

Oliver Andonov,
 Jana Ilieva

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EVROPSKA VARNOST SKOZI PRIZMO IDENTITETE IN MEDNARODNIH KONFLIKTOV (PRIMER REPUBLIKE SEVERNE MAKEDONIJE)

EUROPEAN SECURITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF IDENTITY AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS (THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA)

Povzetek Evropska unija si kot medvladna unija že več kot dve desetletji prizadeva oblikovati evropsko varnostno identiteto, ki bi odražala razumevanje evropske varnosti v vseh državah članicah. Pri implementaciji te teoretične determinante v pragmatično varnostno politiko se je pojavilo vprašanje identitete na nacionalni ravni in razumevanje ohranjanja nacionalne varnosti v meddržavnih konfliktih evropskega varnostnega prostora. Eden izmed pomembnih delov vprašanja varnosti in identitete je integriran v temeljne interese nacionalne varnosti – to je ohranjanje biološkega substrata za preživetje naroda. S tem se spoprijema Republika Severna Makedonija, kar bo v prispevku obravnavano s teoretičnega in praktičnega vidika.

Ključne besede *Evropska varnost, identiteta, mednarodni konflikti, Severna Makedonija.*

Abstract The European Union, as an intergovernmental union, has been trying to create the European security identity as a reflection of the European security perception among all the Member States for more than two decades. In the implementation of this theoretical determinant in the pragmatic security policy, the question of identity at the national level and the understanding of the preservation of national security in the interstate conflicts of the European Security Area has emerged. One of the key segments of the security and identity issue is integrated in the basic interests of national security, and that is the preservation of the biological substrate for nation's survival. The Republic of North Macedonia is facing this issue which will be discussed in paper through both the theoretical and practical aspects.

Key words *European security, identity, international conflicts, North Macedonia.*

Introduction The basic question which is imposed when you think through and elaborate this kind of paper discussing European security is: »Does European security actually exist?«. This is not a hypothetical question, but rather it refers to a broader concept and view of security as a theory and practice in international relations. This is why a second question emerges, which is: »Does international security exist at all and what does it mean?«.

The answer to these two questions within the framework of the security paradigm and empiricism in international relations, and especially in the relations within the European Union and the European security policy towards other countries, represents a clash of theory and practice, especially when it refers to the protection of the European security area. In our attempt to answer these two questions, we will not only try to answer what is the role of the identity in European security, but we will also refer to the influences on the conflict behaviour of states (even if they are EU Member States). In this context, it could be possible to understand the case of the Republic of North Macedonia, and the identity conflict behaviour of Greece and Bulgaria towards North Macedonia, within the context of the preservation and implementation of their national interests towards the Republic of North Macedonia and the Balkans in general. We should not neglect the analysis and understanding of the relations between Greece and Bulgaria as Member States of the European Union, and thus as active actors in the European security policy in the Balkan region and the security reflections towards the neighbouring regions, but certainly through the prism of their mutual national interests and the possible conflicts that may result from those conflicting interests.

Furthermore, we can talk not only about the fears and perceptions of the parties in the specific conflict, but also about the pragmatism that imposes these questions: »Has the Prespa Agreement resolved the conflict between North Macedonia and Greece?«, »Will a new agreement between North Macedonia and Bulgaria solve their conflict?« and »Are there any guarantees that with the settlement of the two disputes, new conflicts with a serious impact and threat to European security will not appear in the future?«.

However, these issues also imply many other issues that are primarily related to identity, and therefore also to the construction and preservation of the European security identity.

1 IDENTITY AS A CONSTITUENT ELEMENT OF THE STATE

The interpretation and determination of identity is related to the creation of a collective identity to the level of people and then a nation with a determined collective memory and all the other attributes that are characteristic of a people and a nation. However, the creation of a nation has a decisive role in the formation and survival of the state, regardless of whether it has in its foundations one nation or several nations that are formed as a state in a historical process and moment (Waeber et al., 2010).

The process of the creation of a nation is a complex and long-term historical-social project that is usually led by the majority and which, according to its linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnographic peculiarities and common historical memory, has gone through the stages of the formation of ethnicity, both from an ethnic group and a community, and has formed itself as a nation within the framework of historical events and processes. Exactly within this framework of historical events and processes, that nation created a state in one territory. This was when the state was in its highest development stage, so the nation transferred its national identity not only to the majority, but to everyone who is part of the nation with all its peculiarities (Ibid, p 34).

In this paper, it is not our aim to start a theoretical discussion about the nation and whether it is a bureaucratic invention of the modern administrative state without the right of the nations to be eternal, or whether the nation is a »victory« of the modern order which is more stable and open than the old ethnic communities based on religious identity and self-recognition.

We want to place the theoretical debate related to the nation as a contemporary identity of the state and statehood precisely in the context of the European Union and its security and defence policy, which is based on building the security identity, that is, the sense of common security responsibility of the European nations and, in the concrete case, the responsibility of European governments within the intergovernmentalism of the Union. Hence, in this paper we will also deal with the philosophical approach to the nation and the state as two inseparable elements. Within the state itself several nations can and must function quite naturally, which is characteristic of Europe and its configuration of ethnic and religious diversity. In this context, we will not dwell on the Balkan experiences with the religious roots of the nations and the attempts, even in modern times, to prove the purity of the nation and the national-state territory, which is an anachronism. Many European elites are deeply committed to the EU as a political project. While the EU has not yet succeeded in crafting a common European sense of »who we are«, time is on its side (Chackel and Katzenstein, 2011).

Exploiting growing mass concerns and fears, in recent years the EU has begun to define an alternative agenda for European identity politics – one inspired by multiple currents, including nineteenth-century romanticism, including the evolution of European identity. The theory of European identity begins with articulated different theories of European integration from Erns W.Haas and Karl W.Deutsch (Ibid, p 5).

As we previously noted, firstly the basis of the state is the nation, together with the established constitutional and legal order. Secondly, it is the ruling of law and the accepted obligations to respect the international law of the state (nation). Thirdly, it is an international legal entity, so it must respect human rights and freedoms on different levels of individual and collective rights. In fact, nations in the modern world are a spontaneous and possibly unwanted phenomenon of social interaction

and the historical scene. They are certainly a political construction; no matter how much some scientific circles try to emphasize the natural creation of the nation, i.e. the growth of the people into a nation, nations are exclusively an artificial and, above all, a political construction of a state territory in a certain historical social moment (Waever et al., 2010, p 35).

