Marijana Opašinova Šundovska[*]

North Macedonia after the Ohrid Framework Agreement: a state (in)stability?[1]

Abstract

Independence movements triggered by the end of the Cold War ended in state collapse and the creation of new states across the European continent. The decade coloured with violent wars in the Balkan region did not leave the Republic of Macedonia immune from ethnic conflict, which occurred in 2001. The outcome in the form of the so-called Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was the intended improvement of the rights of minorities and the sharing of power in decision making, both on local and central levels. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether theoretical approach patterns to state instability match the causes for the outburst of the Macedonian conflict of 2001. It will also try to detect if the conflict resulted from minority discrimination, state institutions' inability to control the territory, poor economic situation, uneven regional development after independence, or it was a combination of factors that – fully or partially – contributed to its emergence. The paper will also seek to confirm if addressing these factors two decades later decreased the divisions across ethnic lines in the state.

Key words: state instability; ethnic conflict; political rhetoric; identity; minority; North Macedonia

Introduction

Determined to create its own institutions the Republic of Macedonia managed to achieve peaceful and successful transition from an authoritarian regime to a parliamentary republic in 1991. Macedonian politicians, tormented by past memories of identity denial from their neighbours, strived to achieve the long-desired goal of a sovereign state of the Macedonians, reformulating the Constitution Preamble, which

[*]   Marijana Opašinova Šundovska, Ph.D., University American College Skopje, North Macedonia, mo-
      pasinova@gmail.com
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aroused suspicion among the Albanian community about their genuine intentions to build a multi-ethnic state. The armed conflicts in bordering nations (Marshall, 2002), combined with the minority's feelings of exclusion and discrimination, fuelled the clashes between illegal fighters and state security forces in 2001, which was characterized as an ethnic conflict. The troublesome transformation of state enterprises and uneven regional development in the country, as well as the Greek embargo imposed in the 1990s, left thousands of people unemployed, fostered both grey and black economies, thereby weakening state institutions and aggravating the situation, making it even more complex than before.

Today, twenty years after the conflict, Macedonia is celebrating the victory of liberty over conflict, being proclaimed a success story and an example to follow by other states in the region and worldwide. The road they took was neither easy nor simple, and the situation, despite many improvements, is still revealing unresolved issues in the domain of inter-ethnic relations. Majority Macedonians believe that the OFA remodelled the state in the interest of a long-lasting peace, and its implementation should be limited to the terms of the agreement. On the other hand, majority Albanians consider that the OFA represents a good starting point for further promotion of their rights. The current economic situation and the rule of law reform are still facing numerous challenges.

The analysis of different theoretical causal models of state instability and the use of reliable contemporary methodologies for detecting and alarming of state instability, compared to the real-case scenario of Macedonia and supplemented by statistical data and poll opinions, should determine the real underlying causes of the 2001 conflict, nowadays mostly labelled as an ethnic conflict due to the discrimination of the minority by the majority. The paper attempts to prove that the conflict did not stem from a unilateral approach. Rather, a sequence of interdependent factors caused by internal and external circumstances collectively contributed to its outbreak, and the measures taken years after the conflict contributed to the improvement of conflict-driven developments.

State instability epistemological approach

The post-Cold War era inevitably produced old-forgotten debates on the nature, function and meaning of state sovereignty. Provoked by phenomena like global capitalism, international governance, and governance transition, classical state sovereignty was in decline, in some cases already diminished (Cable, 1995). Even when states act like independent actors based on their interests and preferences, the dependency of state sovereignty on international law implies that their preferences are framed by the shared understanding of the community (Adler, 1997). The international institutionalization

of human rights and humanitarian law moved the individual trajectory toward global humanity, making it a global discourse rather than a national state imperative (Robertson, 1992). The lifted economic barriers and the rising globalization processes also prevented concerted state control action. Such a "borderless world" (Ohmae, 1991) made states less capable of protecting the hallmarks of their state sovereignty: the impermeability of national borders (Herz, 1959). Today, the Westphalian state concept is in danger of being "withered away" and replaced by a prevailing global economic governance system, dominating over security issues and national politics. Such "globality" will change the perception of sovereignty and territoriality and give priority to policies and social relations favourable to businesses and trade (Scholte, 2000).

Internal issues and identity factors

So, why do states fail or collapse? What are the reasons for worldwide state instability? Arguments lead to the conclusion that state sovereignty is threatened mainly by internal processes, i.e. the dark mirror images of losing control over means of violence (Rotberg, 2002); when the threat to state stability is made visible through the evident collapse of government authority and state institutions, and their inability to exercise full control of their territories (Dekker and Wouter, 2004); or the dependence of central governments on foreign and international institutions (Wallace, 2000). In a conventional scenario, state breakdown occurs when mighty civil society groups effectively challenge official authority. William Zartman (1995) considers that curbing state domination leads to increased autonomy of societal actors who influence the government's capabilities, which he defines as a societal conflict model, compared to the state contraction model of a weak state, without proper leadership and poor economic and political management, deteriorated from within, plagued by incapacity to govern and the "immobilisme." Helman and Ratner (1992), on the other hand, argued that conflicts arose due to states' incapability to be a sustainable part of the international community.

