Bulgarian "Macedonian" Nationalism:
A Conceptual Overview

Anton Kojouharov

In August of 2003 Bulgaria and Macedonia[1] celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Ilinden (St.Elija) Uprising. The celebrations commemorated the heroic efforts of revolutionaries to liberate Macedonia and Thrace from Ottoman rule. Although the two states hail the same historical events and figures, they do so for different reasons. Bulgarians celebrate the heroic efforts for freedom and liberation of those, who in 1903, were still outside the borders of the motherland; while Macedonians look back on the event as the legendary struggle that founded their modern state and provided a common ground for a Macedonian identity.

Although at present Bulgarian-Macedonian relations are improving, the historical burden between the two states, and its political as well as popular manipulations still present an enormous obstacle toward a cooperative neighborly coexistence. And although economic cooperation, much encouraged by the EU, might further facilitate a warming of relations, there are deep, historical and psycho-social conditions in both populations that continually frustrate bilateral relations. Bulgaria's recognition of the Macedonian state (the first country to do so in 1991) initiated a period of a peculiar ambiguity in its foreign policy, as it refused to recognize a Macedonian language and nationality[2]. Moreover, periodic statements by Bulgarian officials such as former president Stoyanov's proclamation that "Macedonia is the most romantic part of Bulgarian history, have infuriated Macedonians and made progress in the political dialogue almost impossible (Büchsenschütz).

Bulgaria and Macedonia resolved the so-called language dispute in 1999, when Bulgaria recognized Macedonian language in return for Macedonia's affirmation that it would not interfere in Bulgaria's domestic affairs. Despite this significant step on the political level, on the nongovernmental level in both states there exists an ideological, historical, linguistic and cultural battle aimed at the reaffirmation of one's history and identity at the expense of the other. Macedonians continue to accuse Bulgaria of "stealing" its history, while Bulgarians denounce the existence of a Macedonian language and nationality (Özergan 2003).

Such disputes of identity and history have been typical for the Balkans for a long time. Moreover, some modern political commentators argue that the resurgence of nationalism and the related ethnic and religious conflict can attributed to unresolved histories. For much of Eastern Europe and the Balkans the fall of the soviet regime and the end of the bi-polar system in international affairs meant there was a return of history, whereby past grievances, buried identities, territorial claims, psychosocial conditions and traumas have been resurrected (Lorrabee 1994: XII). The violence in the former Yugoslavia and Macedonia has too been described as conflicts of histories and values (Pfaff 1993: 26).

This paper will attempt at a closer look of Bulgarian-Macedonian relations utilizing theories of nationalism, identity, civil society and psychosocial developments.

The Indispensable Historical Background

In 1878, as a result of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Bulgaria achieved her independence. The ensuing Treaty of San Stefano granted

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[1] For the purpose of this paper the Republic of Macedonia or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) will be referred to as simply Macedonia.

[2] It should be noted that Bulgarians consider only the ethnic Macedonian Slavs to be of Bulgarian descent.

Bulgaria the regions of Macedonia and Thrace. The territories given to Bulgaria were in accordance to the plebiscite of 1870-1871, which established the Bulgarian Exarchate to be sovereign over ethnic Bulgarians and/or people who identified themselves as Bulgarians (Bakalova). However, threatened by a large and powerful pro-Russian Bulgarian state on the strategic Balkan peninsular, the Great Powers intervened by summoning the Congress of Berlin, which sought to revise the treaty of San Stefano. The result of the Congress was the return of Macedonia and part of Thrace to the Ottoman Empire, and the division of the remaining Bulgarian territory into the independent Kingdom of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, which was to acquire the status of an autonomous region within the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, emerging victorious form the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885, Bulgaria achieved the unification of the independent Kingdom of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.

Macedonia, however, remained under Ottoman control. Its diverse ethnic and religious composition ensured that it became a battlefield for the nationalistic interests of its neighbors – Serbia, Greece, Albania and Bulgaria. Yet, most of the Christian Slav population, which constituted the majority in Macedonia, identified themselves as Bulgarian (Brubaker 1996: 153; Ruhl 1916: 6; Perry in Lorrabee 1994: 61). Moreover, Bulgarians in Bulgaria proper believed that most of the population of Macedonia was Bulgarian (Bakalova). Fueled by irredentists and revisionist nationalisms Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria defeated the Ottoman Empire in the 1912 Balkan War, thus liberating Macedonia and Thrace. In the aftermath of the war Macedonia was occupied by Serbian and Greek forces, while Bulgarians were mostly involved in battles in Thrace, where Bulgarians were only a minority (Brubaker 1995: 153). Bulgaria declared war on its allies in 1913, determined to incorporate Macedonia in her territory, but was defeated, as both Rumania and Turkey joined Greece and Serbia. Hence, Macedonia was repartitioned between Greece and Serbia, while a small region – Pirin Macedonia – remained in Bulgarian possession.

