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Republic of Macedonia and the Dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: a Peaceful Exit in a Time of Violence (1991-1993)

Abstract

The article addresses the Republic of Macedonia's struggle for independence and its peaceful and diplomatic exit from Yugoslavia. The study covers the period from the Macedonian referendum for independence, held on the 8th of September 1991, until the country's accession to the United Nations, under the name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on the 8th of April 1993.

Keywords

Macedonian question, Yugoslav crisis, Ten-day war, JNA, Badinter commission

Introduction

The disintegration of Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century, during the "gentle revolutions" in Eastern Europe, provoked a great crisis in the Balkans. Soon enough the crisis became a threat not only to the peninsula's security, but also to the entire continent. Because some of the problems still remain unresolved, the consequences of the Yugoslav wars continue to resonate to the present day. The crisis affected all republics in the federation, but the degree of the severity of the problems varied among the republics. Under the pressure of the events, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM) was forced to decide its fate and begin its exit out of the federation. It was one of the smallest and most underdeveloped republics in Yugoslavia. The SRM had to find a peaceful solution to the obstacles standing in the way of its independence. Its chief concerns were soothing its relationship with Greece, becoming a member of the UN, and avoiding military conflict.

Origins of the crisis

The multinational Yugoslav federation was built after World War II as a complex structure of political checks and balances aimed at controlling the various republics that constituted it. Since the constitution of 1974, the republics enjoyed a broad autonomy. The system, however, worked smoothly only if two conditions were present – the availability of a final arbitrator and economic prosperity.¹ After the death of Josip Broz Tito on the 4th of May 1980, both of these disappeared. The country was burdened with significant external debt, while high inflation rates led to increased poverty. Some economic problems were due to the global recession in the 1980s, the loss of markets, and rising interest rates. Others had their root in the awkward combination of federal structures and local governments. Attempts to stabilize the federation proved ineffective because they were based on outdated economic policies which offered nothing innovative. By the middle of the decade, a political crisis emerged in the federation. Yugoslavia became fragmented not only in cultural and economic, but also in political terms. The new leaders who came to power in the republics no longer shared common interests. The Yugoslav Communist Party was gradually losing its legitimacy, and alongside it the federal authorities also lost their legitimacy.² As nationalist ideas started to prevail, tensions between the republics grew. In the last two years of the 1980s, Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević started to change the political and ethnic balance in the federation by ending the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina and installing a puppet regime in Montenegro.³ These actions allowed Belgrade to pursue its political goals through a Belgrade-centered voting block that controlled four out of eight votes in the Federal presidency and to neutralize the influence of the other Yugoslav republics.⁴

The politics of the Serbian boss were a product of the nationalist revisionism of the Serbian intellectual elite from the 1980s, for whom the Yugoslav federation was a spiritual, political and economic loss for the Serbian nation. These ideas were developed to the fullest by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) in its Memorandum, which was published in the newspaper “Večernje novosti” on the 24th and 25th of September 1986 and led to a huge scandal in the federation.⁵ Milošević embraced Serbian nationalism and used it in his drive for power. He started to pursue the forging of an enlarged Ser-

¹ Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babel. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milošević*, 4th edition (New York: Westview Press, 2002), 27-28.

² Aleksandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia. Nationalism and War in the Balkans*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press LTD, 2000), 77.

³ Mojmir Mrak, Matija Rojec and Carlos Silva-Jáuregui, *Slovenia. From Yugoslavia to the European Union* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2004), 5-6.

⁴ Ivo Banac, “What Happened in the Balkans (or Rather Ex-Yugoslavia)?” *SAGE Journals*, October 7, 2009, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0888325409346821>, 464.

⁵ The memorandum presented the Serbian nation as oppressed, divided by the constitution of 1974, economically subjugated by Croatia and Slovenia, a victim of cultural disintegration along republican lines and genocide in Kosovo

bian state which had to consist of the three republics of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Croatian Serbs.⁶ His plan was to try to impose Serbian control upon a centralized form of the federation or, in case this attempt failed, to create a Greater Serbia in its place.⁷

In the late 1980s, a last-ditch attempt was made to democratize the federation and transform its devastated economy into a free market economy. Ante Marković's federal government launched a shock therapy and imposed strict monetary and credit restrictions.⁸ Unfortunately, the Western countries did not offer financial assistance needed for reforms to succeed and cooled the federation's hopes of a fast integration with the European Community.⁹ When the Cold war ended, Yugoslavia lost its geopolitical importance as a crucial buffer zone between the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.¹⁰

Despite the fact that the economic situation was disastrous, the reform of the political system became the main controversy between the republics. Slovenia was against constitutional changes aimed at reducing the rights of republics and autonomous regions as proposed by Serbia. Despite its dissatisfaction, the amendments were adopted in November of 1988 and granted the federal government the right to intervene in republican affairs and to create a single tax, monetary and financial system. In Slovenia, these changes raised concerns because Slovenians did not want to fund the underdeveloped republics and regions, like the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo, nor to absorb the negative effects of a failed federal economy. Another cause for concern became the undermined constitutional equilibrium by Milošević's campaign. Soon, Slovenian desire for independence grew.¹¹

In 1990, Slovenia and Croatia proposed transforming Yugoslavia into a confederation without a central government and a capital, but with a common market and a monetary union like the European Community. Their proposal was opposed by the Serbian idea of an "efficient federation", which was in the end the only one offered to the Federal Assembly for consideration.¹² During

and Metohia. See Ivo Banac, "The Fearful Asymmetry of War: The Causes and Consequences of Yugoslavia's Demise," *Daedalus* 121/2 (1992): 149-150.

⁶ Josip Glaurdić, "Inside the Serbian War Machine: The Milošević Telephone Intercepts 1991-1992" SAGE Journals, 2009, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0888325408326788>, 89-91.

⁷ Josip Glaurdić, "The Owl of Minerva Flies Only at Dusk?: British Diplomacy on the Eve of Yugoslav Wars" SAGE Journals, 2013, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0888325413484758>, 547.

⁸ Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia*, 101-103.

⁹ Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe. Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 44.

¹⁰ Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe. Yugoslavia and its Destroyers* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 7-8.

