in the following days".

Przhino 2 happened on July 20, 2016.

Hence, it was agreed for the early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Macedonia to be organized on December 11, 2016.

As regards Przhino negotiations, several years after the fact, then-current Deputy President of VMRO-DPMNE and Minister of Health Nikola Todorov would state they had been so exhausted from negotiations that they started rejecting their own proposals due to tiredness and confusion about who tabled which proposal.

532

## **PRIEBE 2**

In 2017, the group of senior experts engaged by the European Commission and led by Priebe drafted new report wherein they proposed series of reforms for key sectors and state institutions. Actually, this report served as follow-up to the first report published in June 2015 amidst the political crisis in the country. By that time, many recommendations from the first report remained unrealized. The need for their implementation is "urgent", the experts wrote, in order to compensate for lost time. These priorities became condition for start of accession negotiations with the European Union..

## **CARETAKER GOVERNMENT ACCORDING TO "PRZHINO"**

On September 2, 2016, Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia appointed caretaker government responsible to organize the early parliamentary elections scheduled for December 11. Emil Dimitriev became the new-old Prime Minister.

In his address, Dimitriev said the government's focus would be organization of fair and democratic elections that "nobody could contest and that would end the political crisis".

According to the agreement reached by leaders of the biggest parties in parliament, the caretaker government should be appointed 110 days before the elections.

Moreover, the inter-party agreement stipulated appointment of Santa Argirova as MRT's executive editor 100 days before the elections. In spite of that, Argirova was appointed chief editor of news programme, which is the fourth-ranked position under the systematization act for the public service broadcaster.

An ad-hoc committee to monitor media coverage and presentation was also formed, with mandate by the end of elections.

Previously, the voter register was revised to eliminate disputable entries.

## **ELECTIONS: DECEMBER 11, 2016**

At the early parliamentary elections, VMRO-DPMNE won 51 seats in parliament, SDSM – 49, DUI – 10, BESA – 5, Alliance for Albanians – 3, and DPA – 2 seats.

533

After the votes were tallied the same night, both SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE celebrated their election victory.

"Dear citizens, rejoice, celebrate life. A regime had fallen. The entire world should know that Macedonia is writing its history by overturning regime with pencil, with ballots. Be happy and proud. You will have what to tell your children and grandchildren. I'm proud of you. Macedonia is a happy country. As of today Macedonia opens a new page for EU perspectives, with beautiful future and life for all citizens", declared Zaev standing outside the government building on Str. Ilindenska No.2.

At party headquarters, VMRO-DPMNE president Nikola Gruevski declared: "VMRO-DPMNE had a tough opponent on these elections and therefore this victory has special weight and importance, especially after everything the party and the state had gone through. Number of votes for VMRO-DPMNE corresponds to the party's constant constituency support, with surprises noted among the Albanian electorate. SDSM received significant support from the Albanian electorate, but conclusions and lessons will be inferred after the analyses are conducted".

Instead of lessons, everybody immediately started with post-election calculations. At the elections DUI had won only 10 seats in parliament. DUI leader Ali Ahmeti did not hide his disappointment. "Angered, I have to confirm that Albanians lost MP seats. DUI won the elections, but I was always more interested for Albanians to win, not DUI", said Ahmeti.

The high number of votes which SDSM had won from Albanian citizens was interpreted as "hint", especially for DUI, but also for BESA and the Alliance, and maybe even DPA, to enter government coalition with Zaev.

## COMPLAINTS, RALLIES, PROCLAMATION, OBITUARIES...

When the State Election Commission was deciding upon complaints lodged, VMRO-DPMNE organized protests "convinced" that they would be deducted MP seat. Various speakers were changed on the improvised plateau outside NIP Nova Makedonija's building. The noise created by protesters was interpreted to serve as "warning" to SEC members.

An impactful speech was delivered by President of the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups Valentina Bozhinovska. "This is the night of the knives. This will be either the night of reckoning or the night of a man's insanity; the ultimate Macedonian traitor [...] Zoran Zaev, should you dare [outmanoeuvre] VMRO-DPMNE, the people will happen to you, Macedonia will happen to you. Our home will be [the streets] outside SEC, in tents [...] A day will come and we'll say 'come brothers and sisters, let's gather and set on our path, let's see who will be our tsar and who will be the spy'. Chichakovski and Duma [SEC members, n/a] should know they are killing Goce and Chento with two bullets", said Valentina Bozhinovska on December 16.

Already the next day, Nikola Gruevski would "overshadow" the speech about the knives. In their reports, journalists assessed his speech to be "sharp, angry, with hint of threats waged at foreign representatives and non-governmental organization, and subtle calls for non-recognition of state institutions in case VMRO-DPMNE does not form government". Outside SEC, he read the proclamation to all supporters, adopted earlier that night by the party's executive committee:

## PROCLAMATION BY VMRO-DPMNE

1. The State Election Commission adopted illegal decisions to undermine the people's electoral will. Work of the State Election Commission has been turned into parody. We have information about interference from certain foreign representatives aimed to influence some members of the State Election Commission to engage in post-electoral engineering and falsification of the electoral will of citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. A number of SEC's independent representatives are not independent. SEC's illegal decisions can be corrected by the Administrative Court. We call the Administrative Court not to be pressured, by anybody. In case the Administrative Court subsides to influences and confirms SEC's illegal decisions, and thereby takes away VMRO-DPMNE's victory and falsifies the freely expressed will of citizens in Macedonia, VMRO-DPMNE announces that it would not participate in repeated balloting and will not recognize results thereof. We will not allow pardoned criminal Zoran Zaev to form government with falsified will of citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE will not allow institutions to function under falsified will of citizens and will not allow functioning of institutions that do not have the legitimacy from citizens of the Republic of Macedonia.