Bulgaria joined Germany and the Central Powers in WWI driven by the desire and determination to "liberate" Macedonia from Serbian and Greek control. Again Bulgaria suffered a defeat and the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919 confirmed the partitioning of Macedonia, while further reducing Bulgaria's territory. This was named by Bulgarian historians and politicians at the time as the "greatest catastrophe" in Bulgarian history. Bulgarian nationalism intensified as "some 250,000 refugees from Macedonia and Thrace brought with them the seeds of an aggressive expansionist dream which cane as a sole possible compensation for their humiliated national dignity" (Bakalova).

The interwar period in Bulgaria, as for most of the Balkans, was characterized by great civil turmoil, political instability and military coups. Having received the enormous influx of Macedonian-Bulgarian refugees the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) became instrumental in Bulgarian domestic and foreign politics. Aimed at either the formation of an autonomous Macedonia (The Federalists) or at the incorporation of Macedonia into Bulgaria (The Centralists) IMRO activists engaged in terrorist acts in Greek and Serbian Macedonia and Bulgaria, and were responsible for the assassination of Alexander Stamboliyski, the leader of perhaps the only stable/democratic government in Bulgaria between the two world wars (Gianaris 1996: 113; Perry in Lorrabee 1994: 61). Bulgarian ambitions to "free" Macedonia were further encouraged by the fact that most of the Slavic population in Macedonia at that time had not developed a distinct national consciousness, which in turn justified the intensification of Serbization and Hellenization of the Macedonian population (Perry in Lorrabee 1994: 63).

During WWII, following Hitler's promise that Bulgaria will be allowed to occupy Serbian and Greek Macedonia, Bulgaria joined the Axis. Again, as the Axis were defeated, Bulgaria's cause was once again lost, and although towards the end of military activities Bulgarian armies had already turned and fought against Hitler, Bulgaria had to cede all

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territories it had occupied during the war (Bakalova; Perry in Lorrabee 1994: 61; Gianaris 1995: 114).

In the new world order, then Yugoslav and Bulgarian claims to Macedonia were viewed largely within the framework of international communism and were supervised by Moscow. Under pressure from the USSR Bulgaria, having much weaker position than Yugoslavia, had to recognize the "Macedonian" nationality (Bakalova; Perry in Lorrabee 1994: 61). Tito encouraged the formation of a distinct Macedonian identity in order to reduce and restrict Serbian and Croatian influence within Yugoslavia (Glenny 1995: 83). Thus, the recognition of both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria of a Macedonian nationality deprived both states from any legitimate claims to Macedonia (Perry in Lorrabee 1994: 61). Moreover, the close relation between Tito and Stalin in the first postwar years pressured Bulgaria to begin a process of "Macedonization" of the Pirin region in 1946, as the reigning Bulgarian Communist Party declared that the population there was a Macedonian national minority (Bakalova; Nikolov). Although the "Macedonization" process halted as soon as the Tito-Stalin break of 1948, it ushered Bulgarian/Macedonian nationalisms in a new era – Bulgaria's "forced" recognition of a Macedonian nationality deprived her nationalism of its core ideology, namely that Macedonians are Bulgarians, while for the Macedonians it acted as a milestone in the building of their separate identity.

In 1956 the Bulgarian leadership reversed its position on the Macedonian nationality, but it refrained from actively seeking confrontation on the Macedonian problem, since such actions would challenge the post-WWII status-quo and possibly start a new war. Internally, too, the issue had been suppressed, as in the totalitarian communist regime in Bulgaria civic organization and expressions that differed from the party line were discouraged if not persecuted. Thus, the issue of Macedonia became frozen in time until the fall of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe and Macedonia's self-proclamation of independence from Yugoslavia in 1991.

The Return of History

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe resulted in the explosive re-emergence of nationalism in all of its nuances. As if a return to the early 20th had occurred and nationalism once again ruled the Balkan peninsular. The destructive potency of nationalism manifested itself in the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, the Kosovo and Macedonian crises. Apart from the aggressive nationalisms that have caused wars in the Western Balkans, so far non-violent nationalisms continue to dominate inter-Balkan relations – the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute, the Serbo-Bulgarian dispute over treatment of the Bulgarian minority in Serbia, Romanian-Hungarian dispute over the Hungarian minority to name a few (Nelson 1991: 26).

The West's involvement in armed conflict on the Balkans has produced an unprecedented upheaval in media coverage, journalistic curiosity and a revival in studies of nationalism. Yet, even today historical inaccuracies, stereotypes, overgeneralizations and prejudices about the Balkans have infiltrated the commentaries of influential and prominent commentators and analysts. This has added considerable difficulty in analyzing political/nationalistic forces in the already complex interrelations in the region, for it is known that a simple overgeneralization and a stereotype are more readily and easily accepted.

