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## The External Memorial Politics of Influence of the European Union. A Study of the Case of North Macedonia

STUDIA I ANALIZY

**Key words:** Memorial Politics, EU influence, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece

**Abstract:** The memorial conflict between North Macedonia and its neighbours already lasts for 33 years. This is the occasion to analyse and to reflect the complexity of the external memorial politics of influence of the European Union and of its members, within a situation of strong conditional power.

### Introduction

On Monday, May the 13<sup>th</sup> 2024, Greece threatened to hinder North Macedonia's bid to join the EU. A conflict, that was considered as solved, reappeared, after the inauguration discourse of the newly elected president Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova of North Macedonia. In this speech, the President called her country "Macedonia". The EU also sounded a warning. "For North Macedonia to continue its successful path on EU accession it is paramount that the country continues on the path of reforms and full respect for its binding agreements," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wrote on X on Sunday<sup>1</sup>. This tension illustrates the complexity of the EU external memorial politics of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/north-macedonian-presidents-inauguration-revives-name-dispute-with-greece-2024-05-13/> (13.05.2024).

influence, and give us an opportunity to propose an analysis of the process. It brings out the question of the efficiency of the EU policies as the EU invested a lot to prevent future conflicts in the region, through the so-called Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), using the conditionality and the dream to access the EU club, and through the Stability Pact (SP)<sup>2</sup>.

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia, later renamed the Republic of North Macedonia, has been plagued by identity and memorial conflicts with its neighbours, mainly with Greece and Bulgaria. This is why the term FYROM, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was used by international organizations from 1993 to 2019 to designate this State. After the declaration of independence, the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was identified as the Republic of Macedonia<sup>3</sup>. The conflict over this name is at the heart of this article. Quite quickly, the international community will choose the temporary term FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), pending an agreement on this name. Our aim here is not to take sides for or against this name, but to study the influence of the European Union at the tribunal of this process of memorial and identity negotiation. Therefore, to avoid entering into this controversy, we will use the term used by the Republic in question, followed by that used by the international community, and therefore Republic of Macedonia/FYROM until 2019, then Republic of North Macedonia.

Despite positive developments with the official start of the negotiations and of the screening of the *acquis* since 2022, the conflict is not over. These conflicts have been a hindrance to the opening of negotiations of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM aimed at integrating the European Union and could still block its accession, while the negotiations have finally just begun. These post-independence conflicts, which have now lasted since 1991, or 33 years, have been analysed in several publications from the point of view of neighbourhood conflicts. Finally, and surprisingly, they have not been the occasion for very little reflection on the memorial action of the European Union on its close neighbourhood<sup>4</sup>.

Indeed, it was the attractiveness of cooperation and eventual membership of the European Union that was one of the main motivations for the governments of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM Republic of Macedonia/FYROM

<sup>2</sup> A. Elbasani, *EU enlargement in the Western Balkans: strategies of borrowing and inventing*, «Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans» 2008, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 297–307.

<sup>3</sup> FYROM is the state's international United Nations name according to United Nations Security Council Resolution 817 passed on 7 April 1993.

<sup>4</sup> One rare exception: the article F. Mavromatidis, *The Role of the European Union in the Name Dispute between Greece and FYR Macedonia*, «Journal of Contemporary European Studies» 2010, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 47–62. This article, never-the-less, constitute more of a reflection concerning the reasons of a failure of the EU in that domain, in 2010.

called later North Macedonia to seek compromises regarding their own national identity and memory. It is also the veto power of the Member States in this European process, in this case Greece and Bulgaria, that has given them great influence. While the conflict and negotiations have been the subject of numerous scientific and press articles, this particular aspect has not been studied. Studies on the normative powers of the European Union and the power deriving from conditionality have dealt with the European Union's capacity to have a transformative power over its near abroad, in a situation of desire for integration<sup>5</sup>. Our research shows that they have never dealt with the question of external memorial influence, or how it operates in relations between the Commission and the Member States. The case of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, then North Macedonia, and its neighbours is a radical one, which can shed light on a number of processes. Radical in terms of the scope of the memorial negotiations, the number of actors involved, and the duration of the conflict, this case can enable us to discuss the European Union's agency in the field, and to understand the modalities of interaction and multilevel governance.

The research hypothesis is supposing that a qualitative study of the long-standing case of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, then the Republic of North Macedonia will reveal specificities in the dissemination of the memory within international relations. A first sub-hypothesis is that the distribution of roles and interactions between the Commission and the Member States provides a better understanding of this specificity, both in terms of international policy and domestic politics<sup>6</sup>. The second sub-hypothesis is that the study of relations with the international community is essential to understanding the entire process.

The method used here is to reconstruct, on the basis of information known to the general public, the interactions of the players in this memorial conflict, around key moments. This makes it possible to estimate the actorness of the participants in the plot, their operating and decision-making logics, and the levels at which these decisions are taken. Given the vast amount of information accumulated over these 33 years of high-profile conflicts, we will limit

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<sup>5</sup> C. Pippan, *The rocky road to Europe: the EU stabilization and association – process for the Western Balkans and the principle of conditionality*, «European Foreign Affairs Review» 2004, 9, p. 221–229; M. Turkes, G. Goksoz, *The European Union strategy towards the Western Balkans: exclusion or integration?*, «East European Politics and Societies» 2006, vol. 20, no. 4, p. 675–677.

<sup>6</sup> This topic was studied concerning other specific topics, but rather not on the base of a case qualitative study of this type. An example of this is this article: F. Aleskerov, G. Avci, V. Iakouba, Z. Umut Türem, *European Union enlargement: Power distribution implications of the new institutional arrangements*, «European Journal of Political Research» 2002, vol. 41, no. 3, p. 379–394.

ourselves to a simplified presentation that highlights the logics at work, showing the elements of unity in the diversity of modes of action, as well as the differentiations in the joint action sometimes deployed.

## **Context of the conflict**

The Republic of North Macedonia has a population of around 1.8 million, of which almost three-quarters are Macedonian (or Slavo-Macedonian), and around a quarter an active Albanian minority. The country's name refers to the region of Macedonia, of which it occupies only about a third of the territory, the rest being mainly and currently in Greece and to a lesser extent in Bulgaria.

Historically, references to the term Macedonia go back well before the arrival of the Slavs in the 7th century. The Kingdom of Macedonia played a major role in the history of ancient Greece, and the two peoples are closely linked. Although it was a region of barbarians for Aristotle, Alexander the Macedonian was considered the first leader of the pan-Hellenic movement by the Greek national movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. The region was also part of the ancient Roman world. It is a symbolically important region for the first Bulgarian state (7th century AD), particularly in the 9th century, for the role of several personalities in the empowerment of Slavic Orthodoxy and the appearance of the Glagolitic alphabet, the direct ancestor of Cyrillic. Skopje, the current capital of North Macedonia, was also the capital of the first Bulgarian state in the 10th century and of the Serbian state in the 13th–14th centuries.

