

MODERN MONUMENTS OF NORTH MACEDONIA AFTER THE PRESPA AGREEMENT

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Introduction

The break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991 was marked by a rapid rise of nationalism in the context of an ongoing process of building a new national consciousness and identity. However, it is worth noting that the effort to build a Macedonian identity had already begun at the beginning of the 20th century with the creator of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito. The creation of Macedonian national consciousness is inspired by the following paradox: the state created the nation through the policies adopted by the political leadership. The main purpose of this indirect imposition was to serve Yugoslavia on a geostrategic level. Greece's attitude toward the domestic and foreign policy pursued by its neighboring country was characterized by relative inertia, which directly contributed to the strengthening of national feeling among the Slavic population of the region (Κουρβετάρης Γεώργιος, Ρουδομέδωφ Βίκτωρ-Κουτσουκης Κλεομένης, Κουρβετάρης Ανδρέας, Σιουσιουρας Πετρος (eds), 2009: 19-33).

Therefore, when the dissolution of the Federal Republic occurred, the Republic of Macedonia managed, unlike other states, to secure a 'velvet divorce' from Yugoslavia through the referendum held on 8 September 1991. On 17 November, the secession from Yugoslavia was officially completed. However, independence marked the beginning of a long period during which the newly established state had to assert its identity and self-determination, at the global and regional levels (Κουρβετάρης Γεώργιος, Ρουδομέδωφ Βίκτωρ-Κουτσουκης Κλεομένης, Κουρβετάρης Ανδρέας, Σιουσιουρας Πετρος (eds), 2009: 174-176).



The dispute with Greece over the name of the newly created state turned out to be much more complex than a simple inter-state confrontation. The conflict in question was, in fact, about conflicting nationalisms and, by extension, the clash of national identities. This led the two neighboring states into a deep political and particularly social crisis. The signing of the New York Interim Agreement between Greece and FYROM superficially settled the inter-state problems, providing a basis for further negotiations. It is worth noting that the Interim Agreement regulated a wide range of transnational issues, including cultural heritage (Φλούδας, 2009).

As well as the challenges posed by neighbouring states Greece, Bulgaria, and to a lesser extent Serbia, the country had to contend with internal disputes, including armed conflicts between the Slavic and Albanian populations. These factors created a need to protect Macedonian identity and language, which became an issue of major importance for the country's internal affairs (Αρμακόλας Ιωάννης, Ντόκος Θάνος (Eds), 2010: 116).

These tendencies were confirmed by the rise to power of the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE party in 2006. Through the capital's redevelopment program, named 'Skopje 2014,' its creator and head of state Nikola Gruevski aimed to create a historical link with the modern Macedonian state through a wave of archaization, thereby legitimizing it. Although the Prespa Agreement was intended to resolve the name issue between the two states, questions remain as to whether an inter-state agreement can address the core of the problem and whether the measures taken under it were the most effective solutions, ultimately putting an end to the conflicts between the two states.

Monuments as a Tool for Building National Identity

From a legal point of view, monuments are defined as "cultural goods that constitute material evidence, belong to the cultural heritage of the country, and require special attention and protection." Monuments are divided into ancient, modern, movable, and immovable property (Legal Advisory Service for Intellectual Property Matters, Heallegal). The purpose of monumental imaging is to record historical evidence that traces back to the ancestral past and aligns with the political agenda of the present (Gibson, 2009: 5-25). The practice of "monumentalizing" history has been known since the Neolithic era, when the construction of monuments was an integral element in building unchanging social structures and collective identity, thereby creating the cultural memory of the population concerned (Martin Furholt, Friedrich Lüth, Johannes Müller (Eds), 2011: 16-17).

Memory, preserved through monuments, is the backbone of the formation and preservation of national identity. It is how society and its individuals perceive their existence, their place in the world, their history, and their subsequent evolutionary course. However, the factor of forgetting also plays an important role in the formation of memory, particularly through the silencing of traumatic experiences of individuals or society (Tsiara, 2000: 9-18).

The formation of collective memory within a social group necessitates that each individual revises certain personal memories, replacing them with those shared by the group. This makes it possible to form a collective view of events. For in states and advanced societies, specific socio-cultural mechanisms are utilized to foster or enhance collective memories shared among their populace (Tsiara, 2000: 9-18). Similarly, according to Jan Assmann, cultural memory refers to traditions and theories that are transmitted either orally or materially to the members of a given society. In this way, collective memory is strengthened (Martin Furuholt, Friedrich Lüth, Johannes Müller (Eds), 2011: 16-17).

