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THE STATUS OF MACEDONIAN EDUCATION AFTER THE AGREEMENT FOR FRIENDSHIP, GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA FROM 2017

"But the truth is that if now, in the pre-unification period for the Republic of Macedonia, its bilateral relations with Bulgaria are not built on a correct and healthy good-neighborly basis, then Sofia will have a very small amount of instruments with which the Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia will defend its cause, while Skopje's opportunities will increase. And even the strongest arguments of Bulgaria would then be intellectually and morally vulnerable."
(excerpt from "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia...", Sofia, 2007/2008.)

Abstract

The independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 visibly stirred the spirits of the neighboring states that included part of the territory of geographical and ethnic Macedonia. These countries, aware of the new situation, and especially of the struggle of the Macedonian state for international recognition, as well as for membership in the Euro-Atlantic integrations, used every opportunity to achieve goals that ranged from changing the Constitution, the constitutional name, the national flag, education, to degrading definitions of language, history, culture and other interference in the internal affairs of the state at multiple levels. It is evident that a special emphasis was placed on education, or rather on history and history textbooks, and in the case of Bulgaria, additionally on the Macedonian language and culture, with which the intention is to prove that Macedonians do not exist, nor a Macedonian state that would encouraged self-determination of other Macedonians in neighboring countries. Because of that our interest is to raise the question: if this is the moment when the Bulgarians should impose their demands and causes, for the Macedonians this is the moment when they should not succumb to the Bulgarian demands. After all, assimilation does not belong to the XXIst century, it is part of previous centuries, and assimilation of the Macedonians is even less possible because if it was not done when they did not have a state, institutions and their own education, at a time when they have all of the above, it is simply impossible. That is why real good neighborly relations, facing the historical truth accepted by the world, apologizing for historical crimes, mutual respect and putting an end to the endless demands to highlight one's own at the expense of others are the solution for permanent reconciliation in the Balkans.

Key words: Agreement for friendship, good neighborhood and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria from 2017, education, assimilation, denomination.

It is a constantly repeated truth that education is very important for every country and every nation. Macedonian education with all its characteristics has a special place in the life of every Macedonian citizen, and especially for every Macedonian, it is a constant topic of discussions among people at all levels, a constant topic in professional circles, on a personal and institutional level. Since the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, education has been subject to various influences from individuals, various interest groups, faculties, international factors, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders who, through their views, claim that if their suggestions are accepted, it will become more qualitative, and that for the Macedonian state and it will be better for Macedonian citizens if the goals of certain countries and interest groups are realized.

In the period after the Declaration for independence of the Macedonian state, the influences from the neighbors were particularly noticeable, who after 1991 brought their various strategies, ordinances, guidelines, etc., in terms of their approach to the Macedonian question and to Macedonian education, with an emphasis on historical education and Macedonian language. The priorities of the neighboring countries have been raised to the institutional level and they, through their ministries, state agencies and other institutions, make constant attempts to influence the Macedonian educational system, the teachers and the authors of textbooks, mostly in terms of language, culture, history and education in wholeness.

The independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 visibly stirred the spirits of the neighboring states that included part of the territory of geographical and ethnic Macedonia, i.e. Pirin Macedonia in Bulgaria and Aegean Macedonia in Greece. These countries, aware of the new situation, and especially of the struggle of the Macedonian state for international recognition, as well as for membership in the Euro-Atlantic integrations, used every opportunity to achieve goals that ranged from changing the Constitution, the constitutional name, the national flag, education, to degrading definitions of language, history, culture and other interference in the internal affairs of the state at multiple levels. It is evident that a special emphasis was placed on education, or rather on history and history textbooks, and in the case of Bulgaria, additionally on

the Macedonian language and culture, with which the intention is to prove that Macedonians do not exist, nor a Macedonian state that would encouraged self-determination of other Macedonians in neighboring countries.