Despite a rich history spanning several national narratives, the modern state history of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM only began in 1991, with the break-up of Yugoslavia, inheriting the administrative structures of the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which had emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was also after 1945 that the Macedonian language was codified, and a first version of Macedonian history written. An Institute for the National History of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was opened in 1948, and the first academic version of the history of the Macedonians (in the Slav-Macedonian sense) was published in 1969. The Yugoslav version of Macedonian history ran counter to Greek and, above all, Bulgarian history, attributing a Macedonian origin to many figures considered by the Bulgarian state and historiography to be Bulgarian national heroes. The very interpretation of the term "Bulgarian" was questioned by Yugo-Macedonian historians. But the geopolitical situation allowed contradictory versions to exist in parallel, while relations between states were rare and unfriendly.

The independence of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM and the end of Yugoslavia changed the face of the problem. The USSR collapsed, the non-aligned clan lost its *raison d'être*, and the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, with around two million inhabitants, was much more fragile in the face of its much larger Bulgarian and Greek neighbours. But it's the new country's desire to join the international community and draw closer to the European Union that has been blocked from the outset, and is now at the heart of a memorial tug-of-war.

## **The source of the European Union's power**

The newly independent state, declaring itself the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, found itself lacking international reference points as soon as it declared its independence. The framework for its development, Yugoslavia, had collapsed, and a new doctrine had to be established. The USSR and its empire had also collapsed, leaving the country with few alternatives. But identity conflicts with Greece and Bulgaria were seen as threats to the existence of the Macedonian identity itself. The fear of civil war with the Albanian minority added to the country's insecurity.

The European Union and the major European countries could be a source of stability and recognition in the region. The United States could be a guarantor of security. At the global level too, European and/or American support could contribute to the country's international recognition.

Facing the Post-Yugoslavian wars, the EU tried to constitute a regional strategy, a new vision for the Balkans, to transform those countries into liberal democracies and free market economies, with states respecting the rule of law. In this purpose, the EU will constitute the Stabilization and Association Process and the Stability Pact<sup>7</sup>. The lack of cohesion and military forces within the EU will not let the EU overpass the traditional division of tasks between Europe and the USA. The EU increased its capacities, and hoped to avoid new massacres, as the one that happened during the Yugoslavian wars. But the memorial conflicts in the region was the heart of the problem. The EU was not

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<sup>7</sup> On this topic, see W. Barlett and V. Samardzija, *The reconstruction of South East Europe, the Stability Pact and the role of the EU: an overview*, «Moct Most» 2000, no. 2, p. 245–263. On the tension between the European Security identity and the western Balkan question – in particular the North Macedonian one, that are the tensions of the national policies and the EU vision, see O. Andonov, J. Ilieva, *European Security Through The Prism of Identity And International Conflicts (the case of the Republic of North Macedonia)*, «Contemporary Military Challenges» 2022, vol. 24, no. 4, p. 95–118.

willing and was not able to agree about the historical legitimacy of national positions in the conflict, but the Stabilization and Association Agreement (1999)<sup>8</sup> partly answered to the need of the region, introducing the political dialogue and the stabilization within the conditional process of enlargement. The process worked quite well in Macedonia, but showed its limit when it was concerning the relations with two EU Member States, Greece and Bulgaria. Inside of the EU, there were, as usually, divisions on the security policy to conduct<sup>9</sup>.

Initial recognition of the country, albeit temporary and patchy, took place under the name of FYROM, which was the first step towards the international stabilization of the state. But the European Union could also offer the dream of development that would bring stability and economic development to this periphery of Southeast Europe. Becoming a member of the European Union seemed to guarantee security, freedom, protection and economic development. This was soft power with civilian means. This power is particularly important in a context of conditionality. Indeed, the attraction of the prospect of joining the European Union can help convince countries to radically transform themselves.

## The European actorness in question

For B. Rosamond (2005)<sup>10</sup>, the EU cannot be fully-fledged analyzed as a player in International Relations, as it is not a state. These kinds of approach are very common: Jacob, Klaus & Teebken, Julia. (2022). Those authors consider the actorness of the EU through different dimensions. The internal conditions of this actorness are according to them the Authority (of the EU), Autonomy and Cohesion<sup>11</sup>. The Cohesion criteria is expecting that all the nation-states will speak with one voice. This definition, if we take it seriously, is so strict that it would recognize to the EU some actorness only within the non-polemic trade policy aspects. That would strongly underestimate the role and influence of

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *The Stabilisation and Association Process for Countries of South-Eastern Europe*, Brussels, 26 May 1999, COM (99).

<sup>9</sup> Concerning the French-British conflict concerning the EU security guarantees for Macedonia/FYROM, see J. Howorth, *France, Britain and the Euro-Atlantic Crisis*, «Survival» 2003, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 173–192.

<sup>10</sup> B. Rosamond, *Conceptualizing the EU Model of Governance in World Politics*, «European Foreign Affairs Review» 2005, vol. 10, no. 4, p. 463–478.

<sup>11</sup> *Die Höhen und Tiefen der Europäischen Union als Akteur in der internationalen Klimapolitik*, «Integration» 2022, no. 45, p. 219–236.

the EU. On a similar way, some authors<sup>12</sup> consider the EU as a very fragile and incomplete actor. For Vincent Delaere, Louise G. Van Schaik<sup>13</sup>, there is a relation between actorness and effectiveness in multilateral relations, i.e. between the EU authority, its homogeneity and the EU socialisation. These authors would expect, once again, the EU speaking with one single voice<sup>14</sup>. These approaches are actually openly applying to the EU the frame of a modern nation-state, concluding that the EU do not fulfil all the criteria of a modern state actorness. Some authors recognise the EU as having an actorness *sui generis*, that is a more sophisticated way to look at it, but still within the frame of a modern state model.

Nevertheless, the questions issuing from these approaches are important, as they remind us the particularity of the EU actorness. For Urbanski (2020),<sup>15</sup> there would be a more adequate approach: the “corporate action model of actorness establishes a sharp distinction between corporate and collective actors” (p. 10). For this instance, we would have to rethink how the models were built.

Concerning the type of the power itself, there is as well a very rich literature concerning the EU normative power, inherited from the Duchêne civilian power<sup>16</sup>. This is belonging to the same category of power as the soft power. We will see that the conditionality is making from the European Transformative Power ETP a particularly powerful soft power, but only on certain conditions, that are, for instance, the condition of negotiations.

