



**Datar**



**COESIONET**  
**EUROPEAN COHESION AND TERRITORIES RESEARCH NETWORK**

## **“EXTREME” RIGHT PARTY IN MACEDONIA**

**Paper by**

**Elena CHUTROVA**

**Director**

**François Bafoil**

**CNRS – Sciences Po/CERI**

**Collège Universitaire de Sciences Po – Campus de Dijon**

The name conflict between Greece and Macedonia is always popular, besides the big enthusiasm of the possible compromise in 2010, that unluckily remains unresolved for another year. The different proposals of the mediator Matthew Nimitz have not been approved by both sides. The name question of the country remains a hot topic and shape the political talks in the country, especially the right-wing political talks. This conflict blocks the perspectives of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country, since the name question was the obstacle for the opening of the negotiation talks of Macedonia with the EU, as well as the membership of OTAN, followed by the Greek veto. The name Macedonia is officially recognized by 120 OTAN member countries, including the United States of America(2004), Russia, China, India and recently Canada. Nevertheless, the Greek blocking persists since the Macedonian Declaration of Independence in 1991.

“ The Macedonian question” is a very complex one, one that provoked many massacres in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the Second World War and still remains the first motive for nationalist discussions. At the time, Macedonia was in a position of a double combat, on one side against the Ottoman Empire ( 5 centuries under Ottoman sovereignty); and on the other side the one between the many Christian people in the region, the Bulgarians, the Greeks and the Serbs. The contemporary nationalists stand for correcting the historical injustice. The Bucharest treaty is the key moment of this “injustice” made regarding the Macedonian nation, regarding the nationalist’s disputes that claim to Pirin Macedonia ( Bulgaria ) and Aegean Macedonia ( Greece ).

The other element is the response by the nationalists to the continued denial of the Macedonian identity by its neighbors. The Bulgarians deny the Macedonian language by treating it as a Bulgarian dialect. The Serbian Orthodox Church does not accept the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and there is a denial from Greece as for the recognition of the name of the country. These three main arguments were the axis for raising the nationalist feelings in the country population and political scene. To all these reasons we should add an unfriendly regional environment in the Balkans. Given that there is no communication path to control or no oil to protect in the Balkans, the real challenge to understand the conflicts is to dissect the challenge of “post-imperial” nationalism in the Balkans. That’s the reason why studying the phenomenon of nationalism in the Balkans through the prism of Macedonia is an important and ambitious challenge.

Even if a large number of political parties were created after the end of the communist govern, this paper will focus more on the right-wing party VMRO-DPMNE. The period that is studied is the one after the secession of Yugoslavia. The reason for which I have not chosen 2008 as a starting point is the fact that even if in the other countries the economic crisis had a significant impact, this was not the case in Macedonia, a country that was already in “a crisis”. It is only after 1991 that the debate around the Macedonian national identity appears, as a consequence of the partition of the different nationalities living together in the area of former multinational state of Yugoslavia. The national idea was inconsistent with the Yugoslav government of Tito, who advocated the disappearance of class antagonisms and national differences in favor of a single class. Therefore, the question is to know whether Macedonia as most countries of the former Yugoslavia has faced a surge of extreme nationalism.

Can we speak of the existence of an extreme right party on the political scene in Macedonia after the declaration of its independence? Moreover, assuming the existence of an extreme right

party which elements are feeding a political speech? On the contrary, can the identity, political and economic challenges the country is now facing later be the source of (re) emergence of a right-wing extremism?

Although if in the early years of its founding, the VMRO-DPMNE party had nationalistic policies, its subsequent evolution disproves the hypothesis of the existence of an extreme right-wing party in Macedonia today. In the second half of the 1990s some reforms took place in the VMRO-DPMNE policy henceforth adapted to the needs of a modern state as well as the collaboration with the parties of the Albanian minority and the European perspective which was becoming more and more important. That's the reason why we cannot speak of it as - an "extreme" nationalist party in order to describe VMRO-DPMNE, but rather a moderate right-wing party.

This study will try to prove how the evolution of VMRO-DPMNE political discourse and its ability to cope with multiple crises by reformation was approved by the majority of the population and of course, its rise to power.