It is not possible, especially in the territory of Europe, to divide territories into states and create nations without dividing their language, culture, market, traditions and religion, so that the territorial jurisdiction is intertwined by many elements and must be supported by loyalty to the state, and this is made possible by the construction of the nation. In this context, the nation does not necessarily have a national identity, but it is certainly based on a higher form of common identity, even if it is based exclusively on political or economic interest.

Nations are not defined by blood kinship or religion, but by homeland. Loyalty to nation states is rooted in European history. People undoubtedly need to identify themselves through the first person plural »WE«, in order to be able to accept the sacrifices required by society, with WE representing tolerance towards diversity in society, and also highlighting the sovereignty of us – WE, of our nation and our sovereignty over territorial jurisdiction (Waever et al., 2010, p 37). Loyalty to the state and self-sacrifice to society is the basis on which the nation and identity are built, and in the case of the European Union it is loyalty to Europe and self-sacrifice to its common security that in practice can be the greatest incentive for strengthening mutual solidarity and the altruistic connections of European nations. If we want to understand the contemporary meaning of nations and the states' undisputed jurisdiction over their territory, it is necessary to understand the common European interest in order to create a European security identity.

2 EUROPEAN SECURITY, THE EUROPEAN SECURITY IDENTITY, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY AS ITS BASIS

The modern security concept in the analysis of security and the establishment of its paradigm are usually based on national security. This is the result of the fact that society as an arrangement usually arises from the nation or from other ethno-political communities that are modelled on the basis of the idea of nation, regardless of whether it refers to the level of Europe, the nation or national minorities (Waever, et al., 2010, p 49). Taking into consideration the connection of European security with national security, and bearing in mind that national security is based on the concept of nation, we should consider it necessary to briefly clarify and define the concept of nation in its modernist context and characteristics.

The basic characteristic of the modern nation and all that is related to it is its modernization, but in the 19th century (until the 1880s) the term »nation« most often referred to the inhabitants of a province, country or kingdom (Waever, et al., 2010, p 49-50).

The first step towards the modern concept of a nation was grounded in its definition, as an alternative source of political legitimacy opposite to the former sovereign-king in a country (a kingdom). In this way, the nation as a political term gains significance in pragmatic politics and creates a basis for the identity connection of the inhabitants of a country. The basic problem in defining the nation is actually the identity definition. The question is, how exactly do we define who or what this nation is? The historical basis in the philosophical sense of the modern world, the definition of the nation, was given in the Declaration of the French Revolution on the rights of the human and the citizen in 1789, formulated as: »all humans are the same by their nature«. ¹ This is the historical moment of the breach in the establishment of the term nation (instead of people) in the contemporary and political sense.

In fact, there are no »natural« nations in Europe, not even within its state-political borders, but since the end of the 18th century, the process of creating political nations has been going on, and the territorial borders of all European states are the result of some kind of arbitration, war or other development. This phenomenon is especially important to be understood in the Balkans, because after the collapse of the medieval feudal states and the Ottoman occupation, the so-called »Millet system«² was introduced, or translated into modern language, a connection of groups of people based on religious identity.

This exact kind of religious connection and the creation of a religious identity, primarily among the Orthodox population, whose head was recognized by the Sultan as the patriarch of Constantinople, created the conditions for Greek expansion at the time of the beginning of the creation of the nation and national states and the romanticism for the renewal of the Eastern Roman Kingdom (Byzantium) – but now as a Greek state.

This is why the struggles of the Balkan peoples for the creation of their own national states began, and those struggles have their contemporary reflection even today, two centuries later. We can establish that the Balkan people had religion as the basis of their national identity, unlike the European identity of nations which, in the 19th century, sought a cultural connection for the creation of the nation through folk culture, transforming it into a national culture, thus studying the basic nature of the nation and strengthening it through a new system of national education, and the anthem, the flag and the coat of arms as national symbols. The religious identity of the nation among the Balkan people is the phenomenon that affects present

¹ Full text of Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789, can be found on: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp

² The Millet system is Ottoman Law System which regulates the relations of the Empire with religious societies as well as the relations between the religious societies. The consequence of the Millet system in relation to Islam is the theocratic Ottoman state in which the Sultan is the religious leader and all Muslims are under his rule: secular and religious. As for the Christians, they are subjects of the Sultan, that is, the Ottoman government, but they are spiritually subordinated to the Orthodox Church. In this context, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, through various forms of social action, politics and corruption at the Sultan's court, managed to subjugate all the local Orthodox churches under itself, with the aim of realizing the Greek Megali idea.

events so strongly in the mutual relations of the modern Balkan nations and their continuous struggle to prove themselves and to become dominant at a regional level. Therefore, in the contemporary political discourse of the creation of a new European identity, primarily through the European security identity, the Balkans represent a problem for Europe, and contemporary European political pragmatism shows a lack of understanding of this phenomenon, primarily because the European states, especially the great powers, according to tradition only take into consideration their own national interest, rather than the common »security« interests of the European Union.

However, the European identity is based on the European security identity as a result of the new sources of risks and threats, not only the asymmetric threats and conflicts within the territory of the European security area, but also those coming from the European neighbourhood, which of course have a strong influence on the threat to the European security space. In this context, we should not forget that European identity and European security identity cannot exist if there is no basis in national identity. The European Union does not have the possibility, at least for the time being, to revise the national identity of the citizens of its Member States, but through the notion of European citizenship, it will exert a significant influence. This »misunderstanding« is especially visible in the attitude of Hungary and the countries of the Visegrad Group towards specific security risks and threats, in the prevention and resolution of which these countries proceed exclusively from the national interest, and not from European legislation (Caboda, Walsova, 2018).

Even from the theoretical aspect of defining European security, Ole Wever (2000) says: »European security does not represent a simple collection of equal states that in some way express an increased reliance on rules. Constellation is very different from that. It is a centralized formation (that's why it works), in which some are closer to the centre than others«. It is this claim of Wever, not only through the theoretical approach but also in practice, which shows us that even today Europe cannot create a common perception of the sources of risks and threats as a single security space and challenge without confrontation with national security concepts. The only thing that Europe has managed to solve in the relations between the European Power Centres is the rejection of war by the creation of a common identity as a union of nations.