I will argue here that to understand the EU actorness, we need first of all to stop to consider the EU as similar to a state. Second of all, we have to remember that even in a modern state, to consider that the state institutions are acting according to one aim and as one man is clearly a reduction, and a simplification of a reality<sup>17</sup>. We have then to complexify the explanatory model in some situations.

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<sup>12</sup> Y. Richard, G. Van Hamme, *The European Union as an Actor in International Relations. A Geographical Assessment of European Actorness*, «L'Espace Géographique (English Edition)» 2013, vol. 42, no. 1, p. 15–30. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26213667> (21.11.2023).

<sup>13</sup> V. Delaere, L. Van Schaik, *EU representation in the OPCW after Lisbon: Still Waiting for Brussels*, «Clingendael Paper No. 7», The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael 2012.

<sup>14</sup> 20120903\_research\_paper\_no\_7\_lvschaik.pdf (clingendael.org)

<sup>15</sup> K. Urbanski, *Chapter 1: Introduction: actorness and EU sanctions*, [in:] *The European Union and International Sanctions*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing 2020.

<sup>16</sup> F. Duchêne, *Europe's Role in World Peace*, [in:] R. Mayne (ed.), *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, Fontana/Collins for Chatham House/PEP 1972, chap. 2, p. 32–47.

<sup>17</sup> G.T. Allison, *Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, «The American Political Science Review» 1969, vol. 63, no. 3, p. 689–718.



When speaking about the power of the EU, we are making a classic reduction. As we know as well, the EU decision procedures are complex. In order to understand the power and actorness of the EU, we will have to come back to a more precise determination of the procedures, in order to give a better definition of this reduction. The Sjöstedt<sup>18</sup> definition of the EU agency, expecting some traditional characteristic of a State, are very difficult, or even impossible to operationalize: State are various and different, but it would be rather to consider false to consider the EU as a state, and impossible to neglect its power in international relations. Alexander's Wendt<sup>19</sup> constructivism is proposing here tools easier to use for our topic: norms and legitimacy, perceptions. Adopting this constructivist approach in this case of conflicts between Member States and candidates convinced us to follow the idea of a complexity of interaction constituting the system of the EU action.

### **The decision making process within the EU: Europa duplex or triplex?**

Officially, there are 3 main institutions involved in EU decision-making:

1. the European Parliament, representing EU citizens;
2. the Council of the European Union, representing EU governments;
3. the European Commission, representing the EU's overall interests.

A 'co-decision' procedure of these three main institutions allowed to co-produce the EU policies, mainly through the ordinary legislative procedures. The more visible activities, for our cases, were on the level of parties and governments. Those parties have links to the European parties, and the main procedural coordination of the government actions are done within the Council of the EU.

For strategic decisions, a national government can use its right of veto within the Council of the European Union. In the case of memory conflicts, Greece, then Bulgaria, will use this power within the Union to demand memory transformations from the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, then from the Republic of North Macedonia. In this way, the European Union became an important lever for Greek and Bulgarian national policies, was resonance box. In such a situation, can we consider the European Union as an actor, or just an instrument of Greek and Bulgarian policies?

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<sup>18</sup> G. Sjöstedt, *The External Role of the European Community*, Westmead: Saxon House, 1977.

<sup>19</sup> A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.



Our argument here is that the actorness of the Union is partly in question, because it must be better specified, with limits and fields of action that need to be specified, as well as a field of action to be drawn. Indeed, both Greece and Bulgaria are associated with the decision-making power of the Union in a procedural manner and in accordance with the treaties. We will also see that the motivations and games of influence make the places of production of certain political choices and their developments illegible. But it is by using the power of attraction of the Union, following a decision-making procedure of the Union that the decision to open or not to open negotiations with the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, then North Macedonia are taken. Furthermore, we have observed that a complex game between Member States is developed during these decision-making processes, much more developed than that of the Commission or the European Parliament.

On the other hand, it would be illusory to believe here that the strategies of the Union are decided only at the level of the Commission. But some of the decisions follow illegible logic. The negotiations between the European Commission and the Member States, the negotiations between Member States, the role of discussions between political parties present in national and European parliaments, all these elements do not allow a single strategy to be systematically defined for the entire Union.

The European Parliament will have many activities, as an institution, and through its members. But it will be difficult to assert its clear and strong agency. Parts of these actions will be confirming the Commission's activities. Another part will be in a weak interaction with the national parliaments within the region. For this case, we decided to describe the tension as a game between the national states within or outside of the EU and the EU Commission. We will see that the USA will be a very important outside player as well, in some situations.

This decision-making system can lead to significant internal contradictions constituting either a balance of powers or a contradictory and sometimes paralyzed system. In this specific case, it is the participation and contradictory wishes of the Member States in the co-decision that constitutes tensions and inconsistencies between decision-making bodies within the Union. Then we find ourselves in a situation similar to what Michel Crozier and Ehrard Friedberg describe: although the actors see a logic to their action, allowing them to guarantee or strengthen their room for manoeuvre, the projects are not as coherent or clear as that. The actors calculate according to a limited rationality<sup>20</sup>.

If the institutional perspective of the Union leads us to outline a complex situation, we will see that the field of action, the question of collective mem-

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<sup>20</sup> M. Crozier, E. Friedberg, *L'Acteur et le système*, Editions du Seuil, 1977.

ory, plays a role in the methods of action of the actors, and in their strategies. Also, I will come back to a slightly more contextualized definition of the notion of collective memory used here.

### European collective memory

The notion of collective memory, conceived at the beginning of the 20th century, was extremely developed in the 80s and 90s in France, then in Germany, in the United States, to be an internationally used concept. Of course, collective memory does not concern individual, lived memories. But events, symbols or people from the past, certain interpretations of real or imaginary events, are represented as if they constituted memories lived by the abstract and imaginary body of a social group, a nation, or possibly the European Union, even if no one concrete remembers them specifically. If international memory studies are very developed, they remain less developed in the discipline of international relations<sup>21</sup>.

Memory policies, sometimes called historical policies in Poland, do not fall within the scope of the work of an historian in the noble sense of the term. If the historian analyses the traces of the past to understand the past as it was at the time, memory policies aim to use past events to shape the future. Thus, modern states have multiplied the use of these symbols to socialize populations to chosen norms and values. There is a symbolism in street names, monuments, flags, and canons of compulsory reading.

At both national and international levels, publicly “remembering” can even be considered a form of aggression<sup>22</sup>. This was already the case at the time of Aristotle, in his commentary on the constitution of Athens, praising the wisdom of the Athenians in their ban on remembering (or recalling) the events survived during the tyranny of the thirty, in order to ensure social peace. There are commemorations that can lead to civil war. But in the case of too great conflicts of memories, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur recommended correcting memories by a return to history.