Consequently, through public spaces, statues, and monuments, concepts are reproduced and ideologies of a particular region are expressed and perpetuated. They also contribute to the formation of hierarchical relations. Simultaneously, they constitute a 'text' of stone intended to act as a stabilizing factor in society, countering upcoming changes (Knapp, 2009: 48-49). In other words, monuments aim to serve as a continuous visual stimulus that activates memory. This process targets not only the permanent residents of the area but also visitors, thereby legitimizing specific beliefs both locally and abroad (Tsiara, 2000: 2-13).

Monuments as a Soft Power Policy

The sites of cultural heritage and monuments selectively narrate history with the aim of both concealing and highlighting events. Therefore, it is a common phenomenon that the social process of forming collective memory is based on the deliberate omission or suppression of certain events, as mentioned above. Notably, the size, materials, and style used in their construction are not arbitrary. For instance, the scale and grandeur of a monument directly signify the importance of the person or figure depicted. Thus, the various ways in which monuments are conceived, interpreted, and utilized within society fall decidedly within the politicized realm of public and collective memory (Alderman & Dwyer, 2009: 42-53).

Representations of historical events are both the imprint of social power and a necessary element for its achievement. Moreover, the transmission of widely

held beliefs is a fundamental pillar for the legitimation of political goals. Likewise, any changes in the field of cultural heritage often imply strong shifts in political ideologies at the level of government, which frequently uses public symbols to legitimize certain ethnic and political attributions throughout history. A typical example is the Soviet Union, where the erection of images of great political leaders was an integral part of the politicization of the people (Alderman & Dwyer, 2009: 239). This example also applies to the Balkan countries, which, following the model of Soviet Russia, sought to consolidate the communist political regime by creating monumental depictions of leading communists of the time.

The importance of this practice lies in its contribution to the empowerment of historical events through monuments and cultural landscapes, as they are exposed to public view, thereby giving legitimacy to the historical narrative. The practice of politics through monumental representations, symbols, or cultural sites can often strengthen the sense of belonging within society by constantly projecting and reminding people of a common history and origin. On the other hand, it can also prelude tensions between competing nationalisms and identity concepts. Thus, the issue of monuments can be a point of contention. When there are conflicting collective perceptions regarding monuments, they are likely to be seen as encroaching on the space of others' symbols (Alderman & Dwyer, 2009: 239).

It is worth noting that on the global political stage, the concept of political and national identity, and its construction under various socio-political conditions, often encounters significant challenges in being comprehended by political leaders, particularly in the Balkan region. It should be emphasized that the newly established Balkan democracies used the tactic of ethnic and cultural discrimination to construct national identity, with cultural elements being instrumentalized to achieve self-determination. Moreover, creation myths played an important role in mobilizing national consciousness, providing historical and lawful continuity to the nation (Mazgalieva, 2016: 4-6).

An example of this conflict is the monuments erected under the Skopje 2014 project by the then-ruling VMRO-DPMNE party and political leader Nikola Gruevski. As discussed below, the program had a twofold objective: firstly, to rebuild the city of Skopje, and secondly, to establish the concept of Macedonians as descendants of Alexander the Great and his historical legacy. These objectives attempted to establish a national identity in the contemporary world as a counterweight to the political changes that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The 'Skopje 2014' Program: The Idea, the Announcement, and the Initial Projects of Skopje 2014.

During the period when North Macedonia was a federal state of Yugoslavia, cultural policy was strictly centralized, with the central government playing a catalytic role in shaping the cultural policy of each federal state. From the 1970s onwards, the federated entities entered a period of self-management, accompanied by the establishment of cultural institutions at the municipal level. Whereas, the policies of decentralization and self-management failed in the long run due to the rigid bureaucracy that plagued the federation. In the 1990s, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the cultural policy of the then FYROM became administratively centralized again, resulting in individual municipalities losing the competencies they had acquired in the cultural sector during the previous period. At the same time, there was no formal provision for a national cultural strategy or specific intentions regarding cultural development (Mazgalieva, 2016: 25-26).