¹¹ Iskra Vasiljeva Čurkina, *История Словении* (Saint Petersburg: Алетейя, 2011), 411-414.

¹² Viktor Meier, *Yugoslavia. A History of its Demise* (London: Routledge, 1999), 151-152.

the first months of the next year, Croatia and Slovenia raised the issue again, but nothing happened. Differences also arose with regard to the borders and the army. For a while, Slovenia continued to maintain the idea of an asymmetric federation or confederation, but then, along with Croatia, decided to move away from the federation altogether.

On the 25th of January 1991, the Macedonian Parliament adopted a “Declaration on the Sovereignty of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia”. It allowed authorities to maneuver in the deepening Yugoslav crisis, while the federal government was practically being ignored by the republics. With this document, the Parliament declared that the entire political, economic, and legal system would be based on the constitution of the republic and its laws. The federal laws would not be applied if they contradicted the constitution, the republic’s laws, and the decisions of the Parliament. The adoption of a new constitution and new state symbols was also envisaged. According to Article 4, the SRM would have to decide about its future relations with the other republics of Yugoslavia. Unless a new federal treaty was reached, the country would act on its sovereign right and establish a way of negotiating, with the other republics, the federation’s legal heritage and bilateral relations, according to the rules of international law.¹³

Independence, in the declaration, was presented in a conditional form, especially when compared to the actions of Croatia and Slovenia, and can be considered as a kind of tactic to protect national interests rather than as a method of achieving independence.¹⁴ For example, Slovenia changed its constitution in 1989 by adding in it the right to independent financial, foreign and interior policy, the right to self-determination including separation, and the right to hold a referendum for independence. The Slovenes practically did not have a Serb minority in their country, but they witnessed how Milošević used street protests, regional coups, the mobilization of Serb minorities, vilification campaigns in the Belgrade press to destabilize his opponents and to suppress other republics to his will. The amendments were adopted because of the fear that Serbia would attack Slovenian sovereignty within the federation.¹⁵ On the 2nd of July 1990, the republic adopted the “Declaration of the Sovereignty of the Republic of Slovenia” which pointed out that Slovenia would implement only those federal laws and regulations that did not contravene its constitution. The independence referendum was held on the 23rd of December 1990. In it, Slovenians were asked “Should the Republic of Slovenia become an independent and sovereign state?” The citizens of Slovenia answered the question and voted 93.5% in favor of independence. The voter turnout was also high at 88.5%.¹⁶

¹³ Декларација за сувереност на Социјалистичка Република Македонија (Skopje, 25.01.1991), 1-2, <http://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/suverenost.pdf>.

¹⁴ Angel Dimitrov, *Раждането на една нова држава. Република Македонија меѓу југославизма и национализма* (Sofia: Академично издателство “Марин Дринов”, 2011), 108.

¹⁵ Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe*, 53-56.

¹⁶ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Sofia, FO 48-3/26/3.

The “Declaration on the Sovereignty”, adopted on the 25th of January 1991, was accompanied by another document – the “Platform of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia for the future organization of Yugoslavia”. At that time, SRM’s representatives took part in debates about the future of the federation and sought a new model for Yugoslavia. This was the reason why Skopje did not take a firm stand and left open the possibility of preserving the Yugoslav federation. At the same time, it pleaded its future settlement to be negotiated by the Yugoslav republics. The Macedonian political stance argued for the equality of all republics and was against all kinds of superiority and majority in international relations between them, as well as against any forms of political unitarism, hegemony, and centralism under the guise of a reduced or asymmetrical federation.¹⁷ The republic did not have a desire to leave the federation and it expected the signing of a new federal treaty. Because of that it concentrated all its efforts towards the negotiations, during which it wanted to achieve the best possible outcomes for itself.

On the 27th of January 1991, the new parliament held elections for the president of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The only candidate was Kiro Gligorov¹⁸. His advantages were his patriotism, his career in federal institutions, his political contacts and popularity (including among Albanians). After the first unsuccessful vote, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)¹⁹

¹⁷ Kiro Gligorov, *Македонија е сè што имаме* (Skopje: Култура, 2002), 178-179.

¹⁸ Kiro Gligorov (3rd of May 1917-1st of January 2012) started his political career as a member of the Antifascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) in 1943. After WWII he moved to Belgrade and occupied various positions in the federal government. He became an influential economist and as vice president of the Federal Executive Council from 1967 to 1969 was responsible for the country’s finance. Gligorov was notable for his pro-reformist orientation and his participation in implementing the first free market-based modifications of the Yugoslav economy. He was a member of the presidency of Yugoslavia from 1969 to 1972 and president of the National Assembly of the federation from 1974 to 1978. During the 1980s he occupied sinecures, but made a successful political comeback in the political life in the Republic of Macedonia.

¹⁹ VMRO-DPMNE is a nationalistic political party founded in Skopje on the 17th of June 1990. The party considers itself the ideological successor of the historic Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) – a rebel movement formed in 1893 for the liberation of the Ottoman province of Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE won the first free elections held in the same year on the 11th of November 1990 with a second round on the 25th of November 1990. It became the strongest party in the new parliament winning 38 of the 120 seats. The victory of VMRO-DPMNE did not bring the party to power but put the country in line with the other republics where the anti-Communist nationalist opposition won the multi-party elections – Slovenia (DEMOS), Croatia (HDZ), Bosnia-Herzegovina (coalition of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)), in comparison with Serbia and Montenegro where the Communist-successor parties of Milošević and Momir Bulatović triumphed at the elections. See Ivo Banac, “What Happened in the Balkans (or Rather Ex-Yugoslavia)?,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 23/4 (2009): 464-465.

decided to give its support to Gligorov in exchange for the posts of the deputy chairman of the republic and the prime minister. After a consensus was reached on the 27th of January 1991 with 114 votes out of 119, the Parliament chose Kiro Gligorov as the president of the republic.²⁰ In his first speech Gligorov spoke about the need for a broad consensus on issues like the sovereignty of the state, the fate of the compatriots in neighboring states, the relations with the diaspora and broader international relations. Gligorov was convinced that the Macedonian people, divided in three countries, would sooner or later live in a single cultural and economic space and would realize their legitimate national goals.²¹ The president also warned that the danger emanating from neighboring states had not disappeared.