In this context, were the memory conflicts between the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM and its neighbours preventive conflicts? It is difficult to accept

<sup>21</sup> With the important work here of V. Rosoux, for exemple in *Les usages de la mémoire dans les relations internationales*, Bruyant 2001. There are as well other publications, like in Poland N. Maslowski, A. Szeptycki (eds.), *Pamięć zbiorowa, pojednanie i stosunki międzynarodowe*, Warsaw 2020.

<sup>22</sup> N. Maslowski, *Pamięć jako konflikt a pamięć jako droga do pojednania*, [in:] N. Maslowski, A. Szeptycki (eds.), *Pamięć zbiorowa, pojednanie i stosunki międzynarodowe*, Warsaw 2020, p. 9–22.

this argument from neighbours several times more populated and richer than this small country. The fact is that it was not a return to history that served as the basis for compromises, but the interpretation of history made by politicians during negotiations.

The European Commission and the European Parliament do not have a clear memorial doctrine themselves. Apart from the issue of the Holocaust and the memory of the suffering of communism, there have been very few attempts to create transnational commemorations. The European memorial influence, in the case of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, is therefore formed while the institutions do not know what memory they would like to promote. This does not call into question European expertise in financing and supporting reconciliation organizations, among others following the Yugoslav wars.

The negotiation of national memory is such a sensitive point that it can be interpreted as specific.

Indeed, for this small country negotiating its future with the European Union, the redefinition of its national memory that is in stake also redefines national security issues. According to the Copenhagen School, public discourses and State discursive production belongs to the perception of the security, and to its interpretation<sup>23</sup>. In a collective book, main representatives of this school observe the necessity to make a shift from States toward Societies in the study of security in Europe, in the 90s<sup>24</sup>. The community, sense of belonging, identity became a major aspect of the security understanding, and the collective of authors introduced the conceptual framework of societal security, that will be developed by Buzan, Waever and de Wilde in a following book<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, the questions of the identity of the nation, defined partly by the politics of memory, is becoming a central question of national security.

For a State to agree to open this type of sector to negotiation, a very specific situation is required with a certain number of prerequisites opening the condition of possibility of existence of this relationship. First of all a strong asymmetry given in the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM, then North Macedonia by its size and its economic situation. The lack of geopolitical alternative of the candidate country since the collapse of the blocs and Yugoslavia makes

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<sup>23</sup> O. Waver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, [in:] R.D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security*, Columbia University Press 1995, p. 46–86 and B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> O. Waever, B. Buzan, M. Kelstrup, P. Lemaître, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, Pinter Publishers, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> B. Buzan, O. Waever Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1998.

the Union the only perspective of positive evolution for the country, which creates a relationship of dependence in the negotiation, which constitutes the power of conditionality of the Union. The motivation is all the stronger because joining the union would allow us to move away from relations based on force to relations based on the rule of law and on justice and equality. It is understood that Russian and Chinese activities in the region could change this perspective of dependency. A dependency that lasts, which is humiliating and in contradiction with the message of democracy, freedom and equality that the European Union carries.

The negotiation of national memory is specific to the European Union itself. It concerns an area on which there is no consensus of the Union, no assumed doctrine. Moreover, it becomes at the same time an element of external policy (of enlargement) and internal policy. The conflict puts the Union in a situation of profound internal contradiction, since it leads it to have to defend a universalizing vision, and at the same time be an instrument of defence of the interests of its own members. By this second point, the Union plays the role of sounding board of the foreign policies of its members, as described by Franck Petiteville<sup>26</sup>. But we will interpret this as an internal effect of the European Union, due to the struggles of influence between Member States and other actors, within the framework of European decision-making procedures. These struggles concern the policies of allocation of resources (symbolic, financial, structural such as enlargement in this case).

I will therefore, as proposed by the constructivist A. Wendt the representative of the Copenhagen/English school B. Buzan and also following my Czech colleagues K. Čmakalová, and J.M. Rolenc, "suggest treating the Union as an actor sui generis (e.g. multi-level, multi-faceted structure of trans-national institutions, member states and various other actors), which in addition is in a constant process of evolution."<sup>27</sup>

This will be the case during the very long conflict between North Macedonia and Greece, and the case of the intermittent and ongoing conflict with Bulgaria, two members of the European Union, and two conflicts which will mobilize the European institutions and the member states.

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<sup>26</sup> F. Petiteville, *La politique internationale de l'Union européenne*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> K. Čmakalová, J.M. Rolenc, *Actorness and Legitimacy of the European Union*, «Cooperation and Conflict» 2012, vol. 47, no. 2, p. 260–270. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45084659> (30.10.2023).

## **The conflict between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece**

### **The International actors**

After the independence referendum on September 17, 1991, the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM was strongly legitimized. This multi-ethnic state, with real internal tensions, will emancipate itself with massive support from the population (96% support for independence with more than 75% participation), while the first violence and attacks against Slovenia and especially Croatia increase the fear of imperialist domination by Milosevic's Serbia. But this massive support must not hide the boycott of the Albanian minority.

Greece's immediate rejection of the new name and the country's symbols are not spontaneous, as it might seem. Indeed, the rejection of the use of references to ancient Macedonia had been controversial for several years, culminating in 1988, when Greece decided, as part of this rhetoric, to name the second Greek administrative region (from a political and economic point of view), around its capital, Thessaloniki, "Macedonia". The threatening was even military, with Greek disturbances of the Macedonian/FYROM airspace, and military exercises at the border<sup>28</sup>. The relations between the identity/memory and national security was clearly made since the beginning.

The declaration of independence of the self-proclaimed Republic of Macedonia follows that of Slovenia and Croatia. It will also follow the declaration of the Arbitration Commission of the European Conference for Peace in Yugoslavia, chaired by the Frenchman Robert Badinter, declaring Yugoslavia "in the process of dissolution". This commission, initially composed of five presidents of constitutional courts of Member States of the European Union, will propose a series of non-binding advisory opinions, but with strong legitimacy, because they come from the commission, which had been seized for this purpose by the Council of Heads of State. We can see there the desire to try to create a broad and deep consensus, within the Member States, on the attitude to adopt towards the new states emerging from Yugoslavia, while the question of the recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence, following their declarations, had been the occasion for strong tensions between France and Germany. Since the beginning of the plot, we can observe then a multiplicity of actors, an active participation of the EU, but as well of some member-states.

The threat of more muscular Greek reactions convinced the Europeans to act quickly, to prevent the Yugoslav conflict from spreading. The Republic of

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<sup>28</sup> D. Marolov, *The Relations Between Macedonia and Greece in the Context of Name Issue*. «Balkan Arařtırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi» 2013, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 23–34.