Conflicts can also arise when national interests are inclined toward a strong nation-state concept that can often clash with societal interests or those of smaller communities. Brubaker (2006) considers the sense of "ownership" of the state by a titular nation and the "remedial" project of using state power to promote specific national interest, as main postulates of nationhood on the European soil. Barth claims that cognitive or mental boundaries in people's minds, as maintained constructions, create ethnic boundaries visualizing insiders as *us* vs. *them* (Barth, 1969). Steel's concept of ontological security points to the struggle for identity by nation states, sown into the narrative to secure the coherence of the "Self," since states lacking the narrative represent an area without a concept (Steel, 2008). Moynihan claimed that the nation constitutes the most politicized form of ethnicity, "denoting a subjective state of mind as regards

ancestry, but also, almost always, an objective claim to forms of territorial autonomy ranging from a regional assembly to full-blown independence." He considered that the interest in ethnicity did not spring exclusively from a philosophical point of view, but rather from the urgent search for solutions to end the rising ethno-political, usually internal, conflicts starting after the end of the Cold War. They call into question the right to self-determination and hence provoke exponential growth of legal complexity within. He concluded that affluence may be a good cure for such inter-ethnic rivalries (Moynihan, 1993).

Nations often make mistakes by equating state building with nation building, bearing in mind that smaller communities with different ethnic backgrounds than the majority are disregarded as separate from the corresponding majority nation in the state. When state institutions support a political system valuing the more powerful ethnic group, the "raw" ethnic sentiment (Horowitz, 1985), delegitimizing other ethnic groups coexisting in the state for centuries, they undermine their own stability and security. In many cases, conflicts arise in geographical areas populated by a particular ethnic group, reflected in civil wars or arms rebellions (Bates, 2005) between different indigenous groups, putting into question the normative concept of national versus local, or even transnational perception of group self-identification. Lijphart (1999) argues that the majoritarian interpretation of the basic definition of democracy reads "government by the *majority* of the people," where majorities govern, and minorities oppose.

The consensus model of democracy developed by Nobel Prize-winning economist Sir Arthur Lewis sees the majority rule as interpreted as undemocratic because of the principle of exclusion from accessing the instruments of power, and all those concerned by a particular decision should have been given the opportunity and the right to take part in the decision-making process, either directly or by their elected representatives. Lijphart (1977) considers that such consociational democracy entails governments of grand coalitions of political leaders, mutual veto over majority rule, vital to protect the minority. The spirit of compromise and moderation among leaders, while preserving loyalty of their followers, remains crucial. Horowitz (1994) believes that in divided societies, those who are included will enjoy privileges, while the excluded ones will face penalties, where ethnic identity determines the lines of inclusion and exclusion.

Functioning of state institutions, income factors and spillover effect

Rotberg differentiates between strong and weak states by applying several indicators which influence the situation. For example, strong states can control their territories and provide high-quality policies to their citizens, measured by indicators like GDP *per capita*, the UNDP Human Development Index, Transparency International's Cor-

ruption Perception Index, and Freedom House's Freedom of the World Report. This supposes high-level security, low violence and crime rates, strong and credible judiciary system, ensured human rights and freedoms, solid infrastructure and administration – thus creating a sound environment for economic growth and prosperity. On the other hand, he defines weak states within a broad set of continua of geographical, physical, and economic constraints, including ethnic, religious, linguistic, and inter--communal tensions, high urban crime rates, corruption, compromised rule of law, deteriorated physical infrastructure, dissatisfactory GDP *per capita* and other economic indicators (Rotberg, 2003).

The Political Instability Task Force (Marshall and Cole, 2017), founded after the outbreak of ethnic wars in the 1990s, identified four types of instability according to their data: ethnic war, revolutionary war, genocide, and adverse regime change. Their methodology used a range of political, demographic, economic and environmental factors in determining vulnerability and political instability. State political institutions and material well-being had a determinant role in state stability, i.e. weak democracies with limited executive checks and balances were as much as 30 times as likely to experience instability compared to stronger democracies, or even closed autocracies. "Bad neighbourhood" effect of conflicts in bordering countries significantly increased the risk of instability. A state beset by an outburst of violence and a flow of refugees also increased the odds of a spillover effect to other states in specific regions, because modern terrorism is usually planned across many states (Schneckener, 2004). A similar study by Marshall found a correlation between state instability, regime change, and terrorism, especially in bordering nations. These states experience low quality of life, high rates of youth unemployment and systematic ethnic discrimination, which may serve as a predictor for emerging conflicts. Instability occurs in newer autocratic states, or states with factionalism problems too, in which minorities seek major changes to their status. Due to ignored factionalism, states often face instability problems (Marshall *et al.*, 2009). In another study he conducted with Cole in 2008, Marshall examined conflict and state instability, and their connection to income, including conflicts between 1995 and 2007. They found that states with higher GDP *per capita* are less likely to experience instability (Marshall and Cole, 2008).