The European identity should be accepted as a layer of identification (Georgieva, 2010), in addition to the national one. Theoretically, this is an explanation to support the tendency to create a European identity as a substitute for national identities, which should not replace the nation-state, but should strengthen European security as a project in the process of development. This is why the European security identity has been taken as the carrier of the promotion of the European identity.

No matter how much we try to justify the formation of the European identity in theory, and no matter how much we see that process in practice, yet in the traditional

concept the basis of the state is the nation, the national states, their culture, language and tradition and, above all, the national security.

This raises the question of the success of the project carried out over the Republic of North Macedonia in relation to the annulment of the North Macedonian nation as a political nation created in the historical context of a national space. If North Macedonia and the North Macedonian nation were a test example, then the question arises: »What prevents the creators of this project from applying the same to every other state and nation in the future, with the same goal?« Or maybe: »Is there a need for redefinition in the modern concept and renewal of the North Macedonian nation based on new principles?«

3 EUROPEAN SECURITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

European security is firmly embedded in global geopolitics, and thus within the framework of the »New World Order«, i.e. in the establishment and functioning of the new era in world politics. If the prism through which we see so-called international security represents a definition of it as a synonym in which the main impact has the national security of states (nations) as international legal subjects which participate in the creation and the relations in international politics as well as security, we should also observe European security in this context. The difference in seeing European security over international security is in the notion of the European Union as a global actor who should unite the national-state interests of its Member States and promote them in international relations from the position of a global actor. In this context, the first or in fact the only national and state interest of EU Member States, and also the candidates for EU membership, is European security and its preservation. Hence, the tendency to build a common European identity aimed at preserving European security is understandable, thereby formulating a substrate called a *European security identity*.

Such a European security identity creates additional misunderstandings because an amalgam of security interests and identity is created. It becomes a cultural, religious, historical, traditional, linguistic and territorial characteristic of each nation, ethnic community or group. Each one of them possesses a self-knowledge which is transformed into identity or identification with another related or similar identity in the neighbourhood or another region (usually by religion, language group, cultural or historical connections). This diversity and similarity in European identity directly influences the creation and maintenance of the European security identity, especially if they have a cultural, historical or religious connection outside Europe, i.e. in its neighbourhood. For example, during the war in Bosnia, 2000 people wore the flags of Saudi Arabia and Turkey to protest in Sarajevo in 1994, people of Sarajevo identifying with their Muslim brothers, showing the world who are their true, not quite true friends (Huntington, 2010).

3.1 The Judgment of European Security and National Security Through Specific Examples

From the example of Huntington, alluding to the importance of symbolism in expressing identity connection, we can see clearly how complex European identity is and why its creation is strongly promoted through the prism of a European security identity, i.e. through the preservation of European security. It is understandable and quite clear that without sustainable certainty which will guarantee the sustainable development of societies or the states that make up the European Union, there is no possibility for the absolute preservation of the national identity of each separately. This is why European security is the key to the survival of national security within the EU; but the creation of a European security identity also reinforces European security. It is a visible political-security tendency to preserve the national interests of each state through mutual assistance and solidarity that is not seen exclusively through the military component. This is the theoretical basis of the EU and the protection of the European security space, especially when it comes to external threats relating to the entire EU, and especially from third countries (Huntington, 2010).

However, in practice the EU shows many weaknesses when it comes to preserving the security of the European security space, or in the neighbourhood of any occurrence of various risks and threats and sources of endangerment. As a rule, there is a conflict between national interests and European security. The Member States of the EU as a rule, and unsurprisingly, are oriented primarily towards the preservation of their own national interests, and within those frameworks towards national security, and only then towards the interests of the Union, and by this, in these aspects, they intensively protect their own national interests through the protection of European security.

Many clear examples of this behaviour include the Covid-19 pandemic, where some of the EU Member States (such as Italy) tackled this threat in their own way without proper strategy and a unique approach to all of the European security space; and the crisis with Ukraine, where each of the Union Member States has its own approach to Ukraine, and even more so to Russia, due to energy dependence and the danger of endangering energy security. Furthermore, when the energy domain is not sufficient for such an end, as Michael Dimitrov describes the case of Romania, Moscow uses alternative pathways to facilitate such an outcome (2015, p 198): »The Kremlin's priorities in this part of the Black Sea region represent the possibility that Russia will use the Trans-Dniester Moldovan Republic to further destabilize the region and influence the political factors in Romania«. In both cases, the EU states have their own approach guided by national interests, depending on their own assessment and exposure to threats to the security of the state.

In this situation, the direct military threat is excluded; on the contrary, energy and economic security come to the fore, and yet the EU does not have a unified response based on solidarity and mutual assistance. This refers to the Lisbon Treaty and other positive regulations, and not to the ad hoc solutions which require a rapid response. At the same time, it should be taken into account that once again the Member States

are guided by their own national interests in preventing risks and threats, which even in such a case would affect, that is, threaten, all the Member States. One example can be the procedure with the energy crisis, but not as a unified solution, although there are EU resolutions that can be interpreted more as general recommendations, on which all the Member States agree.

In this context of the behaviour of the EU countries as pragmatic actors with the aim of preserving their own national security, the weaknesses of the Union are manifest not only in relation to the establishment of the European security identity as a basis for political security, and any other action of the Union in the protection of the European security area and the neighbourhood from risks and threats, but even more as a practical and successful action of the Union as a geopolitical actor. The EU undoubtedly demonstrates the capacity to apply soft power and manage a risk or threat to its security. But when multiple risks and threats from different sources appear simultaneously, or one source of threat causes multiple different risks and threats to EU security, then there is a visible weakness in the Union's capacity to manage these challenges to European security, as well as an inability to apply visible and concrete hard power on the part of the Union. Precisely as a result of these weaknesses, the EU fails to build and firmly establish the European security identity as a substitute for the European identity, which is impossible to build in practice and be accepted by all Member States. Also, as a result of these weaknesses, the need for individual protection of the national interest of each Member State increases, with each separately assessing the threat to its own interests and national security.