Macedonia/FYROM itself is torn between the desire for international affirmation and the will to calm the conflict and the Greek criticism of Macedonian irredentism<sup>29</sup>. Thus, two amendments to the Constitution were introduced, one confirming the borders and introducing a procedure making border changes possible only in accordance with international and constitutional standards. The second, confirmed that the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM had no territorial requirements. But the question of the protection of the Macedonian minority outside its borders remained as the confirmation of a danger for the Greeks. Greece then blocked the international recognition of the country as long as the word Macedonia was present in the name of the new independent Republic. Here, Greece is playing its chess game on different arenas. The UN are here one arena, we will see that the EU can be sometimes an arena for the Greek foreign policy, sometimes an actor of the plot.

Already in 1992, the UN mediator Matthew Nimetz will be very active, proposing various alternative names to the newly emerged state, without having any major success. But he comes back to his vision concerning the conflict and his activities in his own article<sup>30</sup>, but analysing it mainly through the bilateral and UN prism, without any deeper reflection on the EU source or modalities of power. He nevertheless mentions among the actors, the EU, the USA, and the UN. We will see that he will be personally a source of many propositions.

Some propositions will come from the academic sphere, from member-states. During the first decade of the conflicts, quickly, there won't be any research of originality in the proposition of the actors. For instance, the Portuguese Foreign Minister Joao de Deus Pinheiro received a mandate from the Council to try to solve the conflict. He will, in April 1992, propose the name of "New Macedonia" that will be instantly rejected by the Greek side. The United Nations, and their negotiators Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen will use again this same proposition, but in a non-translated version (in Slavic), that will be rejected in March 1993 as well. Some other propositions will be supported by Germany or France, later, with a clear will to play a role in solving the problem, rather than to affirm their paternity on the name itself. Since that periode, Germany will have an impressive number of diplomatic visits, supports, advisors. The country is strongly involved economically as well. We see that since that time, the member states' diplomacies act parallely to the EU one, to solve and influence this memorial conflict.

<sup>29</sup> S. Erdoğan, *From The Name Dispute To The Prespa Agreement: The Relations Between Greece And North Macedonia*, «Актуальные Проблемы Международных Отношений» 2020, no. 4 (57), p. 3–14, in particular p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> M. Nimetz, *The Macedonian "Name" Dispute: The Macedonian, Question – Resolved?*, «Nationalities Papers» 2020, 48 (2), p. 205–214.

During the first year, even though the EU representatives from different types were playing an important role in the negotiations, the role of the UN and of the USA behind was not least important. The actors are not playing as if they were here in competition, but rather supporting each-others. It seemed as if the International Community, the UE, the United States were here sharing the interest of the international stability, and the memorial issue itself was not so much, since Badinter, considered as a matter of principles.

## The European Union

Greece began in 1992 a three years long commercial embargo against the non recognized Republic of Macedonia. This Greek retortion is a source of strong criticism and pressure on Greece from the EU, including various additional member states and from the USA. The EU commission organized its first legal action against a member-state at the European Court of Justice, for violation of free trade law. Greece here overpassed the European rules, using non-agreed retortion on the European level, that is an attack against the rule of the common market. The EU action is therefore important, influencing the conflict and limiting Greece in its action, but without officially expressing any statement concerning the memorial question itself.

We can consider that in that moment, the EU shows its capacity to act, very strongly, but within the very limited frame of the European free market common rules agreements. It was efficient enough to obtain that an *interim accord* between Greece and Macedonia was signed on 13 September 1995. Macedonia accepts here to remove *the star of Vergin* from its flag, a symbol referring to the antic Macedonian Empire, and eliminated the so-called Irredentist clauses in its constitution (rights of the Macedonian minority in neighbouring countries).

Resulting from this, FYROM signed a cooperation agreement with the EU in 1997, as the first country in the Western Balkans to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU in 2001. Paradoxically, the Greek diplomacy contributed greatly to the conclusion of these agreements. It will not be the only member state engaged, and Germany, France, and other member states are regularly acting supporting the EU leadership, or maybe its own leadership within the EU. But a civil war in FYROM with a rebellion movement from the Albanian minority will stop temporarily the negotiations process in 2001.

Since 1995, the perspective of collaboration with the EU, and to enter the EU became a main goal of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM government. That gave an important conditional power to the EU over the still not recognized under its name Republic of Macedonia. The question of the national



identity, of the relation to Greece, of the relation to the EU became a major dividing line within the Republic of Macedonian politics. From this point of view, the EU soft power is very important, enough to polarize the citizens of this country. But clearly not enough to have a decisive influence on the whole political spectrum of the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM<sup>31</sup>.

The very limited progresses, within the Macedonian Greek relations, does not mean any kind of convincing compromise concerning the past. The will of a national unity (after this small Macedonian-Albanian civil war), the lack of quick or clear perspectives are some of the elements that explains the success of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), having a strong national and memorial project<sup>32</sup>.

With the Gruevski's governments (2006–2016), the discussions were no longer possible, due to this radicalization of the Macedonian national discourse. The national narrative was referring directly and strongly to Alexander the Great and to a continuity since this antic empire. The explosion of Macedonian memorial politicians related either to Orthodoxy (problems with Bulgaria) or to the heritage of the region<sup>33</sup>. It was the case as well of the tsar Simeon 1st (considered here as more Macedonian than Bulgarian), Saint Clement and Saint Naum, creating here strong tensions with Bulgaria as well (see the subpart concerning the relations with Bulgaria). Gruevski's national discourse was more directed towards internal questions than international relations. This version of history, based on the antiquation of the national identity, was freeing the right-wing party from the dominating left-wing and pan-Yugoslavian national discourse. To achieve that, Gruevski was presenting a theory of a geographical and populational continuity with antiquity, based on the supposition of the mix of population following the Slavic arrivals. But this national identity was source of tensions and conflicts non only with the neighbours, but as well with the Albanian minority<sup>34</sup>. But these conflicts, with Greece, Bulgaria,

<sup>31</sup> A. Tziampiris, *The Macedonian name dispute and European Union accession*, «Southeast European and Black Sea Studies» 2012, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 153–171, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2012.661225>. In this article, the colleague from a Greek university explain how the EU accession of FYROM passes through the acceptations of the Greek expectancies.

<sup>32</sup> About the various commemorations and politics of remembrance of 2001, see N. Trajanovski, *Remembering the 2001 Armed Conflict in Macedonia: modes of commemoration and memorialization*, Humanitarian Law Centre 2022.

<sup>33</sup> T. Marinov call this "the anticommunist assertion of Macedonian Identity": T. Marinov, *Historiographical Revisionism and Re-Articulation of Memory in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, «Sociétés politiques comparées» 2010, no. 25, p. 1–19.

