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## AN OUTLINE OF SERBIAN-MACEDONIAN RELATIONS IN THE FIRST DECADE OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**ABSTRACT** The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Serbian-Macedonian relations was characterized by significant number of problems which mostly influenced them in negative way. As both countries began to cooperate on eliminating one problem, many other problems emerged – an issue of recognizing independence of Kosovo and conflict between national churches. Political structures in both countries in the beginning of the studied period were not eager to compromise. Over time, as national issues in Serbia have lost their influence in favor of economic and as the MPC was consolidating its influence in Macedonian society (and as the threat from Ohrid Archdiocese was weakening), relations began to improve. It led to a paradoxical situation in which political leaders of both countries were appealing to clergymen to solve the conflict. Further perspectives for cooperation between Macedonia and Serbia look promising. Positive changes can be achieved through developing economic cooperation and maintaining close cultural and social ties which were not broken under influence of 1990s. On the other hand, different positions about the independence of Kosovo will still have negative impact on them, especially because of the hard line of Albanian minority in Macedonia. Also, the Albanian minority which is actively participating in the Macedonian government will not only indirectly influence the relations with Serbia (through close cooperation with Kosovo on the international level). Also, due to significant Albanian minority in the South Serbia it will continue to influence bilateral cooperation.

**Key-words:** Serbia, Macedonia, Serbian-Macedonian relations, border demarcation, Kosovo, conflict between national churches

The Republic of Macedonia was the only one of the former Yugoslavian republics which in a peaceful way regained its independence in the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Lack of military conflict with Belgrade, as in the case of Slovenia, Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina and common history has had a huge significance in the process of creating relations between the Federal Republic of Macedonia (Федеративна Република Македонија – FRM) and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Federativna Republika Jugoslavija – FRJ).<sup>2</sup> Nowadays Serbia recognizes both the Republic of Macedonia and the nation.<sup>3</sup>

After regaining independence and the creating of the independent Republic of Macedonia on November 17, 1991<sup>4</sup>, both countries contacted many times on the political and economic level. However, many issues remained unsolved and official diplomatic relations were not established until 1996 with the signing of an agreement about regulating mutual relations.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the fact that contacts intensified, relations remained tense. The reason was, among other things, authoritative way of Slobodan Milosevic's governing in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Because of that, both countries could not initiate a dialogue in order to solve controversial issues. This did not change until 2000 when Milosevic was overthrown. It gave Belgrade an opportunity of refreshing relations with Skopje and initiating a cooperation mainly on the economic level and in the sector of security (due to the necessity of stabilizing the situation on the south of the country), establishing and demarcation of the common border and trying to improve situation of national minorities. As those issues were regulated, the next ones began to appear and had an impact on relations between both countries – taking an attitude on the conflict between national churches and the different position regarding independence of Kosovo, which was declared in 2008.

## COOPERATION IN THE SECTOR OF SECURITY AND MAIN PROBLEMS OF POLITICAL NATURE

After declaring independence of Macedonia, one of the key issue in Macedonian-Yugoslavian relations was establishing and demarcation of common border. Because of the unspecified administrative border between two former republics (Macedonia

<sup>1</sup> V. Ortakovski, 'Odnosi sa SR Jugoslavijom i položaj manjina' in *Nacionalne manjine u Republici Makedoniji*, Zbornik radova Demokratija i nacionalne manjine, Beograd 2002, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> К. Джембакоски, *Културно-општествени врски на Македонците со Србија во текот на XIX век*, Скопје 1960, pp. 139-142; Љ. Доклестик, *Српско-македонските односи во XIX век (до 1897)*, Скопје 1973.

<sup>3</sup> B. Pavlica, *Odnosi Srbije sa Republikom Makedonijom 1996-2008*, Beograd 2009, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> I. Stawowy-Kawka, *Historia Macedonii*, Wrocław 2000, p. 293.