The Republic of Bulgaria, as one of the interested countries which claims that there are no Macedonians and which disputes the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language in every way, constantly emphasizes that it was the first to recognize the independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 and that it is fighting for good neighborly relations between Sofia and Skopje. But it has never recognized the Macedonian nation, the Macedonian language, or gives a specific and relevant definition of them only for them.¹

In the context of all of the above are also the agreements, strategies and other documents that are a central part of the text, and in which it is seen that gradually, depending on the position of Bulgaria in the international community, it is working on the assimilation of the Macedonians and the realization of its strategic goal, i.e. proving that the Macedonians are Bulgarians, against the centuries-old opposition of the Macedonians. Within the framework of assimilation is also proving that the Macedonian language is a dialect of Bulgarian, and that Macedonians and Bulgarians had a common history until 1944. In the whole context, education is also included, that is, in all agreements signed by the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria after 1991, it is a key and inevitable part. In different agreements, education is covered and interpreted in different ways, first at a lower level, so that at a given moment, suitable for Bulgaria, a whole strategy can be developed that covers several segments and which was supposed to prove certain Bulgarian claims. At the same time, the experienced Bulgarian diplomacy will only mention it as "education" in the first agreement, and then add other wordings related to education in another agreement. Very important for the topic is the appearance of the Strategy entitled "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia - recommendations for the development of good neighborly relations after the admission of Bulgaria to the EU and in the context of the expansion of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans" which will be drawn up between the two agreements or in 2007/2008, after Bulgaria's entry into the EU and NATO, and which is actually the key document that guides Bulgarian politics to this day. As a result of this document, the "Agreement on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the Republic of

¹ Ivanka, Vasilevska, *The Balkans in the new Millennia – Rewriting history as a prerequisite for having a good neighbor*, Law Review, vol. 12, Special Issue Year 2021, 5.

Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria" will be signed, which will later become part of the negotiation framework for Macedonia's entry into the European Union.

In each of the documents that are mentioned and that follow, the attempts for the Bulgarian assimilation of the Macedonians have their own special place, even in the XXIst century.

I. The place of education in "the 3rd joint declaration of the Minister-President of the Republic of Bulgaria and the President of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia" and in the Strategy "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia"

After the recognition of the Macedonian state by Bulgaria, several agreements were signed between the two states. The first agreement or "the joint declaration of the Minister-President of the Republic of Bulgaria and the President of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia", was signed in Sofia on February 22, 1999, in two original copies, each of them in the official languages of the two countries - Bulgarian, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Macedonian language, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, that is, between Gjorgji Parvanov and Ljupco Gjorgievski. In this agreement, there is a small section that refers to education. Specifically, in this declaration, to which the Republic of Bulgaria is later referred to on several occasions and for different topics in point 8, it is said: "Both sides will encourage active and uninterrupted cooperation in the fields of culture, education, health, social care and sports." Although the point eight is small, it is enough to upgrade. Also, it sounds "good-neighborly", like the aforementioned mention of the languages of the states, but behind them there is a trap, which says "before the codification of the Macedonian language you spoke Bulgarian, and after the codification you speak the Macedonian language, which the Republic of Macedonia recognizes with the Constitution, and the Republic of Bulgaria considers it a dialect of the Bulgarian language and will never recognize it". In the historical part, the statehood acquired in 1944 and after it is alluded to, something that will be seen in the later moves of Bulgaria. It should be emphasized that during this period Bulgaria is a post-communist poor country that is fighting for entry into the Euro-Atlantic institutions, and its

aspirations towards its neighbors at that time were not expressed, but on the contrary, it aimed to show good neighborly relations. Although it shows good neighborly relations, Bulgaria secretly waited for a moment, after its entry into the EU and NATO, in a favorable political situation in the Republic of Macedonia, to realize its policy towards Macedonia, the Macedonian nation, the Macedonian language, etc. This coexisting Bulgarian policy and attitude towards Macedonia and the Macedonian nation will experience changes only in form, that is, it will be mirrored from one agreement to another with increasing demands, unacceptable for the Macedonian nation.²