<sup>34</sup> B. Gjuzelov, M. Ivanovska Hadjievska, *Institutional and symbolic aspects of illiberal politics: the case of North Macedonia (2006–2017)*, «Southeast European And Black Sea Studies»

the Albanians was a source of cohesion for its voters. The Macedonian Prime Minister sent a letter to the Greek Prime Minister (2008), with the expectation that the rights of the Macedonian minorities in Greece will be recognized. This was considered as a strong provocation, as according to Greece, there are no Macedonian minorities in Greece. The conflict between the EU members, that involved the EU institution itself, was organizing the division of the internal political scene in the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM. We will see that the relation to this conflict and to the EU will contribute to polarize as well the Greek and the Bulgarian scene.

The conflict was concerning the EU matters, but as well UN and NATO. The three arenas were related together. In 2008, before and during the NATO summit in Bucharest, some countries supported the decision of an enlargement of NATO, and of the opening of the accession process. Croatia and Albania were invited. The will of Ukraine and of Georgia was welcomed, without any clear invitation, as part of the European countries were divided on the question, and feared of the Russian reaction. Concerning The Republic of Macedonia FYROM, the blockade of the NATO membership at the Bucharest summit in 2008 is blocked by a Greek veto. Despite the fact that this was considered as a violation of the interim accord from 1995 by the International court of Justice in 2011, it has no consequences on the conflict<sup>35</sup>. Bulgaria will join the Greek position on this point in 2012. Great Britain and Germany were looking actively for solutions, when France consider to be morally obliged to support Greece, that was already an EU-member. The divisions, and the negative reactions of the Macedonian citizens gave to Gruevski a new electoral success. According to some authors, the EU (and NATO) accession fatigue was a favouriting alternative directions, like nationalism, and by this way authoritarianism<sup>36</sup>.

The European Commission recommends starting accession negotiations between Republic of Macedonia/FYROM and the EU for the first time in 2009, and for 4 years in a row. All recommendations were ignored by the European Council. We can see here a clear division between the community of the member-states and the Commission itself.

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2020, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 41–60. We find some aspect of similar analysis in the chapter A. Graan, *Seeing double – Political polarization and identity politics in Macedonia, before and after the Prespa Agreement*, [in:] V.P. Neofotistos (ed.), *Macedonia and Identity Politics After the Prespa Agreement*, Routledge 2021, p. 173–205.

<sup>35</sup> S. Erdoĝan, *From The Name Dispute...*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> See for instance G.P. Draško, I. Fiket, J. Vasiljević, *Big dreams and small steps: comparative perspectives on the social movement struggle for democracy in Serbia and North Macedonia*, «Southeast European and Black Sea Studies» 2019, vol. 20, no. 1, DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2019.1654317, in particular p. 202–204.

A second stage of the EU influence over the memorial questions in the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM began after the Gruevski government in January 2016. The memorial and identity questions changed strongly, and as a result, Republic of Macedonia/FYROM and Bulgaria signed a treaty of good neighbourhood and cooperation in 2017. A joint commission of historians is created. As Bulgaria holds the presidency of the European Council, Bulgaria decides to lobby for FYROM. But the phantoms from the past are complicating again the situation, and revived arguments from the 1960's and 70's are coming back in Bulgaria, and then Macedonia/FYROM<sup>37</sup>.

On the other side, the growing influence of Russia, China and Turkey in the region motivates the European Commission, and various member states and the US to lobby for a resolution of the conflict, and work on EU and NATO enlargement.

The Macedonian Prime minister Zoran Zaev decides to have an active reconciliation policy. He accepts to change the name of the airport and highway, eliminating any reference to Alexander the Great. In exchange, Greece opens the possibility of accession to the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative<sup>38</sup>. For Zoran Zaev, the international agreement for peace, and steps towards the membership to the EU is as well a question of internal politics. He needs to be successful to prove to its population that his choices were the right-ones compared to the VMRO's ones<sup>39</sup>.

Here, the activities of the European powers (Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy) and of the EU succeed in convincing Macedonia to make compromises. But on the other side, they have their influence over Greece as well, as after the huge crisis, Tsipras is very eager to find lasting solutions, that will bring his country and the region to the right direction.

A positive evolution is then possible, thanks to the alignment of the internal political positions of the pro-European forces. Despite this positive constellation, the negotiations were very difficult, as the opposition between the countries was very strong. The 17th of June 2018, the Prespa agreement is signed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Ministers, witnessed by the UN mediator, but in presence of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commissioner for

<sup>37</sup> A precise analysis of the development in Bulgaria is presented in U. Brunnbauer, *Side Effects of "Phantom Pains": How Bulgarian Historical Mythology Derails North Macedonia's EU Accession*, «Comparative Southeast European Studies» 2022, vol. 70, no. 4, p. 722–739.

<sup>38</sup> S. Erdoğan, *From The Name Dispute...*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> S. Marusic, *Macedonia Sets 'Name' Referendum for September*, [in:] *Balkan Insight*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-sets-name-referendum-for-september-07-30-2018> (16.11.2023).

Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policy. Parallely to these negotiations, there are many initiatives, secret or public, of member-states, the NATO general secretary, the US representative and others, under the supervision of the United States. I remind here the major element of the compromise was the rejection of any continuity and inheritance with the Macedonian antic empire and the new republic. The main concrete aspect of it is a compromise about the name of the republic, changed into "the Republic of North Macedonia". The other symbols considered as provocative, as the flag referring to the antic Macedonian flag, are limited, transformed or suppressed. The Macedonian language is defined as a Slavic language, and there is no continuity between the now-a-day population and the antic Macedonian one. EU enlargement commissioner Johannes Hahn called the agreement "a historic breakthrough for the two countries, the region and Europe as a whole (...)", and the European Council President Donald Tusk wrote on Twitter "They had imagination, they took the risk, they were ready to sacrifice their own interests for the greater good. Zoran [Zaev], Alexis [Tsipras] – well done! Mission impossible accomplished"<sup>40</sup>.

We see here that there is a negotiation about the interpretation of the past, the identity, what is generally called politics of memory, between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia (becoming the Republic of North Macedonia). The topic is the heart of its national identity. The instrument of the Greeks, in the negotiation, was first the commercial boycott (until 1995), then the veto on recognition on the international level, the veto on negotiations concerning the enlargement of NATO and of the EU.

For the North Macedonian, the international negotiations became a major topic after its independence. After time, the temporary name of FYROM was progressively sufficient to exist internationally. As there was no short-term danger of invasion, the membership in NATO can be interpreted as a step toward international recognition, and normalization of the functioning of the State in International Relations, and acceptance by the western countries. The membership in the EU was and is much more important: it was related with the hope of wealth and better future, in period of economic crisis and massive migration<sup>41</sup>.