<sup>5</sup> 'Sporazum o regulisanju odnosa i unapredjenju saradnje između SRJ i RM', *Službeni list SRJ – Međunarodni ugovori*, No. 1 (1996), p. 4.

and Serbia) of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija – SFRJ), there was a difference of opinion between Belgrade and Skopje.<sup>6</sup> They decided to appoint a common commission for establishing the border in an agreement regulating mutual relations from 1996.<sup>7</sup> The Kosovo crisis has not only broken off works of Commission but also has changed the situation in the area. After it had finished, a part of the border of FRY with Macedonia (belonging from the side of FRY to Kosovo) has been passed to international forces.

The overthrowing of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia on October 5, 2000 enabled the resuming of works of the commission and the quickening of Macedonian-Serbian negotiations about establishing and demarcation of the common border, what resulted in the signing of an agreement on February 23, 2001 in Skopje.<sup>8</sup> According to records included in the agreement, Belgrade and Skopje have accepted borders existing within SFRJ. The next step was the process of demarcation of the border in the area.

Meanwhile, signing an agreement between Macedonia and Yugoslavia about the border dissatisfied the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. The reason for that was their exclusion from negotiations although an agreement applied to the “Kosovan” part of the Yugoslavian-Macedonian border.<sup>9</sup> In a tense atmosphere among the Albanian population in Macedonia, negotiations and the signing of an agreement with the FRY was one of the factors that caused tension inside the country and an outbreak of Albanian irredentism in Macedonia in 2001.

It created foundations for closer Macedonian-Yugoslavian relations initiated with negotiations about the common border after 2000. As a result, both countries have begun to cooperate intensively, mainly in the sector of security. It was formalized with the signing of a protocol about cooperation of Ministry of Defence from both countries, in the sector of security in 2001.<sup>10</sup>

By the signing of the protocol both countries agreed on issues connected with the protection of mutual border, exchange of information for the purpose of fighting with terrorism and organized crime. The Ministers of Defence also expressed satisfaction from having a common position about the crisis in Macedonia and southern Serbia.<sup>11</sup> For both

<sup>6</sup> It concerned mainly areas near the mountain of Šara, Kopiljača district and the Prohor Pčinjski monastery. For more information see: D. Dimitrijević, ‘Međunarodno-pravni tretman graničnih sporova na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije’, *Međunarodni problemi*, Vol. 55, No. 3-4 (2003), p. 365.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Sporazum o regulisanju odnosa...’

<sup>8</sup> ‘Ugovor između Savezne Republike Jugoslavije i Republike Makedonije o protezanju i opisu državne granice’, *Službeni list – Međunarodni ugovori*, No. 1 (2001); see also: B. Pavlica, ‘Ugovor između Savezne Republike Jugoslavije i Makedonije o protezanju i opisu državne granice’, *Tokovi istorije*, No. 1-2 (2004), pp. 91-115.

<sup>9</sup> About 150 kilometres, from the town of Straža (Стража) from the Albanian-Macedonian border.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Protokol o saradnji između Saveznog ministarstva za odbranu Republike Jugoslavije i Ministarstva odbrane Republike Makedonije’, Bilateralni odnosi – Makedonija, Ministarstvo inostranih poslova FR Jugoslavije, 4 June 2001, at <<http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/spoljna-politika/bilateralala/45-bilateralala/638-makedonija?lang=cyr>>, 25 May 2013.

<sup>11</sup> B. Pavlica, ‘Saradnja Državne Zajednice Srbija i Crna Gora i Republike Makedonije u borbi protiv albanskog ekstremizma’, *Bezbednost*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2006), p. 133.

countries cooperation played a huge role in fighting against Albanian armed groups because one of the main reasons of the escalation of the conflict in 2001 was the possibility of free movement of Albanian troops between Kosovo and Yugoslavia and Macedonia.