A key document of Bulgaria after its entry into the Euro-Atlantic institutions is the strategy adopted in 2007/2008, which guides Bulgaria towards the "Macedonian question" and which shows Bulgaria's open attempt to assimilate the Macedonians. The strategy known under the name "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia - recommendations for the development of good neighborly relations after the admission of Bulgaria to the EU and in the context of the expansion of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans"³ was developed under the leadership of Lj. Ivanov, with the participation and contribution of Z. Andonova, P. Atanasov, S. Barakov, B. Bobev, Zh. Georgiev, G. Daskalov, A. Dimitrov, B. Dimitrov, E. Ekov, S. Eldrov, V. Iliev, Z. Ilieva, N. Kolev, K. Kosev, M. Milanov, I. Mitov, P. Pantev, G. Papakochev, A. Popov, A. Prvanov, V. Rachev, N. Stojanova, V. Tekelov, M. Trajkov, S. Hadjitodorov et al.

This work outlines the Bulgarian policy towards Macedonia in the XXIst century, as well as its actions, often together with Greece, which is mentioned on several occasions and which undermines honesty and good neighborly relations, always reminding us of the agreements against Macedonia in the Balkan Wars and the division of Macedonia. According to this strategy, as a Balkan country that is a member of the European Union and NATO, with immediate borders with the Western Balkans, Bulgaria has the special competence to guarantee (together with Greece) that the candidate countries from the region achieve modern European standards for good neighborly relations, as well as to laid a sound and permanent foundation for the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia, which is of interest not only for the citizens of Bulgaria, but also to a no less extent for the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia,

² Ivanka, Dodovska, *Macedonia in the 21st Century: Social, Political and Diplomatic Issues (1991 – 2015)* - Политичка мисла/ Political Thought edition of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Institute for Democracy "SocietasCivilis", Skopje, 14 Years, No. 52, December, 2016, 60.

³ Lj. Ivanov et al., *Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia*, Manfred Werner Foundation, Sofia, 2007/2008.

and from here also for the successful development of the Balkan region as a modern and prosperous part of the United Europe.⁴

During the preparation of the said work, the Bulgarian President Georgi Prvanov and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivajlo Kalfin will emphasize that Bulgaria's support to the Republic of Macedonia for EU and NATO membership is not unconditional and that the moment is coming to deliver their requests. It is for this reason that this strategy was written, according to which the basic elements of the Bulgarian policy need to be specified in relation to the entire spectrum of specific problems related to the development of bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia in the new conditions.⁵ The document was prepared with the participation of a large number of experts, who offer potential solutions, including solutions in language, history and education, which are key in the contemporary Bulgarian strategy for the assimilation of Macedonians.

Justifying their policy towards the Republic of Macedonia and speaking about their positions, and facing the reality at the beginning of the document, the Bulgarian experts state the following: "But the truth is, that if now in the pre-unification period for the Republic of Macedonia, its bilateral relations with Bulgaria are not built on correct and healthy good-neighbor basis, then Sofia will have instruments to a very small extent with which the Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia will defend its cause while the opportunities of Skopje will increase. And even the strongest arguments of Bulgaria would then be intellectually and morally vulnerable. If the previous silence and passivity had some explanation, now, when the requirement for a good neighborly policy by every candidate for membership in NATO and the European Union is the primary criterion for access, our every silence will be interpreted by our partners in the Alliance and in the EU and in the Republic of Macedonia itself, how to legitimize policies and practices, which no self-respecting country would accept as good-neighborly."⁶ Here, Bulgaria is clearly stating the measures, but there is no like-minded person in the government since the event of the strategy until 2017. Consequently, it will find a partner in the Republic of Macedonia in the Governments of 2017, with which it will be able to really or fully implement its policies and fuel its hopes for the Bulgarian assimilation of Macedonians, even in the XXIst century. In the Governments of the Republic of Macedonia

⁴ Ibid.30.