First of all, the focus in the political discourse of VMRO-DPMNE following the country's independence after the referendum of September 8, 1991 was oriented toward establishing the state continuity. The position of the right "nationalist" party in Macedonia was characterized by its claim to the ancient Macedonian heritage and especially to the personalities of Philip of Macedonia and Alexander the Great. Also, symbols like the flag representing the "Star of Vergina", symbol associated with Alexander the Great, are being promoted during the Macedonian "quest for origins", feature for the construction of each nation. However, the later evolution of the discourse of VMRO-DPMNE unlike the extreme right parties in neighboring countries is moving more towards a moderate right-wing political party supporting and promoting multiculturalism. The evolution of VMRO-DPMNE political discourse and political program during election campaigns proves whenever the change and the adaptation of its political, ideological and organizational profile. Professor Cane Mojanoski highlights the "new identity" of this party, hence the name change and the - adjective 'democratic' in the second part of its new name. The other point of this "new identity" is a sympathetic political discourse with the policies of the European Union. The author emphasizes that without a complete abandon of the previous political agenda, VMRO-DPMNE has made significant changes that contributed to its access to power as well as a decreasing number of representations of this party as being a party of "extreme right" and "intolerant".

Then, it is interesting to analyze the ability of VMRO-DPMNE to face the challenges of the political scene of Macedonia. As a governing party, VMRO-DPMNE faces the conflict of 2001 and an increasing Albanian nationalism especially after the declaration of independence of Kosovo. So it is pertinent to study - the impact of the 2001 crisis on Macedonian nationalism. In this particular context of Macedonia, the economic crisis of 2008 had a smaller impact as a potential reason of the emergence of extremism in Macedonia compared to other countries, such as the Western European countries. It is certainly a factor among others, but in this case the economic crisis of 2008 isn't the primary cause of extremism.

Finally, on one hand it is necessary to study the acceptance by the people of the moderate right party VMRO-DPMNE discourse which is certainly -less nationalist and exacerbated than in other Balkan countries. On the other hand, this paper will try to analyze the expression of the will of the accession to the EU advocated by VMRO-DPMNE and its correlation with the elections. Even in 1990

when it was created VMRO-DPMNE had envisaged a "unity of the Macedonian people in united Europe" which moderates the discourse about this party suspicion toward international society. It has now among the Balkan countries the most advanced state in the process of accession after Croatia. The prospect of European Union membership has become the central objective of all governments including the right-wing government VMRO-DPMNE. Moreover, the policy reform has resulted in the mass acceptance of VMRO-DPMNE which can be illustrated by the great victory on 1 January 2008 parliamentary elections. The coalition "For Better Macedonia" led by this party had the highest win in the history of multiparty politics winning a total of 481,501 votes that have been translated into 63 seats. With this victory, the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE won an absolute majority in the Parliament. Nevertheless, the actual situation in the country seems to indicate a degree of unpopularity of this party, especially after a massive mobilization of the opposition. It is up to the 2011 anticipated elections whether people will decide for or against a new rule of a reformed VMRO-DPMNE.

## Appendix

# 1. The partition of Macedonia by the Treaty of Bucharest



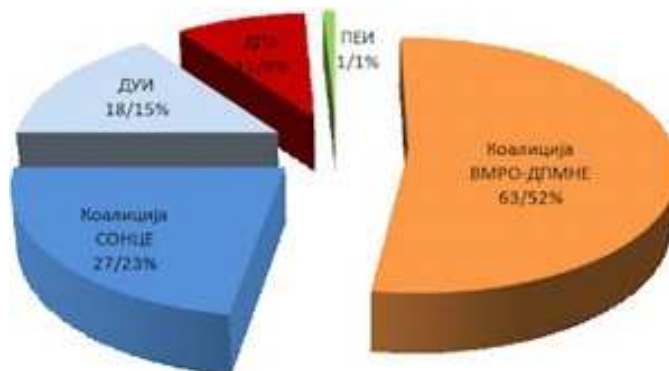
Source : Le site francophone de la Macédoine

## 2. The armed conflict of



2001

## 3. Results of 2008 parliamentary elections: the great victory of VMRO-DPMNE



→ The coalition VMRO-DPMNE won 63 of the 120 seats in the Macedonian Parliament.

Source: Site of the Parliament of Macedonia, URL:

<http://www.sobranie.mk/?ItemID=49COD93849BD41449EDC0E0159A0718E>