The electoral victory of the right-wing party VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevski in the July 2006 elections was largely based on a highly ambitious political programme, with particular emphasis on the economy, but as it turned out in retrospect, it aimed to substantially reshape society. Gruevski, through his rhetoric, primarily aimed to create a national identity with historical origins, strengthen the Macedonian national sentiment as a counterweight to conflicting nationalisms at home and abroad, and establish continuity over time. To achieve these goals, exorbitant sums were spent from the state budget, and various programs and campaigns were carried out. One of the most well-known initiatives for achieving these objectives was the 'Skopje 2014' program, which aimed to completely reconstruct the city of Skopje and, by extension, transform the entire country. The 'Skopje 2014' project was part of a broader policy called 'Macedonian Revival,' which had been on the party's election agenda as early as 2006. In fact, during the election period, VMRO-DPMNE stated that cultural heritage issues would be a priority for the party. The announcement of the program 'Skopje 2014' took place on February 4, 2010. In practice, 'Skopje 2014' was an urban renewal project funded by the VMRO-DPMNE government. Initially planned to include nine new structures, the program expanded significantly, encompassing 136 new structures by 2015 (Skoulariki, 2017: 32-14).

The official goal of completing the project was to restore the architecture of buildings from the 1920s and 1930s that had been destroyed by the 1963 earthquake. Besides, high on the agenda was the creation of new sites, such as a new national theatre, new government buildings, bridges, and numerous bronze and marble statues depicting elements of national heritage and history. Between 2007 and 2013, nine changes to the urban plan of the city of Skopje were carried out (Mazgalieva, 2016: 55-57).

It was decided that the new buildings would be constructed in Baroque and Neoclassical styles. This decision aimed to silence both the socialist past and the period of Ottoman rule. According to official government statements, the move was intended to create a modern capital city that would correspond to the European model, attract tourists and potential economic partners, and generate a sense of national pride among its citizens (Graan, 2013: 136-161). Gruevski stated in 2010 in support of the project that it would help ease the state budget, as each institution and public service would have its own space, thus eliminating or at least minimizing the cost of renting buildings. He also claimed that *“Skopje will become more beautiful through this project”* (Blazhevski, 2016: 3-5).

The focal point of urban regeneration was the city centre, where numerous monuments and buildings were constructed. The reconstruction of old buildings, alongside the entire ‘Skopje 2014’ project, frequently ignited tensions among the government, architects, historians, and heritage protection bodies. Critics argued that certain elements of the program blatantly contravened existing legislation designed to safeguard cultural heritage. Multiple violations were reported during its implementation (Blazhevski, 2016: 3-4).

One notable example is the renovation of the building housing the Parliament. Experienced architects and historians strongly opposed the decision, arguing unanimously that the Parliament building is a first-class monument protected by the country’s National Heritage Protection Office, and therefore any architectural intervention is considered illegal. Despite strong opposition, the reconstruction of the building began in 2010. Upon completion of the Programme, the total cost of the project was estimated to be €500 million. However, the exact amount spent on the ongoing unfinished project remains undisclosed (Blazhevski, 2016: 3-4).

The Historical Periods Behind “Skopje 2014”

The monumental depictions in the Skopje 2014 program can be categorized into four main chronological periods, through which the government aimed to historically link the nation and create an undeniable continuity and connection through time (Pompeani, 2017: 200-201). The four chronological periods can be briefly described as follows:

- First historical period: Ancient heroes dating back to the 4th century BC.
- Second period: Figures from early Christianity and the era preceding Ottoman occupation (2nd-14th century AD).

- Third period: Heroic figures of the birth of the Macedonian language and ethnicity (19th-20th century).
- Fourth period: Heroes linked to Macedonian independence. This temporal category can be seen as two subcategories:

A. Leading revolutionary heroes of the 19th and early 20th century, with particular emphasis on the Iliden Uprising (1903) and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913).

B. Leading revolutionaries and historical figures of the communist period, as well as persons connected with the creation of an independent statehood of North Macedonia, in the late 20th century (Pompeani, 2017: 200-201).