⁵ Ibid.31.

⁶ Ibid.32.

formed after 2017, Bulgaria will recognize its partner, and will try to fulfill its goals and requirements, with an emphasis on the fulfillment of the most important sector for them, which is education through which it is easiest to carry out the Bulgarianization of the Macedonians, that is, to make attempts for the Bulgarian assimilation of the Macedonians.

The goal of the strategy, as highlighted, is the development of infrastructural and other projects (including those from the European Union and NATO), Bulgarian investments in the economy of the Republic of Macedonia, facilitation of obtaining Bulgarian citizenship for persons from the Balkan countries with Bulgarian origin and the stimulation of their access to the Bulgarian higher schools, as well as many others, will undoubtedly be tempting and suitable for solving, but they will not find a wider echo in the Republic of Macedonia. Of course, these are also part of the attempts for the Bulgarian assimilation of the Macedonians.

In the indicated strategy, the history of Macedonia is explained in an extremely humiliating way, the Macedonian is belittled and not only basic human rights are not respected, but the highest degree of chauvinism is used. Among other things, the strategy states: "The Macedonian nation and state were formed in the process of realization and evolution of Serbian political construction, announced for the first time in 1889, supported by a decision of the Communist International in Moscow in 1934 and achieved between 1944 and 1991 in the part of the historical-geographical region of Macedonia (about 36% of its total territory), known as Vardar Macedonia, included in the territory of Yugoslavia and governed by the communist party of Yugoslavia."⁷ This is what a communist state said yesterday, which all its success in history was achieved with the help of other countries, and above all Russia. It should be emphasized here that such arbitrary constructions are always possible, and this description of Macedonian history by Bulgaria is an example of chauvinism. If the Bulgarian history were to be described in a similar way, for example, we could get the following: The Bulgarian nation and state were formed in the process of the realization and evolution of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian political construction in the Balkans, which arose after the Russo-Turkish wars, a state which became fascist in the second world war, occupied territories in the Balkans and deported 11,400 Jews from Macedonia, Serbia and Thrace, and after the Second World war became a communist and socialist state that was a member of the Warsaw Pact, and until 1991 was governed by the communist party after directives from Moscow. But it should be emphasized that such historical

⁷ Ibid.33.

definitions, in which there is no benevolence, and in which historical data, which are often untrue, are emphasized, cannot be defined as good-neighborly, which is constantly emphasized by Bulgaria. In that direction, it can be said that every Bulgarian definition for a certain part of the history of Macedonia is given in the same way, and even sometimes with more incorrect data, or correct only for the Bulgarian history.

This is also referred to in the text which states: "This idea proclaims that the Bulgarian population of Macedonia, who lived in those countries since the VIIth Century, has nothing in common with the Bulgarian state and the Bulgarian nation, a claim that contradicts the historical truth confirmed predominantly by the Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia in world science." This text, for example, is a total Bulgarian fabrication. The historical review continues with a part that is extremely untrue and unproven, and certain procedures that are described are specific to the Bulgarian assimilationist policy that continues today, which is also shown by a large part of the following quote: "The Macedonian doctrine was imposed in Vardar Macedonia with the specific methods and means for a totalitarian communist state: terror and repressions against people who were considered Bulgarians (30,000 shot and 120,000 sent to camps and prisons); rewriting history through education and the media; falsification of authentic documentary evidence and artifacts, and falsification of historical monuments (inscriptions on churches, monasteries, graves, etc.). Similar activities in one form or another exist even today in the modern Macedonian statehood. The reason for that is the choice for the further development of the newly formed Macedonian nation, which was made in the conditions of the new independent state of the Republic of Macedonia in the early 90s of the last century. One possibility (still current today) was to report the objective parameters of this development such as: independent statehood within the framework and borders of the Republic of Macedonia (a joint state of ethnic Macedonians and Albanians); changes in the ethnic self-awareness of a large part of the population of Vardar Macedonia (today's Republic of Macedonia) after 1944; many centuries of historical development of the basic part of the population in today's lands of the Republic of Macedonia as an integral part of the Bulgarian nation; and the preserved Bulgarian ethnicity of a certain part of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. The other possibility, unfortunately preferred by the political elite of the new state, was the Serbian-Yugoslav project, applied without modifications, always on an anti-Bulgarian basis, already in a different environment and partly with new protagonists and bearers." Two things can be seen here, the