We do not intend to justify the individualistic behaviour of the individual Member States of the Union, but we would like to note it through only two visible sources of endangerment in just two years. The creation of a single response to the endangerment of the European security space has proven to be difficult or impossible. The reason for this is the absence of a European security identity, and a framing of its acts and binding EU documents which would enable its practical action and expected visible results. At the same time the national interests should not be forgotten, because as we have already discussed, each security is based on national security, and national security itself is based exclusively on all aspects of personal and public security. In practice, this means that EU citizens should have stable personal and public security.

4 INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS AND IDENTITY

The emergence and intensity of international conflicts depend on the state of the international community. In fact, the term »international community«, as well as »international security«, are abstracts. There is no international security, as it is based on the national security of each of the states individually; the international community is based on relations between countries that are international legal entities, and on their state of mutual conflict. In this context, we can conclude that international politics, and thus international relations, are anarchic, and that anarchy

is overcome by concluding alliances between states or forming various forms of collective security systems or military-political and economic alliances.

It is precisely within the conclusion of the alliances that the needs of preserving the national interests of entities entering the alliances are highlighted. One of the basic interests of the states is to preserve their own population, i.e. the biological minimum of the nation's survival. Of course, the definition of the nation in itself contains its identity, so we can make one conclusion, which is that the protection of the nation's identity as the state is crucial in terms of entry into or the avoidance of a conflicting state in international relations.

State foreign policy has its own key directions which basically protect the identity of the nation in the currently established international system. Whether values, power, ideology or pragmatic causes are key benchmarks of foreign policy, it basically depends on the historical stage in which the international system (Kissinger, 2011) is located.

However, the fact is that some aspects of international politics and conflict interpretation are traditional and have not yet changed, and this is why the subjects and facilities of protection remain unchanged. Of course, modern sources of endangerment only affect the models of practical protection of the protected object, but the goals and meaning of the protected object are unchanged. There is a historical logic of hostility, a dilemma over the security that supports politics between states (Nye, 2008, p 22). Part of this logic is the question of identity. This is why the issue of identity protection is one of the key issues in international conflicts. Contrary to the protection of identity is the annulment of the identity of one nation, that is, its change or merger into another neighbouring and greater identity. Bulgaria's attitude towards North Macedonia and the North Macedonian identity is a clear example of such an attitude on the international stage, creating conflict and bringing EU entry into this conflict.

A visible example of action in an international conflict related to identity is the action of the United States in the Balkans, with the United States holding the same function as the Austrian and Ottoman Empire (Kissinger 2010) in the past, in terms of keeping peace in conflicts between peoples of the Balkans³. This form of establishing »soft« protectorates in the interest of preventing the outbreak of internal and international conflicts often has to do with the protection of the identity of the nations. In this context, two contemporary key tendencies are visible which are expressed in the perception of the international community:

³ *In order to understand this context, in addition to the role of the Millet system in the Ottoman Empire, which is actually the resolution of national relations through a religious prism, it is necessary to perceive the state-political organization and functioning of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially after the annexation of Bosnia in 1908, as well as the functioning of the state in Slovenia and Croatia.*

Firstly: that the United States has an appropriate democratic solution regardless of cultural, religious and historical differences. This is particularly evident in the Balkans, where inappropriate solutions have been imposed, and we can emphasize the example of the Republic of North Macedonia with regard to the resolution of the conflict with Greece, and also with Bulgaria, as well as the internal political-social redefinition of the state.

Secondly: the inability of the European Union to create a model for continuous dealing with the challenges of European soil, that is, within the European security space, which implies powerlessness in the theoretical and practical creation of a modern European security identity of this space. The created and strengthened European identity, based on a European security identity, will provide the opportunity to overcome the conflict potential, especially that based on the identity fears of various historical experiences, which is actually the conflict between North Macedonia and Greece and between North Macedonia and Bulgaria.

5 IDENTITY AS A SECURITY ISSUE IN THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA

To write about identity as a security issue in the case of North Macedonia means to write about the North Macedonian identity in its constant struggle with the denials of its neighbours. These denials have a deep foundation in the claims to history, tradition, culture, language and every uniqueness of North Macedonian identity, but above all they insist on making a historical audit of the early 20th century. In this context, Bulgaria and Greece have a historical fear of accepting the North Macedonian identity, a fear based on the dread of the recognition of the genocide and the denationalization of the North Macedonians and, at a certain historic moment with international confirmation in Bucharest in 1913, the breaking up of the entire geographical North Macedonia. As a consequence, a large number of North Macedonians were left to live in the territory of Bulgaria and Greece, but with a strong sense of their uniqueness from the Bulgarian and Greek people, and their own language, tradition and collective memory. Actually, these facts and the descendants of those North Macedonians a century later are still waving their spirit in Bulgaria and Greece, which persistently dispute the North Macedonian identity even in today's state of North Macedonia.

At their root, the Balkan nations have a religious identity. It is a legacy of the Millet system in the Ottoman Empire where, regardless of the affiliation of a nation, the population was grouped according to their religious affiliation. Later, in the formation of national states in the Balkans, people advanced to nations; religion was the basis for nation creation. So, today in the Balkans we have a clear distinction that the national identity of the North Macedonian nation is exclusively linked to Orthodox Christianity; it is completely the same as the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs. This is why the key pillar in the preservation of its identity is the Orthodox Church, and why the 19th-century Orthodox churches have an emphasized national determinant (the

ethnophilic sign), as opposed to the original understanding of the Orthodox Church and its local names according to the department of headquarters. Lately, there have been attempts to include those members of the nation who have a different religious identity within the national identity, who are members of the same people at the same time with the same language, cultural and traditional features, and historical memory, but it is the national identity itself which will be the one and only for all of them. These attempts have very poor practical implementation, so in the North Macedonian example we have emphasized influence on the religion. Thus, religious affiliation is used to impose national identity.