Gligorov's chairmanship acted as a counterweight to the victory of the VMRO-DPMNE at the elections. The settlement between them, however, was not respected because Gligorov rejected all four proposals for the post of prime minister made by Ljubčo Georgievski, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE. This forced the party to return the mandate. Following that, Gligorov formed an expert government and economics professor Nikola Klyusev became prime minister. Most of the ministers were connected to the Communist Party.²² With that, Gligorov quickly became the leading figure in the state. He controlled the government and consequently the state's position on the Yugoslav crisis. Under his leadership, the country tried to maneuver between the republics that wanted to preserve the federation and those which chose independence. The opposition blamed the president for his pro-Serbian orientation and wanted a stronger push for independence, but it did not have the power to change anything.

Despite the difference in the approach in comparison with the other republics, Macedonian actions were noticed by Belgrade. It immediately accused Bulgaria of being the instigator of such actions. Bulgaria was also accused of implementing anti-Yugoslav and anti-Macedonian policies.²³ The Bul-

²⁰ Gligorov, *Македонија*, 166-168.

²¹ Стенографски белешки од Петата седница на Собранието на Социјалистичка Република Македонија, (Skopje, 27.01.1991), 13-23, <https://so-branie.mk/WBStorage/Files/05sed27jan91god.pdf>.

²² Gligorov, *Македонија*, 182-184.

²³ When the Allies won the Second World War, Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito negotiated with Stalin and settled the Macedonian issue in favor of Yugoslavia. See Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito. Cominformist splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 30-31. The Macedonian People's Republic was established, and the Macedonian nation began to form at a fast pace. The Macedonian nationhood was a result of the developments in the 1930s and 1940s. Before the Second World War and the creation of the Yugoslavian federation, the idea of a separate Macedonian nation was upheld by small intellectual circles while the majority of the Slavic population in Vardar Macedonia with accomplished national consciousness was devoted to the Bulgarian cultural tradition. See Naoum Kaytchev, "Being Macedonian: Different Types of Ethnic Identifications in the Contemporary Republic of Macedonia," *Politeja* 11/30 (2014): 123-131, <https://doi.org/10.12797/politeja.11.2014.30.13>; Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1995), 93-98; Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re)Writing History. Historiography in the Southeast Europe after Socialism* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004),

garian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a supporting declaration on the 27th of February 1991 in which Macedonian sovereignty was officially recognized and considered as part of the common aspiration of the small states of the USSR and SFRY for independence. The Bulgarian government declared that it had no intention to impede the establishment of the statehood of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and accepted its declaration of sovereignty as a legal act. It was pointed out that Bulgaria would not make territorial claims.²⁴

173. The war changed everything. As a young nation, Macedonia did not have a centuries-old history, but it managed to present itself as the inheritor of the ancient Greek Macedonia and the medieval Bulgarian state, language, and Church. Tito wanted to take Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria and add it to the Macedonian People's Republic. He even had an ambition to obtain Aegean Macedonia from Greece. The supposed Bulgarian-Yugoslav federation, designed by him and the Bulgarian leader Georgi Dimitrov, became an excuse for border changes. See Ivo Banac, ed., *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933-1949* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003), xxxix-xlii. The BCP did not mind handing over Pirin Macedonia in return for the Western Outlands lost after World War I. The party supported the plan for a Balkan federation built as a reflection of the USSR. The idea was that such a federation would resolve all national questions on the peninsula and unite all Balkan nations under the communist flag. While the BCP implemented this policy, it tried to artificially divide the Bulgarian nation and accepted the idea of the existence of a Rhodope nation, a Dobrudzha nation, a Thracian nation, and a Macedonian nation. See Coço Biljarski and Iva Burilova, ed., *Македонският въпрос в българо-югославските отношения 1950-1967 г. Документален сборник* (Sofia: Държавна агенция „Архиви“, 2009), 260-261. Following this type of policy, branded as left-wing sectarianism during Zhivkov's rule, the BCP decided to carry out a denationalization of the Pirin region under the guise of cultural autonomy. See Evgenija Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Българските преходи 1939-2010* (Sofia: Парадигма, 2010), 76-77. After the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform in 1948, Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations entered a crisis period and the "Macedonian question" became a major problem for bilateral relations. The party's policy was officially abolished by Todor Zhivkov in 1963. The existence of a Macedonian nation prior to World War II was categorically rejected as a falsification of history. Relations with Yugoslavia then proceeded with periods of relaxation and increasing tensions, depending on the international situation. It is important to notice that the federation often used the "Macedonian Question" in order to ease domestic political pressures and periodically pushed for the recognition of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria on the basis of the previously given cultural autonomy to the Pirin region. Sofia categorically rejected such requests in order to protect its territorial integrity and to defend itself from foreign interference in its internal affairs. Because of the interests of the USSR, Sofia was obliged to maintain good relations with Yugoslavia during the Cold War. This complicated Bulgarian foreign policy. Bulgaria chose a defensive position and mostly complained about the hate speech against it in SRM and the formation of the Macedonian nation on an anti-Bulgarian basis. Todor Zhivkov tried many times to convince Yugoslavia to sign a joint statement declaring that the two countries did not have territorial pretensions towards each other's territories and that both countries would not interfere in each other's internal affairs or try to manipulate each other's minorities, but without success. See Evgenija Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Българските преходи*, 199-201.

²⁴ Biser Vančev, *България и Югославската криза (1989-1995)* (Sofia: УИ Климент Охридски, 2009), 52.

In Skopje, this action was perceived as a hypocritical interference in internal affairs.