Gurr *et al.* (2005) went even further by using case-control methods with logistic regression to evaluate the onset of ethnic wars from 1995 to 2003 for all nations with populations exceeding 500,000. Around 80% of their estimates corresponded to the classification of ethnic war models. Their main impactful precursor was the underlying state discrimination against minorities by the majority in the state. Additionally, the level of variety of ethnicities in the state increased the chances for occurrence of ethnic wars to a great extent. The outbreak of ethnic wars was also dependant on the level of democracy and politics in the state, meaning that democratic states had lower

risks of "ethnic war onset" (Sambanis, 2001). Together with Marshall, Gurr examined the measure of war from the Minorities at Risk database, also showing that minority factors for an increased likelihood of conflict outburst include the loss of previously gained minority rights due to political system changes, while the decrease depended on their support from the outside, such as international organizations, and their indigenous origin (Gurr and Marshall, 2003).

Empirical findings of state instability and the Macedonia case scenario

In an article written in the *Foreign Policy* magazine back in 1992, Helman and Ratner warned of newly independent states in the territories of the former communist bloc experiencing difficult viability that required close attention and innovative policies by the international community (Helman and Ratner, 1992).

Internal issues and identity factors emerged when the Republic of Macedonia, among the last countries of the former Yugoslavia, gained peaceful independence from the Federation. It came as the result of the will of people, but also after having obtained an opinion by the Arbitration Commission established by the European Community at the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia in 1991. The Commission, presided by Robert Badinter, delivered their opinion that Macedonia provided the necessary guarantees for the respect of human rights and international peace and thus satisfied the EC guidelines to be recognized by the Member States (Arbitration Commission Opinion, 1991). However, the pressure imposed by Greece over the name issue made the European Community temporarily step back before accepting the recommendation by the Arbitration Commission. This was followed by the Declaration of the European Council adopted at its regular meeting in 1992, expressing a readiness to recognize the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under a name which did not include the term "Macedonia" (EC Lisbon Declaration, 1992).

The long and formally hidden problem of conflict regarding the name of the state and the identity of the majority population re-surfaced, creating serious international problems in an already historically troubled region, confirming Madison's belief that the causes of faction are possibly "sown in the nature of the man". Greece's claims on the modern state were that their neighbouring country, by using the name "Macedonia" as its official name, demonstrated territorial pretensions toward the Greek region of Macedonia and its ancient heritage. This came in times of ignited ethnic warfare intending to ravage the Western Balkans region. The country was forcibly put into the Balkan powder keg after having successfully avoided it since their independence. In order to gain international recognition and secure its stability, the country applied for UN membership under a provisional name of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Mace-

donia." It was an unseen and unjustified precedent because it failed to respect the principles of membership in the UN – applying under a reference name, not raising the country's flag in front of their Headquarters, and not taking into consideration the effect the Macedonian case might have on the development of international law through such concept of non-state recognition and respect for rights of self-determination (Shkaric *et al*., 2008).

Wounded by the moment, repressed and disputed over for centuries, with several failed attempts to create their own state, Macedonian politicians, trying to respect the will of their citizens, adopted in 1992 a state flag containing an old symbol of ancient Macedonia, the so-called Vergina Star. In the Constitution, ratified on November 17, 1991, they included an article providing that the state respected the rights and the status of the people of Macedonian origin living in neighbouring countries. Taken as a provocation, Greece imposed a trade blockade in 1994, which lasted for a year, asking that their neighbouring country change their name, their flag and their constitution. It ended when Macedonia amended the Constitution, denying any territorial claims over its neighbours and changing the flag by eliminating the Vergina Star.

In the Yugoslav Federation, Macedonian language and Macedonian identity were confirmed. Trying to preserve the continuity in the battle, Macedonian politicians introduced a political system with a strong mono-national character, which later complicated the multi-ethnic relations in the state. Namely, the first Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, adopted in 1991, defined Macedonia as a national state of the Macedonian people, with respect, full equality and permanent coexistence for the Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanies, defined as other "nationalities" living in the state, with the Macedonian language and its Cyrillic alphabet as the official language and script of the state. People who belonged to the nationality, in areas where they constituted the majority, had their languages and scripts used officially by local self--government institutions, in addition to the Macedonian language. Keeping in mind that Albanians constituted nearly a quarter of the population of the state, and also recalling their rights upheld in the Federation, it is not surprising that tensions arose immediately after the adoption of the new Constitution. They claimed that the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution enabled greater rights for their nationalities. Namely, the Constitutions provided equal use of minority languages in the interest of protecting their rights, including such guarantees as the right to use their language in court procedures and other state institutions and bodies exercising public duty. Equal representation in local assemblies (municipalities), as well as in the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, was also secured by the Constitution, as was the right to use the national flag. The establishment of the Inter-Community Relations Committees, both in local assemblies and in the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, with the aim to recognize the implementation of equal rights of nationalities and propose

measures for their improvement, was mandatory. Most of these provisions were omitted in the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which rightfully spurred inter-ethnic tensions and prompted Albanian politicians to boycott its adoption in the first parliamentary term. They saw the independence process as a chance to regain the position they once held (Demjaha and Peci, 2015). Such provisions were a step back in the exercise of their rights, a deprivation by the new political system, where they were considered second-class citizens in a state where the majority of the population, the Macedonians, enjoyed exclusive rights.