For the European Union, the stabilization of the region was a key point for its own stability, and since the XXIst century, the growing conflicts and compe-

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<sup>40</sup> S. Marusic, *Greek MPs Approve Historic Macedonia 'Name' Agreement*, [in:] *Balkan Insight* <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/01/25/athens-approves-historic-macedonia-name-agreement-01-24-2019> (16.11.2023).

<sup>41</sup> S. Keil, *Europeanization, State-building and democratization in the Western Balkans*, «Nationalities Papers» 2013, no. 41 (3), p. 343–353. It is interesting to notice here as well that the state building process here is described parallely to the problems of the EU politics of memory in the country, but without introducing it into the model.

tition with Russia, China, and Turkey within the region brings to a cooperation with the US, sharing here a strategic interest.

But the EU is as well composed of its member-states, and some of them try to play their own game. The UK, Germany and France, for instance, are supporting the EU, underlying their leadership, by trying to influence the situation. They have as well their own influence on Greece and North Macedonia. Another unexpected player is Hungary, having as well its mediators and experts in North Macedonia. Hungary will underline its ideological proximity with the Gruevski party line, and will welcome Gruevski into exile when he flees, accused of corruption and facing prison in November 2018.

In each of the quoted countries, the position towards this memorial dispute and its way out is a controversial question, dividing the opposition and the majority. This influence of the EU is as well a question of internal conflicts in North Macedonia, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, Germany, and to a less extent in the UK. There is a game between political options, overpassing the borders, within the community of the EU political movements, but finding its agency only through state politics and EU politics.

## **The conflict with Bulgaria**

As already mentioned above, the politics of memory and identity in the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM is a source of friction with Bulgaria and challenges its historical narrative. Our aim here is still not to judge the accuracy of the historical discourse, but to put into context the memory influence of the European Union and its mode of operation, highlighted by this conflict.

Since 1992, Bulgaria has recognized the independence of the Republic of Macedonia (under this name), but does not recognize the existence of its nation. Macedonian is seen as a Bulgarian dialect, and Macedonians are, according to the Bulgarian narrative, a regional subgroup of the Bulgarian nation. From this point of view, the essence of the existence of the Macedonians/North Macedonians was much more endangered. But the conflict was less brutal than with Greece. The conflict was limited to bi-lateral tensions, without involving the influence of the EU or without amplifying it on other arenas.

The rules governing good neighbourly relations agreed between Bulgaria and North Macedonia were set in *the Joint Declaration of February 22, 1999*. It is interesting to note that on the Macedonian side, it is signed by the leader of the national conservative party VMRO-DPMNE. This declaration was confirmed in a common memorandum signed the 22.01.2008 in Sofia.

It seemed then that the Republic of Macedonia/FYROM was protected of any major crisis from the Bulgarian side, and could find there even an ally. But the publication of the "Macedonian Encyclopedia", in 2009, was the beginning of a long period of tension, that was achieved by the end of the Gruevski rules. Many politicians, the medias, and finally the government were considering that Macedonia was appropriating itself Bulgarian national heroes. And Bulgaria was able to make a pressure on Macedonia, through blocking European questions, similarly to Greece. It was considered as an issue on the UN level as well. The long-term use by Greece of the EU structures to defend its position became a source of inspiration for the Bulgarian policy.

After the Gruevski rules, a treaty of friendship is signed in August 2017, and ratified the 15 of January 2018, despite a boycott of the VMRO-DPMNE in the Macedonian Parliament. This opposition is even more unreadable easily, when we take into account the fact that the majority of the negotiations were provided during the VMRO-DPMNE rules. But this treaty has to be understood as a first step in the direction of a stabilization, but it is not really solving the memorial conflict. Bulgaria is still threatening to veto any progression with the EU. And the fact is, that despite the fact that the Republic of Macedonia was the first country in the region that signed a treaty of cooperation with the EU in the region, any progress was frozen since then, and it could still not reach the status of a candidate country. Bulgaria could use its position of member-state as a tool to favourite its own interpretation of history.

In October 2020, Bulgaria proposed a compromise and agreed to recognize the Macedonian language and identity if the Republic of Macedonia acknowledges that they historically had Bulgarian roots. This proposal is rejected, as the Macedonian government do not consider those common roots as Bulgarian, and was considering the origins of the Macedonians defined as descendants of the Slavic and Bulgarian peoples, but also of the antic Macedonians and Thracians<sup>42</sup>.

The Bulgarian position is then very criticized on the EU level, and particularly by some leading member states. The German government used then particularly a lot of its influence to force the Bulgarian government to change its position. In Bulgaria, the government has a thin majority, and is blackmailed by the smallest party of the ruling coalition. Besides the activities of Germany and other major European states, the French activities had a special influence, when France had the presidency of the Council of the EU, in the first semes-

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<sup>42</sup> This was the role as well of historians working on the so-called "ethnogenesis" research (or etnogeneza), see T. Marinov, *Historiographical Revisionism and Re-Articulation of Memory in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, «Sociétés politiques comparées» 2010, no. 25, p. 5.



ter 2022<sup>43</sup>. The French diplomatic capacities in Bulgaria, with the support of many other actors, make possible to convince the Bulgarian Government to change its position. It was even more difficult as the support and the believe in an EU enlargement was regularly falling in North Macedonia, and therefore the understanding for a compromise as well<sup>44</sup>. For Angel Petrov, on the opposite, it is the divisions of the ruling parties that created a space for finding dynamic and new solutions for various topics, as the conflict with North-Macedonia<sup>45</sup>.

An agreement concerning the content of the text-books is found and signed the 15 of august 2022. <sup>46</sup> The conflict, according to them, concerns the language recognition (Macedonian is a Bulgarian dialect, according to them), the nation recognition, and the interpretation of history, expressed in the North-Macedonian Memory Politics<sup>47</sup>. The question of the Bulgarian collaboration concerning deportation of the Jews from Macedonia was as well a topic of conflict<sup>48</sup>.

The French, British, German, EU activism, mainly, was able to influence the Bulgarian politics enough to bring to a government change<sup>49</sup>. This success is difficult to accept, from both sides. In Bulgaria, it will end into early elections in October 2022. "There Is Such a People" party (Ima takŭv narod) quit the

<sup>43</sup> Concerning the Macron policies toward the region, and the vision of France for North Macedonia, in a European context, see T. Mileski, K. Klimoska, *France's Geopolitical Vision For Europe and the Western Balkans: The Case Of North Macedonia*, «The Review of International Affairs» (Belgrade) 2021, vol. LXXII, no. 1181, p. 23–42.