2. The state must take sovereign decisions. A number of ambassadors started meddling in internal affairs of the country. That must stop. We remain open to communication with all ambassadors and representatives from other states, but the ambassadors who started meddling in internal politics must stop their doings. VMRO-DPMNE will not allow further interferences on the part of ambassadors in internal political matters of the country and we demand them to stay within the realm of their mandate and authorizations as diplomats.

VMRO-DPMNE abandons the format of meetings and negotiations with other political parties with participation of ambassadors, foreign mediators and representatives of other countries, which concern negotiations or decisions that in any state belong to representatives elected by the people.

3. In the future, VMRO-DPMNE will not accept nonstandard or hybrid decisions in all sectors, especially when they are not present in other EU member-states.

4. VMRO-DPMNE will not accept and will not allow cantonization and redefinition of the state under any conditions and under any circumstances.

5. We will fight for desorosozation of the Republic of Macedonia and strengthening an independent civil sector that would not be anybody's control. We will make efforts to regulate the area of financing foundations and NGOs, following the example of most advanced democracies in the world.

In the past and the present, but also in the future, VMRO-DPMNE was and will be pro-Western oriented party. We are orientated towards membership in NATO and the EU, and strategic partnership with the United States. Democracy is fundamental value of NATO, EU and US, and this proclamation is made to protect democracy in the Republic of Macedonia.

## OBITUARIES

A day later, photos of several ambassadors in the country appeared on the social network *Imgur* featuring funeral frames, black ribbons and candles. These "obituaries" included faces of U.S. Ambassador Jess Bailey, British Ambassador Charles Garrett, German Ambassador Christine Althaus, as well as ambassadors from France, Italy and the Netherlands. "Obituaries" were also designed for former mediators in negotiations for the Przhino Agreement – Peter Vanhoutte and MEP Richard Howitt, incumbent EU Ambassador Samoil Zbogor, and former EU Ambassador Aivo Orav. Some ambassadors openly acknowledged they had asked for "support" from their home countries.

536

## 53 REFERENCES TO SOROS

Nkola Gruevski's mega interview was published between 2017 New Year and Christmas. Some might say he missed his long holiday addresses aired for many years on television channels and reprised several times in the day.

According to META's analysis, in the first two instalments of his mega interview for the electronic edition of *Republika*, Nikola Gruevski wages war to American billionaire George Soros, referencing his name 53 times and therefore, according to the analysis, assigns great space to fight off "Soros and millions of dollars he bankrolls into Macedonia", but also "corrupted journalists, media owners, professors, intellectuals, analytics, activists – all led by professional protesters". In the interview titled "The civil sector cannot remain Soros's monopoly", Gruevski says: "If it were not for Soros, and the entire network of

NGOs, media, politicians, in-country and abroad, that he pays, and their influence in most powerful countries across the world, and decisive influence when it comes to smaller countries like ours, it would not have been that difficult [for VMRO-DPMNE] and the economy would have been stronger, we would have more new jobs".

In the future, according to Gruevski, the civil society sector "must not be left only in the hands of Soros and foreign governments".

In the opinion of many, this interview served as prelude for formation of the association "Stop Operation Soros", which happened on January 17.

## **IVANOV GIVES GRUEVSKI THE MANDATE TO FORM GOVERNMENT**

On January 7, in Tirana, leaders of DUI, BESA and Alliance for Albanians signed joint platform wherein they declare to respect the will of citizens in Macedonia expressed on the parliamentary elections from December 11, 2016. In seven paragraphs, they define the baseline for their operation, as follows: full and complete equality pursuant to the Ohrid Agreement and the Constitution; attainment of economic equality and social wellbeing by means of equitable regional development; enhancing the rule of law as precondition for progress in the EU integration process; creating an atmosphere of trust for good interethnic relations and for political stability in the country; resolution of the name dispute; good relations with the neighbours, and fast integration in NATO and the European Union.

537

According to VMRO-DPMNE, this platform serves as basis for the country's federalization and called it "T(y)rana".

On January 9, President Ivanov presented VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski with the mandate to form government.

According to the law, Gruevski had 20 days to compose the government cabinet that should enjoy majority support in the parliament, i.e. at least 61 MPs.

Parties from the Albanian block, i.e. DUI, BESA and Alliance for Albanians, announced that the platform they had signed in Tirana is their basis for negotiations to join the new government.