While Macedonian politicians persisted in their position that the Constitution served the interest of preserving the unitary character of the state, Albanians refused to accept the fact that they were defined as an ethnic minority, and not as members of the Albanian nation in the state. The rise of Albanian nationalism was perceived as fatal to territorial integrity, even to the very existence of Macedonians as a nation (Poulton, 1995). They used the justification that, in collective memory, Macedonian people coexisted peacefully with other nationalities and even fought together in history, during Ottoman times, and would prevail, no conflicts arising thereto. Within this context, Macedonian political elites were supported in the view that ethnic Albanians and other minorities in the country already enjoyed minority rights in line with the highest standards of international legislation (Daskalovski, 2013). On the other hand, the Albanians were resolute that the new Constitution was favouring ethnic Macedonians as the only "constitutive nation," a "majority" in the state (Adamson and Jović, 2004), and called for the restoration of their rights guaranteed under the 1974 Constitution. The problem was growing worse, and the indolent, factionalist attitude of Macedonian politicians only contributed to the gradual radicalization of the situation in regions mainly inhabited by ethnic Albanians, namely in western Macedonia.

These developments fully matched the definition that *state sovereignty is threatened mainly from internal processes*. As a countermeasure, Albanians held their own unofficial referendum on territorial autonomy of Western Macedonia in 1992 (Ortakovski, 2001). According to the data, 74 percent of voters were in favour of territorial and political autonomy of the Albanian community. The government denied the validity of the poll. Although Albanian ethnic parties had been established and participated in the political life, the situation did not develop toward cohabitation. In 1998, *The Washington Quarterly* published an article about the ethnic Albanians actually voting in favour of declaring autonomy of the so-called "Republic of Ilirida" in Western Macedonia, a step before a final union with Albania. The rejection of the referendum instigated rallies in a small town in the west of the country, which ended with the arrest and criminal proceedings against an MP from one of the Albanian parties, for having claimed that Ilirida would be the first separate state within Macedonia. Such actions continued – leaflets were distributed in 1993, an illegal university

in the Albanian language established in a house in a village in Western Macedonia in 1995, protests were staged in Skopje, attempts taken to raise Albanian flags by two western Macedonian cities, ending in an epilogue of arrests and imprisonments. It only complicated the inter-ethnic relations and increased the gap between the two largest communities in the state (Immigration and Refugee Board, 2000). Macedonian authorities defended their acts as the mechanism of legal order of the state, while the Albanians argued that the government violated their human rights and discriminated against them on ethnic grounds. The international community raised their concerns regarding the safeguard of the state's multi-ethnic character after a series of secession-ist events (Glenny, 1996). It became clear that Albanian resentment (Petroska-Beska and Najcevska, 2004) was a defining moment, and that the situation might escalate, leading to greater consequences (ravaging wars in the neighbourhood, fuelling the spillover effect of an already fragile internal situation). Politicians tried to keep the multicultural dialogue going, but the events did not help them justify their positions and overcome the tensions.

However, the outbreak of the Kosovo conflict and the acceptance by the Republic of Macedonia of approximately 300.000 refugees into improvised refugee camps, which accounted for nearly 15 percent of the total state population, were perceived by the international community as an act of humanity and solidarity. Still, they expressed internal concerns about whether the state was capable of bearing the burden of such actions, i.e. concerns about its ability to apply legitimate use of force and *control on its entire territory* (Piazza, 2008) to prevent *the spillover effect* and *maintain stability of state institutions*. Although the outcome was relatively successful – the end of the Kosovo conflict – a group of armed rebels, encouraged by the victory of their Albanian brothers in Kosovo, decided in 2001 that time had come to regain their rights by use of illegal force and violence. The state did not manage to stay immune to the region-al developments (LaFree and Dugan, 2004). The domino effect, among other things, proved to be real: the situation escalated between the rebels and the Macedonian se-curity forces. It had already been condemned by the international community, who labelled their acts as "cowardly acts of extremists," invoking that "the violence must end and their tactics will not be successful" (Robertson, 2001).

The conflict aggravated the already fragile economic situation in the country. The troublesome social ownership transformation of public enterprises into mixed or joint-stock companies after the independence secured personal profits to previ-ous managers. It left thousands of people unemployed, without any legal resources of income, pushing them toward grey or even black markets. The uneven regional economic development in the previous system showed that the percentage of Albani-an employees in state enterprises was only symbolic (not exceeding 3%), with only 1% of enterprise privatization engaged in by ethnic Albanian managers (Bexheti, 2006).