The simple conclusion that the Balkans is a backward or even an uncivilized region has been a central point in many discussions about the moving forces behind Balkan politics and its nationalisms. In the 1993 report on the Balkan wars by the Carnegie Endowment commission George Kennan writes that the underlying force behind Balkan developments "was not religion but aggressive nationalism. But that nationalism, as it manifested itself on the field of battle, drew on deeper traits of character inherited, presumably, from a distant

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tribal past…And so it remains today" (Kennan in Todorova 1997: 5). Famous writer and journalist Robert Kaplan went even further when he claimed that "…Nazism, for instance, can claim Balkan origins. Among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentments close to the southern Slavic world, Hitler learned how to hate so infectiously" (Kaplan 1993: xxiii). Samuel Huntington, one of the most influential writers of international politics, too, writes that the Balkans lie outside civilized Western Europe, confirming its backwardness (Huntington 1996: 158-160). Furthermore conflict in the Balkans has largely been viewed as "atavistic, the product of a perverse time warp that unloads fourteenth-century hatreds at the edge of the Europe of Maastricht, high-speed trains and the Single Market. Its cruelty is imputed to impulses beyond modern grasp or response" (Pfaff 1993: 21). Finally, commenting on the nature of American nationalism and the way Americans view it one author states: "Triumphant nationalists celebrate the positive and have little empathy for the whining of aggrieved nationalists whose formative experience consisted of a succession of national humiliations and defeats" (Pei 2003: 34)

Such, perhaps emotionally justified misperceptions, obscure the validity of any attempted explanation of Balkan developments. For instance, following the arguments of the above paragraph, to the question "What are the roots, causes and motivations of the Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute?", one can simply answer – ancient hatreds, tribal rivalries, civilizational backwardness.

Few western authors have challenged such views. Misha Glenny has often criticized Western Policy toward the Balkans that has been influenced precisely by such views – such attitudes and policies were "due in part to the misperception that irrational blood lust rather than calculated territorial expansion was the cause of the Balkan conflict" (Glenny 1995: 90; Hagen 1999: 59). An invaluable insight into the reasons, causes and motifs behind Western popular and scholarly misperceptions about Balkan political developments are found in Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* and Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*. According to the authors, such misperceptions of the Balkans and Eastern Europe have been deliberate, as they helped form and consolidate Western European Enlightenment identity as a contrast to Balkan "orientalism" and backwardness (Balalovska).

Conceptual and Theoretical Considerations

There is no one single theory of political science, nationalism or national identity that would universally and accurately describe political processes in the Balkans, or anywhere else in the world for that matter. The most influential and informative theories of nationalism are the primordial, the modernist, and the expansionist. All possess a certain amount of validity and truthfulness. Therefore, placing the Macedonian-Bulgarian conflict in a theoretical or conceptual environment might help understand better developments between the two states.

The revival of nationalism in the Balkans, as well as elsewhere, can be contributed to several factors. These include: a) democratization; b) concern for human rights; c) self-determination; d) modernization and development; and e) the emergence of regional powers (Kourvetaris 2002: 33). The transition to democracy in Bulgaria and Macedonia has demanded the freedom of ethnic and religious minorities to freely express themselves politically and economically. In Bulgaria this meant the termination of the assimilation program that the totalitarian regime had directed against the Turks during 1984-89. Soon after the Turkish minority organized itself in a political movement, which was eventually, not without fear, recognized by the Bulgarian Supreme Court as political party – the Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS) – which has ever since been a key factor in Bulgarian politics as the third largest representation in parliament (Roudometof 2002: 71-72). The political event, a result from the democratic transition that directly influences Bulgarian-Macedonian

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relations was the formation or re-formation of the nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and its recognition as a political party in 1990 (Nikolov). The IMRO is a direct descendent in name and ideology of the controversial IMRO that terrorized the Balkans in the interwar period. Its political representation has been too week and marginal to have an influence on the Macedonian question on a governmental level, but its role in inciting nationalist sentiments in the public has been considerable (Bakalova, Nikolov). The OMO-Ilinden was also formed -- an extreme organization that insists it represents the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, while having separatist aspirations about the Pirin Macedonia and its unification with Macedonia proper. The Bulgarian Constitutional Court declared the OMO-Ilinden unconstitutional as a part of the Bulgarian policy of denial of the existence of a distinct Macedonian minority on her territory. This act infuriated Macedonians and sparked heated debates and discussions regarding its legality. Eventually, Bulgaria was brought before the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled against Bulgaria in 2003, forcing her to acknowledge a Macedonian minority (Ivanov).

In Macedonia the process of democratization saw the creation of the two main Macedonian political parties -- the IMRO-DPMNE and the Socialists (former communists). Bearing the legacy of Tito's initiation of the Macedonian national identity and language the Socialists have been largely anti-Bulgarian, while during IMRO-DPMNE's rule Bulgarian-Macedonian relations improved significantly (Bakalova, Nikolov, I 2003: 32).