While Gligorov opted to wait, Croatia and Slovenia established the border between them and, during a secret meeting in Zagreb, made an agreement to announce their independence from the federation officially on the 25th of June 1991. On that day, Slovenian authorities declared independence and took control over their borders, customs, and airspace. The European Community decided in advance not to recognize the two republics and signed a loan with the Yugoslav government.²⁵ The West's policy was aimed at maintaining the stability in Europe and the preservation of Yugoslavia because it feared the consequences of its dissolution. According to this point of view, the federation's decay would be used by the Soviet Union as a model with nuclear repercussions, or it would turn the Balkans into a region of permanent instability.²⁶ The EC's position encouraged the Yugoslav prime minister and the federal government ordered the army to restore Yugoslav territorial integrity. The JNA (Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija or Yugoslav National Army) High Command prepared for action, despite the fact that its supreme commander was the federal presidency, and not Ante Marković's government. This decision started the so-called "Ten-day war" which lasted from the 27th of June until the 6th of July 1991. Slovenian Territorial Defense forces put up a brave fight, but they were not a match for the JNA, which quite easily captured the borders. After this, the real problems began. Slobodan Milošević did not support the army's actions from the beginning.²⁷ Slovenia succeeded in presenting itself as a democratic country and victim of communist armed forces and the JNA lost any unspoken support from the West for its efforts to hold the federation together. Even Ante Marković left the army without political backup when the European leaders prepared a shared response to the crisis.²⁸ The war officially ended with the signing of the "Brioni Declaration" on the 8th of July, with the help of the European Community.

The "Brioni Declaration" did not just aim to end the war in Slovenia, it dealt with the "Yugoslav crisis" as a whole. According to the declaration, all Yugoslav armed forces had to be withdrawn to their barracks, a three-month long suspension of the Croatian and Slovenian declarations of independence had to be implemented, and peace negotiations on all aspects of the future of Yugoslavia had to begin no later than the 1st of August 1991. After the end of the "Ten-day war", the Federal Presidency ceased to function, and Croatia and Slovenia continued to lobby for recognition.

²⁵ Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe*, 169-170.

²⁶ Mark Almond, *Europe's Backyard War: The War in the Balkans* (London: Heineman, 1994), 44-45.

²⁷ The Serbian leader reached a deal with the Slovenian leadership on the 24th of January 1991 in Belgrade to let Slovenia leave the federation in exchange for its understanding of his program to unify all Serbs in one state. With this agreement Milošević broke up the Slovenian-Croatian alliance. See Adam LeBor, *Milosevic: A Biography* (London, Bloomsbury, 2002), 135.

²⁸ Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe*, 176-179.

Immediately after the negotiations were over, Serbian leadership withdrew the army from Slovenia and purged the undesirable cadre from it. Afterwards, Milošević filled the vacant spots in the army through a mobilization which included Macedonian conscripts, and the army moved towards its real target – Croatia. Together with Serbian Territorial Defense units and volunteers, the JNA soon occupied Croatian Baranja, encircled Osijek and Vukovar, and expanded its offensive throughout Dalmatia.²⁹

The referendum for independence

At first, the leadership of the SRM tried to gain support for a peaceful solution to the Yugoslav crisis. Nevertheless, the first independent foreign policy move happened between the 9th and 12th of July 1991 with President Kiro Gligorov's visit to Turkey. It was followed by a visit to France to seek support for the Gligorov-Izetbegović platform for rebuilding the federation. A Macedonian delegation, headed by Nikola Klyusev, visited Albania on the 25th and 26th of July 1991. The aim was to establish international contacts in the case of the most unfavorable scenario for Macedonia, the breakup of the Yugoslav Federation.³⁰

When Serbs began their offensive in Croatia, military activities got closer to the republic and the coffins of soldiers (Macedonians who served in the federal army) started to arrive from the front. Since the number of the soldiers killed in the war exceeded 30, women's organizations held a protest rally in Skopje and the authorities decided to protect the soldiers from new mobilizations. During the night of the 22nd of August 1991, the Minister of the Interior Jordan Mijalkov seized, in secret, military records on new recruits. This was dangerous due to the fact that the federal army was still present there and was hence able to cause an incident at any time. It was impossible to predict whether Serbs would abandon the country or try to make it a part of the projected "Greater Serbia". The psychosis was so strong that the Minister of the Interior advised his colleagues and the president not to sleep in their homes for the next few days because they could be arrested by JNA officers in the middle of the night.³¹

On the 6th of August 1991, the Macedonian Parliament decided to hold a referendum on the 8th of September 1991 with the question "Are you in favor of a sovereign and independent state of Macedonia, with the right to enter into a future union of the sovereign states of Yugoslavia?"³² The republic was economically dependent on the rest of Yugoslavia because of federal subsidies, but the prospect of remaining in a Serb dominated Yugoslavia left no other

²⁹ Ibid., 205.

³⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Sofia, FO 48-3/198/2-3.

³¹ Gligorov, *Македонија*, 187-190.

³² Извештај за спроведувањето и резултатот од претходното изјаснување на граѓаните на Република Македонија на референдумот, одржан на 8 септември 1991 (Skopje, 20.09.1991), https://old.sec.mk/star/arhiva/1990-Referendum/Izvestaj_za_sproveden_referendum_1990.pdf.

choice but to leave. Therefore, when Milošević began solving his problems with the help of the army, its leadership understood that it was better to show the desire for independence before it was too late.³³ However, the way in which the question was formulated displayed that independence was not the ultimate political goal and that the referendum was primarily seen as a diplomatic tool. The second part of the question showed that the SRM wanted to join a future federation. If that proved, in the end, to be impossible, the referendum was going to be used as proof that the people in the republic wanted independence.

The European Community was forced to hold an extraordinary meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the 27th and 28th of August 1991 to adopt a “Declaration on Yugoslavia”.³⁴ It stated that there would be no recognition of border changes that had not been achieved through peaceful means. The Commission and the Member States convened a peace conference and set up an arbitration procedure. Thus, the EC Yugoslavia Conference (from 1992 – the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia) was established and the Community became the main political factor that took the responsibility to deal with the crisis. The idea to organize an international conference was proposed by Germany and the arbitration commission was proposed by France. The process of a peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the EC’s policy towards the Yugoslav crisis and allowed them to act freely and to use the necessary pressure.³⁵ However the Member States of the EC were divided into two groups according to their approach to the problem – while Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Italy and Portugal wanted to restrain the aggressors, i.e. Serbia and the JNA, France, United Kingdom and the Netherlands preferred to put pressure on the weaker side for a quick resolution of the crisis.³⁶

The referendum on independence was held on the 8th of September 1991 in the SRM. It was supported by the entire population, except for the Albanians, and 95.09% of the people who voted gave a positive answer. The Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Victor Valkov immediately announced that Bulgaria would recognize the state, but reminded the public that his country did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian nation.³⁷ In response to the

³³ Bernar Lori, *Балканска Европа от 1945 до наши дни* (Sofia: Колибри, 2005), 170.