The signing of the agreement about the demarcation of borders caused concerns in Kosovo which was under international supervision at that time. To this end, the Kosovan parliament passed a resolution in 2002 in which they defined borders of the province by themselves.<sup>12</sup> That resolution was immediately cancelled by international authorities in the Province – UNMIK (United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo).<sup>13</sup> Despite the protests of Kosovan Albanians, the process of demarcation of the Yugoslavian-Macedonian border was initiated. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2002, foreign ministers of FRJ, Macedonia and Bulgaria placed trilateral pyramid on the common border.<sup>14</sup>

It did not solve the problem of the “Kosovan” part of the border. Because the authorities in Belgrade did not have actual control of this part of territory, Skopje undertook negotiations directly with Pristina. First negotiations were initiated in 2006 but more dynamic cooperation began in 2008. In the same year, Kosovo declared independence (17<sup>th</sup> of February).<sup>15</sup> Macedonia did not recognize straightaway the independence of that former Serbian province but negotiations about the common border intensified. Two months after declaring the independence of Kosovo, in April, 2008 a mixed Macedonian-Kosovan demarcation commission started its work.<sup>16</sup> It caused an official protest of Belgrade.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the commission passed, on 16<sup>th</sup> of May of the same year, a memorandum in which was stated a will to begin demarcation works in the area.<sup>18</sup> Four days after passing a memorandum, that process was initiated.

Simultaneously with the demarcation of the common border, the pressure on the Macedonian government was rising, from the side of Albanian political groups,

<sup>12</sup> ‘Kosovo Resolution Prompted by Status Fears’, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 30 May 2002, at <<http://iwpr.net/report-news/kosovo-resolution-prompted-status-fears>>, 19 May 2013.

<sup>13</sup> According to constitutional frameworks from May 2001, foreign policy, security and issues connected with the rule of law belonged to the competences of UN (UNMIK). Ibid.; ‘Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo’, Republic of Kosovo Assembly, 15 May 2001, at <[http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/FrameworkPocket\\_ENG\\_Dec2002.pdf](http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/FrameworkPocket_ENG_Dec2002.pdf)>, 19 May 2013.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Svilanović, Mitreva i Pasi za dalji razvoj saradnje’, *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 25 November 2002, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b251102\\_s.html#N1](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b251102_s.html#N1)>, 19 May 2013.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Kosovo Declaration of Independence’, Republic of Kosovo Assembly, 17 February 2008, at <<http://www.assembly-kosova.org/?cid=2,128,1635>>, 24 May 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Macedonia recognized independence of Kosovo on October 9, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Srbija protestovala kod Makedonije zbog demarkacije granice’, *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 3 April 2008, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b030408\\_s.html#N1](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b030408_s.html#N1)>, 25 May 2013.

<sup>18</sup> The memorandum was based on the plan for Kosovo worked out by Martii Ahtisari’s plan about the future of Kosovo. In this plan, the borders of Kosovo with Macedonia were defined as the border of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. It meant that the borders had to run according to the division established in an agreement from 2001 between Yugoslavia and Macedonia. ‘Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement’, United Nations Security Council, S/2007/168/Add.1, 26 March 2007, at <[http://www.unosek.org/docref/Comprehensive\\_proposal-english.pdf](http://www.unosek.org/docref/Comprehensive_proposal-english.pdf)>, 25 May 2013; ‘Ugovor između Savezne Republike Jugoslavije i Republike Makedonije o protezanju...’

European Union and USA that they should recognize the independence of Pristina and establish diplomatic relations with them. On October 2008, at the initiative of Albanian groups, the Macedonian parliament passed a resolution in which it recommended to recognize the independence of Kosovo by the government.<sup>19</sup> The day after passing the resolution, on 9<sup>th</sup> of October government recognized the independence of Kosovo and established diplomatic relations with them.<sup>20</sup> It caused a protest of Belgrade which in response, apart from a diplomatic note also recognized the ambassador of Macedonia in Belgrade as a *persona non grata*.<sup>21</sup> In the same period also was finished a process of demarcation of the Macedonian-Kosovan border – on October 24, 2008.<sup>22</sup>

The Macedonian Ambassador returned to Belgrade in the middle of June next year. It initiated a period of normalization in mutual relations. In the same month, before the Meeting of Presidents from Central Europe in Novi Sad, a will to continue with the co-operation from both countries was confirmed by President of Serbia – Boris Tadić and Macedonia – Djordje Ivanov. The Serbian president stated that despite of the difference of opinion about Kosovo, both countries have to develop mutual cooperation.<sup>23</sup>