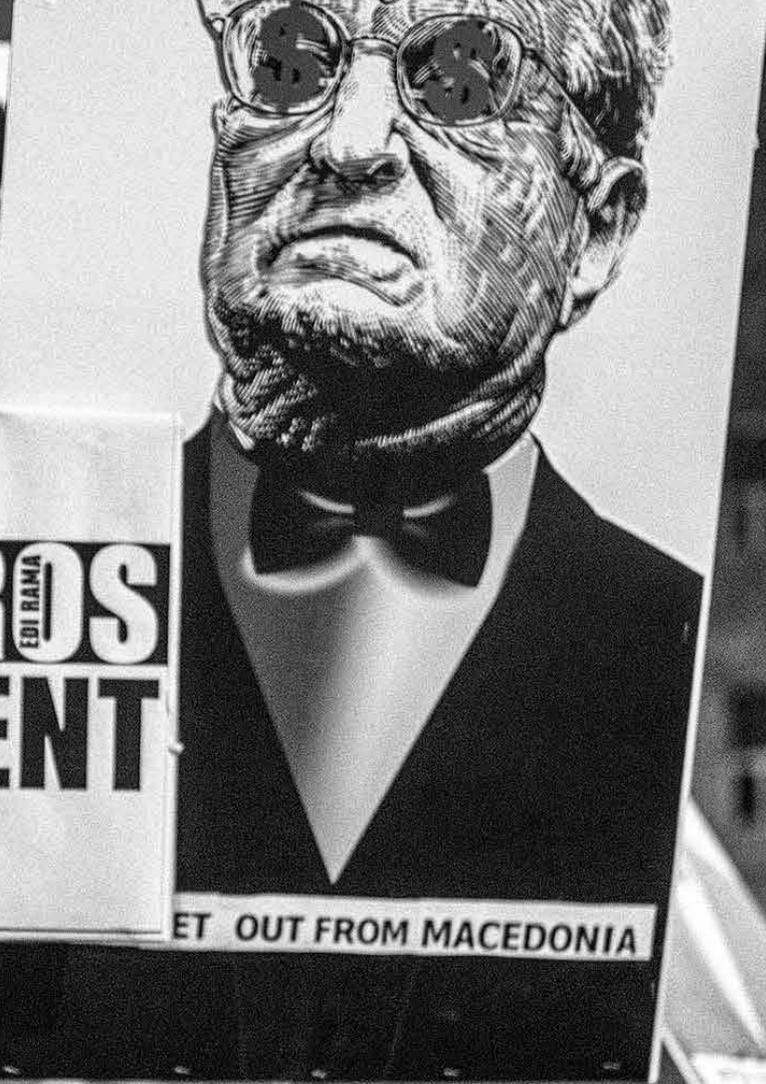
SO  
FEEL  
MAY



**NO FORS**  
**GOVERNME**

**TIRANA**  
**PLATFORM**





EDU RAMA  
OS  
ENT

ET OUT FROM MACEDONIA



The deadline expired and VMRO-DPMNE failed to form the government. While Gruevski was waiting for "message" from his previous coalition partner, gazing out the windows at his party headquarters, DUI took different decision.

In interview for this publication and asked when his party actually decided not to enter government coalition with Gruevski, DUI leader **Ali Ahmeti** said:

"The separation was not easy because we had governed together for ten years. I said it then and I'll say it now. We were in very delicate position about what should be done. An explanation was required of me to their dilemma: 'All right, Mr. Ahmeti. We understand your position and we see that Albanians don't want you to partner with VMRO-DPMNE. We also understand that Albanians have developed an opinion that we strongly object to. Namely, they have created an opinion of VMRO as anti-Albanian'. That was one of the reasons I indicated. I told Nikola Gruevski: 'If you want to bury DUI and the value it developed on this space, then we'll continue [as government partners]. But I'm not prepared to personally burry what I have built and developed with my associates'. Gruevski said he doesn't want that as well, but told me: 'Now you stomp on the principles you had insisted upon. I made a mistake back in 2006. I admit it, but I didn't send you to jail. You're tying my hands and will send me to jail'. I said: "No, I'm not sending you to jail. If you have done something contrary to law that I am not aware of [...]'. Today, under full responsibility, I say that I don't know what he has done. Nikola Gruevski never opened this topic with me, but we discussed, in principle, progress and development of the state, policies, although we had difference of opinions. Particular differences emerged about the name issue, relations VMRO-DPMNE has built with the international community; I didn't like that and I openly told Nikola Gruevski that these relations would not help him and his political party, and he should communicate and put matters on solid basis, because we cannot develop profitable policies for the state if we confront our partners and allies. We want integration in NATO and the EU, not the other way around", elaborates Ali Ahmeti in regard to their decision not to enter coalition government with VMRO-DPMNE.

---

I made a  
mistake in  
2006. I admit  
it, but I  
didn't send  
you to jail.  
You're tying  
my hands and  
will send me  
to jail. -  
Ali Ahmeti  
about his  
conversation  
with Gruevski

---

On February 23, SDSM and DUI agreed to form coalition. Three days later, in interview for TV Sitel Gruevski called the nation to defend the state. "A scenario in several steps is being prepared and includes bilingualism, attack on the unitary character of the state and cantonization [...] there will be problems if the people do not defend their state. If they believe and plan to stay at home and watch television while others defend the state, they are gravely mistaken", Gruevski said and made "self-sacrificing offer" to Zoran Zaev:

---

If he [Zaev] desires to arrest me, I volunteer to be the first taken to prison and be subject of maltreatment, but he should not destroy the pillars of the state. - Gruevski

---

"If he desires to arrest me, I volunteer to be the first taken to prison and be subject of maltreatment, but he should not destroy the pillars of the state", stated Gruevski and sent public offer to Zaev in case the latter is determined to become prime minister at any cost. On the contrary, should he reject the agenda for demolition of the state, VMRO-DPMNE would support him in the parliament to form minority government and would support all laws that do not infringe the identity and the statehood.