This is completely incomprehensible to modern Europe and has an extremely negative impact on building European security identity as the only one in Europe. It is extremely difficult in the Balkans to understand the normal meaning of identity as a national sign while excluding religious affiliation as a special identity unrelated to national identity. We, as citizens of national states, are bound by reciprocal obligations to all those who are entitled to our nationality, regardless of blood kinship and regardless of faith. Accordingly, freedom of worship, freedom of conscience, and freedom of speech and opinion do not represent a threat to our common loyalty (Scruton, 2011, p 18-19).

The conflict between North Macedonia and Greece and North Macedonia and Bulgaria began in this context, but at the same time there is conflict between Greece and Bulgaria on the subject of North Macedonia, which is treated as a reward. This is the basis for interpreting the North Macedonian identity as a security issue of interest to Europe, and at the same time an opportunity for a precise example of the need to establish a European security identity which would, by its very existence, prevent identity conflicts in Europe. At the same time, the European security identity would affect Europe's increase in risks and threats to its own security space.

However, let us go back to the analysis of the North Macedonian identity as a security issue for North Macedonia, and thus to the region's and the European security space, so that we can draw some conclusions on the need to establish a European security identity in order to decrease identity conflicts in Europe.

Specifically, modern developments and Bulgaria's practical behaviour towards North Macedonia have their basis in the 2008 Bulgarian strategy, entitled »Bulgarian Policy towards the Republic of North Macedonia« (Ivanov, 2008). In the Bulgarian edition of this strategic analysis of Bulgarian policy towards North Macedonia, it is clarified that it is about making »recommendations for the development of good neighbourly relations after Bulgaria's EU entry and in the context of EU and NATO tendencies in the Western Balkans«. In fact, this is only a subtitle, and the essence of the strategy is based on the experiences of Greece and North Macedonia's relations through the prism of the identity conflict which was extremely current in the context of Greece's block to North Macedonia's becoming a fully fledged NATO member. It is necessary to emphasize that the experience of North Macedonia-Greece relations

and the change in North Macedonia's constitutional name in order to remove the Greek block to NATO accession, today only complements Bulgaria's strategy towards North Macedonia in a negative context, because through the prism of implementation of Bulgarian Real Politics the interest in copying the Prespa Agreement is noted even in a more rigorous identity trap for North Macedonia.

It is therefore very necessary to understand that the North Macedonian identity is extremely important to North Macedonia, and in particular that it is a security issue with possible implications for the region and European security.

5.1 The Identity Dispute with Bulgaria

In its strategy since 2008 and its implementation in North Macedonia today, through the use of political power (violence) towards North Macedonia, the basic goals have been clearly drawn, which from the very beginning determined the new political reality which gives Bulgaria new political power within the framework of the EU and NATO, and have demanded a change in Bulgaria's policy towards North Macedonia since the period of Yugoslavia. The context of the new political reality is unfortunately linked to historical issues, which are related to the collective memory and identity of the North Macedonians, and this is visible in today's relations with Bulgaria's established framework, where there is almost only historical interest in North Macedonia in the context of the Bulgarian heritage of the 7th century after Christ. The thesis imposed speaks of a historical (7th century) Bulgarian population living in North Macedonia (Vardar North Macedonia) which is linked to the Bulgarian state and nation (Ivanov et al., 2008, p 33-34).

Drawing the goals that need to be achieved by the consistent implementation of this strategy, which is essentially based on the question of the identity of the modern North Macedonia and its historical connection, the first point that the strategy defines as a problem is the »name of the Republic of North Macedonia«, which implies a »lack of good neighbourly« Skopje policy (Ivanov et al., 2008). This is extremely important in analyzing North Macedonia's relations with Bulgaria, as we come to the conclusion that the identity problem is actually a territorial problem that has deep historical roots.

The first goal states the strict observance of North Macedonia on the Declaration of February 22, 1999, and in fact today it means respect for the Agreement of Good Neighbourhood of August 2, 2017, which was quite hasty from the North Macedonian side, but obviously the Bulgarian side strove for the change, extremely so in the implementation of some issues related to Article 8, items 2 and 3 of this Agreement⁴, but exclusively according to their view and purpose.

⁴ *The full text of the Prespa Agreement can be found at the following link (not in English): https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dogovori/Dogovor_Za_Prijateljstvo_Dobrososedstvo_Sorabotka_Megju_Republika_Makedonija_I_Republika_Bugarija.pdf.*

The second goal that is highlighted in the Strategy is extremely unrealistic, and is defined as: »The termination of the abuse of citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia who self-identify as Bulgarians« (Ivanov et al., 2008, p 36). It is particularly evident that even in 2008 the purpose of introducing the Bulgarians into the Constitution of North Macedonia was highlighted. Of course, given that the North Macedonian constitution recognizes collective rights against individual rights, this may be a special topic of analysis, but not in this context; the achievement of this goal of introducing the Bulgarians into the constitutional preamble of the North Macedonian Constitution is not disputed. The issue that attracts attention is the alleged mistreatment of the citizens of North Macedonia who self-identify as Bulgarians. It must first be said that about 3500 citizens of North Macedonia in the last census of 2021 identified as Bulgarians. In fact, the basic tendency is to portray an alleged ethnic-national problem of identification of those who are self-identified as Bulgarians and others who are »non-Bulgarians«, but do have Bulgarian roots. This is why there is a constant tension that Bulgaria is creating in the context of history, the »common« Bulgarian history of North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Basically, the political-national, strategic platform of Bulgaria towards North Macedonia is based on anti-Macedonism, i.e. the non-existence of the Macedonians as a people. This is why, in the same Strategy, Ivanov and others designated points 1.1.4 and 1.1.5, which fully fit into the current Bulgarian policy towards North Macedonia (Ibid.), but in the Agreement of Good Neighbourhood are well-concealed and ambiguous.

Throughout this context of Bulgaria's strategic approach to North Macedonia, an extremely important idea and tendency that Bulgaria has as a key goal is the »Re-Bulgarization« of North Macedonia. The achievement of this goal is envisaged to be implemented through a »plan of action« comprising two parts (framework and activities). In the Strategy, item 2.1. highlights the form under which Bulgarian politicians would publicly expose the damages of North Macedonia's policy and repeat Bulgaria's demands to maintain good neighbourly relations during international forums, regardless of the political, financial and material resources that should be invested in lobbying international support for the implementation of an active campaign against North Macedonia.