The first category includes the statues of Alexander the Great and his father, Philip II. The statue of Alexander the Great, officially named 'Warrior on a Horse,' adorns the centre of Skopje. In the same category are smaller statues and monuments, such as the monument to 'The Fallen Heroes of Macedonia. The second historical period depicted by Skopje 2014 refers to the era of early Christianity and the territorial strengthening and consolidation before the Ottoman conquest in the 14th century. The program prominently features Saints Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, Clement and Naum. One of the statues erected to support this narrative is the statue of Bulgarian Emperor Samuel (Pompeani, 2017: 200-201).

The monumental representations in this subcategory are considered particularly important because they aim to establish a link between the modern state and the spread of Christianity in Southeastern Europe. In addition, these representations attempt to demonstrate the existence of a distinct Macedonian language long before its official recognition and adoption as a national language in 1944. Also, they provide a basis and legitimacy for the Independent Macedonian Church, which broke away from the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1967 (Tsiobanis, 2007: 60).

The third period is associated with the national awakening of the people in the 19th century, when the first attempt to establish an independent Macedonian identity and nation is believed to have occurred. This era saw the early creation of Macedonian cultural heritage, marked by the publication of the first dictionary and newspapers in Macedonian, for example Georgi Pulevski's Dictionary of Three Languages, published in 1861. Here, the statues erected by the Skopje 2014 project mostly represent historians, lexicographers, and writers. These statues, predominantly made of bronze, are primarily located on the Bridge of Art (Pompeani, 2017: 207).

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the fourth and final category included in the Skopje 2014 programme can be divided into two subcategories based on the time periods they refer to. More specifically, the first subcategory includes statues and monuments that illustrate the events of the Ilinden Uprising (1903), the Balkan Wars, the Second World War, and the early communist period. This category predominantly honors leaders and prominent members of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO), as well as individuals who actively participated in the Ilinden Uprising and either died on the battlefield or were later executed. Notable commemorations are Dame Gruev, Goce Delčev, Nikola Karev, and others (Pompeani, 2017: 208).

The revolutionaries depicted from the mid-20th century are presented as intellectuals, including members of the Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM), such as Metodija Andonov Čento, Pavel Šatev, and Nexhat. The Skopje 2014 project extended beyond the city of Skopje to include other cities in North Macedonia, albeit on a much smaller scale. Notable among these are the cities of Bitola and Prilep. It is worthy of note that the Skopje 2014 programme rarely includes female personalities. The only female representations erected under the programme are the aforementioned Muses and the statue of the Winged Victory (Pompeani, 2017: 208).

At this point, it is worth emphasizing that the locations chosen for each monument in the project were not at all random. For example, the fountain in honor of the Mothers of Macedonia is situated in close proximity to the old town, connected by a bridge and inhabited mainly by the Muslim minority. The aim of constructing the fountain is to provide a visual stimulus that reminds Macedonians of their ancestry and to counterbalance the high birth rate of the Muslim minority (Pompeani, 2017: 202).

Therefore, the placement and size of monuments and statues underscore their significance within the historical narrative. The more centrally positioned a monument is, the greater its importance and its impact on society. Specifically, when a monumental representation is centrally located within a town, village, or community, it becomes a focal point for more people, serving as a permanent reminder. Similarly, the size of the monument plays a crucial role by symbolizing the grandeur or importance of the person or event depicted, ensuring its visibility and influence on residents and visitors in the area.

Finally, it is important to note that the Skopje 2014 program faced significant opposition, both domestically and internationally. Historians, architects—both local and foreign—and international organizations voiced objections during

the planning and implementation of the program. Therefore, it can be argued that Skopje 2014, along with other policies of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE, plunged the country not only into a profound cultural crisis but also into an even deeper political one. Internally, Gruevski's program was fiercely criticized by the Social Democratic Opposition (SDSM) and other smaller parties (Skoulariki, 2017: 36-38).

The Prespa Agreement and Modern Monuments: A Critical Assessment

The Agreement, a bilateral international treaty, concluded the protracted negotiations between the two parties. It was ratified by the Parliament of North Macedonia in June 2018. However, the Greek side ratified it later, in January 2019. Subsequently, the Agreement became law in Greece through Law No. 4588/2019, published in the Government Gazette on January 25, 2019. Among other provisions, the Prespa Agreement also addressed issues related to cultural heritage, particularly focusing on the modern monuments of North Macedonia, including those associated with the Skopje 2014 project. This was outlined in Article 8(1) of the Prespa Agreement.¹

The provision primarily addresses representations of symbols that are part of Greek history and cultural heritage. According to the Prespa Agreement, specifically outlined in Article 8(1), North Macedonia was required to remove all depictions of the Vergina Sun from public display throughout its territory by 12 August 2019. The Vergina Sun symbol was prevalent in various forms across the country, including monuments, wells, sports facilities, playgrounds, and coats of arms. The government was mandated to compile a list within 14 days, specifying the locations and objects where these symbols were present and needed to be removed, respecting their significance in Greek heritage (Fakalis, 2020).