When Gruevski was in Vienna, some people listened to his calls and turned off their television sets, becoming "stars of the small screens" at home and abroad.

541

#### APRIL 27, 2017: THE PARLIAMENT IS STORMED

On April 27, 2017, I was in Tirana. Kjendrim Rijani, director from Kichevo, invited me to the premiere of his new play "39 Steps" at the Metropol Theatre. As his friend from Macedonia, I was seated in the first rows. Director Rijani is very successful, his plays have won many awards, and I was full of enthusiasm to see his latest theatre achievement.

Several minutes into the play my silent phone started vibrating like "crazy". I had tens of calls and messages, most often with the question: "Is Zijadin Sela alive?" I told myself, Nazim, leave the play, something is happening at home. Rijani noticed my departure and ran after me. I explained him that the parliament is stormed, possibly with casualties. I returned to the hotel and turned the television set. All channels covered information from Macedonia, with "breaking news" about events in the parliament.

At that time, Macedonia was already the main topic discussed, especially in the days when it was expected for new parliament speaker and government to be elected.

There is still no agreement whether that was a revolution or merely difficult change of government, but one thing is sure: it took Zoran Zaev whole 171 days to form the government after the elections from December 11, 2016, which is the longest period for formation of government from the elections until its vote of approval in parliament. This period, however, is no curiosity or information from the rubrics "have you known that..." or "believe it or not...", because it was period of high tensions, tug of war, distortions, interpretations, manipulation of laws, procedures, and even testing the entire public's nerves.

The most terrifying day was April 27, day that would, in many ways, change politics, life and even Macedonia. The change of government might have happened, albeit not in formal manner, but that night changed what Macedonia represents. After several attempts to hold plenary session for selection of the parliament speaker, it was announced that it will happen on April 27. All MPs were expecting text message indicating the time for its official start.

542

The session started, but so did tensions outside the parliament. Fellow journalists who followed these events, and political actors interviewed afterwards, both said that during those several hours nobody was sure whether Macedonia that we knew would continue to exist, because the events did not only herald interethnic conflicts, but also possible civil war because of "the regime's fall", popular troop used in reference to the replacement of the old government.

The several-hour drama inside the parliament meant several hours of "clinical death" for the legislative pillar of the state. "Bloody Thursday", as it was dubbed later, was on the precipice of becoming "bloody end of the state", is the assessment of journalists, but also the broader public.

From 7 p.m., when the tensions started, until late in the night when the situation was quieted, and when it was initially thought that there might be casualties, rumours circulated in the public that Zijadin Sela is dead. Soon after, information arrived that he is alive, but seriously injured. Nowadays, fact is that 300 brutes from the association "For Joint Macedonia" stormed the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia in order to prevent selection of Talat Dzaferi as parliament speaker. According to the investigation,

they had been assisted by parliament security, police officers and MPs from VMRO-DPMNE Krsto Mukovski and Sasho Vasilevski, while MP Johan Tarchulovski and personal security detail to Veljanovski directed the unruly group to the press centre where their fellow MPs from the "opposite side" were located.

The outcome was violence, injured politicians, including Zoran Zaev whose head was covered in blood, Zijadin Sela who fell unconscious from the blows suffered, after which his body was dragged on the floor and kicked by the brutes. Visible physical injuries were suffered by MPs Oliver Spasovski, Ljupcho Nikolovski, Damjan Manchevski, Maksim Dimitrievski, while MP Radmila Shekerinska had her hair pulled. According to journalists present in the parliament that night, brutes were making loops from camera cables to strangle MPs.

Among MPs from VMRO-DPMNE, Vladimir Gjorchev and Nikola Todorov were alone in their attempt to defend colleagues from these attacks.

The investigation, and statements from the new ruling majority, suggests that the events had been "orchestrated". In June 2017, under the new minister Oliver Spasovski Mol drafted a report on police omissions during the parliament's violent storming. This report enlisted that the police had underperformed in its reaction due to "partization of head people at the ministry and abuse of official duties". A total of 23 police officers were suspended and disciplinary actions were initiated against 45 policemen. Moreover, the report indicated that the violent storming happened because the doors were opened by MPs who were inside, while police officers tasked to secure the building failed to take any action to prevent the doors being opened.

Mitko Chavkov, Director of the Bureau of Public Security and member of VMRO-DPMNE, who also managed the operational headquarters, had not issued timely orders to deploy special police units and evacuate MPs. Moreover, he did not respond to telephone calls from Agim Nuhju who was Deputy Minister of Interior at the time.