The decision of the European Court of Human Rights against Bulgaria is a heavy blow to the core of Bulgarian nationalistic ideology – that the Macedonians are Bulgarians (Engström 2002: 3). The Bulgarian Constitutional Court had banned the OMO-Ilinden because of its separatist ideology. OMO-Ilinden is an ethnonationalist movement aiming at the recognition of ethnic minority rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria, while displaying hints of separatism (Nikolov). Because Bulgaria did not recognize the existence of a Macedonian minority in 2000, it could not use the clause in its constitution banning political parties formed on ethnic or religious basis, instead it used OMO-Ilinden's separatist aspirations to declare it a threat to national security (Bakalova). Since many ethnonationalist movements become secessionist movements, provided they fulfill certain criteria, Bulgaria has clearly a problem to solve. Premdas identified several major factors that contribute to the formation of such movements: a) *an organized struggle*; Premsa emphasizes that such a struggle involves a movement that is usually factional but nevertheless organized in its goals (Premdas 1990: 14-16). There are at least several such Macedonian movements in Bulgaria, seeking minority rights (Ivanov); b) *territorial self-government*; the ethnic groups seeks a territorial homeland – in the case of OMO-Ilinden that would be the Republic of Macedonia; c) *primordial and secondary factors;* the movement aspires to have an unique history, language, culture that support its identity, including an ethic consciousness that may lack any historical objectivity or validity. In this case OMO-Ilinden adheres to the Macedonian official identity; d) *reliance on the principle of self-determination;* Certainly, the purpose of the OMO-Ilinden is its recognition, derived from the right of self-determination, which dates back to the League of Nations; d) *international recognition;* The decision of the European Court of Justice acts de facto as the international recognition that supports the legality of the OMO-Ilinden (Premdas 1990: 14-16). Despite the signs that OMO-Ilinden displays, it is doubtful that it becomes a true secessionist movement, since its support is extremely low -- about 1% in the Blagoevgrad region (in Pirin Macedonia) during the 1999 local elections (Nikolov). Yet, developments around the controversial OMO-Ilinden will certainly continue to strain Bulgarian-Macedonian relations, as Bulgarian nationalism will be pushed onto the defensive.

Results from censuses and polls pertaining to the numbers of persons in Bulgaria who identify themselves as Macedonians varies sharply by historical timing and sources. In the 1956 Bulgarian census, as the result of the Macedonization of the Pirin region, 187,729

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persons identified themselves as Macedonians; in 1965 the number had shrunk to 8,750; and in 1975 the census claimed that there were no Macedonians in Bulgaria (Perry 1994: 61). And according to some sources there were, in 1998, 1,850 officially recognized Bulgarians living in Macedonia, although Bulgaria does not recognize a Bulgarian minority in Macedonia as such (Bakalova). The problem is further exasperated by the insistence of Greece that those who call themselves Macedonians are in fact Slavophone Greeks and the occasional Serbian proposition that Macedonia is a part of southern Serbia, thus Macedonians are of Serbian origin (Engström 2002: 3).

This ambivalence of identity and nationality claims owes its nature in the fact that the protracted disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, coupled with Great Power border tailoring, ensured that large numbers of ethnic groups remained outside the borders of their national homelands. Elaborating and analyzing such historical events and processes Brubaker has developed a modern model of nationalism in international relations, in which *a nationalizing state, national minority* and *external national homeland* play the decisive role. Brubaker's point of departure is that "(n)ationalism is not endangered by nations. It is produced -- or better, it is induced – by *political fields* of particular kinds" and that "(n)ationhood and nationalism flourish today largely *because of* regime's policies (Brubaker 1996: 17). Thus, nationalism is the result of a political will and/or the building, rebuilding, consolidation of political societies and states rather than nationhood. In Brubaker's analysis *nationalizing states* are relatively new states, "ethnically heterogeneous yet conceived as nation states, whose dominant elites promote… the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation; *national minorities* are organized, substantial, self-conscious and politically alienated groups; and *external national homelands* (of the minorities) are those states whose "elites closely monitor the situation of their co-ethnics in the new states, vigorously protest alleged violations of their rights, and assert the right, even the obligation, to defend their interests" (Brubaker 1996: 57). Brubaker maintains that the three factors or different types nationalism are intertwined in a "triadic nexus" constantly relating to one another and reinforcing each other (Brubaker 1996: 58).

Both Macedonia and Bulgaria have, at different times and for different reasons, occupied different roles within Brubaker's nexus. Bulgaria's rejection of the notion that a Macedonian minority exist within her territory placed her in the role of the young nationalizing state. This has caused a reaction in both the self-proclaimed minority led by the OMO-Ilinden and in Macedonia, whereby both felt their rights violated. Criticism of the Bulgarian position in Macedonia and the increased activity of the OMO-Ilinden culminated in the decision by the Bulgarian Constitutional Court to declare the party unconstitutional. In this scenario the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria would rely on encouragement and support from their perceived homeland the republic of Macedonia.

A reversal within the nexus is also plausible. Bulgaria's stance that Macedonians are Bulgarians puts her in the position to exercise and display the homeland type of nationalism, whereby it acts not to support a minority within Macedonia but views all Macedonians as part of a Bulgarian community which in Macedonia has been subjected to assimilation and anti-Bulgarian politics. In this sense Bulgaria attempts to protect the whole Macedonian population from its local elites. Yet, in this case Bulgarian nationalism is not politically constructed and induced, but rather it represents a genuine feeling among many Bulgarians. This is the case, since many Bulgarians who feel nationalistic toward Macedonia are descendants of Bulgarian refugees from Macedonia during the first half of the 20th century. This means that they can actually claim Macedonia as their ancestral homeland.

