

A stylized map of Macedonia composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific locations or regions.

The Radical Right in Macedonia

ZDRAVKO SAVESKI & ARTAN SADIKU

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- In the specific case of the Republic of Macedonia, two forms of nationalism and ultra-nationalism coexist: the ethnic Macedonian and the ethnic Albanian one. There are strong ties between the discourses of the extreme right of both sides and the two biggest moderate right-wing parties *VMRO-DPMNE* (ethnically Macedonian) and *DPA* (belonging to the Albanian side).
- Radical-right ideas, commitments, theses and values, which in other countries are mostly on the margins of public space or completely excluded from it, are part of the conventional media and public space in Macedonia.
- While the ethnic Macedonian right-wing extremism contains the revision of borders with neighbouring Greece and Bulgaria as well as an opposition to EU and NATO, both seen as supporters of Greece in the question of the »name issue« of the country, Albanian extremists either push for a more federalized Macedonia or even the unification of all Albanians in only one state. So, the crucial Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001 which ended the armed conflict between the National Liberation Army (NLA) of ethnic Albanians and the Macedonian armed forces, is consequently questioned from opposite sides.



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1. Radical Right-Wing Actors in Macedonia

The political scene in Macedonia includes several radical right-wing political groups. This study will treat only those holders of radical right-wing ideas who are currently active. The first part of the analysis will focus on nationalism and ultra-nationalism, two forms of which coexist in Macedonia: a Macedonian and an Albanian one, while no significant nationalist project can be identified in the country's other ethnic communities. Radical right-wing ideas, goals, theses and values, which in other countries generally occupy a marginal place in the public sphere or are excluded from it altogether, have an alarmingly high profile in the mainstream media and public sphere in Macedonia. Strongly nationalist positions are, for example, espoused by the biggest moderate right-wing parties – the ethnic Macedonian *VMRO-DPMNE* and the ethnic Albanian DPA as well as sometimes in the language and practice of the *VMRO-People's Party*, the party »United for Macedonia« and the »Dostoinstvo« party. Parties, organisations and groups that we might classify as ultranationalist are generally smaller political entities that advocate more intense and more violent forms of nationalism, although these often collaborate or form coalitions with the major parties of the moderate right. On the Macedonian side the ultranationalist parties include *TMORO-VEP*¹, *TMRO*², the *People's Movement of Macedonia* (NDM) and the *VMRO-Democratic Party*³ alongside the probably most prominent *World Macedonian Congress* (a far-right international lobbying organisation that seeks to represent Macedonians all over the world). On the Albanian side a number of smaller ultranationalist parties emerged between 2001 and 2012; however, apart from the *Democratic Union of Albanians*, none of them managed to survive in the political arena. The only other Albanian ultranationalist organisation worth mentioning is *Illyricum Libertas* from Tetovo, which is more active and prominent in its extreme views. The same goes for the football ultras group called *Ballista* from Tetovo.

1. Fatherland Macedonian Organisation of Radical Renewal – *Vardar-Aegean-Pirin-Prespa*.

2. Permanent Macedonian Radical Unification.

3. The case of the *VMRO-Democratic Party* shows how difficult it is to make a theoretical distinction between »normal« nationalism and ultranationalism. This party can be classified as both a nationalist and an ultranationalist one.

Besides nationalist and ultra-nationalist groups, the study will also analyse groups and organisations whose ideas fall into the category of open neo-Nazism and religious fundamentalism/radicalism. These are either closed shop groups (in the case of the neo-Nazis) quite unknown to the public, whose activities rarely appear in media, or else very informal and unstructured groups (in the case of religious fundamentalists/radicals) that at times and in certain situations have the opportunity to mobilise wider support in their areas of influence. Religious fundamentalism is present only in the Muslim community. In the Christian community a rise in religiosity can be observed, but it is rather traditional and not of a fundamentalist type. The neo-Nazis have so far not organised themselves in a political party, but operate in several groups, more or less related to each other. Neo-Nazism in the Republic of Macedonia is only present in the Slavic Macedonian ethnic community.

1.1 Ultranationalist Ethnic Macedonian Political Parties and Organisations

The most influential currently active ultranationalist ethnic Macedonian political parties and organisations are – as already mentioned – *TMORO-VEP*, *TMRO*, *People's Movement for Macedonia* and the *World Macedonian Congress*.

a) *TMORO-VEP* formed as a party before the 2006 parliamentary elections. Its president is Strasho Angelovski, the erstwhile long-time president of the now defunct *MAAK-Conservative Party*, an ultranationalist party with a similar orientation active in the 1990s. The first part of the party's name refers to the historical Macedonian national liberation organisation – *TMORO*, and the second part explicitly refers to the parts of the wider geographical region called Macedonia, which the party, like other nationalists, considers to be ethnic Macedonian territories. *TMORO-VEP* claims to be a right-wing party with a national orientation, and its stated programmatic goals are »forming a natural Macedonian state on its entire territory« as well as the revision of the borders between the Republic of Macedonia, which it considers to be an artificial entity, and »subjugated parts of the Macedonian state« that now belong to Bulgaria and Greece. More specifically, the party stands for the revision of the Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1913, which ended the Second Balkan War, and the unification of

»Greater« Macedonia. In addition, the party is committed to restoring the status of the Republic of Macedonia as a national state of the ethnic Macedonian people, which means opposing the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001 which ended the armed conflict between the National Liberation Army (NLA) of ethnic Albanians and the Macedonian security forces, as well as the constitutional changes that it introduced.