## CONFLICT BETWEEN NATIONAL CHURCHES

A significant issue which influenced Macedonian-Serbian relations was a conflict taking place in Republic of Macedonia between the Serbian Orthodox Church (Srpska pravoslavna crkva – SPC) and the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Македонска православна црква – МПЦ or MPC).<sup>24</sup> That conflict had an impact on official relations between Serbia and Macedonia until 2000. However, since then Belgrade as

<sup>19</sup> 'Милошоски: Македонија го призна Косово', Влада на Република Македонија, 9 October 2008, at <<http://arhiva.vlada.mk/?q=book/export/html/1257>>, 25 May 2013.

<sup>20</sup> The resolution was passed on the session from 8 October 2008. 'Извештај за работата на Собранието на Република Македонија за периодот 21.06.2008-31.12.2008', Собрание на Република Македонија, at <<http://www.sobranie.mk/default.asp?ItemID=7D8C56E5D2872B4ABD2447996E2CA972>>, 25 May 2013; 'Резолуција за односите на Република Македонија со Косово', *Службен весник*, No. 128 (2008).

<sup>21</sup> 'Ambasadoru Makedonije uskraćeno gostoprimstvo', *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 10 October 2008, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b101008\\_s.html#N13](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b101008_s.html#N13)>, 25 May 2013.

<sup>22</sup> B. Pavlica, 'Proces demarkacije i obeležavanja srpsko-makedonske granične linije', *Vojno delo*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (2009), p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> 'Tadić: Svesrdna saradnja sa Makedonijom', *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 19 June 2009, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b190609\\_s.html#N3](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b190609_s.html#N3)>, 26 May 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Macedonian Orthodox Church was established on March 4, 1945 during the First National-church Council within the Serbian Orthodox Church. The MPC announced autocephaly from the SPC during the Third National-church Council on July 17, 1967 In response the SOC announced non-recognition of the MPC and the two churches have dropped relations. See: Б. Илиевски, Илиевски Б., 'Македонско-српските црковни односи и влијанието на државните фактори врз нив (1944-1967)' in B. Аукоска (ed.), *Историја*, Скопје 2005; I. Stawowy-Kawka, 'Religie i grupy wyznaniowe w Republice Macedonii', *Prace Komisji Środkowoeuropejskiej PAU*, Vol. 18 (2005), pp. 103-112.

well as Skopje started to distance themselves from the conflict. In the meantime, both churches engaged in a dialogue and began negotiations. As a result, SPC and MPC signed an *Agreement from Niš* in 2002. According to an agreement, MPC should have obtained an autonomy within SPC. However, under the influence of public opinion, the Macedonian National Church cancelled the agreement. In spite of that, some clergymen in Macedonia with the metropolitan, Jovan Vraniškovski, refused to obey the MPC.<sup>25</sup> It led to further escalation because Vraniškovski, supported financially by SPC, established in Macedonia the Synod of Ohrid Archdiocese. In this way, the SPC established parallel clergy infrastructure in Macedonia. It was one of the factors that led the Macedonian authorities to officially engage in the conflict. Operations of state security services started to be directed against Vraniškovski. It led to his arrest in January 2004.<sup>26</sup> In consequence, it dissatisfied the authorities in Belgrade and they also started to interfere in the conflict.<sup>27</sup> However, after the initial escalation, the whole conflict appeased during the anniversary of the establishment of the Anti-fascist Assembly for the People's Liberation of Macedonia in 1944 in the monastery Prohor Pčinjski in Serbia. The authorities in Belgrade allowed the arrival of the Macedonian delegation.<sup>28</sup> It should be emphasized that one year earlier, due to the conflict, SPC did not allow the arrival of the Macedonian delegation. The Prime Minister of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica and the president of Macedonia Branko Crvenkovski had a meeting during the anniversary. They declared a will to develop mutual relations and solve the conflict between two churches.<sup>29</sup> However, two weeks after the meeting, a court in Bitoli passed judgment against Jovan Vraniškovski (for hatred against nations) and in that way, the effects of the meeting turned out to be minimal. In effect the authorities in Belgrade and the SPC still financed activities of Vraniškovski in Macedonia while the authorities in Skopje continued repression against the members of the Ohrid Archdiocese and denied its registration as a religious entity.