³⁴ Snezana Trifunovska, *Yugoslavia Through Documents. From its Creation to its Dissolution* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994), 333.

³⁵ Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe*, 206-207.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁷ While Greece refused to recognize Skopje under a name which it considered to be a part of its Hellenistic heritage, Bulgaria, after the democratization process, formulated a new policy towards the Republic of Macedonia. Bulgaria decided to recognize it as an independent state and decided to help it keep its territorial integrity. This was done to prevent an outbreak of war close to the Bulgarian borders and to sever the Serbian influence over the young republic, which was thought to be the chief impediment in solving the problems between the two countries. On the other hand, the Macedonian nation was not recognized because Bulgaria suspected that such a move would lead towards claims for mino-

announced Bulgarian statement, Kiro Gligorov issued a statement expressing the importance of a Bulgarian recognition of the Republic of Macedonia (RM) and commented that national self-awareness was a personal matter.³⁸

The Declaration for independence and the new constitution

At that time, Bulgaria expected a visit from the SRM. Prime Minister Nikola Klyusev and Minister of Foreign Affairs Denko Maleski were invited by the Bulgarian side with the idea of holding a frank discussion about the problems between the two countries. Simultaneously, a meeting between Bulgarian Prime Minister Dimitar Popov and his colleagues Konstantinos Mitzotakis and Slobodan Milošević was being prepared in Athens.³⁹ Greece organized this trilateral meeting for the 19th of September 1991. During the meeting, a lot of emphasis was supposed to be put on Skopje even though the stated goal was the creation of an overall new equilibrium in the Balkans. Greece wanted to discuss Macedonia in particular in order to push its agenda of blocking the formation of an independent Macedonian state. Athens insisted on having a monopoly on the Macedonian name and accused Skopje of stealing its history and interfering in its internal affairs through false claims about a non-existing Macedonian minority in Greece. During the meeting with the Bulgarian and Serbian representatives, Greek diplomats intended to find a solution favoring only those present at the meeting.

Before the meeting, Bulgarian president Zhelyu Zhelev invited his prime minister, Dimitar Popov, to talk about this issue and explained to him why such a meeting was inappropriate. As a result of this conversation, Popov agreed to put off the invitation. The president also made a TV statement that night, explaining that no talks about the Republic of Macedonia can be held in the absence of its state leadership.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the media received a declaration that Bulgaria recognized the will of the people expressed in the referendum. This frank Bulgarian position convinced the Macedonian leadership to send Prime Minister Klyusev to Sofia on the 17th of September. He was going to meet with Bulgarian leaders and talk about the upcoming meeting in Athens. In his meetings with Zhelev and Popov, Klyusev explained his country's views on this issue and found full understanding.⁴¹ His visit ended with

riety or territory rights. It is important to note that during the Cold war Yugoslav SRM leadership used the federal authorities to pressure Bulgaria and Greece to recognize the Macedonian minority in their respective countries. However, during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the country was left alone, and from then on it had to deal with its problems on its own. Its path towards independence was hampered by many problems, most of them connected with its neighbors Bulgaria and Greece. They, from their part, accused Skopje of hate speech, theft of history and cultural heritage, they spoke of unrealistic claims regarding Macedonian minorities in their countries and interference in their internal affairs.

³⁸ Central State Archives of Bulgaria, Sofia, FO 117/50/55/28-29.

³⁹ Ibid., 2-8.

⁴⁰ Zelyu Zhelev, *В голямата политика* (Sofia: Труд, 1998), 151-152.

⁴¹ Gligorov, *Македонија*, 427.

an official statement that the two countries had no territorial claims towards each other's territories. Although Klyusev came to seek support from Bulgaria, he held another meeting in the Yugoslav embassy with the representatives of the Macedonian organization OMO-Ilinden, which pursued separatist aims.⁴² The Prime Minister allowed himself this provocative act in order to squash the accusations of his pro-Serbian political opponents that he was a Bulgarian puppet.

On the same day, the "Declaration on the sovereign and self-reliant Republic of Macedonia" was adopted. It declared that the Republic of Macedonia would respect international norms, the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in interior affairs of other states. It also declared that the country had an interest in the process of European integration and in stronger participation in bilateral and multilateral types of cooperation on the Balkan peninsula. The republic had no territorial claims towards any neighboring state. It would continue to pursue a policy of respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, and, within this framework, the freedom and rights of Macedonians who, as national minorities, lived in neighboring countries as well.⁴³

On the 3rd of October 1991, the Presidium of Yugoslavia held a meeting in the presence of only Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Kosovo, and adopted a decision to seize the functions of the Federation Assembly and to place the JNA under its control.⁴⁴ The very next day, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia condemned these actions and announced that it would defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also requested an immediate return of Macedonian JNA soldiers from the battlefields in Croatia.

At that time in Skopje, the priority was given to the adoption of a new constitution. On the 15th of November 1991, Kiro Gligorov defended its civilian concept in a speech. The constitution was adopted with a large number of votes – over two thirds, but without the participation of the Albanians.⁴⁵ It stated that the Republic of Macedonia was a sovereign, independent, democratic, and social state. The existing border was inviolable and could be changed only in accordance with the constitution. The official language was Macedonian with its Cyrillic alphabet, and the capital was Skopje. The Republic was supposed to take care of the rights of Macedonian minorities in neighboring states as well as take care of emigrants from the country, assisting their cultural development and encouraging relations with them according to Article 49.

⁴² Dimitrov, *Раждането на една нова држава*, 145.