Indeed, following the signing of the Prespa Agreement, North Macedonia undertook measures to comply with the requirement to remove public depictions of the Vergina Sun, a symbol significant in Greek cultural heritage. This symbol was widely displayed across various public spaces in North Macedonia, including monuments, water wells, sports halls, playgrounds, and official emblems. However, the agreement does not explicitly address the use of such symbols on private buildings or in private contexts. Paragraph 8, paragraph 3 of the Prespa

1 For more information, cf Prespa Agreement. (2019) <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathe-mata/agreement.pdf>

Agreement does not include provisions regarding symbols in private spaces. This aspect of the agreement focuses specifically on public displays and official representations.²

Therefore, while North Macedonia took steps to remove the Vergina Sun from public spaces in compliance with the agreement, the issue of symbols on private buildings remains outside the scope of the agreement's provisions. This has led to questions and discussions regarding the complete implementation of the agreement, particularly concerning the ongoing use of symbols in private settings that may still evoke sensitivities related to Greek cultural heritage. It is worth noting that Articles 6(2) and (3) refer to private entities that in any way contribute to or promote irredentist ideas and/or chauvinism. There are no further clarifying instructions, and the article specifically addresses purely irredentist acts. However, the part concerning the depiction of symbols in the private sector remains practically obscure. As a result, private businesses, buildings, and catering establishments continue to display the Vergina Sun.

It is of importance that the first verse of the national anthem of the country reads, 'The New Sun of Freedom.' It declares, "Today over Macedonia a new sun of freedom is born" (Денес над Македонија се раѓа, ново сонце на слободата!). Despite the signing of the agreement, however, the national anthem has remained unchanged.³

Regarding the monuments, signs have been placed stating, for instance, that the statue of Alexander the Great in the center of the capital is "In honor of the Great Alexander, a historical figure from ancient Greek history and culture, and part of world cultural and historical heritage, depicted here as a warrior on horseback." These signs are written in English, Albanian, and Macedonian. However, it has been observed that such inscriptions are continuously removed by unknown perpetrators, underscoring the Macedonian people's perceived lack of legitimacy of the Agreement. It is worth noting that the replacement of signs did not occur until the end of 2019. The delay in repositioning the signs by competent authorities was attributed to the country's rigid bureaucracy and was accompanied by repeated vandalism (Kornegieva, 2020).

Despite the provisions of Article 6(1), the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in Skopje, established in 2008 as part of the Skopje 2014 program, continued to

2 For more information cf Prespa Agreement. (2019) <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathemata/agreement.pdf>

3 For more information s, cf Prespa Agreement. (2019) <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathemata/agreement.pdf>

operate without having completed all the planned changes mandated by Article 6(1) until 2022. They haven't removed any works with propaganda content. An example is the painting by Ukrainian-born artist Larisa Bonadenko, depicting the "victorious" entry of Yane Sandanski and his IMRO troops into Thessaloniki in 1912. However, it appears that the old page has been deleted and a new one has been created with modified content.⁴

To sum up, the Prespa Agreement resolves the long-standing name issue between the two parties. However, its provisions on cultural heritage, especially concerning modern monuments and symbols, can be seen as incomplete from various perspectives. Specifically, Article 8(1) addresses symbols that are part of Greek cultural heritage but lack subsidiary provisions or clarifications for cases similar to that of the Arch of Macedonia.

Furthermore, according to Article 8(2) of the Prespa Agreement, the issue of monuments, public buildings, and infrastructure must be reviewed, and necessary steps taken to clarify that representations of these refer to the cultural heritage and history of the Greek state. It is worth noting that no special committee was set up for the comprehensive settlement of this issue. The placement of signs with relevant references to Greek culture, as it turned out, was a temporary solution without providing a substantial resolution to the issue of monuments. This is evidenced by the frequent vandalisms of these signs, which not only confirms their lack of legitimacy among the population but also indirectly violates the very article meant to address them.