TMORO-VEP ran for election three times as an independent party. The first time, at the 2006 parliamentary elections, when it won only 744 votes (0.08 per cent); the second time, at the 2008 parliamentary elections, when it increased this to 4,319 votes (0.44 per cent), and at the 2009 local elections when it scored its greatest success. On this occasion, the party formed a coalition with the *VMRO-Democratic Party*. The coalition lists for seats on the local council won 15,147 votes,⁴ which translated into twelve seats for the coalition. Most of the votes were won in the cities of Prilep (2,322 votes or 5.9 per cent), Kisela Voda (1,488 votes or 5.6 per cent) and Kumanovo (1,373 votes or 3.0 per cent). At the parliamentary elections in 2011 *TMORO-VEP* even ran as part of the winning coalition led by *VMRO-DPMNE*, which shows how close the relationship is between mainstream conservatism and nationalism in Macedonia.

b) *TMRO* is the second ultranationalist party whose acronym also refers to the historical Macedonian national liberation organisation – *TMORO*. It was established in 2002 and its principal objectives are to get the »Macedonian issue« onto the agenda in the Balkans and to resolve it. The party's president is Vancho Shehtanski. According to information available to the public, *TMRO*'s major commitments include a Macedonian foreign policy that gives priority to relations with the U.S., Israel and Turkey. It places special emphasis on good relations with Israel, because it considers that the Jewish people's fate is similar to that of the Macedonians. In a situation where NATO has made changing the name of the state or a resolution of the »name issue« acceptable to Greece a condition for accession, *TMRO* even advocates a neutral status for Macedonia. The European Union, on the other hand, which holds a similar position, has been subjected

to criticism. For example, when in 2011 the European Commission progress report on Macedonia left out the term »Macedonian«, *TMRO* called for the immediate suspension of negotiations with the EU. Typically for Macedonian ultranationalists, *TMRO* advocates the revision of the above-mentioned Bucharest Treaty (in September 2002 the party appealed to all signatories of the Treaty of Bucharest to revise it) and the return of 750,000 refugees and their progeny to Aegean Macedonia who were expelled to Bulgaria by Greek forces in 1913. *TMRO* in this case typically operates with surprisingly different figures from the generally accepted ones, claiming that today there are some 750,000 Macedonians in Albania (as opposed to only 300,000 Albanians in Macedonia), while in the Aegean part of Macedonia (i.e., in the southern part of what they view as ethnic Macedonia, which today belongs to Greece) they claim there are 1.2 million Macedonians. On one occasion, party president Shehtanski praised the idea advanced by Ljubco Georgievski (Macedonian Prime Minister from 1998 to 2002) that Macedonia and Albania should exchange territory and that the two states should consider redrawing their border. Noting that, owing to its »hostile« surroundings, Macedonia was more comparable with Israel than with, say, Norway and expressing concerns over the military unpreparedness of Macedonian youth, *TMRO* called for the introduction of compulsory military service of at least six months for both men and women up to 27 years of age.

TMRO ran for the first time at the 2005 local elections. It won 1,372 votes and one seat on the council (in the municipality of Kisela Voda). It subsequently took part in the 2006 parliamentary elections, when it won 1,605 votes (0.2 per cent), and the 2008 parliamentary elections when it won slightly more: 1,856 votes (0.2 per cent). Since the 2009 election, *TMRO*, like *TMORO-VEP*, has also participated in a coalition with *VMRO-DPMNE*.

c) The party *People's Movement of Macedonia* (NDM) was established in May 2002. It claims to be a national party espousing patriotism as a virtue. The president of the party is currently Janko Bachev. The NDM opposes the Ohrid Framework Agreement as well as the *TMRO* and is committed to redefining the state organisation on the basis of the ASNOM (Anti-Fascist Assembly for the People's Liberation of Macedonia) Manifesto of 1944 and the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. Furthermore, *NDM* stands for the integrity of the Macedonian nation in its ethnic borders on the principle of the right to