Figure 1. Ethnic conflict evolvement: multiple indicators in Macedonia in 2001 (created by author)
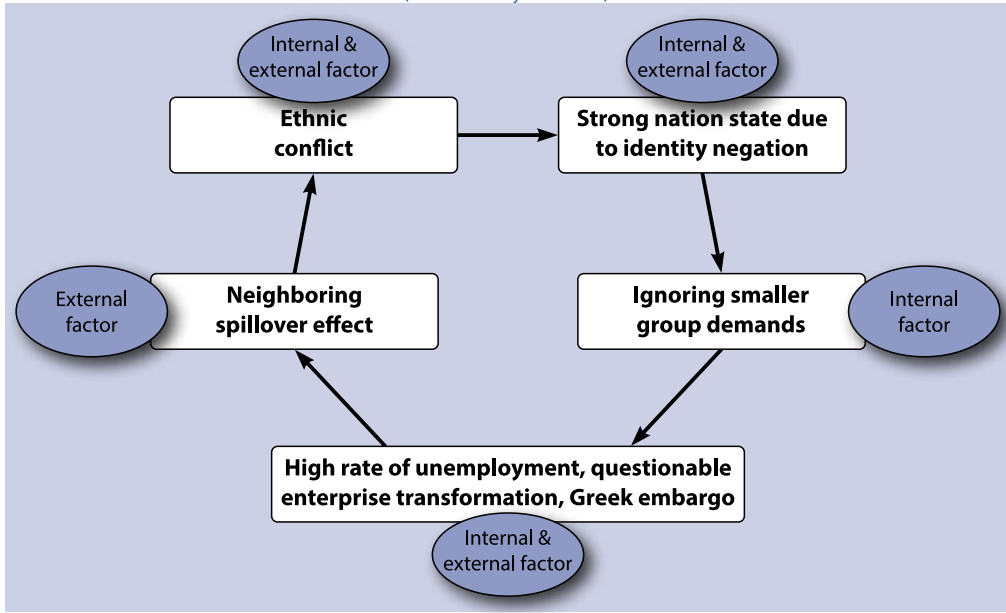
Unemployment rates in areas predominantly populated by Albanians were also high, as well as among the youth and women in rural areas who were reluctant to enter the labour market due to insufficient education. Furthermore, the UN introduced sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro in 1992, blocking access to their markets, which had been main markets for Macedonian companies, accounting for nearly 60% of total exports (Mojsovska-Blazevski and Najdov, 2008). The Greek trade embargo as a means of pressure in the name dispute forbade access to its market and its nearest port. It left severe consequences on the economic development of an impoverished country. The losses to Macedonian economy in the first months reached 60 million US dollars, and 40 million dollars each consecutive month, leaving additional 2500 people without a job (Shkaric *et al.*, 2008). The embargo was counter-productive, in terms that it fostered development of a regional smuggling network, with Bulgaria, Romania and Albania playing a crucial role in the process, gradually undermining state stability (Hajdinjak, 2004). Since the beginning of the transitional period, the country accumulated a debt of 43.5% of its GDP, and the unemployment rate reached 35.5% from 1990 to 2003. Neighbouring conflicts affected the economic growth as well, and the risk of insecurity, discouraging many investors from starting businesses in the country, made it in turn dependant on the World Bank and IMF's assistance to maintain macroeconomic stability (ICG, 1998). This clearly showed that the income

factor influences state stability, i.e. that "affluence was a good cure for inter-ethnic rivalry" (Moynihan, 1993).

Consequently, by comparing the aforementioned theoretical and practical data, there is a logical conclusion that the ethnic conflict was not an issue of unilateral approach, but rather a number of sequenced and mutually dependent determinants caused by internal and external factors that collectively contributed to its outbreak (see Figure 1).

Post-conflict developments

After months of sporadic fighting and heavy international community involvement, a peace agreement was reached – OFA was signed – which included, among other things, a package of constitutional, institutional and budgetary changes to address the demands of the Albanian community. To no surprise, the OFA changes corresponded to the rights obtained for the nationalities in the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The wider concept of the Agreement was greater power sharing. The main turning point in the development of the new state order was the amendment to the Constitution Preamble, changing the status of previous "nationalities" into citizens as part of another nation, i.e. part of the Albanian nation, stating that the Republic of Macedonia was the state of the Macedonian people, as well as the Albanian nation, Turkish nation, etc., with equal rights and obligations toward common goods (Amendment IV to the Constitution, 2001). As such, it implied equal status to different nations living in one state and for the common good, without any exclusivity granted to the majority nation, or dominance of one over other nations, hence annulling the predominant nation-state concept with existing nationalities. The Agreement envisioned proportional representation in state institutions of all under-represented nations living in the state, including the military and the police, as well as the use of the Albanian language on state level. In order to provide increased independence for the local government, new administrative district lines were drawn, reorganizing municipalities. The Albanian majority populating those areas gained the right to use their national flag in front of and inside institutions.

Laws adopted by the Parliament, in order to achieve balance of power, now required a double majority vote for those laws that regulated particularly sensitive areas for nations other than the majority nation: state issues, culture, language, education, and use of symbols. In other words, apart from the votes of the majority nation, those laws required a majority of the total number of votes by Members of Parliament from the minority nations as well. Another novelty was the introduction of higher education in Albanian and the establishment of separate higher education institutions with curricula in the Albanian language, both state and private. The proper implementation of

the spirit of the Agreement was followed by the establishment of the Inter-Community Relations Committee in the Parliament, but also in all municipalities and specialized institutions. They were to serve as an important mechanism for the prevention of majorization of any nation over other nations living in the state.

The end of the conflict and the agreement reached with international assistance quickly helped the political elites in the state to build a consensus and move on with their everyday tasks. More than 130 laws, or amendments to the laws, were adopted by the Parliament to promote the spirit enshrined in the Agreement. Most of them were related to non-discrimination, equal representation, use of languages, culture and increased powers of the local government. The main institution for the implementation of the Agreement was the governmental Secretariat for the Implementation of the OFA, which was later re-institutionalized into the Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations.