⁴³ Декларација по повод плебисцитарно изразената воља на граѓаните за суверена и самостојна македонска држава Македонија (Skopje, 17.09.1991), <http://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/nezavisnost.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Elena Jurevna Guskova, *История Югославского кризиса (1990-2000)* (Moscow: Русское право/Русский национальный фонд, 2001), 106.

⁴⁵ Albanians boycotted the new constitution because they feared that their rights were being downgraded in comparison with the previous constitution. In it, the SRM was described as state of Macedonian and other nationalities while in the new one it was written that the Republic of Macedonia is the state of Macedonian people and all citizens. See Gligorov, *Македонија*, 221-222.

Greece was furious about the mentioned possibility of changing borders in Skopje's constitution and saw this as a sign of future territorial claims. Serbia, on the other hand, was considering how to defend Serbs in the Republic of Macedonia against pro-Bulgarian VMRO-DPMNE. Bulgaria also criticized Article 49 of the constitution but not publicly and at the same time tried to help the young country. Bulgarian Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov visited Italy and the Vatican, where he publicly supported the independence of the Yugoslav republics. The same opinion he presented to the European Community's ambassadors during their meeting in Sofia.

The Agreement with the JNA and the next steps towards independence

On the 21st of November 1991, the Republic of Macedonia managed to sign an agreement with the JNA for its relocation. According to the agreement, the JNA was obliged to leave the country no later than the 14th of April 1992 with its military staff, weapons, ammunition, and movable property. This left the young country completely unprotected from external aggression, but at the same time removed a huge obstacle on the path towards independence.⁴⁶ Also, the peaceful withdrawal of the army was a diplomatic success. The main problems the RM faced after that were the supply of weapons and the formation of a territorial defense force for border protection. The country was deprived of all armament when the JNA left the republic and did not have enough money to build a proper army.

On the 2nd of December 1991, the United Nations (UN) member states received an official letter from President Kiro Gligorov requesting the recognition of his country as an independent state. It pointed out that the Republic of Macedonia advocated the principle of peaceful self-determination and refused to participate in the war. The state was prepared for constructive cooperation with its neighbors and countries around the world and had fulfilled all legal conditions for the recognition of its statehood. The letter also warned that a non-recognition of the RM as an independent state could create tensions and partitions.⁴⁷ Greece immediately rejected the request. Bulgaria, for its part, waited to see the reaction of the European Community and was ready to recognize its neighbor. Turkey also expressed its will to recognize the new republic. The European Community, however, was divided on the issue.

Badinter Commission and the first recognition

On the 16th of December 1991, an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held in Brussels. The topic of discussion was the fate of Yugoslavia. While Greece put the emphasis on the recognition of the "Republic of Skopje", Germany exerted strong pressure over its allies to

⁴⁶ Trajan Gocovski, *Кризите во независна Република Македонија* (Skopje: Култура, 2010), 78-83.

⁴⁷ Ahil Tuntev, *Република Македонија. Прва декада (1990-1999)* (Skopje: МИ-АН, 2005), 76-78.

approve the break-up of Yugoslavia and in the end succeed.⁴⁸ On the same day, the EC issued two declarations in which it formulated its criteria for the recognition of Yugoslav republics and new states in Eastern Europe and the USSR.⁴⁹ In the declaration's guidelines on the recognition of new states in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union, the Member States of the EC confirmed their willingness to recognize those countries which were constituted on a democratic basis, which accepted their relevant international obligations and engaged with goodwill in the peace process and negotiations. In the other declaration – the “Declaration on Yugoslavia”, the Member States agreed to recognize the independence of all republics that fulfilled the stated conditions. In addition, the Yugoslav republics were required to commit themselves to the adoption of constitutional and political changes which would assure that they had no territorial claims towards a neighboring European Community Member and that they would not carry out hostile propaganda activities, including through the use of a name implying territorial claims. The last requirement was pushed by the Greeks and was directed against their neighbor.

A direct result of the meeting in Brussels was the creation of the Arbitration Commission in accordance with the “Declaration on Yugoslavia”. It was headed by the President of the Constitutional Court of France, Robert Badinter. The Commission had the task to develop in detail the necessary conditions for the recognition of the Yugoslav republics.

On the 19th of December 1991, the Parliament in Skopje voted for the “Declaration on the International Recognition of the Republic”. It declared that the country wanted to be internationally recognized and that it accepted the criteria and had already fulfilled the conditions adopted by the EC.⁵⁰ On the 6th of January 1992, the Parliament adopted two amendments to the Constitution in order to remove all possible obstacles for the recognition of the country. They confirmed a lack of territorial claims and the principle of non-interference in the sovereign rights and interior affairs of other states.⁵¹ The reason for these changes was the criticism from Greece.

On the 14th of January 1992, the Badinter Commission declared that the Republic of Macedonia and Slovenia fulfilled the criteria of the European Community and recommended their recognition as independent states, but the announcement of the report was delayed until the next day. During this time, Greece drew attention to the long-standing attempts of Skopje to assi-

⁴⁸ Apostolos Hristakudis, *Балканската политика на Гърция през 90-те години* (Sofia: Херон Прес, 1998), 67-68.

⁴⁹ Danilo Türk, “Recognition of States: A Comment,” *European Journal of International Law* 4/1 (1993): 72-73.

⁵⁰ Декларација за меѓународно признавање на Република Македонија како суверена и независна држава (Skopje, 19.12.1991), <http://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/priznavanje.pdf>.

⁵¹ Стенографски белешки од Дваесет и деветтата седница на Собранието на Социјалистичка Република Македонија (Skopje, 26.12.1991), <https://www.sobranie.mk/sessiondetails.nspx?sessionDetailsId=ee868c06-1caa-47f3-8af5-656924cd9fdb&Arhiva=true>.

milate the Greek cultural and historical heritage and insisted on gaining the support from the EC members.⁵²

The following day, Bulgarian Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov announced in the Bulgarian Parliament that his government recognized the four Yugoslav republics as independent states. He described this act as an expression of the Bulgarian desire to establish peace and cooperation in the Balkans. That evening, President Zhelev addressed the nation on the Bulgarian National Television. He was convinced that this recognition was an important step towards closer cooperation with all Bulgarian neighbors as well as a step forwards in the process of European integration.⁵³ Reactions outside varied according to the interests of the state. Greece blamed Bulgaria for a hasty and unwarranted recognition. Unsurprisingly, Belgrade reacted negatively as well. The recognition of the republics was defined as a flagrant violation of the UN Charter and other international documents. Turkey and Italy, however, were not against the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia.⁵⁴ On the 20th of January 1992, Skopje decided to congratulate Bulgaria on the decision made and request the establishment of diplomatic relations.⁵⁵ Till then no other country had recognized the republic.