4. Excluding the City of Skopje. Since in local elections the citizens of Skopje also vote for municipal councillors within the City of Skopje, in order to avoid overlapping of votes, we excluded the votes for councillors of the City of Skopje. At the elections for the councillors' list in Skopje *TMORO-VEP* won 3,552 votes.

self-determination, seeing Macedonia as a unitary nation-state, i. e. as the national state of the Macedonian people, but with a guaranteed status for all national minorities. Concerning the »name issue« of the country, *NDM* considers the accession of the Republic of Macedonia to the United Nations under its provisional name FYROM⁵ as a shameful act and thinks that Macedonia should leave the name talks with Greece currently being conducted under UN auspices. In this context it supports Macedonia's accession to NATO and the EU but not at the cost of the name. In 2009 the *NDM* submitted to the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences a »Memorandum for the Macedonian Encyclopaedia« focusing on national issues, which classified it as essentially anti-Macedonian to refer to the Slavic character of the Macedonian nation.

The *NDM* is known for its tendency to reveal real and assumed conspiracies and espionage activities in Macedonia, which, according to the party, is full of spies. It is also well known for filing numerous criminal charges. In 2004 it agitated against the »apostate, schismatic and Serbian-Greek spy« Archbishop Jovan Vranishkovski because of his ties to the Serbian Orthodox Church, while in 2009, along with the *VMRO-Democratic Party*, it filed criminal charges for falsification of the 2002 census, arguing that the size of the Albanian minority had been deliberately exaggerated and that this was an act of treason against the Republic of Macedonia.

The second feature distinguishing *NDM* from other ultranationalist parties is its commitment to the introduction of a special tax for the rich and its left-orientated economic policy. Condemning the »dishonest, immoral and unjust privatisation [in Macedonia] in which only a few oligarchs split and stole Macedonian social wealth created by the working people in the socialist period«, *NDM* asserts that taxing the rich will allow some of the »stolen« privatised assets to be legally returned. As a second step, the party intends to give these assets back to the people through various programmes in the fields of health and social care, education, sports, culture and local development.

As far as its participation in the elections is concerned, *NDM* campaigned for the first time for the 2002 parliamentary elections, winning 2,220 votes (0.19 per cent). At the 2005 local elections, it ran in most cities as part of the coalition led by *VMRO-DPMNE* and alone in two

municipalities. There it won 597 votes and one council seat. At the 2006 and 2008 parliamentary elections it again entered into a coalition with *VMRO-DPMNE*. In the 2009 local elections it ran alone, winning 5,166 votes⁶ and two seats. It won most of its votes in Strumica (695 votes or 2 per cent), Prilep (548 votes or 1.39 per cent) and Gazi Baba (528 votes or 1.70 per cent). At the 2011 parliamentary elections *NDM* ran again as part of the coalition led by *VMRO-DPMNE*.

d) The *World Macedonian Congress (WMC)* is an organisation which aims to represent the rights and interests of Macedonians in Macedonia, in the neighbouring countries (i. e. the territory of »ethnic Macedonia«) and around the world. It was created in 1990 and Todor Petrov became its president. Concerning the name dispute with Greece, *WMC* stands for an immediate and unconditional termination of negotiations and unconditional continuation of UN membership under the constitutional name, qualifying the provisional reference as a »racist temporary reference«. It believes that any bargaining over the name of the state is a crime against humanity, genocide against the Macedonian people and high treason, and that this will never change. *WMC* rejects the idea of a referendum on the constitutional name and considers Macedonia's accession to NATO and the EU under the provisional name to be unacceptable. As they put it, if the anti-Macedonian position of Athens, the Greek genocide against the Macedonians and Greece's racist and Nazi-Fascist demand to change the name of Macedonia are grounds for the solidarity of Brussels and Strasbourg with Greece, then Macedonia should reject accession to the EU and NATO. The *WMC* accuses Greece of occupying southern Macedonia and of genocide against the Macedonian people, »lasting until today«. However, despite this historical background, the *WMC* believes that Macedonia and Greece could achieve lasting peace and good neighbourly relations but only after an apology and compensation from Greece. It should also be mentioned that *WMC* is one of the biggest supporters of harking back to Antiquity as a source of Macedonian national identity.

The *WMC* often makes public statements about the ethnic Albanian community in Macedonia. Like all Macedonian ultranationalists, the *WMC* believes that at the

5. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

6. Without the City of Skopje. At this election *NDM* won 676 votes in the City of Skopje.

2002 census the size of the Albanian minority was deliberately exaggerated and it therefore calls for a revision of the composition of the state administration, arguing that the number of ethnic Albanians in the administration is disproportionate to their real share of the population. Recently, when the Albanian national anthem was sung at a primary school in the village of Dzepchiste, near Tetovo, at the start of the new school year, the *WMC* demanded that all pre-schools and primary and secondary schools should have masts flying Macedonian state flags, and that all educational institutions should play the Macedonian national anthem. In 2004 the *WMC* initiated a referendum calling for the annulment of the new territorial organisation of the country. The requisite number of signatures to organise the referendum were collected only after the initiative was supported by *VMRO-DPMNE*. It is worth mentioning that in 2012 the *WMC* filed criminal charges against Ljubco Georgievski for endangering the country's territorial integrity after he advocated exchanging territories with Albania.⁷ It called for him to be sentenced to life imprisonment and for his property to be confiscated. The *WMC* has not participated in elections so far, but its president has occasionally shown ambitions to engage in party politics. Thus prior to the 2006 parliamentary elections, Petrov created the *Macedonian Party*, which won 2,311 votes (0.25 per cent), but it did not compete in the next elections in 2008. In 2009, however, Petrov applied to the *VMRO-DPMNE* congress for candidacy as President of the Republic of Macedonia, but failed to be nominated.

1.2 Ties With Mainstream Macedonian Nationalism

Of the political parties that cannot categorically be determined as nationalist, but that from time to time and to a greater or lesser extent represent nationalist views, we will focus only on *VMRO-DPMNE*; this party has, after all, been the main party in government coalitions since 2006. *VMRO-DPMNE* is the main centre-right party in Macedonia and it has been in power as the main party in the government coalition for almost half of the period since the beginning of political pluralism in Macedonia in the early 1990s. In its early years, until 1995, nationalism could be regarded as a component of the ideological profile of *VMRO-DPMNE*. One of the most

controversial statements of leading officials of that time was party President Ljubco Georgievski's statement that the party would hold its next congress in Thessaloniki. After this period, *VMRO-DPMNE* downplayed its nationalist rhetoric and adopted the ideological profile of a moderate, predominantly conservative party. A new nationalist twist occurred, however, shortly after the party returned to power after winning the 2006 general elections. Usually in Macedonia, parties with nationalist inclinations tend to tone down their nationalist rhetoric after coming to power (as is the case with the ethnic Albanian *DPA*), but in 2006 *VMRO-DPMNE* did exactly the opposite. Adopting the ultranationalists' obsession with Ancient Macedonia of Antiquity, *VMRO-DPMNE* used its position as a leading party in the governing coalition to rename buildings, erect monuments and conduct a government marketing campaign to »raise national awareness«. Thus, ancient names were given to Petrovec Airport, the City Stadium in Skopje and the Macedonian section of the international corridor E-75. The controversial project »Skopje 2014« involved constructing many monuments representing figures from Macedonian history, in which the ancient Macedonian kings Alexander III and Philip II featured prominently. Moreover, several marketing campaigns were conducted, such as »You are Macedonia«, which, for example, glorified the military might of Alexander the Great. Using its administrative power to implement such measures, *VMRO-DPMNE* succeeded in bringing many ultranationalist views into the mainstream. Therefore, many attitudes that used to be typical for isolated circles of Macedonian ultranationalists have now become mainstream attitudes. An additional element of *VMRO-DPMNE*'s relationship with Macedonian ultra-nationalism is, of course, its formal coalition with the ultranationalist parties. Thus, as mentioned above, the *NDM* has been part of the coalition led by *VMRO-DPMNE* since 2005, *TMRO* since 2009, and *TMORO-VEP* and the *Macedonian Alliance* since 2011. Thus the predominant conservative party in Macedonia has no qualms at all about maintaining a relationship with far right-wing parties. In this context, it is important to mention that in the city of Bitola, where *VMRO-DPMNE* has been in power since 2005, the local authorities have for years »ignored« the fact that swastikas have been painted in many public locations, including the centre of the city. In 2011 the initiative »70 years of anti-fascism« and the Veterans' Association of Bitola asked for a meeting with Bitola Mayor Vladimir Talevski to require the local authorities to remove the swastikas,

7. See page 2.

but the mayor refused to attend such a meeting and did nothing to remove the swastikas. In other words, a *VMRO-DPMNE* mayor was prepared to accept the most prominent symbol of overt neo-Nazism.

1.3 Ultranationalist Ethnic Albanian Political Parties and Organisations

The main active ultranationalist ethnic Albanian political parties and organisations are the *National Democratic Union*, *Illyricum Libertas* and the football fanclub *Ballista*.

a) *The National Democratic Union* (NDU) was created in 2007 through the unification of the *New Democratic Forces* and the *National Democratic Party*. Its president is Hysni Shaqiri, who prior to that was president of the *New Democratic Forces*, a group established in 2005 after Hysni Shaqiri left the ruling Albanian party DUI, having accused it of treason vis-à-vis Albanian interests. Earlier, during the 2001 conflict, Shaqiri left parliament and joined the Albanian NLA.⁸