During the last decade, the situation on the ground showed different results in each area. The largely decentralized work in the municipalities, intended to increase their competences and their independence, brought to the forefront many challenges. The new territorial organization brought more polarization in different municipalities, favouring the majority population and, consequently, majority-ruled local authorities and administration, to the detriment of the minority groups who lived there. The majority group was satisfied with its dominance and the rights enjoyed in the municipality, while the minority felt threatened for being put aside or discriminated. This ethnic "gerrymandering" deepened the already existing sensitive divisions between different communities (Crowther, 2017), making the attainment of positive peace more elusive (Galtung, 1996).

In the field of education, OFA addressed the issue of the establishment of higher education institutions in Albanian, which was legally secured by funding and accreditation of the state University of Tetova and a semi-private South East European University, supported by the OSCE and international donors. It encouraged many Albanian teenagers to enrol and study at state-funded universities in their language and graduate in different areas and academic fields, increasing the numbers of highly educated people in the state. The integrated primary and secondary education, despite efforts by both state actors and civil society organizations, did not see much progress after the conflict. Problems continued to occur only in schools with students from different communities, which forced authorities to propose the organisation of classes in "shifts," in order to avoid clashes between ethnic groups, mainly between Macedonians and Albanians, but they did not receive substantial support by the international community. The attempts to re-name schools after members of the National Liberation Army (NLA) in majority Albanian schools, and members of the Macedonian forces in 2001 conflict did not work in favour of building one society for all citizens.

Today, twenty years later, Macedonia is celebrating victory in conflict, being pro-claimed a success story and an example to follow by other states in the region and worldwide. The road was neither easy nor simple. The conflict seriously deteriorated the internal situation in the country. Although it ended in only a few months, 200 lives were lost, and many people went missing (Daskalovski, 2003). Parallel realities and interpretations of the conflict have been created that still persist today. Majority Macedonians remained mistrustful of the true intentions of their fellow Albanian cit-izens (Fraenkel, 2004). On the other hand, majority Albanians perceived the attackers as heroes, people who dedicated or even lost their lives for a greater cause, to regain the rights they had been deprived of. They perceived the conflict as the initial point of departure rather than the ceiling of their collective rights (Aziri, 2011). Inter-ethnic relations remained burdened by prejudice and stereotypes, which were rather deep immediately after the conflict, only to decrease even further in the last decade.

Inter-ethnic relations were also called into question in 2016-2017, when Albanian political leaders from Macedonia organized a meeting in Tirana, the capital of Alba-nia. The meeting was hosted by the Albanian government representatives, with an explanation that the aim was to extend the rights of the Albanians and to further the implementation of the OFA. The document that came out of the meeting, the so-called "Tirana platform," envisages promotion of the status of Albanians in the state, i.e. calls for their recognition as a state-building nation, and their ethnic equality across all state levels. The document demands full language equality on all levels of governance as a fundamental and constitutional right, together with specific institutions to monitor and penalize all those who neglect its implementation, as well as increased representa-tion in security and armed forces, and the judicial system. Albanian politicians called for opening a comprehensive debate on the flag, the anthem, and the coat of arms of the state. They also insisted on the adoption of a resolution that would condemn the genocide over Albanians in the state between 1912 and 1956 (Netpress, 2017).

Macedonian politicians perceived the demands as overstepping the international framework for minority rights. The meeting distressed the Macedonian public about the consequences that might follow if the demands were met. The fear that the pro-motion of minority rights might lead to a future federalization of the state resurfaced among the majority, especially after the statement of the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama that uniting Albania and Kosovo was not his wish, but a wish of certain Albanian nationalists, provided that the door to the EU remained closed for those countries. Experts interpreted his statement as a cover for low-quality democracy and rule of law in the region, which allowed room for nationalism and threats to Europe. In an extreme case scenario, they considered nationalism to serve as a communication vessel, where only one small wave would be sufficient to spur animosity among others (DW, 2017).

Opening of the debate on new state symbols was seen by the majority as an attempt to redefine the Macedonian state concept, so painstakingly built over the decades, while Albanians implied that the state symbols in use did not reflect the multi-ethnic character and ethnic equality of the state, but rather favoured the majority population, i.e. the Macedonian nation. And the request for the adoption of a resolution for genocide over Albanians due to personal family tragedies in that period did not receive positive feedback from Macedonian politicians, so the demand was somehow omitted in the negotiations on new government (AKO, 2017). Nonetheless, it was followed by statements of historians that the adoption of such documents on historical issues must be based on historical facts and a methodological procedure, in accordance with the international law on genocide, where it is defined as one of the greatest crimes against humanity (Press 24, 2017).

The last developments on the Law on Use of Languages in 2019 gave the Albanian language equal status to Macedonian. The legislators claimed that the Law extended the rights of the Albanians envisaged in the 2008 version. The establishment of institutions that penalized those who did not use Albanian language provoked harsh reactions by the Macedonian linguistic and legal academic communities. As a comparison, there are no such institutions established for the Macedonian language in the state, so the Law was seen as detrimental to the unitary character of the state, discriminating against citizens mentioned in Article 1 of the Constitution. The provisions for the change of banknotes, postal stamps, police and army uniforms, as well as changes in other public sectors, did not accord with the OFA. University professors called for a sound and sensible analysis and a public debate, with the aim of reaching a proper solution before the adoption of the law. In the end, they pointed out to the alarming state of the Macedonian language and relevant state institutions (Fokus, 2017). The Law had been adopted anyway, and sent to the Venice Commission for an opinion, which confirmed that its provisions greatly extended the rights and use of the Albanian language, going beyond the minimum standards of minority protection laid down in international law. The law lacks clarity on some issues of the use of other community languages. The Commission considered that the authorities should examine the weaknesses of the 2008 law and assess the budget impact of the new law. The Commission also specifically advised in favour of abandoning the provisions regarding bilingualism in judicial proceedings, for the time being (Venice Commission Report, 2019). There have been no follow-up activities taken after the report.