In its role as the homeland state Bulgaria also occupies the position of a "big-brother" to Macedonia, expressing overt interest in Macedonia's domestic and foreign politics

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(Engström 2002: 7). The fact that Bulgaria unilaterally recognized Macedonia gives it a unique status as far as Macedonian outlook on the region is concerned. On a number of occasions during the Albanian crisis Bulgaria was quick to offer assistance to Macedonia. In 1999 as result of thawing of bi-lateral relations Bulgaria donated 94 T-55A tanks and 108 M-30 122 mm artillery cannons, described as military equipment as well as munitions, insisting that it bears all costs of transportation too (Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia 1995). Furthermore, Bulgaria's self-perceived position as the national homeland is also provoked and justified as the conflict between Albanians and Macedonians intensifies – the doctrine that Macedonians are Bulgarians internally/domestically enables Bulgaria to play the role of guarantor and protector of the Macedonians, as it deems part of her own kin being threatened.

Hobsbawm's position on the nature of nationalism is similar to Brubaker's in that both are considered modernist, and that both believe that nationalism is an artificial and political construct. Hobsbawm maintains that nationalism's main characteristic and goal is its drive to build a nation state – "Nations only exist as functions of a particular territorial state or the aspiration to establish one" (Hobsbawm in Smith 1998: 121). Hobsbawm's vital novel contribution to the understanding of states, nations and nationalism is his analyses or theory of the invention of tradition. In *The Invention of Tradition* he states: "Invented tradition is meant to be a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seem to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm 1983: 1-2). Hobsbawm implies that the building of an imagined or real identity that is rooted in the historic past of a community is crucial and vital for it to become a state or to consolidate its nationhood. In this sense identity, the process of its construction, or lack thereof, is at the core of nationalism. Furthermore, identity "…offers individuals the security of community and solidarity, of shared patterns of meanings; a bounded world in which to live and in which one can find others like oneself" (Schopflin in Engström 2002: 16).

Macedonia under Tito is a perfect example of the invention of tradition from top to bottom, along Hobsbawm's lines, with the purpose of building a nation. Under Tito Macedonia was first recognized as a separate nation. Tito's model of solving nationality issues was similar to that of Stalin, whereby "brotherhood and unity" were promoted to deal with crises of nationality. Thus, under the general guidance of Tito the Macedonian nation was given its corresponding territorial boundaries embodied in the Social Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; a Macedonian Autocephalous Church was established; and a Macedonian language was codified (Engström 2002: 5-6).

With the fall of communism and the consequent lack of a great power in the region to "supervise" political developments, Macedonia's "invented nationality" came under attack from all of its neighbors. It became evident that Tito and Yugoslavia had borrowed heavily from the histories of neighboring states to construct a believable and suitable Macedonian identity/nationality that at times clamed Alexander the Great among its ancestors (Bell in Engström 2002: 6). Macedonia was hard pressed from all sides – Bulgaria contested its national identity; Greece contested its name and symbols; and Serbia its religious identity, for Macedonia still lacks an independent Exarchate/Patriarchate (Engström 2002: 3; Özergan 2003: 43).

Bulgaria could not have recognized both the state and the nation of Macedonia, for the simple reason that Macedonia claimed a part of Bulgarian history, hence recognizing the nation would mean giving up a part of Bulgarian national historical identity. And in this sense the nationalistic struggle between Bulgaria and Macedonia becomes the struggle between Macedonia's "invented traditions" and Bulgaria's factual and established history and

identity. Historical debates between the two states are heated and politicized, as each historical claim produces and incites outrage and tensions in both sides. For instance, during talks in 2003 Macedonian President Traikovski deliberately included in the official visit the "Vodocha" Monastery, which is associated with the tragic defeat of Bulgarian King Samuel of the Middle Ages (Penkova 2002: 24). The Bulgarians were outraged -- they hold the tragic massacre to be a vital identity forming part of their collective history – as they interpreted Traikovski's move as another attempt at historical theft (it is paradoxical, since the Byzantine Emperor who defeated Samuel is written and remembered into the annals of history as "Basil the Bulgar Slayer"). The attacks on the Macedonian authenticity have produced a sort of paranoia toward Bulgaria with clear anti-Bulgarian sentiments in both the media and the Socialist party. Tensions arose again in 2003 with the arrest and sentencing of a Bulgarian citizen in Macedonia for provoking a debate, as she mentioned on a public bus that Macedonia was a state only 10 years old (Trud Daily Editorial 2002: 30-31).

Macedonian-Bulgarian nationalistic disputes only confirm the importance of identity for the successful operating of a state and nation. Some Bulgarians have asserted that Bulgarian nationalism has been transformed over the centuries and become "nonconfrontational" (Bakalova). However, as we have established, identity is an integral part of nation/nationalism. And because the process of identity building is based on confronting the "other" in order to reaffirm and establish the "self", all nationalism are confrontational, although it must be said that confrontational does not mean violent.