In its political activity the *NDU* has so far failed to garner a critical mass of supporters and has never won any seat in the National Assembly, except by supporting other candidates. The party is run solely by its president and a few supporters. Most of the support for it comes from Kumanovo and Lipkovo, which in 2001 was the region with the most intense conflicts and is also the president's home region. Owing to the small amount of media attention, the party organises and attends events in the form of rallies and protests to promote their political platform, which advocates the federalisation of Macedonia. In his addresses the president often expounds his nationalist positions and maintains that the proper way to defend Albanian interests in Macedonia, which he claims are under threat from Macedonian nationalism, is to change the way the state is organised. Given his involvement in the NLA and relations with Kosovo fighters in 1999, he often appears at events marking important dates in these two wars at which ultranationalist views are expressed. However, having failed to garner any serious support, the *NDU* remains a marginal party that has no power to establish itself as a driving force of Albanian nationalism in Macedonia.

8. See page 2.

It ran for election for the first time in 2008, when it won 1,651 votes (0.17 per cent). This was a rather poor result, given that in the previous elections in 2006, the parties that later merged to form the *NDU*, the *New Democratic Forces* (in coalition with the *Democratic Alliance of Albanians*) and the *National Democratic Party*, together won 8,442 votes (0.87 per cent). At the local elections in 2009 *NDU* formed a coalition with (i. e., supported) *New Democracy* – the party of Imer Selmani – but at the parliamentary elections in 2011 it ran independently and won only 470 votes (0.04 per cent).

b) Within the group of Albanian organisations, formal and informal, there have been some nationalist outbursts purporting to defend Albanian interests in Macedonia, which they believe are under threat from state policies. The only organisation to have taken concrete steps and tried with some persistence to mobilise support through extreme nationalist rhetoric is the *Illyricum Libertas* group from Tetovo. Its membership is composed of less than a dozen young people who are not close to any other political direction in Macedonia but have established communications with similar organisations in Kosovo. *Illyricum Libertas* differs from other organisations in that it advocates the »unification« of Albanians in the Balkans in a single state, but exclusively by peaceful means. In its rhetoric, the idea of unification follows from the historic need to »repair« the unjust division of Albanians into five states. This organisation became known to the public when the slogan »Greater Albania« began to appear as graffiti at the entry to Tetovo as well as when subsequently criminal proceedings were initiated against members of this organisation. It is important to note that although Tetovo is the only city in which the organisation is active, *Illyricum Libertas* may enjoy a certain amount of support from the younger population there. Nevertheless, nationwide it has not succeeded in mobilising a significant number of members or activists. In recent years membership has dropped and the organisation's activities have been reduced to sporadic statements that hardly reach the mainstream media in Macedonia. Its attempts to communicate its message consist largely of graffiti with extreme nationalist content and sporadic columns and articles posted online on a few portals that have an important role in public media space.

c) The football ultras group *Ballista* consists of radicalised supporters of the football team *Shkendija* from Tetovo. They have no formal relationship with the football club,

but the group uses football matches to convey its ultranationalist messages and rally support for them. *Bal-lista* consists of high school and university students and is organised – like *Illyricum Libertas* – only in the city of Tetovo. Beyond a clearly defined ultranationalist rhetoric, its actions also include the singing of humiliating, abusive songs and violent behaviour towards the ethnic Macedonians. Their rhetoric includes slogans advocating the »unification« of Albania and hatred of the ethnic (Slav) Macedonians and Serbs. *Ballistas* do not really have a political impact, but they do represent a mobilising force for a number of young people in Tetovo so they operate mainly in certain youth circles and secondary schools in the city.

1.4 Mainstream Albanian Nationalism

In the spectrum of ethnic Albanian political parties in Macedonia that do not fall into the category of radical right-wing parties, but which occasionally use rather radical language that may potentially generate and nurture mainstream nationalism, we can identify one of the two largest ethnic Albanian parties in Macedonia, *the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA)*. The role of the DPA is comparable to that of *VMRO-DPMNE* in the ethnic Macedonian political arena. It was formed in 1997 out of a merger of the *Party for Democratic Prosperity of Albanians* (which in 1994 succeeded the *Party for Democratic Prosperity*) and the *National Democratic Party*. The party has established its position in the political arena through harsh nationalist rhetoric and radical political demands in support of the rights of the Albanians in Macedonia. The DPA achieved its biggest success at the local elections in 1996 (under the old name PDP-A) when it won several municipalities in the western part of Macedonia, especially the two large municipalities of Gostivar and Tetovo. Incidents that occurred in these two cities in 1997 after the local mayors raised the Albanian flag in front of municipal buildings were used by the DPA to boost its nationalist rhetoric and increase its support. This led to its success in the 1998 general elections after which it formed a government with the *VMRO-DPMNE*.

The *DPA* is today one of the biggest ethnic Albanian parties in Macedonia, clearly identified as a right-wing party with a background of strong nationalist and occasionally ultranationalist discourse. Its electorate is spread over the whole territory of the Republic of Macedonia with a greater concentration in the north-western part.