The graph below shows waves of changes in value of political rights. We can compare them with the chronicled events, ands see that peak values are split over three time periods: the years after the independence and the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, the years around the outburst of the ethnic conflict, and the years around the political crisis in the state 2014-2018. Among other things, the most recent wave

happened due to the political crisis in 2014 and the armed incident in a town near Skopje (BBC, 2015). The population saw the threat of past ghosts reappearing and challenging state stability, which caused the damage to the economy several months after the event.

Graph 1. Freedom House, Macedonia, Political rights index; 7 (weak) – 1 (strong).
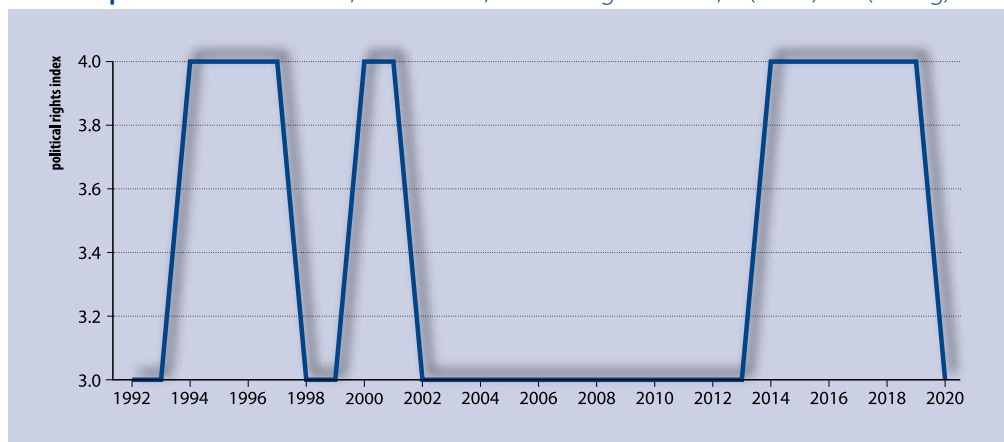
A sparkle of hope brings the right reasoning for the population in the state, despite political offers during campaigning. A recent survey carried out by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) shows that the majority population is concerned about normal everyday problems, rather than about inter-ethnic issues. Regarding their consideration of what poses the most serious problems to the country, 27% mentioned the economy, 24% crime and corruption, 22% Covid-19 situation, 17% judiciary and justice, 6% standard of living, 5% general political situation, 4% health, 3% EU integration, 2% human rights, democracy and freedom, and only 1% considered this problem to be inter-ethnic relations. The numbers clearly show that the majority believes that inter--ethnic tensions are easing. A most concerning issue, one that affects both the Macedonians and Albanians, but also all others living in the state, is at the very bottom of the list (NDI Poll Results, 2020). This may be due to balanced equal representation in public institutions and their employment policy, an obligation taken from the OFA (the current makeup: 73.93% Macedonians, 20.41% Albanians, 2.07% Turks, 1.21% Romanies, 0.93% Serbs, 0.43% Bosniaks, 0.38% Vlachs, and 0.54% other communities) (Annual Public Administration Report, 2019). Another reason may be the fact that the citizens share their feelings about existential issues affecting their lives. In another poll, they expressed distrust in state institutions and feelings of exclusion. Once again, ethnic background played no part in it, the majority of citizens have a similar stand

on this issue, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin (Maleska, 2019). Voters have also shown concern about the direction of the country: 44% believe that the country is moving in the wrong direction. The support of NATO membership and joining the EU is still high, although not as high as in the previous decades – a consequence of the solutions to overcome open bilateral disputes with the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Bulgaria (NDI Poll Results, 2020). The 2008 global economic crisis and internal problems within the EU put the issue of future enlargements aside. Recent inertia at the highest level to prevent unreasonable demands from delaying the process threatens to open the Pandora's box and endanger the European perspective of the whole region. EU officials and politicians once again failed to understand that without the integration "prize," political elites may backslide in key areas of democracy and reinforce the ethno-rhetoric as a justification for the failed process. Today, although the fragility index shows improvement, the country has stepped forward significantly over the years; however, the situation is still not ideal due to the high percentage of factionalized elites and group grievances (Figure Fund for Peace, 2020).