first of which is extremely distasteful, and always connects the Macedonians with Serbia, that is, it is about the Bulgarian obsession with Serbia through the coat of arms of the Macedonians, and their division, known in history as pro.. one or the other, is for the purpose of assimilating those who will be evaluated as pro-them. The second thing that is seen in the previous text is the description of the Bulgarians who were assimilated or killed, which is also incorrect, and is being marketed to the European and world public by Bulgaria. We can freely say that it is exactly the opposite, i.e. that the Bulgarians are the ones who assimilated Macedonians, Turks, Roma, Vlachs and other smaller ethnic communities and declared them all Bulgarians, so that today in their country, according to the constitution, only Bulgarians are recognized. Driven by their policy of assimilation, they tried to do the same in the XXIst century, distributing passports throughout the Balkan countries, and in the case of the Macedonians, they are making attempts at assimilation with pressure that if their demands are not accepted, the Macedonian state will not continue its path to the European Union.

The strategy continues with extremely insulting explanations, open political aspirations and identification of the Macedonian with the Bulgarian past, all with the aim of continuing the assimilationist policy towards the Macedonians already seen over the centuries.

In the same part of the text, the history of Macedonia is contested, where the Bulgarians do not only "care" for them, but also for the neighbors whose history the Macedonians "stole". In addition to the Macedonian history from any approach in the work, the Bulgarians also "care" about the name "Macedonia", about which they say: "The name "Republic of Macedonia" itself, later, due to the bad-neighbor policy of Skopje, created problems in the traditional use of the name "Macedonia" for the other significant parts of the geographical region with the same name - Bulgarian (Pyrinska) Macedonia and Greek (Aegean) Macedonia."⁸

The Strategy also explains the change in Bulgaria's position after its accession to the EU, with the following sentence: "initial credit of trust with unconditional recognition of the new independent state in 1992 was an investment in favor of good relations between the two countries, which unfortunately did not materialize of reciprocity. In the perspective of the past, the then non-committal recognition of the new state with clear standards for good neighborly policy seemed to encourage the continuation of the old South Macedonian policy, instead of

⁸ Ibid.35.

putting bilateral relations on a new basis.⁹ The truth is that the then post-communist Bulgaria had neither strength nor capacity for anything more, until its entry into the EU, when it started calling for European unity, solidarity, etc.

One of the most important segments that has special attention for Bulgaria is education. With it, they intend to implement their theory, which is stated above, not only in Bulgaria and in the international framework, but also in the Republic of Macedonia, which would achieve their goal, which they did not achieve with weapons, that is, they are trying to carry out a quiet and gradual assimilation of the Macedonians. Therefore, the next step and the next effort is to change the education, the history, the introduction of Bulgarian historical theories in the Macedonian textbooks, and then the formation of people who will defend these theories in a national key, with the help of the "balancer" tool, to become a part from the institutions as a whole, with the intention that they will appear in the institutions that are of crucial importance for the state (education, defense, police, culture, etc.), not as citizens who work for the state, but as Bulgarians who fulfill Bulgarian requirements.

In "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia - recommendations for the development of good neighborly relations after Bulgaria's accession to the EU and in the context of the expansion of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans" there is a special section dedicated to education, and that section in which the following Bulgarian requirements are important :

1. Termination of history education with textbooks, which completely falsify history and contain insulting qualifications for the Bulgarian state and nation, bordering on open racism. At the Bulgarian request, in the textbooks, officially approved by the competent authorities of the Republic of Macedonia, the Bulgarian nationality (as determined by the world historical science) of prominent figures from our general history such as St. Kliment Ohridski, Tsar Samuil, Miladinovci brothers, Goce Delchev.