Social strata supporting the *DPA* are diverse and there is no particular social group which could be identified as a main supporter of the party. It is important to mention that the *DPA* twice participated in national government (1998–2001 and 2006–2008) and in important political decisions in the country such as the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

The *DPA*'s rhetoric takes on an ultranationalist tone every time the party is in opposition, and its political activity is directed against institutions, without making any distinction between the ruling parties and the political system itself. When the *DPA* is in opposition its attitude to institutions and to the state itself are quite hostile and the critical language it uses makes it seem like an extra-parliamentary organisation, while, at the same time, it regularly participates in the work of the (national) Assembly and other state bodies. On several occasions, the party's current leader, Thaqi, has openly expressed explicitly extreme attitudes, such as that »Macedonia is an artificial state«. The party has often opposed fundamental policy decisions which, paradoxically, it has itself participated in, e. g., declaring the Ohrid Framework Agreement a »dead deal«. It often refers to Western Macedonia as exclusively Albanian and believes that »Albanians should hold the power« there.

1.5 Religious Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalist and radical groups in Macedonia have long been a subject of speculation, unconfirmed information and incidents attributed to radical elements. The first indications that a radical Islamic wave had emerged in Macedonia came after 2001 and were associated with incidents and tensions over the management of the Islamic Religious Community (ICM). On several occasions the head of the ICM, Reis Ul Ulema Haji Suleyman Efendi Rexhepi, spoke about the existence of radical Islamists, Wahhabis, in Macedonia. Although during the interethnic conflict of 2001 in Macedonia, references were made to the presence of foreign troops from radical Islam, these were never verified, nor did they seem very credible. These rumours also arose partly as a result of the government's efforts to portray the ethnic Albanian NLA as an organisation with links to »Islamic terrorism«. The traumatic case of »Rastanski lozja«, in which six Pakistanis and one Indian were killed by the Macedonian police outside Skopje in 2002, was

allegedly carried out in order to provide proof of such a connection. Although never proved, it is still suspected that the murders were ordered by then Minister of the Interior Ljube Boskovski in an attempt to present Macedonia as a country actively fighting Islamic terrorism.

However, so far there is no evidence that such fundamentalist groups are more than informal and unstructured and it would appear that they are only able to mobilise broader support at certain times and in certain situations. Skopje and environs are the only areas of Macedonia where we can talk about a significant presence or influence of radical Islamic elements. This is due mostly to the isolation of some predominantly Albanian (and therefore Muslim) neighbourhoods in the city, a poor infrastructure, a lack of public services and a low level of education. The isolation and conservative behaviour of these circles contributes to more successful mobilisation and acceptance of radical religious views by those communities. Another reason for this may be that where political parties and institutions are hardly present, radical groups appear as the only form of social organisation and support. The emergence of a radical Islamic stream in Macedonia has also increased the pressure on traditional Islamic believers to adopt more fundamentalist religious practices, and religion has also gained a higher profile in society (primarily in the media and schools). In line with this, various Skopje mosques have become venues for quite radical preaching. This is compounded by radical religious Internet forums and radical multimedia products glorifying the violent acts of ultra-radical religious fundamentalists, including the Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden.

The fact that so far radical religious beliefs have not been associated with any clearly defined group makes the objectives, methods and rhetoric of radical Islamists in the country hard to identify. The only relevant event that made radical groups more visible, but still without an identifiable core, were the protests against the arrests in connection with the murder of five people at Smilkovci in May 2012, which state officials maintained had been committed by radical Islamists. The protesters sent strong radical messages via slogans and banners. The way in which these protests were organised and conducted suggests that there was no identifiable organisation behind them and that instead they were spontaneously organised by individuals, who had managed to mobilise a large number of citizens.

From this analysis it can be concluded that in Macedonia there is a radical wave of Islam, which on certain occasions can mobilise a large number of citizens, but that there are few, if any, organised groups. In the aftermath of the protests in May 2012, there was an attempt to politicise such a presence in the media and fuel speculations about the emergence of an Islamist party that would represent the interests of such groups, but this has so far come to nothing. It is thus impossible to speak of any serious tendency towards voicing radical Islamic views in a political framework, such views being largely confined to the private sphere and individual religious practice. The only exception is moderate religious messages conveyed to the public by some public figures and media. Therefore, we can say that no real religious rhetoric has been established in public discourse, although this discourse does have greater religious content than before.