The Agreement, in many cases, instead of bridging differences and promoting peaceful coexistence between the citizens of the two states, has become a source of discord, particularly concerning questions of cultural heritage, which are directly related to the sense of "belonging" and identity. In this context, there is an indirect violation of Article 6(2) and (3), which addresses the elimination and prevention of irredentism and hate speech. This is evidenced by the approach taken by the Government of North Macedonia, complying with Article 8(2) through the placement of signs, which has sparked strong reactions among the Macedonian people, resulting in nationalist actions. Conversely, these nationalist actions have provoked equally strong reactions from the Greek side.⁵

4 For more information, cf Museum of Macedonian Struggle for Independence. *Educational programs and workshops*. <https://mmb.org.mk/en/educational-programs-and-workshops/>

5 For more information, cf Prespa Agreement. (2019) <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathe-mata/agreement.pdf>

Proposals for the development of the modern monuments of North Macedonia after the Prespa Agreement

The issue of cultural heritage is a crucial element of identity for the population, and therefore, its inclusion in the bilateral Agreement was inevitable. However, the limited time dedicated to addressing the relevant articles, coupled with the desire to resolve longstanding disputes swiftly, may have inadvertently created more problems at the societal level than they actually solved. As mentioned earlier, the solutions eventually implemented often led to tensions among the citizens of both states, thereby hindering the desired outcomes in some cases.

Based on the above and with the aim of creating bonds of friendship, peaceful cooperation, and acceptance of both the different “Other” and “Self,” at least regarding culture and cultural heritage, it is proposed to permanently remove from public spaces in North Macedonia any elements that do not pertain to its history and culture, similar to the approach taken by Bulgaria (Luleva, 2010: 10-12). These elements should be placed in a specially landscaped and equipped area designed as an outdoor museum. In more detail, this space can not only include a comprehensive and modern exhibition but also multiple activities and educational programs for children and adults.

The aim of the museum will be to recount the history of the modern state of North Macedonia as well as the various aspects of the Prespa Agreement. Through tours and guided visits to the museum premises, visitors will be able to understand the complexities that characterize the Macedonian identity and language, exactly as they have been created and shaped over the years.

However, in this proposal, the spatial limitations must be considered, as well as the almost expected reactions that may arise from such a decision. Therefore, to avoid strong protests from the public, the process should be carried out gradually and methodically. This implies parallel efforts in education and the implementation of open-ended actions for the country’s population. Regarding the spatial issue, it is recommended that only the most significant statues from the Skopje 2014 program be placed in the statue museum. The remaining statues could undergo reconstruction, with their materials recycled to create new artworks or infrastructure that serve the community. These new projects could be installed in public spaces or parks, providing new experiences and aesthetics to the community. Additionally, the recycled materials could be used to build or enhance infrastructure in the city, such as sidewalks, parks, or green spaces. This approach would offer practical benefits while also improving the environment and aesthetics of public spaces.

Educational Planned Activities: The process of recycling and creating new projects can be accompanied by educational activities aimed at raising public awareness about art and environmental sustainability. Workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions can engage the community, teaching them about the importance of recycling and how art can contribute to sustainable development.

These proposals can help find a sustainable solution for managing the statues of the Skopje 2014 program, respecting both the history and modern needs of the community. By integrating educational initiatives, the community can be involved in and informed about the transformation process, fostering a greater appreciation for both their cultural heritage and the importance of sustainability. Recycling and reconstruction practices are well-established in European countries like France, Italy, and Germany.⁶ Therefore, these practices are familiar in the field of art and cultural management.