However, Bulgaria was not in a hurry to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Macedonia. Minister of Foreign Affairs Stoyan Ganev made it clear that he wanted to wait for a time when the two countries would have clarified their relations regarding the issues of the renunciation of territorial claims and the issue of non-existent minorities in each other's countries.⁵⁶ In his memoirs, Kiro Gligorov commented that the Bulgarian government wisely built a strategic position, according to which the recognition of the state would not mean the recognition of the Macedonian nation. He admitted that nations were not a subject of recognition in international relations, but blamed Bulgaria for a half-hearted recognition because of its decision not to establish diplomatic relations at an ambassadorial level immediately after the 15th of January 1992.⁵⁷

Despite these problems between the two countries, Bulgaria continued to support the RM. On the 26th of January 1992, Philip Dimitrov discussed with the Albanian Foreign Minister the recognition of the Yugoslav republics. During the World Economic Forum in Davos on the 31st of January 1992, he spoke about the issue with Turkish Prime Minister Sulejman Demirel. In addition, Zhelev urged Slovenian President Milan Kučan and Croatian President Franjo Tuđman to recognize Republic of Macedonia. The same question was discussed with the President of Belarus.

⁵² Hristakudis, *Балканската политика*, 207.

⁵³ Zelyu Zhelev, *Обръщения на президента към народа и парламента* (Plovdiv: Христо Г. Данов, 1996), 95.

⁵⁴ *Демокрация*, 18.01.1992, no. 15, 5.

⁵⁵ *Демокрация*, 21.01.1992, no. 17, 1.

⁵⁶ *Демокрация*, 10.02.1992, no. 32, 6.

⁵⁷ Gligorov, *Македония*, 435-436.

Soon after that, Ljubčo Georgievski and Dosta Dimovska from VMRO-DPMNE paid a visit to Bulgaria. Before the press, Georgievski accused Skopje's authorities of sabotaging the relationship between the two countries by being too close with Serbia.⁵⁸ The following month began with a visit by Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov to the United States. There he pleaded for the recognition of the RM, but Washington had not yet decided.

The European Community and the Republic of Macedonia

Meanwhile, Athens was increasing its diplomatic activity. It managed to impose its position on its allies, and on the 13th of March 1992, the European Parliament concluded that the Republic of Macedonia should insert a clause in its constitution that guarantees the permanent nature of its current borders. On the 6th of April 1992, a meeting of the EC Council of Ministers was held in Luxembourg. The council decided to recognize Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent state, but also to postpone the recognition of the RM. The Bulgarian President issued a declaration on the 8th of April 1992, calling on the European Community to recognize it. According to Zhelyu Zhelev, postponing the recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia would have unpredictable consequences for its security and could lead to a new destabilization in the Balkans.⁵⁹

A "Declaration on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was adopted on the 2nd of May 1992 at the EC Foreign Ministers meeting in Guimarães. The Member States were ready to recognize the republic in its current borders, but under a name accepted by all the parties affected.⁶⁰ In response, Gligorov warned that his country cannot give up its name because it is threatened by the appetites of its neighbors, so should, therefore, be recognized.

From the 27th to the 28th of June 1992, the European Council met in Lisbon where it adopted the "Declaration on Former Yugoslavia" confirming the decision made in Guimarães. In it was stated that FYROM (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) would be recognized as an independent state within its current borders and under a name that does not contain the term "Macedonia".⁶¹ This was a triumph of Greek diplomacy. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia immediately rejected the Lisbon declaration. However, the declaration became a reason for a vote of no confidence to the government.⁶² Two days later, on the 30th of June 1992, Kiro Gligorov addressed a letter to the Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali asking for the Republic of Macedonia to be accepted as a member of the UN.⁶³ Greece tried

⁵⁸ Luiš Gonzaga Ferejra, *Революция на Изток. Един португалец в София* (So-fia: Карина М, 1997), 438-439.

⁵⁹ Zhelev, *Обръщения на президента*, 104-105.

⁶⁰ Christopher Hill, *European Foreign Policy. Key Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), 376.

⁶¹ *Bulletin of the European Communities*, no. 6 (1992), 22.

⁶² Gligorov, *Македонија*, 307-309.

⁶³ Elena Jurevna Guskova, *Македонија: Путь к самостоятельности. Документы* (Moscow: Радуга, 1997), 415.

its best to block the process in the UN, but failed in the end. Despite this, Greeks succeeded in other areas. A high-level Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) summit was held in Helsinki from the 9th till the 10th of July 1992. The issue of the RM's admission to the organization was also discussed. Despite the support of the delegations of Bulgaria, the United States, Turkey, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia, the EC blocked the country's entry into the CSCE.⁶⁴

On the 25th of July 1992, Philip Dimitrov met with Kiro Gligorov in Istanbul and refused to accept his request made during the visit of his advisor Konstantin Mishev to Skopje on the 22nd of July 1992, when Skopje asked Bulgaria to sell it arms. The country needed military equipment because, after the withdrawal of the JNA, it did not have enough weapons to protect itself. The Bulgarian Prime Minister wanted to help and had several talks with the American, British, and French ambassadors, but all of them warned that an arms deal with Macedonia meant the violation of the UN embargo over Yugoslavia. Therefore, he had to refuse Gligorov's request. Upon his return from Istanbul, Philip Dimitrov informed the three ambassadors and the President about his final refusal of Skopje's plea.⁶⁵ His government continued to monitor the situation in the RM and was ready to take necessary diplomatic measures to protect the country from foreign aggression. Dimitrov feared a wider Balkan war.