<sup>44</sup> *Anger at EU North Macedonia deal may unseat government*, [in:] *Oxford Analytica* (2022), Expert Briefings, <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB271379>, (11.07.2022).

<sup>45</sup> A. Petrov, *How Instability in Bulgaria Helped Make the North Macedonia Deal*, «Südosteuropa Mitteilungen» 2022, no. 62 (issue 5–6), p. 19–31.

<sup>46</sup> <https://mkd.mk/makedonija/politika/makedonija-gi-objavi-dosega-usoglasenite-preporaki-za-zaednichko-chestvuvanje-i> (2.09.2022).

<sup>47</sup> U. Brunnbauer, *Side Effects of "Phantom Pains": How Bulgarian Historical Mythology Derails North Macedonia's EU Accession*, «Comparative Southeast European Studies» 2022, vol. 70, no. 4, p. 722–739, <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2022-0064>.

<sup>48</sup> On this topic, see the very good chapters from a collective book: S. Troebst, *Macedonian Historiography on the Holocaust in Macedonia under Bulgarian occupation*, [in:] N. Ragaru (ed.), *La Shoah en Europe du Sud-Est: Les Juifs en Bulgarie et dans les terres sous administration bulgare (1941–1944)*, Mémoriale de la Shoah 2013, p. 131–137, and N. Ragaru, *Nationaliser La Shoah? Les enjeux identitaires des controverses Bulgaro-Macédoniennes sur l'Histoire*, [in:] N. Ragaru (ed.), *La Shoah en Europe du Sud-Est: Les Juifs en Bulgarie et dans les terres sous administration bulgare (1941–1944)*, Mémoriale de la Shoah 2013, p. 138–161, and finally L. Dejanova, *The "Non-Saved Jews": Recent Controversies And Political Uses In The Bulgarian Public Space*, [in:] N. Ragaru (ed.), *La Shoah en Europe du Sud-Est : Les Juifs en Bulgarie et dans les terres sous administration bulgare (1941–1944)*, Mémoriale de la Shoah 2013, p. 162–172.

<sup>49</sup> S. Todorov, *S. Bulgarian Ruling Coalition Cracks over North Macedonia Dispute*, [in:] *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/08/bulgarian-ruling-coalition-cracks-over-north-macedonia-dispute/> (16.11.2023).



coalition, as the Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov is ready to reopen the accession talks between the European Union (EU) and North Macedonia.

The 26 October 2022, the European Agency signed a deal on boarder management with North Macedonia. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and North Macedonia's Prime Minister Dimitar Kovacevski held a joint news conference in the capital Skopje. But it was not noticed publicly that the deal was signed in two linguistic versions, English and Macedonian. This fact was latter interpreted as a recognition of the EU *de facto* of the Macedonian language, closing symbolically the dispute with Bulgaria on this point. It seems paradoxically that this consequence of this deal was unexpected and not planned.

### **To conclude: Understanding the EU power on its close neighborhood in the memorial questions**

The aim of this article is to analyse the functioning of the power of the European Union over one of the smallest and poorest European states, North Macedonia, based on the particular example of its memorial conflicts with its neighbours Greece and Bulgaria, both members of the European Union. Other member states of the Union will intervene, as well as other great powers. The interconnection between the European and national level of decision-making processes and certain elements of power calls for a need for conceptual simplification to understand European power and its functioning.

Within the EU, some Peripheral states are working to change the European shared memory<sup>50</sup>, but on the other side, some areas remain very strongly national. In our case study, on the contrary, it is the existence of the European Union, its influence, which constitutes a pressure on the periphery to adapt its memory. This pressure is done, due to procedures, and without a clear memorial project of the Commission. On the opposite, regularly, the Commission express the hope that the historical conflict won't limit the progress of the European collaborations, the enlargement process and the good relationships between the communities.

The European Union is powerful. The purpose of this article is not to demonstrate this entirely, but to complete the analysis of this power. To analyse its power in this case study, we have to understand it from three points of view.

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<sup>50</sup> M. Mälksoo, *The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe*, «European Journal of International Relations» 2009, vol. 15, no. 4, p. 653–680.

1. First, the EU has to be seen as an actor among others in this plot. It has its actorness, strategies and influences. But the scope of the action is limited by the lack of clear memorial strategy, lack of own interpretation of history, and there is no clear will to change this point.
2. Secondly, the EU can be seen as acting with two bodies, that we can define as *Europa Duplo*. Despite the institutional definitions, the actions of the EU parliament, were not clearly identifiable.
  - a. The European Commission, through its procedures and negotiations, supported by its attractivity, is playing a major role. It defines universal rules and values, but has to take into account the interest of its members, to avoid a veto, as
  - b. parallelly to the European Commission, we can see a very intense activity of the member-states. First of all, the neighbours, Greece and Bulgaria, that use the EU as an amplifier of their claims and strength, and not as an actor, through their power in the European Council. In that situation, the EU is not anymore an actor, but is an arena. We can see as well activities of some other member-states, regularly, or in the moment of their presidency of the EU. France, Germany, UK, Hungary are particularly active. They use their national diplomatic capacities to convince to their plans, to look for solutions, to defend their values or their leadership. They constitute a community of states, as they are playing on norms and values, on belonging. They are trying to influence both, the external subjects, like here the Republic of North Macedonia, and the EU itself.
3. The memorial question was very related with negotiations related with security and economy. Like in the rest of Yugoslavia, the EU is collaborating and co-acting regularly with the USA and the UN. Once again, we can consider it as a will to establish a larger community of norms, to avoid another war in Europe. But the entrance into NATO or the recognition by the UN never had such an amplifier effect as the EU for its member-states.

The European Union constitutes turn by turn a resource that can be mobilized in the memorial policy of member states (as an attractive institution and community), a framework for the constitution of the standards of the community of European nations, and an institution exporting, to a certain extent, normative frameworks governing relations with neighbouring countries, but also with its own members.

The memorial conflict is not finished in North Macedonia, and will probably last<sup>51</sup>. An important part of the population of North Macedonia still strongly

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<sup>51</sup> S. Kacarska, *The Opening of Accession Negotiations with North Macedonia – Glass Half Full or Half Empty?*, «Südosteuropa Mitteilungen» 2022, no. 62, p. 7–19.

identify with the name "Macedonia" and with the antic symbols that used to represent it. Moreover, similar issues are existing in Kosovo, and my appeared in other regions. The European Union should work on establishing therefore a doctrine concerning memorial politics, based on European consultations. Rule of law, economy and peaceful negotiations are not always able to make those hot topics disappearing by themselves. And the uses and misuses of the EU by some of its members is very likely to be a source of conflicts for the future of the EU and its neighbours.

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