As North Macedonia is an acceding state, the above effort could be financially supported by various international and domestic bodies. For instance: UNESCO: As a leading organization in the preservation of cultural heritage, UNESCO could provide funding and expertise for the sustainable management of monuments.⁷ Also European Union: Through programs like Creative Europe and Horizon 2020, the EU funds projects related to cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and public engagement.⁸ World Bank: With its focus on sustainable development, the World Bank could support projects aimed at recycling materials and creating environmentally friendly public spaces.⁹ National Government and Ministries: North Macedonia's Ministry of Culture and other relevant government bodies could allocate funds for the reconstruction and recycling initiative as part of their cultural heritage preservation programs.¹⁰ Private Foundations and NGOs: Organizations such as the Getty Foundation or the Aga Khan Trust for Culture often fund projects related to art, culture, and heritage conservation. Crowdfunding and Public-Private Partnerships: Engaging the public and private

6 For more information cf Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *National recycling strategies: France, Italy, Germany*. <https://www.oecd.org/environment/waste/national-recycling-strategies-france-italy-germany.htm>

7 For more information, see UNESCO. *UNESCO*. <https://www.unesco.org/>

8 For more information, cf European Union *Creative Europe*. <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/>

9 For more information cf World Bank. *World Bank Initiatives in Sustainable Development and Heritage Conservation*. <https://www.worldbank.org/>

10 For more information, cf [a]Getty Foundation *NGO contributions to cultural heritage preservation: Case studies from Getty Foundation and Aga Khan Trust* <https://www.getty.edu/foundation/>

sectors in financing through crowdfunding campaigns and partnerships can also be a viable strategy to gather the necessary resources.

The appropriate cultural management of monuments that do not align with the history and culture of North Macedonia will create opportunities for new constructions serving as national symbols, emphasizing the country's distinctive history and multi-ethnic character. These monuments will act as focal points to attract both domestic and international visitors. Moreover, promoting a climate of reconciliation at political and social levels will encourage acceptance of local and foreign identities, thereby bridging divides and fostering cooperation on a transnational level.

Conclusion

Issues of cultural heritage are of paramount importance, especially in matters concerning how a people perceive their existence in the global context. Monuments, statues, and cultural spaces in general often function as connecting links between the finite past, the present, and the unknown future. They decode the deeper structures and perceptions of each society. The dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 marked the beginning of nationalist conflicts, bringing to the surface both similarities and substantial differences among the nations. The dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 marked the beginning of nationalist conflicts, bringing to the surface both similarities and substantial differences among the nations involved.

It is deserving of attention that in the case of North Macedonia, the sense of national identity was imposed from above within the framework of Tito's policies, primarily to serve the geostrategic interests of the Federation. Hence, it emerges that in the country's case, the state created the nation and not vice versa. The policies pursued by the leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Tito, included a wide spectrum of both politicization and nationalization of the people living within the boundaries of the nascent state. Naturally, cultural policy was one of the fundamental components of this process. However, within the framework of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the cultural policy of today's North Macedonia was subsumed under a broader federal democratic regime.

The rise to power of the nationalist Nikola Gruevski likely confirms the trends of the era and the need for substantial legitimization of the nascent state. This process concerned both domestic affairs, especially considering the internal conflicts of the multinational state, and external affairs due to multiple disputes

with neighboring countries. The implementation of the Skopje 2014 program was essentially an effort by the VMRO-DPMNE government to establish cultural unity internally, emphasizing the Slavic part of the population, and promoting a branding name externally in response to challenges and disputes from neighboring states.

The intricate years following the global economic crisis of 2008 led the then country towards greater introspection, further opening the field for nationalist rhetoric. Conversely, the economic and political instability that characterized the Greek state likely shifted the focus of both citizens and political leadership toward resolving domestic issues, leaving the conflict with the neighboring country on the sidelines.

The Prespa Agreement was signed with the aim of resolving the longstanding name dispute between North Macedonia and Greece and allowing the latter to commence negotiations for entry into international organizations and the European Union, as the naming issue with Greece had been a hindrance to further international integration of the state. Among other provisions, the Agreement also included clauses for resolving issues of cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, the solutions provided, particularly in the management of the contemporary monuments under the Skopje 2014 urban renewal project, can be deemed inadequate. This conclusion arises from the fact that while the installation of relevant signs appeared to superficially resolve the complex issue, it nonetheless provoked strong societal reactions. The intense public backlash, sometimes taking extreme forms, serves as tangible evidence of the Agreement's lack of legitimacy and also delays the process of acceptance and reconciliation of relations.

The current study aims to achieve better cultural management of the monuments erected under the Skopje 2014 program. The removal of many of these monuments and their relocation to a specially designed area, along with parallel educational activities, will help reduce social tensions. Furthermore, the use of sustainable practices will contribute to environmental sustainability and the creation of a modern European capital city.

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