2. The educational system (from primary school to the university) is a basic instrument for creating strong and massive anti-Bulgarian attitudes among the population of the Republic of Macedonia (conviction that Bulgaria is an occupier, assimilator, divider of the Macedonian ethnicity), attitudes that the policy of the Republic of Macedonia remains a permanent hostage regardless of political changes and changes of power.

⁹ Ibid.35.

3. It is important to underline that the removal of forgeries from textbooks and the cessation of anti-Bulgarian media propaganda would not deprive the Republic of Macedonia of the foundations for its existence. The state can continue to exist on the basis of today's realities without projecting them retrospectively to build some unrealized past, to exist recognizing the Bulgarian historical realities. Just as Bulgaria can recognize today's realities without bringing the past into the present.

4. Restoration of the destroyed or falsified inscriptions on churches, monasteries, icons, frescoes, fountains, bridges, etc., in accordance with the existing international standards in that area.

5. Assistance for the restoration, that is, the removal of the Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia, the obstacles to the restoration of 471 Bulgarian military cemeteries - a particularly painful issue for Bulgaria.¹⁰

These policies are stated to be implemented together with Greece, which, according to them, is interested in "the Republic of Macedonia accepting modern European standards for good neighborly relations." Bulgaria and Greece can contribute (including and jointly) to this direction in the process of preparing the Republic of Macedonia for membership in the EU and NATO. In particular: 1.3.1. Bulgaria and Greece could initiate within the European Union the development and acceptance of an appropriate *acquis communautaire* in the field of education, which would enable a certain general standard of objectivity in school and academic history education.¹¹

The indicated document also states an action plan according to which the most striking and relevant to the topic that is of our interest are the points that predict who will implement the strategy, while stating institutions such as ministries, state agencies, municipalities, embassies, as well as scientific institutions, lobbyists, politicians, as well as the Bulgarian Cultural and Information Center in Skopje for popularizing Bulgarian culture and politics in the Republic of Macedonia, by investing the necessary resources. Part of the plan envisages the creation of conditions for preserving and expanding the scope of education in Bulgarian colleges and universities for students from the Republic of Macedonia, but also the creation of appropriate forms for maintaining further contacts between and with them, as a natural Bulgarian lobby.

¹⁰ Ibid.40.

¹¹ Ibid.41.

At the end of this document it is said: "If Bulgaria builds its policy towards the Republic of Macedonia at the level of today's challenges - and it would be national irresponsibility to miss the current historical opportunity - this also requires the proper preparation of the Bulgarian public, media and official institutions, which will provide the favorable conditions for success.

In the end, we can conclude that through this strategy the Bulgarian demands for assimilation are shown, with modern methods. The strength of this document will be seen later, when the Macedonian state is admitted to the European Union, that is, when Bulgaria will be given the opportunity to show what it can do, to become an example of assimilation in the XXIst century.

II. The agreement on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria and its consequences for the Macedonians

The strategy "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia - recommendations for the development of good neighborly relations after the admission of Bulgaria to the EU and in the context of the expansion of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans", shows that the Republic of Bulgaria will insist on respecting its determinations, that is, on open assimilation, request that the Macedonians be declared Bulgarians, and the Macedonian language be declared a dialect of Bulgarian. The Republic of Bulgaria recognized that after the change of government with the vote of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in May 2017, conditions were created for the implementation of its strategy in the Republic of Macedonia, i.e. that they found the right political partner, after which it will be signed on August 1, 2017 Agreement on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria.

After signing for a large part of the Macedonians, this agreement will be condemned and declared treasonous in relation to the national interests, and especially in relation to the Macedonians. The part of the agreement that refers to education, which defines the formation of a multidisciplinary expert commission for historical and educational issues, joint commemorations of joint historical events and personalities, is especially condemned.