Later, the investigation showed that Goran Zhivaljevic, agent from the Serbian intelligence service BIA and resident in Skopje, as diplomat and advisor in the Serbian Embassy since 2015, had taken part in the parliament's storming. Thanks to major pressure from the public, but also from the international factor, MPs were evacuated from the parliament building with armoured vehicles late in the night, and the police used shock bombs to disburse demonstrators outside the parliament building.





According to Mol, 70 citizens, 22 policemen and 3 MPs had sought medical assistance at hospitals that night. Eight persons were arrested the next day, but were soon released from police custody because the prosecution did not request their detention. Nevertheless, people were accused and convicted for the events from April 27.

In November 2017, it was announced that ten people have been accused of attempted murder, because they tried to deprive MP Zijadin Sela of his life.

In July 2018, eight persons were convicted to more than 80 years of imprisonment. Nikola Vojminovski was convicted to imprisonment in duration of 13 years and 6 months. Kire Gjorgjevski and Aleksandar Janevski-Toshta were convicted to 10-year imprisonment each, while Andrej Micov, Kosta Delov, Oliver Oshavkovski and Nikolche Dimitrievski were convicted to 10 years and 6 months in prison. All of them were convicted on charges that they had inflicted injuries to Sela which could be fatal for him.

In March 2018, the Public Prosecution Office of the Republic of Macedonia convicted 32 persons, of which 28 were convicted for terrorist threat against the constitutional order and security.

Convicted persons included Director of the Bureau of Public Security Mitko Chavkov, 5 MPs from VMRO-DPMNE: Krsto Mukovski, Ljuben Arnaudov, Johan Tarchulovski, Sashe Vasilevski and Ljupcho Dimovski. Goran Gjoshevski, who served as personal security to then-incumbent Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski, Oliver Popovski, who was dismissed as Mol commander, Munir Pepikj, employee from the Intelligence Agency, Abdulfeta Aljimi from the parliament security, Mol commander

Dushko Lazarov, Mitko Peshov, Jane Chento, Goranche Angelovski, Aleksandar Vasilevski-Ninja... The list of convicted persons also included initiators of the movement "For Joint Macedonia", i.e. Bogdan Ilievski, Igor Durlovski, Boris Damovski and Vlado Jovanovski, and two employees at UBK, Oliver Radulov and Sasho Markovski, who had taken the discs from security cameras with video footage from the parliament.

By the end of this complex court process, only 16 persons were issued imprisonment sentences in accumulative duration of more than 200 years. On March 15, 2019, court verdicts were taken against former Director of the Bureau of Public Security Mitko Chavkov, who was convicted to 18-year imprisonment. Mitko Peshov – 15 years, Dushko Lazarov – 15 years, Goran Gjoshevski-Levi – 15 years, Oliver Popovski – 13 years, Oliver Radulov – 10 years, Munir Pepikj – 15 years, Abdulfeta Aljimi – 7 years, Mladen Dodevski – 12 years, Jane Chento – 15 years, Gorancho Angelovski – 12 years, Igor Jug – 12 years, Vlatko Trajkovski – 15 years, Vilijam Mihajlovski – 14 years, Nikola Mitrevski-Koljo – 15 years, Aleksandar Vasilevski-Ninja – 8 years. Only Igor Durlovski was issued acquittal verdict by the court. New round of indictments, this time against organizers of the events from April 27, were filed by the Public Prosecution Office and targeted Nikola Gruevski, Trajko Veljanovski, Mile Janakieski, Spiro Ristovski and Nikola Boshkovski, all of whom were charged of having committed criminal offence "terrorist threat against the constitutional order and security".

5 4 6

On December 18, 2018, while the court process was still in progress, the parliament adopted the Amnesty Law with 95 votes "for", no votes "against" or abstained. According to this law, amnesty does not cover organizers, persons who committed physical violence, carried weapons, as well as officers who had abused their authorizations. Nevertheless, this law granted amnesty to 15 persons, including five MPs – Mukoski, Arnaudov, Vasilevski, Tarchulovski and Dimovski, organizers of the initiative "For Joint Macedonia" – Bogdan Ilievski, Vlado Jovanovski and Boris Damovski, employees in the Parliament Speaker's Cabinet – Ivan Cvetanovski and Elena Docevska-Bozhinovska, Mladenovski brothers who first revealed details about the organization behind "Bloody Thursday" and Zaharije Simovski, Ilija Slavevski and Mitre Pitropovski from the patriotic associations.

It was this court process, which took place at the time when Zoran Zaev's government had to secure two-third majority votes for adoption of constitutional changes pursuant

to the Prespa Agreement with Greece on Final Resolution of the Name Issue, which created great dissatisfaction in the public, but also in the political arena.

On the account of these events, but also because of the previously shaken coalition in the wake of the local elections that took place on October 15, 2017, when the Alliance for Albanians withdrew from the government, party leader Zijadin Sela who barely survived the "Bloody Thursday" now raises concerns that it was a matter of orchestrated events, with DUI in the centre of them.

"I had already put that event behind me", says Sela. Nowadays, he views it only in political terms, although it had left deep emotional scars with his close family. "In our house, we don't talk about April 27. Whenever information about April 27 comes up on television, I make sure my daughters and my son are not around, because my youngest daughter is only 2 and half years old and she still does not understand. I attempt to keep them far away from information and news about April 27".

While he has special method of dealing with the family trauma, he personally inferred an important lesson from that day.