The second part of the action plan is point 2.2, entitled Activities. This is a very interesting part which actually gives us information on Bulgaria's concrete operational activities towards North Macedonia, so that the package of historical, cultural, political, geographical, ethnographic and other »arguments« of Bulgaria will be given to North Macedonia as conditions for fulfilment, with a special note that a young state has a perspective on development and its own creation.

Before analyzing the plan of action that is actually practical action, it is necessary to note that it is precisely these actions of Bulgaria towards North Macedonia and the plan of action itself which have a negative impact on the tendency to build a European security identity to the level of creating animosity in North Macedonian society towards the EU. Of course, this is not EU policy, and through the construction

of the European security identity the Union does not intend to annul the national, ethnic, religious or cultural identity of any nation in Europe. But the actions of Bulgaria as an EU Member State which emphasizes its position in the European Union towards North Macedonia creates a bad perception of the EU among North Macedonian citizens. Also, this action of Bulgaria in practice destroys the Union's opportunities to create a European security identity, as it is a negative example of other EU Member States and their mutual relations in this respect, especially to third countries.

The key part of Bulgaria's action plan for North Macedonia is contained in point 2.2.2 (Ibid., p 43-33), where it is literally said: »This Bulgarian package should be well balanced with Athens' consistent policy on protection of Greek interests ... so that the general application is cooperative towards Skopje and preferably cumulative and coordinated«.

At one point, Bulgarian politics could not follow Greek political actions, and for this reason it was very extensive and vaguely an integral agreement for good neighbourly relations from August 2, 2017. As a result of the later »awareness«, and after signing the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece (of course to the detriment of North Macedonia), Bulgaria in its political calculations for action towards North Macedonia tried to do the same. If Greece used its membership of NATO to put pressure on North Macedonia, then Bulgaria had to use its EU membership as an instrument of pressure on North Macedonia to pursue its interests.

As a key diplomatic activity and goal of Bulgaria, such a national venture should be the utilization of Western Balkan integration towards NATO and the EU as an occasion for joining the Bulgarian nation and people from North Macedonia, Serbia, Albania (where there are North Macedonians from Pustec and Korca) and Kosovo (referred to Gorani and North Macedonians of the Islamic religion); in fact it is about »rebuilding« the population in these areas. No matter how incomprehensible, this is exactly what has been happening in Europe in the 21st century, which instead of building a common security identity, is solving the issues and frustrations of the 19th century. As a result of the action and influence to accept the Bulgarian positions in relation to their thesis that the Macedonian people and nation do not exist, we may point to their tendency to fill the media space with acceptable theses for the average EU citizen, such as the existence of examples such as Germany-Austria and Romania-Moldavia, according to which Macedonians are, in fact, Bulgarians.

Exactly at a time when Bulgaria is trying to strengthen its national identity in practice by imposing it on North Macedonians, the EU cannot, especially after Brexit, find an appropriate solution to strengthen its own connection, which could be undoubtedly in the construction of a European security identity. In this context, the North Macedonian national identity can find its place, but if the North Macedonian identity is subject to problematization, endangerment or ethnicity then we come to a moment when the North Macedonian national identity is a security issue not only

for North Macedonia, but also for Europe, and in this way we will return the region to the period of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

5.2 The Identity Dispute with Greece

Historically, the issue of identity between Greeks and North Macedonians is an issue that arises from the period of the »Megali idea« placed through the Constantinople Patriarchate in the 18th century, which aimed to restore the Byzantine Empire as a modern Greek Empire, where everybody would be Greeks. The foundation of this idea in the direction of its presentation of modern Europe – the Europe of the new century – has been found in the usurpation of ancient history as a cradle of European civilization and culture. Since the old century, i.e. from the time of the Greek policies and the North Macedonian Kingdom of Philip II and his son Alexander III of North Macedonia, the need to present them as Greek, or of Greek identity, has been created. This is identity engineering, quite characterized by the nature of the creation of modern nations and their identity in the 19th and 20th centuries as sociological and political works. This is why the very demand of a historical background for the deprivation of the North Macedonian identity in equilibrium with the ancient North Macedonians as people with the ancient Greeks is a historical problem and inaccuracy, similar to the example, of a century from today, of a claim that due to the mass use of English in the international and personal communication of modern people, and the massive presence of American pop culture today, everyone in the world is American.

In fact, Demosthenes himself did not count North Macedonia as a Greek country in ancient times. He spoke quite precisely about the arrival of Philip at the head of the North Macedonian Kingdom, excluding North Macedonia from being part of the Greek Empire and not thinking that a North Macedonian could sometimes rule Greece, saying: »So much North Macedonia, this country from where not even good slaves could be bought, looking weak and retarded« (Carlier, 1994, p 93).

Even in ancient times, according to Demosthenes, North Macedonia was not part of Greece, but it was certainly an important and separate state and people in the Hellenic world, with a different culture, people, economics and military-social organization from the Greeks, and a special dynasty. At that time North Macedonia was in constant war with Greek states in Central and Southern Greece, but especially with Thrace, towards which the North Macedonian kings had a similar policy as the policy that they had to Athens. In the full perception of Demosthenes and the ancient world, North Macedonia was perceived as a separate people and kingdom which was in constant conflict with Greek policies and Thrace to the point of creating »North Macedonian colonies« in Thrace, Thasos and Thessaly, approaching Greece from the North and reaching Thermopiles like the Persians once did (Ibid, p 95). Much later, as part of the political achievement of the »Megali Idea«, Greek political strategy imposed the position of the Greek identity on the ancient North Macedonians. This is particularly expressed through religious identity by the propaganda of »Slavicized Greeks from North Macedonia – North Macedonians«, and in the action of the

Constantinople Patriarchate towards the neighbouring Slavic Orthodox Churches. This action was practised through a corrupt influence on the Ottoman government to abolish the Slavic Orthodox churches, because in the 18th century, at the beginning of the »Megali idea« to restore Byzantium as a Greek kingdom, it was clear that religious identity was an unbreakable part of the national identity of the Balkan peoples, despite the established Millet system in the Ottoman Empire.