Graph 2: Fund for Peace; 0 (low) – 120 (high).
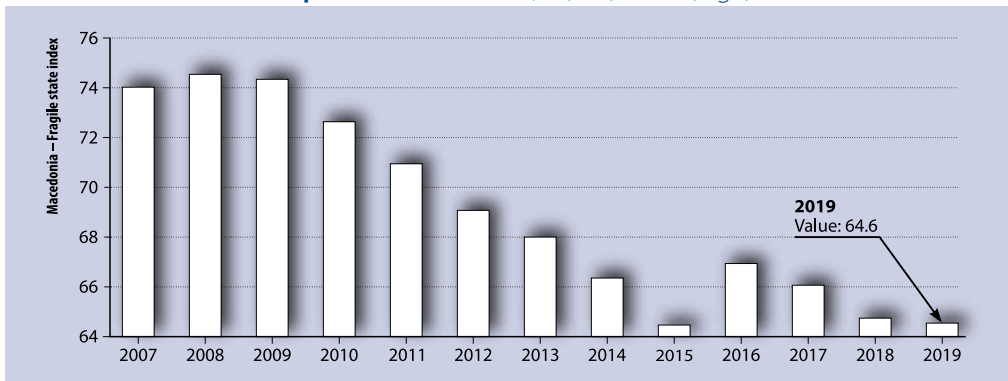
Seen through a twenty-year kaleidoscope, OFA still divides experts on the issue of building a multi-ethnic state. The question remains whether it managed to promote the rights of the smaller communities or there is still a lot to be done for its full implementation. The analysis has shown that Macedonian authorities, in restoring the previously *annulled minority rights* within the international legal framework, managed to *improve the internal situation* and regain the citizens' trust in state institutions and *their proper functioning.* Among other things, this resulted in an increased education rate of minorities and their employment in state institutions, which in turn contributed to the lower unemployment rate and thus to the *decrease of the odds for a future conflict outburst.*

Conclusions

The paper carefully examined whether the theoretical concepts of conflict outburst occurred in modern states. The analysis of collected data, based on a chronological sequence of events within the thirty years of political processes in the Republic of North Macedonia from its independence, confirmed that the 2001 conflict in the Republic of North Macedonia matched to a great extent the theoretical and expert notions of state instability.

Self-identification, the need for security and cohesion, mainly achieved within distinct ethnic groups, the growing mistrust toward members of other ethnic groups, were among the main triggers of conflict. Ethnic tensions and mistrust among different ethnic and religious groups, as well as intolerance toward the *other*, existed long before the independence; but what really kept the fire of hatred and mistrust burning were the facts of continuous poverty and the lack of perspective for ordinary people. Confidence in state institutions and the rule of law challenge and threaten the stability of the whole region and continue to represent one of the root causes of conflict outbursts.

However, compared to other models of ethnic conflict, the Macedonian conflict of 2001 has been evaluated as a moderate outburst of tensions, with a prompt reaction resulting in a diplomatic success for the country and the region. Today, divergent experiences and memories of the two largest communities regarding the truth and the root causes of the conflict still remain. The Albanian viewpoint is filled with the sense of exclusion, while Macedonian community fears the thralls of their never-ending demands. The gradual implementation of the OFA, as well as the demands that were not originally provided by the Agreement, led to the relaxation of inter-ethnic relations in the state, although the society did not internalize in full the features of a true citizen--based concept. The EU membership package, supported by the carrot-and-stick rule, helped the country carry out these sensitive reforms through the years, as the majority believes this is their favoured future. Hence, sustainable assistance from the European Union and other international donors supporting the OFA will continue to be crucial in the years to come.

On a more general note, the contemporary models of conflict detection outlined in this paper demonstrated that conflicts can be predicted well in advance. Another lesson to be learned is that power of multilateralism, combined with the proven effectiveness of the fragility index analysis, may be useful in the detection of future state instabilities and the prevention of major disasters in potential conflict regions. This leads to the conclusion that each political issue causing societal antagonism should be resolved through dialogue and compromise, together with external mediation, if needed, since conflict damages, both physical and political, cost the country in question much more in the long run.

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Sjeverna Makedonija nakon Ohridskog okvirnog sporazuma: (ne)stabilnost države
Sažetak

Pokreti za „neovisnost pokrenuti krajem hladnog rata završili su kolapsom država i stvaranjem novih država diljem europskoga kontinenta. Desetljeće obojeno nasilnim ratovima na Balkanu nije učinilo Republiku Makedoniju otpornom na etnički sukob koji je izbio 2001. godine. Ishod u obliku takozvanog Ohridskog okvirnog sporazuma imao je za cilj poboljšati prava manjina i omogućiti podjelu moći u odlučivanju, kako na lokalnoj tako i na centralnoj razini. Cilj je ovog rada utvrditi poklapaju li se teorijski obrasci u proučavanju nestabilnosti država s uzrocima izbijanja makedonskog sukoba iz 2001. Pokušat će otkriti i je li sukob rezultat manjinske diskriminacije, nesposobnosti državnih institucija da kontroliraju teritorij, loše ekonomske situacije i neravnomjernog regionalnog razvoja nakon osamostaljenja ili je riječ o kombinaciji čimbenika koji su - potpuno ili djelomično – pridonijeli njegovom izbijanju. Članak će pokušati utvrditi je li suočavanje s tim čimbenicima dva desetljeća kasnije smanjilo etničke razdjelnice u državi.

Ključne riječi: nestabilnost država; etnički sukob; politička retorika; identitet; manjina; Sjeverna Makedonija