In 1992 Bulgarian president Zhelyu Zhelev explicitly stated that Bulgaria recognized the state of Macedonia and not the nation, further reiterating the Bulgarian position that Macedonia was only a geographic term (Engström 2002: 7). From the perspective of modernist nationalist approach we saw that the notion of Bulgaria recognizing Macedonian nation is inadmissible, unless Bulgaria was ready to willingly renounce parts of its own history and identity. Apart from the general and widely accepted belief that Macedonians are Bulgarians, Bulgaria's position derives also from certain Balkan historical peculiarities, such as the preeminence of ethnic ideas.

On the other side of the scale of discussions on nationalism are the premordialists and perennialists. Their main argument is that nations are a product of extended kin groups and should be viewed as such (Smith 1998: 147). This means that the belonging to a nation and/or certain identity is not only natural but it is inherited. In this theory symbols of nationhood become ethnic symbols and state politics become ethnic politics, wherein the building of a nation follows ethnic, rather than strictly political lines, providing for the occurrence of ethnocentrism or ethnocracy.

Pierre van der Berghe suggests that "the very notion of a nation is an extension of kin selection" (Berghe in Smith 1998: 147). Therefore, according to Connor a nation is "a group of people who feel that they are ancestrally related. It is the largest group that can command a person's loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is from this perspective the fully extended family" (Connor in Smith 1998: 161). Nevertheless, the perception of history and identity play an important role in ethnic nationalism as well. Connor goes on to suggest that the sense or belief in a common ancestry need not be based on factual history, but it is the feeling or sentiment of shared and common ancestry/history that provides the identity of an ethnic group and a nation (Smith 1998: 162). Anthony Smith reiterates the point by adding that "the myth of a common and unique origin in time and place …is essential for the sense of ethnic community, since it marks the foundation point of the group's history, and hence its individuality" (Smith 1998: 191). Donald Horowitz goes further to maintain that "most people are born into an ethnic group, so that whatever other differences there might be between groups, birth ascription is ultimately the defining element of ethnicity"(in Smith 1998: 165). And finally, the political implications of ethnicity and ethnic politics is that when

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nations are formed on the bases of ethnicity "nationality is also superior to citizenship…since it connects political principles and practice to a sense of shared history and culture, and a sense of place and time" (Smith 1998: 211).

Historians and political scientists have long associated the Balkans with the primordial and perennial type of the notion and development of the nation/state. Kuhn sharply divides nationalisms as the voluntarist/political one, which persisted in the Anglo-Saxon world, and the ethnic/organic one which became typical of Eastern Europe (Smith 1998: 146).

This has helped shape the substance of Balkan politics since its liberation from the Ottoman Empire. The concepts of the nation as an ethnic construct rather than a political one has prevented Balkan societies from developing a viable civil society of western type, which is vital for the development of a democratic system of a western type. Instead the Balkans have been developing without the Western liberal tradition that protects minorities and individual rights (Hagen 1999: 54). Collectivist values and rights were only observed by and extended to ethnic groups rather than political groups and entities, while often freedom meant liberation from a certain ethnic group, rather than the implementation of rights of individuals (Gallagher 1998: 44). The primordial and perennial concepts of nationalism and the state provided that Balkan conflict throughout the 20th century involved the consolidation of nations along ethnic lines, thus a state felt complete only when all members of the ethnos were incorporated into it. The re-tailoring of borders up until WWII ensured constant tensions and conflicts among Balkan nations as they attempted to unify their corresponding ethnos.

The war in Yugoslavia and the minority crisis in most Balkan states even today confirm the above. Contrary to what analysts have described as expansionist nationalism, Balkan nationalism is more a nationalism of ethnic unification and/or ethnic "unmixing" to use Brubaker's term (Hagen 1999: 52). The ethnic concept of a nation explains the great emotional depth of national identity in the Balkans, as nationalism of this kind is "love of one's nation; the largest felt descent group" (Connor in Smith 1998: 162).

Thus, still today national identity in the Balkans transcends state/political/territorial boundaries. Moreover, as was established previously, national/ethnic identity is superior to citizenship, hence it is much more valued and serves as the vital source of identity. Such a theoretical approach helps explain the at times irrational and paradoxical Bulgarian policy toward Macedonia -- not recognizing Macedonia as a nation, but a state, while generously providing military assistance and playing the "big-brother" in Macedonia's regional and international affairs[3]. In Bulgaria's view nothing could be lost in the recognition of Macedonia as a state, since regardless of their citizenship Bulgarians, and Macedonians are considered as such, would remain Bulgarians regardless of their citizenship. Moreover, a political recognition would allow Bulgaria to influence Macedonian politics. Yet, an official recognition, even only of a state, is sufficient to make internationally accepted and recognized legal norms in international affairs binding in the Macedonian-Bulgarian bilateral relations. It seems Bulgaria had not accounted for such a development and with the weighing pressure of the European Court of Human Rights, many Bulgarians have begun to view Bulgaria's even only formal recognition of the Macedonian state as a failure and a betrayal. The sentiments are even more intense in the large part of Bulgarians who are descendants of Bulgarian-Macedonian immigrants.