The Bulgarian support for independent Macedonia

On the 3rd of August 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin arrived in Bulgaria to sign a new bilateral treaty between the two countries as well as many other agreements concerning the economy, agriculture, trade, transport, and military cooperation. That evening, Zhelyu Zhelev hosted a dinner for a few selected guests. He reminded them of their previous conversations – in Istanbul in June and in Helsinki in July – during which Yeltsin firmly promised that Russia would recognize Macedonia's independence. The Russian President replied that he would formally declare, the following day, that his country recognized the Republic of Macedonia and that the decree would be shown at the press conference.⁶⁶

Indeed, the day after, during the official discussions, Yeltsin announced that he wished to coordinate his actions regarding Yugoslavia with Bulgaria. Zhelev then reminded Yeltsin of the conversation they had had the night before. Yeltsin turned to his Minister of Foreign Affairs to write the text for the recognition of the RM, but Nikolai Kozirev explained that the Greeks would be angry and informed the Russian president that the official seal remained on the plane. Yeltsin told Zhelev that the decree would be signed 10 minutes after the aircraft took-off, and that the Bulgarian side would be notified about it on the radio.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Gligorov, *Македонија*, 310.

⁶⁵ Metodi Spasov, *Правителството на Филип Димитров* (Sofia: Гутенберг, 2002), 239-240.

⁶⁶ Central State Archives of Bulgaria, Sofia, FO 1512/1/564/15-19.

⁶⁷ Zelyu Zhelev, "Macedonia Today and the Future of Macedonia," *Crossroads – The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal* 1 (2006): 39-40.

Thus the Republic of Macedonia not only received recognition of its sovereignty by another country, but also by a member of the UN Security Council.

The significance of what had happened was marked by a stern Greek reaction, which defined Russian recognition as a hostile act. However, Zhelev and Yeltsin had a strong relationship. Zhelev was the first head of state to officially oppose the attempted military coup in the USSR and Bulgaria was the first state to recognize the Russian Federation. Undoubtedly, the Russian President did not forget this help and on the 4th of August 1992 returned the gesture with the recognition of Macedonia.

Afterwards, Yeltsin and Gligorov came to Bulgaria for an informal meeting with Zhelyu Zhelev in Burgas. They talked about the relations between the three countries and the recognition of the Macedonian nation and language. The Bulgarian head of state explained that Bulgaria hosted nearly two million refugees from the Balkan wars and that all of them, however, considered themselves Bulgarians (instead of Macedonians) and their influence could not be ignored. Because of that, there was no chance for the recognition of the Macedonian language and nation. Zhelev explained that he could talk in Parliament about Gligorov's request but warned that the Parliament would most likely remain deaf to such requests. For his part, the guest tried to reverse Zhelev's position because he thought that such a shift would dislodge the obstacles in the way of normalizing the relationships between the two countries, but without success.⁶⁸

On the 20th of October 1992, a military delegation from Skopje headed by Minister of Defence Vlado Popovski arrived in Sofia. The delegation met with Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov, Minister of Defence Alexander Staliyski, Deputy Minister of Defence Nikola Daskalov, and the head of the Bulgarian army. The two sides made sure that there were no Bulgarian weapons in Macedonia and that no illegal trade was going on between the two countries.⁶⁹ During that time, Bulgaria was in the middle of a public scandal when the media reported that Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov had sent his adviser Konstantin Mishev to negotiate an arm deal in the Republic of Macedonia. The Prime Minister was accused of threatening national security. After being reprimanded by the Parliament, Philip Dimitrov decided to demand a vote of confidence for his government. On the 28th of October 1992, his government lost the Parliament's confidence.

A month later, on the 27th of November 1992, the Macedonian Deputy Prime Minister arrived in Sofia to seek assistance from the Bulgarian authorities. His country was threatened by an economic catastrophe because of the trade blockade imposed by Greece. Bulgaria had been able to negotiate with the United States the permission for the passage of an oil-loaded train composition through Serbia. The deal helped Skopje survive during the Greek economic blockade. On the 8th of April 1993, the Security Council, seeking additional stability measures in the Balkans, adopted Resolution 817, which made the republic a member of the United Nations under the name of the Former

⁶⁸ Gligorov, *Македонија*, 436-437.

⁶⁹ Ferejra, *Революция на Изток*, 439-440.

Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This marked a symbolic end to its peaceful exit from the Yugoslav federation. Problems with neighbors were gradually resolved over the years. Bulgaria's efforts to support its independence were recognized in 2008 when Zhelyu Zhelev was awarded the RM's highest state award. The name dispute was resolved by the Prespa agreement signed in 2018, after which the country changed its name and became the Republic of North Macedonia. A "Treaty for friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation" was signed with Bulgaria on the 1st of August 2017, and was expected to solve the controversial issues between the two countries. The treaty provided the setting up of a Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Committee on Historical and Educational Affairs. The committee had to contribute to the objective, authentic and sources-based scientific interpretation of historical events. The treaty also prescribed joint celebrations of shared historical events and personalities, emphasized that Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia did not and would not make territorial claims against each other, and that they would take effective measures against illicit propaganda.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be written that during the reviewed period, the Republic of Macedonia managed to save its identity and to depart from Yugoslavia through diplomatic means. Compared to the other republics like Croatia and Slovenia, it lacked a strong economy, support from the European Community, and the desire to leave the federation. The country was stronger as a part of the Yugoslav federation. Skopje depended on Yugoslavia to support its economy and to advocate for it in its disputes with neighboring countries. Despite the many problems which they faced on the path to independence, Macedonian politicians tried their best to negotiate fairly. For a long period of time, they put all their efforts into the talks for the future of Yugoslavia and tried to achieve a new federal treaty. When it became clear that the other republics had different political goals and that the federation would not survive, the leadership of the RM took careful steps to come to an agreement with the JNA and to achieve international recognition. There was no immediate breakthrough in the bilateral relations with its neighbors, but the Republic of Macedonia remained open for dialogue and understanding with a commitment to find solutions to the many problems. In this way, it became the only country that left the Yugoslav federation peacefully and that proved that dialogue and diplomacy are irreplaceable in a time of violence.

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