However, in the second part of the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the conflict between the churches softened. The Macedonian Orthodox Church filed a letter to the SPC in 2008 in which it appealed to resume the dialogue. Belgrade replied positively – for the first time the SPC did not demand for participation of Vraniškovski in the negotiations. However, any serious steps in order to solve the conflict were not

<sup>25</sup> J. ПАВЛОВСКИ (ed.), *Сто македонски години, 1903-2003*, Скопје 2004, p. 718.

<sup>26</sup> Stronger engagement of the country in a conflict between churches was caused by the rebellion of clergymen from four MPC monasteries which have declared willingness to transfer themselves under the authority of the Ohrid archdiocese (*de facto* SPC).

<sup>27</sup> 'Svilanović: Uhapšeni makedonski državljani, nema mesta za državu', *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 14 January 2004, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b140104\\_s.html#N5](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b140104_s.html#N5)>, 26 May 2013.

<sup>28</sup> 'Premijer Srbije i predsednik Makedonije u Prohoru Pčinjskom', *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 2 August 2004, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b020804\\_s.html#N1a](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b020804_s.html#N1a)>, 26 May 2013.

<sup>29</sup> 'Koštunica: Osvedočeno prijateljstvo dva naroda', *Bilten Ministarstva inostranih poslova*, 2 August 2004, at <[http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b020804\\_s.html#N3a](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b020804_s.html#N3a)>, 25 May 2013.



undertaken. One of the reasons was undoubtedly the severe health condition of the SPC's patriarch, Pavle, and this did not help to make clear decisions. However, this did not stop secret negotiations between two churches. The bishop of Bačka, Irinej, especially contributed to the overcoming of the conflict.<sup>30</sup> The new impulse for negotiations gave also Irinej, the Bishop of Niš, who became the new patriarch of the SPC in 2010. In his first public appearance as the Patriarch he referred to the situation in Macedonia and declared a will to solve the conflict.<sup>31</sup> During the celebration of an anniversary of the battle near Kumanovo, the Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić and Macedonia's president Djordje Ivanov expressed also a hope that both national churches will find a way to regulate mutual relations by taking an example from national relations.<sup>32</sup> Moving further, in the beginning of 2013, the Prime Minister of Serbia Ivica Dačić visited Macedonia. The Prime Minister emphasized that Serbia does not have any claims from southern neighbour. According to Dačić the only open issues were the relations between the SPC and the MPC. For overcoming the conflict he declared a will of the government for negotiations but also stated that this a problem within the competence of churches.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 'Makedonija: pod stalnim pritiskom suseda', *Helsinki Bulletin*, No. 61 (2010), at <<http://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/HB-Br61.pdf>>, 25 May 2013.

<sup>31</sup> 'Обраћање јавности Његове Светости Патријарха Српског Г. Иринеја', Српска Православна Црква, 28 January 2010, at <[http://www.spc.rs/sr/obracanje\\_javnosti\\_njegove\\_svetosti\\_patrijarha\\_srpskog\\_g\\_irineja](http://www.spc.rs/sr/obracanje_javnosti_njegove_svetosti_patrijarha_srpskog_g_irineja)>, 26 May 2013; 'Makedonija: pod stalnim...'

<sup>32</sup> 'Nikolić i Ivanov: Saglasnost oko vecine pitanja', *Bilten Ministarstva spoljnih poslova*, 29 October 2012, at <<http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/pres-servis/vesti-od-znacaja?year=2012&month=10&day=29&modid=77&lang=lat>>, 25 May 2013.

<sup>33</sup> 'Dačić i Gruevski: Otvorena pitanja odnosi dve crkve i Kosovo', *Bilten Ministarstva spoljnih poslova*, 28 January 2013, at <<http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/pres-servis/vesti-od-znacaja?year=2013&month=01&day=28&modid=77&lang=lat>>, 25 May 2013.

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