Proponents of primordial and perennial concepts of nationalism perhaps explain such behavior, since they insist that "national bond is fundamentally psychological and non-rational…but not irrational only beyond reason" (Connor in Smith 1998: 161). Certainly such

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[3] Paradoxically too, Macedonia itself asks Bulgaria for assistance, exemplified in former Macedonian President Gligorov's plea that Bulgaria should assist in the establishment of an independent Macedonian Church (Özergan 2002: 43).

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a psychosocial condition can politicize itself, under certain requirements, to produce non-rational or even irrational political decisions. Bulgarian nonviolent nationalism of today, however, stands in clear and sharp contrast to her recent past. Bulgaria has fought four devastating wars for its unification with Macedonia – although the Second Balkan War of 1913 and WWI left Bulgaria utterly destroyed militarily and economically and to great extent physically, Bulgarians entered WWII again with only one goal in mind, to bring back Macedonia. The Macedonian obsession was such a potent force that Bulgarians entered WWII against their greatest allies and friends – the Russians. Clearly, there had been something that greatly troubled the Bulgarian psyche.

Robert Jay Lifton has argued that there are certain events in the histories of certain societies that are so powerful in their collective traumatization, that they are capable of completely transforming the social and political system – psychohistorical dislocation and historical desymbolization. Lifton's point of departure is that "we can understand much of human history as the struggle to achieve, maintain and reaffirm a collective sense of immortality under constantly changing psychic and material conditions" and that "man seeks lasting symbolic structure" to produce and reaffirm the sense of collective immortality (Lifton 1979: 208). Lifton argues that such episodes of psychohistorical dislocations or historical desymbolization produce "collective forms of restlessness and unhappiness", which in their turn, have the potential of bringing a form of "ideological totalism" in a society as a way out. By ideological totalism Lifton understands "an extremist meeting ground between people and ideas that involves an all-or-none subjugation of the self to an idea-system" (Lifton 1979: 214).

Not all psychohistorical dislocations and desymbolizations, however, have to lead to ideological totalism. When the perception of self and of identity, constituting a vital part in the symbolism that provides the collective immortality, is disturbed or no longer possible psychohistorical dislocation may occur. Lifton has used his model to describe developments in postwar Germany and interwar China, as an explanation of China's choice of communism for its ideology. To think that, from 1878 until the end of WWII, Bulgaria and Bulgarians had experienced a psychohistorical dislocation of such a scale is rather imaginative. Nevertheless, the persistence of Bulgarian aggressive nationalism in all of its irrationality could be in part a result of the inability of Bulgarians to reaffirm their sense of identity and symbolism coupled with humiliating defeats in the attempts to rescue these identity and symbolisms.

Bulgarians after the liberation form Ottoman rule seemed to have sustained a rather solid, deep and clear national consciousness and identity. Moreover, Bulgarians of that time had displayed a rather consolidated view of their political, cultural and moral position within the Balkans and Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries. At the height of pan-Slavism and Slavophil sentiments during the 19th century Bulgarians were acknowledged and recognized by the Slavic world, mainly Russia, as the bearers and founders of the Slavic civilization (Todorova 1997: 84). Bulgarians themselves upheld this self-perception based on their history as being the homeland of St. Cyril and St. Methodius – the creators of the Slavic alphabet, as well as being among the first Slavic state to convert to Eastern Orthodoxy in 865.

The numerous uprisings of various magnitudes in the latter years of Ottoman oppression, and their violent suppression, have earned Bulgarians foreign recognition that their suffering, among the Balkan nations under Ottoman rule was the greatest. Russian historian Venelin writes on the subject: "In a word, Turkish domination and existence in Europe is based mostly and perhaps exclusively on the Bulgarians…Among the Slavs, the Bulgarians have suffered the worst" (Venelin in Todorova 1997: 83). The quick and decisive victory in the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885 and the ensuing unification boosted Bulgaria's self-confidence significantly. Still, in the Balkan War of 1912 against Turkey foreign

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observers, confirming Bulgaria's own perception, maintained that "the Bulgars had borne the brunt of the war against the Turks and driven them all but out of Europe" (Ruhl 1916: 5).

Thus, Bulgaria's self perception as the bearer of Slavic civilization; as the people who suffered the most; and as the nation with the most heroic and costly contribution to Turkey's defeat in 1912, firmly justified the notion and idée fix that Bulgaria *deserves* Macedonia. International recognition that Bulgarian claims to Macedonia were most justified only exasperated the Macedonian idée fix (Fox 1915: 137-145). Bulgaria's unification with Macedonia, thus, becomes the symbol of Bulgaria's national revival, liberation, completion and identity. The Congress of Berlin and the outcome of the Second Balkan War, whereby Macedonia was again taken away from Bulgaria, constitute events that fit Lifton's description of an event of psychohistorical dislocation. The inability of Bulgaria to complete her wholeness of identity, ushered the nation in a state aggressive nationalism that was centered on the idée fix of Macedonia. The ideology that Bulgaria deserved Macedonia would dominate Bulgarian domestic and foreign politics from 1978 until 1945.