"I hope the society has inferred lessons, but politics, unfortunately, not that much. Here I refer to game and theatre staged by Talat Dzaferi so that the former parliament speaker Trajko Veljanovski would not be stripped of his immunity for the events from April 27, especially because of information in his possession that would allow continuation of the court process for final delivery of justice", says Sela.

All three collocutors, i.e. Zijadin Sela, Ali Ahmeti and Zoran Zaev, confirm they held a meeting several weeks before April 27 to agree and anticipate what might happen on the day when Talat Dzaferi is voted as President of the Parliament.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, Sela says he was unaware of possible risks for April 27, because he only communicated with Prime Minister Zaev via phone and was only informed that the vote in parliament will happen on April 27.

"I had no information about April 27 and that is the truth. If Ali Ahmeti had certain information, it would have been 'manly' to share them with the others, because we were all on the same line of ending the political deadlock. It is not all right to throw you

<sup>4</sup> Statements from Zoran Zaev, Hristijan Mickoski, Ali Ahmeti, Zijadin Sela and Artan Grubi are taken from interviews conducted in the period April 1 to 12, 2019, for this publication.

partners in the fire, while you stay comfortable in your party headquarters and hide out, right? The fact that Ali Ahmeti disposed with information that VMRO would not easily leave this matter alone opens the question about the measure his party had taken at the time, knowing that Agim Nuhiu from his party was deputy interior minister. He must have had information [that something is in the works], but did not do anything to prevent the crowd from storming the parliament. Given that VMRO would not easily leave this matter, the interior minister could have removed Chavkov as the person responsible to secure the parliament. All these dilemmas are opened, including Ahmeti's absence from the parliament on the day, the parliament speaker's statement later that he had known something might happen, and the interior minister's statement that he did not know anything, all of them raise many concerns about the role of Ali and DUI in these processes. On the other hand, I had been informed that MPs from DUI told demonstrators where to find me. I would not name them here, you have the photos and you can easily see who they are", explains Sela.

Ali Ahmeti and Zoran Zaev denied they had known in advance that Sela might be the target of attacks.

548

Ahmeti explains that he went to the parliament several days in a row, but the vote was postponed. On the day of the vote, Prime Minister Zaev had told him to pursue his agenda of meetings.

"A decision was made to hold the constitutive session. I waited until 1 p.m., but the session did not take place. I went the second day, and the session was postponed again. On the third day, Zoran called me and asked me whether I could do my part because they had agreed to hold the constitutive session and I had to show understanding for that matter. I told him I had come to the parliament for two days in a row, but there was no session. He said: 'You came two days, but we didn't manage to hold the session. We will do it today'. So I continued with my agenda. I had several meetings. The parliament session was scheduled and several procedural articles were used for its organization. But the events turned for the worst", explains Ahmeti.

Zaev says that nobody could have anticipated the violence.

"At those moments, Mr. Zijadin Sela was my fellow fighter against this violence. We were together and he had suffered the most from this unfortunate event from April 27, 2017.

All details we know, each of us, and especially me as holder of the mandate to form government, were shared with the others. What we knew in terms of the worst scenario, having in mind that Nikola Gruevski still held the power, was that the doors could be opened and people could enter the parliament. Nobody even thought that it would be possible for things to culminate with such violence. I truly regret the consequences that we will suffer for the rest of our lives. Nobody would ever forget those events. But I also believe that we came out from those events wiser, smarter, and careful for the state. All of us, both in government and opposition", says Zaev.

Ahmeti agrees with this statement.

---

Sela: "Irrespective of measures that could have been taken, we will never agree whether it would have been better to do it one way or another. I think they did not expect the wave of people and the protesters' rampage against constitution of the parliament. They were not prepared that such rampage could have happened", says Ahmeti.

Sela still has his doubts, but on the question whether justice has been served he responds:

"It is unfortunate, but justice was not delivered. As regards the events from April 27, thousands of people that stormed the parliament were given amnesty without amnesty law. But, rule-of-law state should not

---

grant amnesty to anybody and everybody should be held responsible. The mere fact that they had audacity to violently enter state institution should be punished, not with imprisonment of 20 years, but with other sanctions. Their records should include these sanctions. As to whether their sanctions should be in duration of three or six months, or maybe one year, I don't know what the law stipulates, but each and every one of those who entered the highest state institution, the parliament, and who violated the law, should be sanctioned. On the other hand, many of them received amnesty without amnesty law. Then amnesty was extended to those that are the most responsible for April 27, i.e. those that opened the doors. On the other hand, people that saved my life were punished. Here, I refer to Abdulfeta Aljimi. I cannot call this justice. Moreover, to keep these political actors in government knowing they had an opportunity to prevent April 27, starting from the interior minister and deputy ministers in the police, heads of different

sectors, etc., does not seem like justice to me. The fact that Trajko Veljanovski was not stripped of his immunity is not justice. In other words, the regime had two components – VMRO and DUI. As long as justice is not served for the regime’s second component, there will be no justice. Justifications that they needed numbers [votes in parliament] are not sustained. Alliance for Albanians is not part of the government, we are in opposition, but we still created this government. If anybody has the reason not to vote for constitutional amendments, it would be me. But nothing stopped me as opposition MP and party leader to support constitutional amendments. I did not do that to please somebody, but to ensure bright perspectives for children of all citizens in Macedonia”.