Hence, following the historical context of the modern dispute between North Macedonia and Greece, we can confirm that it is invented by Greece, with a tendency to distort historical facts, in order to achieve the modern national interests of Greece, which are based on fear of the historical consequences of the occupation of part of geographical North Macedonia after 1913, and the genocide and cultural invasion of the North Macedonian Slavic population in Aegean North Macedonia, or today's northern Greece, which until 30 years ago was called the »newly conquered territories« and the name North Macedonia was not allowed to be used.

Based on these facts, it is evident that Greece, although a member of NATO and the European Union, is not interested at all in building a European security identity when it is in a position of preserving its own national interests, but on the contrary enforces its own national identity and imposes the same internationally. At the same time it is trying to destroy the existence of the North Macedonian national identity, to the ultimate absurdity of representing it as part of the Greek national identity. We can certainly claim that in this direction it will continue to use all available instruments, including the Orthodox Church in Constantinople.

The dispute with Greece and its actions towards North Macedonia are basically no different from that with Bulgaria; although the question of the name of the state has been exaggerated, it is still a question of the North Macedonian national identity or at least its presentation as part of the Greek identity, which was undertaken in exactly the same way in practice by Bulgaria. But even after the signing of the »Prespa Agreement«, in the Agreement itself it can be noted that the dispute has never been related to the name, but to the identity of the North Macedonians who live in Northern Greece as a minority (in Aegean, or we can now say, Southern Macedonia) (Nikodinovska-Krstevska and Stojanovski, 2019). The negotiating of the state name itself is problematic because the ability to choose the name of the political community is one of the key aspects of political and cultural identity, and as such is an emanation of the North Macedonian people's fundamental right to internal self-determination (Karakamisheva-Jovanovska, 2020, p 10).

The Prespa agreement expands the scope of the dispute and »the difference« (around the name) and turns it into »differences« in identity, language, culture, history, education, political and administrative systems, constitution, and the rights and freedom of humans and citizens (Siljanovska Davkova, 2018), which represent essential elements which are integrated in the principle of self-determination of nations.

The Prespa Agreement is a troubled and asymmetrical agreement both in terms of the power of the parties and in terms of their rights and obligations. Even after its conclusion, it opened the door to fierce disagreements and divisions with regard to its interference in the identity issues of the North Macedonians, in favour of the thesis that the agreement had never been related to the name issue only. It seems that this agreement is a sloppy attempt by the Government of North Macedonia to create a virtual European identity which will annex national identity, but still today, almost four years after concluding it, such an opportunity has not come to pass.

Thus, provisions 2 and 3 of the controversial Article 7 of the Prespa Agreement limit the use of the terms »North Macedonia« and »North Macedonian« to a different historical context and cultural heritage. Denomination, denationalization (such as demos) and demacedonization (such as demos) are in question, unknown in modern international and bilateral relations (Ibid.), because they make an extremely strong negation of the North Macedonian national identity and its recognized right to self-identification as a people with their own language, culture and identity. Like the state name (or ID), the identity of a people or a nation and its culture and language are inherent, indivisible, non-transferable and inalienable (Janev, 2018). For the first time, instead of in terms of historical folklore and romantic nationalism, identity is being determined in purely political terms (Vankovska, 2019, p 276).

One of the most controversial parts of the agreement (1.3 f) limits the use of the adjective »North Macedonian« in public use, referring to all official authorities and other public institutions, as well as to private entities that use state financing directly or indirectly. As a basic national marker, the national institutions of every nation-state are named after the national nomenclature (Nikodinovska-Krstevska and Stojanovski, 2019, p 638). With such linguistic invasion and deletion of the adjective North Macedonian, the North Macedonian state and national identity and character are being defaced.

The intrusion into the North Macedonian language is also evident in the regulation of the use of toponyms with North Macedonian (Slavic) names, to the extent of their prohibition under the Prespa Agreement. This ban is selective because other nations of Slavic origin in the Balkans have the right to use the Slavic nomenclatures of endonyms used in Greek toponyms. The acceptance of the endonyms used in Greek toponyms means deleting the collective memory of the North Macedonian nation of the historical presence of North Macedonian toponyms, and thus the North Macedonian national element in the territory of Aegean North Macedonia, especially as these endonyms, by the period between the two world wars, were exonyms and forcibly imposed by state and forced intervention (Ibid., p 640).

The takeover of corrective actions on monuments and cultural heritage (as regulated in Article 8 of the Agreement) denotes *damnatio memoriae*, i.e. forcibly deleting the collective memory of the North Macedonian national narrative for historical periods, the period before the formation of modern nation-states (Ibid.).

Finally, Greece pursues problematic policy about Macedonian question and supports the theses of negation or distancing national from ethnic identity, practical implications of the application of the Prespa Agreement. The evident inclination of day-to-day usage is to deduce/draw the citizenship from the name of the country, that is to say, citizens of North Macedonia in many instances have automatically become referred to as North Macedonians; thus in reality, however, this is but a new (imposed) form of national engineering (Vankovska, 2019, p 278). In this way the national identity is terrorized and the national ideology redefined.

All of the above shows Greece's historical and political tendencies towards North Macedonia, but at the same time the fears that reflect Greece's abuse of EU and NATO membership. It is immediately evident that in an almost identical way to Bulgaria, Greece is trying to abolish modern North Macedonian identity, and even to present it to the European public as part of the Greek identity, i.e. North Macedonians are actually Greeks, even though historical truths do not say that; the ancient North Macedonians were not the same as the ancient Greeks, whose foundations have been used by the modern Greeks to build their modern history. The monopolization of the historical symbolism of Alexander the Great, as a Greek national myth, is a worldwide absurdity, as historical interpretations fluctuate and follow the development of the respective scientific disciplines that they study. There is also a worldwide civilization value that he produces and which may not be subject to national interpretations, especially if we take into consideration the fact that he lived in a non-national era⁵ (Nikodinovska-Krstevska and Stojanovski, 2019, p 640). Alexander the Great was a person of general, even of world history, and he is in the memory of many nations in ancient times; he was not limited to the North Macedonian or Greek national identity according to today's contemporary notions of nation and national identity.

Conclusion The EU must find a solution to the North Macedonia case pertaining to its identity, i.e. identity denial and the need to separate the national identity from religious identity, in order to construct and actualize a European security identity which does not endanger national and religious identity, but on the contrary connects all other identities in a security identity that is of general importance and interest in Europe. In this context, linguistic specificity does not represent a threat to security and the creation of a European security identity.