A Glance into the Future

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the emergence of an independent republic of Macedonia have resurrected the "Macedonian Question" and put it back on the political agenda of the Balkans. Although aggression and direct confrontation have been avoided, issues and problems revolving around the authenticity of the Macedonian nation and its alleged corresponding minority in Bulgaria, have plagued relations between the two states. Up until the formal resolution of the language dispute in 1999, almost no bi-lateral treaties and/or agreements had been signed.

The underlying reason for the conflict, or rather bitter disagreement, are the different directions that Bulgarian and Macedonian nationalisms have embarked on toward the answer to the "Macedonian Question". On the one hand, there is the young and passionate Macedonian nationalism whose most vital purpose is the refutation of all neighborly claims and the affirmation of a separate and independent Macedonian identity, which, in the best scenario, would be as distanced from those of the neighboring states as possible. On the other hand, there lurks an old and experienced Bulgarian nationalism, whose purpose in this matter is, quite in opposition, the invalidation of the Macedonian nationhood and identity. In this sense the Bulgarian answer to the "Macedonian Question" has been that Macedonians are Bulgarians.

Regardless of what concept or notions of nationalism the two states utilize and employ nationalism in the Balkans is likely to be a key player in the regional politics for the foreseeable future. If Balkan nationalism is evaluated from the modernist perspective, that nationalism is a political construct, the fact that the republic of Macedonia is only some 12 years long would mean that the political process of state-building, of which nationalism is an integral part, is likely to continue in the next several decades. Following Hobsbawm's postulates, confrontations and disagreements with Bulgaria will be inevitable, as Macedonian alleged identity will be in direct conflict with established Bulgarian identity. And in the case of Balkan nationalism as primordial and perennial concept, frictions and tensions would be perpetuated, as proponents of this type of nationalism have labeled it non-rational. In this scenario Bulgarians would never be able to completely abandon the idea and belief that Macedonians are a part of the extended Bulgarian kin, while Macedonian attempts of new identity will be challenged.

As paradoxical as it may sound, one probable approach to solving problems of nationalism is employing a different kind of nationalism. The latter half of the 20th century in Europe saw the unprecedented development of a type of new nationalism called supra-

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nationalism. This new nationalism sought to unite a band of local/state nationalisms into the formation of an identity of a heterogeneous character which would transcend identities of local nationalisms. The construction of the EU has given hope to some political analysts that supra-nationalism in Europe would bring an end to nationalistic disputes and act as a catalyst for the formation of a common European identity.

Such an identity, however, must be the result of a prolonged social and political practice of engineering a novel identity (Smith 1998: 217). Furthermore, "the engineers of the new Europe will have to look at 'common European trends' and design a myth of origin, rewrite history, invent traditions, rituals and symbols that will create a new identity" (Guibernau in Smith 1998: 217). Such policies, however, have the potential to be more alienating than unifying. Moreover, intellectuals have criticized the EU for being to economic and financial, to blunt and dull. Historian Fernand Braudel notices that "it is disturbing to note that Europe as a cultural ideal and objective is the last item on the current agenda…no one is concerned with a mystique or an ideology" (Braudel 1995: 423).

It is true that much potential conflict in the Balkans has and is being prevented by the complex relationship of the EU and the Balkans. Eventually, most Balkan states will be invited to join the EU. EU monitoring and strict guidelines secure the compliance of Balkan states to international and EU law. Moreover, the aspirations of the Balkans states, including Bulgaria and Macedonia, to acquire the economic and financial security of an open European market and investment are powerful deterrents of conflict and confrontation. It is important to note that, above all, the move toward the EU is motivated by a desire for economic and financial stability and regional stability, and not by a genuine desire to share European values and identities.

There is a peculiarity in Balkan nationalism that should require and demand significant amount of resources and attention. The Balkans states, or rather identities, have millennial histories, which makes them extremely durable and cherished. It is noticeable that Balkan nationalisms have erupted every time the European or International status quo have been challenged or a new European or international order established – after the fall of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires; at the start of WWI and WWII again; and most recently with the fall of communism and the by-polar international system. This would mean that Balkan states are usually dominated and overwhelmed by foreign (Great) powers and dependent by developments in European and international politics. Most importantly, it indicates that no ideology or world order has been able to quell Balkan nationalisms, but only keep them suppressed and isolated (Nelson 1991: 2). That is why it is important to deal with the problems of Balkan nationalisms before the Balkan states become a part of the next regional order and ideology, in this case the EU. If the Balkan states enter the EU with their nationalistic issues unresolved, nationalism will certainly explode again at the next turn of the historic cycle.

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Anton Kojouharov *has earned my BA in International Affairs and Political Science from the University of Nevada, Reno. His interests include theories and studies on nationalism, inter-ethnic and intercultural relations, studies of identity formation, and conflict resolution. He plans to pursue a Master's and a PhD degree in an international field of study. This is his first publication.*