1.6 Neo-Nazism

Neo-Nazism in Macedonia is present only in the ethnic Macedonian community and neo-Nazis are active in several groups, more or less related to each other. Most indications of their activity can be found in the cities of Bitola and Skopje, but they have little public presence, which makes it difficult to collect information about their organisation and demands. Their main public activity is painting swastikas and Celtic crosses in public places. On several occasions lately the name of the football »ultras« (supporters) group »Komiti« was painted next to the swastika. In the ultras group from Bitola the presence of people with neo-Nazi views has also been recorded, which suggests that these groups may form a basis for the spread of neo-Nazi ideas. In addition, at least two or three times since 2000 Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated with anti-Semitic slogans, and in August 2012 the neo-Nazis succeeded in publishing an obituary on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the death of Rudolf Hess in the daily newspapers *Dnevnik* and *Vest*, causing quite a negative public reaction.

Macedonian neo-Nazi ideology has been »updated« and localised. Although the dominant (German) neo-Nazi symbols are present, extreme Macedonian nationalism is at least as much a defining feature of the neo-Nazis in Macedonia. They are distinguished by their extreme hatred towards Albanians, Greeks and Roma, by their talk of »purifying Macedonia« and by their attempts to

recruit supporters through their allegedly uncompromising defence of Macedonian national interests. There are indications that neo-Nazis are present in the organisation Macedonian Radical Front »Sarisa«, which espouses the idea of the ancient roots of the Macedonian people. This is where their ideas connect with those of the above-mentioned ultra-nationalists. It is worth mentioning that, despite their anti-Semitism, there are indications that the Macedonian neo-Nazis have a more positive than negative opinion of Israel because of its treatment of Palestinians, which they believe Macedonia should emulate in its treatment of non-ethnic Macedonian minorities.

2. Counterstrategies and Recommendations

The radical-right in Macedonia includes forms of nationalism, ultra-nationalism, religious fundamentalism and neo-Nazism. The overall situation is therefore very special due to the country's ethnic diversity: There are two ethnic forms of nationalism (and ultra-nationalism), the Macedonian and the Albanian, while in other communities we cannot identify any significant organisations representing these kinds of positions. Religious fundamentalism is present only within the Muslim religious community, and more or less interrelated groups of neo-Nazis are found only in the Macedonian ethnic community.

The two most important conservative parties in the Macedonian and Albanian bloc, the *VMRO-DPMNE* and the *DPA*, respectively, have both tended to flirt with nationalist positions and have resorted to them when they face a decline in the poll ratings. While in Macedonia parties with nationalist inclinations usually tone down their nationalist rhetoric when they come to power, the opposite happened in the case of the *VMRO-DPMNE* in 2006. Using its power to implement controversial »national« projects, *VMRO-DPMNE* managed to mainstream many views that had previously been typical only of Macedonian ultra-nationalists.

While ethnic Macedonian ultra-nationalist parties and organisations have shown increased interest in the national rights of the Macedonian minority in Greece, Albania and Bulgaria and reject the Ohrid Framework Agreement, they claim that the 2002 census exaggerated the number of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. They usually reject the accession of the Republic of Macedonia to the

UN under the name »FYROM«, have an uncompromising stance in the name dispute and share a commitment to put an end to the negotiations. They also oppose the accession of Macedonia to the EU and NATO at the cost of the name and demand a revision of the Treaty of Bucharest of 1913 in favour of the Republic of Macedonia.

Ethnic Albanian ultranationalist parties and organisations, in turn, stress the »historical borders« of Albania, including parts of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece and demand a review of the conclusions of the London Conference of 1913 (which ended the First Balkan War). They constantly complain about the discrimination of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and about allegedly fascist state policies towards the Albanians. They also question Macedonian national identity, claiming that it is an »artificially created nation« and are sceptical about the willingness of state institutions to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

Religious fundamentalism is based on Islamic identity as a basis for a political definition of Islamic believers in Macedonia and is connected with the promotion of certain radical Islamic cultural practices. The language of radical groups is characterised by an aversion to »Western values«, containing strong anti-American rhetoric and calls for a conservative and fundamentalist way of life.

Neo-Nazis are an isolated phenomenon in the Republic of Macedonia, but they have managed to establish themselves in some ultras sports groups, and have lately increased their visibility by painting swastikas and Celtic crosses in public places and by attending nationalist protest rallies. Their »classic« nationalist attitudes also means that they have a fair amount of potential to increase their influence.

To successfully counter the influence of the radical right we firstly recommend that the nature of nationalism be clarified and distinguished from patriotism. Instead of using the pejorative word »nationalism«, nationalist supporters hide their ideas behind the more accepted term »patriotism« and locate nationalism exclusively in other countries. However, the essence of all ethnic forms of nationalism (in the Balkans and beyond) is the same: giving priority to national issues over all others (social, democratic, economic etc.), and espousing the idea that their respective ethnic group is threatened by the others and that this must change. It is important

to make people aware that almost all nationalists assume the guise of patriotism and that excessive popular interest in national issues allows political elites to manipulate this for their own ends when deciding social and democratic policy, often making decisions that go against real popular interests. The break-up of Yugoslavia brought ethnic issues to the fore in all its successor states, which showed a strong tendency to become »ethnic states«. In this context, any criticism of nationalism is presented as anti-state, anti-patriotic and even as treason, and attempts are made to mobilise the public against anti-nationalist voices. This overlooks the important fact that in multi-ethnic countries like Macedonia advocating purely nationalist positions and turning citizens against each other on the basis of ethnicity works greatly to the detriment of the country's interests and those of its citizens – in other words, it is in itself an anti-patriotic act.