On the question whether justice was delivered and whether “painful” compromises had to be made to secure votes for constitutional amendments according to the Prespa Agreement, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev says:

“First instance verdicts are taken and there will be verdicts in second instance. I expect the entire organization behind this event to be disclosed, because it is obvious that the event was designed, organized and that many people entering inside and opening the doors might not have been aware of that. I’m certain of that, but as citizen, as informed person. Investigations are establishing the facts. As for the violence, the court already confirmed that it was a matter of organized attack, while relevant investigation procedures will further untangle members of that organization”.

One thing is certain. April 27 will continue to divide the Macedonian society.

For this publication, VMRO-DPMNE’s new leader is still of the position that “it was an emotional reaction by the people in response to then-current opposition, and now government, which attempted to elect President of the Parliament of Republic of Macedonia in unconstitutional and illegitimate manner. That action caused reaction of the population, the people, and you all know that, regretfully, it resulted in unfortunate events that could have culminated in wrong direction”.

Asked whether from two-year distance the reaction of then-incumbent government by VMRO-DPMNE was inadequate, he says: “The party was not part of the emotional reaction by citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. Citizens on that day included people of different

political proveniences, both from opposition and government. They had one common denominator, which was the fact that nobody wanted the new government to be installed unconstitutionally. That was the essence".

Mickoski says that even today he holds the same opinion: "If you ask me whether what had happened at the parliament and what preceded that event, then my answer is yes. I share that opinion. It should not have happened; the parliament speaker should not have been elected in such illegitimate and unconstitutional manner."

From all statement and the chronology of events, it could be concluded that April 27, irrespective of different views, has shaken the entire political reality. It showed how much things might escalate when certain entities want to stay in power at any cost. But it also brought another realization, i.e. politics and power are not always prepared to fully disclose the truth. The amnesty and court processes cast deep shadows in the context of the Prespa Agreement. The new government led by SDSM made major compromises, while the old government is unwilling to renounce the past. The new Albanian opposition, especially the Alliance for Albanians, and large number of citizens, are disappointed. In their opinion, April 27 put an end to VMRO-DPMNE's rule, but did not restore the rule of law.

5 5 1

## **IVANOV DEMANDS GUARANTEES FROM ZAEV FOR THE STATE'S UNITARY CHARACTER**

After all events and turmoil, and despite the fact that, on February 27, ZaeV presented Ivanov with 67 signatures from MPs to obtain the mandate to form government in coalition with DUI, BESA and Alliance for Albanians, then-incumbent President Ivanov waited until May 10, 2017, to call SDSM leader Zoran ZaeV and request guarantees for strengthen unitary character of the state as condition to award him the mandate, which had never been seen or heard before, let alone justified in terms of constitutionality.

"President Ivanov expects SDSM leader to deliver on his publicly given word that, together with his coalition partners, he would secure guarantees on strengthened unitary

character of the state and that everything will be in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. President Ivanov remains on the position that neither the so-called Tirana Platform nor any other document, act or action contrary to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, can serve as condition or basis for formation and action of any government in the Republic of Macedonia. As regards the mandate award, the President of Macedonia will act pursuant to the constitution and previously established practices", read the press release from the Cabinet of President Ivanov for MIA.

The new Parliament Speaker Talat Dzaferi wrote a letter to Ivanov wherein he informed that parliamentary majority is formed, while Zaev said he is drafting the text with requested guarantees.

"We're in continuous contact with the Cabinet of President Ivanov to align text of the guarantees for the state's unitary character that should be presented to him. As soon as this matter is completed, I expect the president to grant me the mandate to form government", said Zaev.

5 5 2

## **AT LAST, IVANOV AWARDS THE MANDATE TO ZAEV**

On May 17, 2017, recalling Article 90 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, President Gjorge Ivanov awarded the mandate to form government to SDSM president Zoran Zaev.

After he was presented with the mandate, Zaev stated that, on behalf of the formed parliamentary majority, he guarantees the unitary character, territorial integrity, protection of national interests and multiethnic character of Macedonia.

Zaev had legal deadline of 20 days to compose the new government.

## **JUNE 1, 2017: NEW GOVERNMENT**

Exactly 171 days after the elections, on May 31, 2017, Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia elected the new government with 62 votes "for", 44 votes "against" and 5 "abstained". Zoran Zaev became the Prime Minister.

Prior to the vote for selection of new government, Zaev declared he would work on unification instead of division, and that the law will equally apply to all, underlying that he does not want revenge and retaliation and that the legal state will be restored by setting personal example and demonstrating political will. "Everybody will be held responsible for their deeds when there is evidence for that", said Zaev.

As regards the name issue, he said that the government will engage in discussion with the opposition in order to reach compromise and that decisions will be finalized on referendum, but only for the purpose of finding solution, not blocking the process.