In this paper we would like to emphasize that we do not advocate optimistic universalism or transnational rule, as the EU itself does not have such a tendency, but simply the practical and real functioning of intergovernmentalism. Within that intergovernmentalism it is necessary to create a European security identity as an identity connection of European peoples and nations without disturbing their national and religious particularities or historical memory. It is primarily a look forward to the future, through a prism of security that is as universal as personal and public security.

⁵ *i.e. ethnically uncommitted.*

The basis of the establishment of a European security identity as an identity connection between the nations and peoples of the EU and the European continent is to preserve »European values«; exactly those values that are accepted within human rights and freedoms and based on the historical memory and experience of the European peoples. Of course, these are not the values of assimilation and denationalization, culturocide and deprivation of the right to religious and national personal and collective rights of the European citizen. This is why in the example of North Macedonia, the North Macedonian national identity which is different from that of Bulgaria and Greece but which is attacked in all aspects by these two national entities, the necessity of creating the European security identity is seen.

This represents the established discourse of Greek and Bulgarian politics, which complement each other in the annulment of the North Macedonian national identity by destroying the theoretical opportunities for building a European security identity as a basis for European identity. In this theoretical point of view, everything is associated with power, i.e. if we take a philosophical approach to the consideration of building a European security identity, then we can establish the power of the EU, that is, to support Nietzsche's position that everything is power. After all, every entity has power, so the European Union has power. But, obviously that power is possessed by most of its members, and the power of the EU to build a European security identity, regardless of the level of risks and threats to the Union itself, depends solely on the shared power of its members. If we interpret Nietzsche, then the power of each entity tends to impose its power on another entity and dominate it, and the truth about which is right, especially in matters of identity, depends on power, that is, truth is an addition to power (Solunchev, 2020, p 46). From here we can conclude that both Greece and Bulgaria, in their discourse and the creation of the truth about the North Macedonian national identity, use their power to the maximum, especially political power through the institutions of the European Union, and at the same time they do not take into account at all the interests of the Union and its protection against risks and threats, nor the truth and the creation of European security identity.

If the European Union becomes powerful enough and truly recognizes the risks and threats to its own security, then of course one of the key factors and a direct threat to its security is the introduction of the practice of challenging the national and religious identity of every nation in Europe. Even more risky is for EU Member States and neighbouring states to deny that identity by presenting it to the EU at the same time as their vital national security interest. It is the peak of hypocrisy towards the Union, as it is contrary to European values that have been created by the Union, and at the same time a risk to European security. No challenge has led to better security, so the denial of national and religious identity will improve European security. As it is at this point, long-term hostilities are actually created between neighbours and close peoples because of identity disputes. Formal (contractual) EU-mediated solutions, or other global actor imposed as a geopolitical solution, only formally represent a solution to the identity dispute, and of course sooner or later, under the pressure of time and change in political gatherings, they will undergo change, whether they are

unilateral or contractual. In any case they will surface in European politics and the European political scene as an internal security issue. They will show the weakness of the European internal security policy, with the potential to be used by third parties as an impact. After all, currently we are not far from the concrete applications of such an impact which would directly violate European security. This is why there is an emergence of great Euro-scepticism in the Balkans, and mistrust in the power of the Union for righteous problems solution, particularly in the protection of the national identity of a people as one of the European values.

Creating a European security identity represents a solution to overcome the endangered identity feelings of the European peoples and nations, and it is the basis for building common European security and foreign policy through the prism of risk assessment and threats to European security, i.e. threats to the European security identity, which covers European values and all the peoples and nations of the European continent.

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email: andonov.oliver@yahoo.com

email: j.ilieva@utms.edu.mk

e-mail: andonov.oliver@yahoo.com

Izr. prof. dr. Oliver Andonov se ukvarja z varnostnimi študijami in kriznim upravljanjem na vojaški akademiji General Mikhailo Apostolski v Skopju v Makedoniji. Leta 2010 je doktoriral na temo Varnost in obramba v miru in njun razvoj na inštitutu za varnost, obrambo in mir v okviru filozofske fakultete na Univerzi sv. Cirila in Metoda. Leta 2016 je bil imenovan za dodatnega namestnika ministra za notranje zadeve Republike Makedonije. Je član več uglednih strokovnih združenj in forumov s področja varnosti.

Assoc. Prof. Oliver Andonov, PhD works in the field of Security Studies and crisis management at the Military Academy »General Mikhailo Apostolski« in Skopje, Macedonia. He obtained his PhD degree in the field of Security and Defense in Peace and Development at the Institute for Security, Defence and Peace within the Faculty of Philosophy, University „St. Cyril and Methodius« in 2010. He was appointed Additional Deputy Minister of Interior of the Republic of Macedonia in 2016. He is member of several distinguished professional associations and forums in the field of security.

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*Articles, published in the Contemporary Military Challenges do not reflect the official viewpoint of the Slovenian Armed Forces nor the bodies in which the authors of articles are employed.

e-mail: j.ilieva@utms.edu.mk

Izr. prof. dr. Jana Iljeva se ukvarja z mednarodnim pravom na ekonomski fakulteti univerze za turizem in management v Skopju v Makedoniji. Opravlja tudi funkcijo generalne sekretarke univerze. Doktorirala je iz mednarodnega prava na Univerzi sv. Cirila in Metoda, na pravni fakulteti Iustinianus Primus v Skopju. Je pridružena članica svetovne akademije znanosti in umetnosti ter predsednica kulturnega centra Sterna v Skopju.

Assoc. Prof. Jana Iljeva, PhD works in the field of International Law at the Faculty of Economy, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje, Macedonia. She holds the position of University Secretary General as well. She obtained her PhD degree in International Law at the University »St.Cyril and Methodius«, Faculty of Law »Iustinianus Primus« in Skopje. She is Associate Fellow of the World Academy of Arts and Science and President of the Cultural Center Sterna in Skopje.

*Prispevki, objavljeni v Sodobnih vojaških izzivih, niso uradno stališče Slovenske vojske niti organov, iz katerih so avtorji prispevkov.

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