Civil society and responsible politicians must therefore strive to show people that nationalism is often used as a means of distracting attention from social problems. As anywhere else in the world, isolating people in ethno-national groups runs counter to any kind of social cohesion that would produce a social awareness in the state. At the same time, nationalism is still the main instrument used to oppress disadvantaged social groups (e.g., the Roma community) and the working class by creating a constant state of ethnic tension.⁹ This prevents the establishment of real left-wing political options that would stop nationalism from consuming the welfare state. By strengthening leftist and progressive organisations fighting nationalism and social injustice, a political space could be created where a discourse on social issues could develop, challenging the prevailing nationalist discourse.

Another goal should be to raise awareness that ethnicity is only one aspect of personal identity and not a person's main or sole identity. By constantly propagating nationalist ideology through the family, school, the media etc., ethnic identity becomes established as the highest instance of subjectivisation of citizens in Macedonia. Here intervention and education informed by emancipatory politics is required to create space and receptiveness for new social practices that stress the importance of other

identities, such as social class. This would do much to discredit the hegemonic status that ethnic identity currently has in citizens' political identity.

Historiography in the Balkans, including Macedonia, today is largely biased. It gives a distorted view of history, presenting it as narrative with distinctively black and white characters. It is thus full of nationalist discourse and is abused for political purposes. History teaching in schools serves to perpetuate this »national consciousness«. Success in preventing the adverse effects caused by primary ethnic identification in the political sphere largely depends on the extent to which historiography is based on objective academic standards rather than on political opportunism. Therefore, it is important to encourage a scholarly and critical review of certain historical figures and events that nurture nationalism.

The issue of nationalist rhetoric at sporting events in Macedonia remains entirely unaddressed, and is in some cases even supported by certain parts of the political spectrum, including those in power. To counter this stricter legal penalties should be introduced for all crimes, not just hooliganism, and include inciting ethnic hatred and intolerance. Otherwise, the use of sporting events to convey nationalist messages to the general public will continue to fuel ethnic tensions in the country. Nationalist outbursts by ultras, although officially classed as a crime by law, go unpunished and generate a sense of general irresponsibility with respect to such practices. Lately, ultras groups have increased their support among the public, which does not see any problem in their nationalist chanting. It should be borne in mind that some ultras groups serve as recruiting bases for neo-Nazi groups and that it is precisely the neo-Nazi espousal of nationalism that puts young supporters at risk of coming under their ideological influence. The ideology of Macedonian neo-Nazis today has been updated and localised. Any attempt to lessen their impact will largely fail, if we lose sight of the fact that neo-Nazis base a large part of their propaganda on Macedonian nationalism rather than on a copy of the German »original«. Therefore, instead of downplaying the problem and claiming that Macedonia is historically an anti-fascist country in which neo-Nazism simply cannot develop, effective counter-arguments need be presented against this updated and localised variant of neo-Nazism in Macedonia. And since neo-Nazism draws its support from a nationalist position, providing effective counter-arguments to nationalism will also help to counter neo-Nazism.

9. Bunden, Boris/Močnik, Rastko: *Kako je nacionalizam progutao socijalnu državu*; <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/most-rse-kako-je-nacionalizam-progutao-socijalnu-drzavu/24659450.html>



Finally, it is important to address the issue of religious fundamentalism from a social point of view. The ideology that promotes Islamic fundamentalism appears in isolated neighbourhoods in Skopje, which in some cases have a disastrously poor social and economic infrastructure, and is hence an attempt to instrumentalise the frustration of citizens in these settlements. Hence the best prevention strategy would be for the state to invest in infrastructure projects and socio-economic programmes and create forums for cultural and social life in these neighbourhoods, thus giving citizens the opportunity for active social engagement.



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About the authors

Zdravko Saveski is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Diplomacy and Journalism at FON University Skopje.

Artan Sadiku works as Program Director and Junior Researcher/Teaching Assistant at The Institute in Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje.

Editor: Stephan Meuser is a political analyst at the Division for International Dialogue, Department for Central and Eastern Europe, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin.

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Dr. Reinhard Krumm, Head, Dep. for Central and Eastern Europe

Phone: ++49-30-269-35-7726 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9250
<http://www.fes.de/international/moe>

To order publications:
info.moe@fes.de

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