"I'm Macedonian and equally proud of everything Macedonian, just as all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic background", said Zaev. Speaking in the parliament, he expressed respect for leaders of Albanian parties for their presence of mind. "I'm sure that everybody feels regret for the events from April 27. I want to send the message that it should never happen again", said Zaev

553

In his expose, Zaev announced he would lead a reform-oriented government based on three key pillars: commitment to economy and ensuring life for all, professional institutions and justice for all, and European Union and NATO perspectives for all.

Stressing that his government would work honestly and only for the benefit of citizens in Macedonia, he said that Macedonia will become the state of all citizens and they will build a united society that guarantees stability: one society for all.

"Our goal is start of accession negotiations with the EU and membership in NATO in the shortest period possible", said Zaev in his expose.

Soon after, on August 1, 2017, in Skopje, Prime Ministers Zaev and Borisov signed the Agreement for Good Neighbourly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation between Macedonia and Bulgaria.

"This is a strong message to EU and NATO that Balkan counties are building bridges of cooperation in order to secure prosperous future for their citizens [...] Bulgaria becomes

ally to Macedonia on its road to EU and NATO", stated Zaev after endorsing the agreement.

"If you look backwards, you might stumble and fall. That is why we decided to look forwards", stated Borisov.

Europe welcomed the agreement, calling it "historic and inspiration for the entire region".

On June 17, 2018, in village Psarades, Greece, on the Prespa Lake, Macedonian and Greek Foreign Ministers Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias signed the Prespa Agreement.<sup>5</sup> Its purpose is to put an end to the three-decade-long name dispute and for the country to continue its path towards NATO and the EU. Main points of the agreement include:

- ▶ Name: Republic of North Macedonia, erga omnes, with translation in all languages.
- ▶ Language: Macedonian, no footnote, as recognized by the United Nations.
- ▶ Nationality: Macedonian/Citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia.
- ▶ International codes: MK and MKD.

The signing ceremony was attended by Prime Ministers Zaev and Tsipras. The Greek Prime Minister who does not wear ties was gifted the red tie which Zaev wore on that occasion. In interview for MIA immediately before his visit to Skopje in April 2019, Greek Prime Minister Tsipras said he keeps Zaev's tie in his work desk to remind him of that "historical moment; the brave step forward to friendship and cooperation between the two nations".

Then-incumbent President Ivanov did not sign the proclamation act for the Law on Ratification of the Agreement with Greece.

On June 17, 2018, EU Council of Foreign Ministers took decision to start accession negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia in June 2019.

On July 12, 2018, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg personally presented Macedonia with invitation to join the most powerful alliance.

Opposition VMRO-DPMNE qualified the Prespa Agreement as capitulation of the state.

5 [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/konechna\\_spogodba\\_makedonija\\_grcija.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/konechna_spogodba_makedonija_grcija.pdf)

On September 4, 2018, *WikiLeaks* released a document from the U.S. Embassy in Skopje according to which, back in 2008, the Macedonian government had agreed to the name "Republic of North Macedonia".

On October 19, 2018, under vote tally of 80 MPs the parliament initiated procedure for adoption of constitutional changes pursuant to the Prespa Agreement. In the name of "greater good", four days earlier, during his speech in parliament Prime Minister Zaev called for reconciliation about the events from April 27.

On January 11, 2019, under vote tally of 81 MPs the parliament approved the constitutional changes. Four days later, the Prespa Agreement was ratified in the Greek parliament.

On the account of dissonant opinions, VMRO-DPMNE expelled from its ranks several renowned party members, including eight MPs who voted for changes to the constitution according to the Prespa Agreement. In December 2017, at the Valandovo Congress, Hristijan Mickoski became the new leader of VMRO-DPMNE and although he put on the act of "being tough", he was still considered to work as "extended hand" to Gruevski.

**LONG IS THE HAND OF VMRO, BUT ALSO THE LEG...**

On November 13, 2018, Nikola Gruevski posted this message on his *Facebook* profile:

**"In the last several days, I received numerous life threats. I am in Budapest now and have applied for political asylum with the Hungarian authorities. I will always remain faithful to the Macedonian cause. I will never back down."**

How Gruevski managed to flee the country remained an enigma. The public will have to wait for answers to questions such as: Did he flee through the underground garage at his building dressed as woman or hidden in car trunk? Who assisted him and when did he first start to plan his escape? Did he cross the unmarked border near Debar to enter Albania? Did Hungarian diplomats drive him through Serbia to Budapest? How does he sustain himself in this expensive capital on the River Danube?

Asked about Gruevski's fleeing the country, his long-term coalition partner Ali Ahmeti said: "I was surprised to learn news of him fleeing the country. He did not seem a frightful type of person. I expected him to face the court, face the arguments and provide counter-arguments, face the facts with counter-facts. I did not think he would be faint-hearted person."

On November 20, 2018, Nikola Gruevski as convicted felon in the case "Armoured Car" (the thing starting with "M", n/a) was granted protection under political asylum by President Victor Orban.

What they have in common and do not hide from the public, at least for the time being, is their animosity to Soros.

---

Ahmeti about  
Gruevski's fleeing  
the country: "I was  
surprised, because  
he did not seem a  
frightful type of  
person".

---





FOUNDATION | ФОНДАЦИЈА  
OPEN | ОТВОРЕНО  
SOCIETY | ОПШТЕСТВО  
MACEDONIA | МАКЕДОНИЈА