Namely, in the Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria, education, as well as in the previous agreement from 1999, is treated in Article 8, which has been expanded and upgraded in relation to the previous agreement. The 2017 agreement states:

1. The two Contracting Parties will encourage active and uninterrupted cooperation in the fields of culture, education, health, social care and sports.

2. Within three months at the latest from the entry into force of this agreement, with the aim of deepening mutual trust, the two Contracting Parties will establish a Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues, on a parity basis, to contribute to an objective and based on authentic and evidence-based historical sources, scientific interpretation of historical events. The Commission will submit an annual report on its work to the governments of the Contracting Parties.

3. The two Contracting Parties will organize, by mutual consent, joint celebrations of joint historical events and personalities, aimed at strengthening good neighborly relations in the spirit of European values.¹²

As a result of paragraph 2 of this article, the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues started its work. The focus of this commission is on historical issues and the efforts of the Bulgarian side to include in the history textbooks in the Republic of Macedonia contents that would be appropriate to the Bulgarian perception and interpretation of historical events. For the entire time of its operation, Bulgaria insists on a point of view on Macedonia, which coincides and is explained in detail in the strategy "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia - recommendations for the development of good neighborly relations after the admission of Bulgaria to the EU and in the context of the enlargement of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans"

The consequences are clear, and that is that in Macedonian education, in addition to the officially accepted history taught in schools in the Republic of Macedonia, there will be an insistence on the acceptance of Bulgarian interpretations of history. Such activities create opportunities for the Bulgarian state to constantly "veto" chapters related to education, culture

¹² Agreement on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Skopje, 2017. 4.

and history, as well as to repeat the thesis about "the existence of the Macedonian people, language and history after 1944".

The next consequence for Macedonian education related to the Bulgarian demands is the introduction of the Concept for Basic Education in 2020 and the depersonalization of the Macedonian people through the destruction of identities after all the basic ones. According to the Concept, several teaching subjects were abolished, including History and Geography. With this abolition of the sciences, there were reactions and pressure from the scientific and professional public, after which the subject History was returned through the subject History and Society, and the subject Geography disappeared, that is, it was divided into several subjects.

However, the contents of history in certain classes are taught by a class teacher, and in certain classes it has not yet been defined. With this, we can say consciously, history and its realization are relativized and one gets the impression that they can be realized, that is, taught by anyone, not an expert history teacher. If we connect that in the Macedonian textbooks, in addition to the existing contents, the Bulgarian side insists on the existence and Bulgarian view of the events, we can only assume what would happen if they were taught by an insufficiently expert teacher. It is assumed that the purpose of the mentioned concept is to destroy the Macedonian identity, as well as to carry out actions that represent an attempt to assimilate the Macedonians.

We note that efforts are being made to make all of the above in one way or another a part of the negotiation framework of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU, that is, Bulgaria is making, and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia accepted an agreement with which in 2022 assimilation will become part of the Negotiating Framework with the European Union. Although this is a precedent and a bilateral issue is introduced in the negotiation framework of a country during its accession to the European Union, this negotiation framework will receive the consent of the representatives of the Macedonian government. The mentioned negotiation framework should enter into force after the acceptance of certain Bulgarian demands that require a change to the Macedonian Constitution.

In addition to Article 8 of the Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria, paragraph 6 of Article 11 of the Agreement, which states: "Both Contracting Parties shall take effective measures to prevent of malicious propaganda by institutions and agencies and will discourage

activities of private entities, aimed at inciting violence, hatred or other similar actions, which would harm their relations."¹³

The establishment of Bulgarian clubs and non-governmental organizations that bear controversial names from history, especially from the time of the Second World War and some of them related to the Holocaust, does not cooperate with the mentioned article, which caused reactions from the public, but not from the experts in charge of the historical issues between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ambassador in IHRA¹⁴.

More precisely, the non-respect of the agreement and the consequences of Bulgaria's nationalist and self-willed policy can be seen with the establishment of the club "Vanko Mihailov" in Bitola, with the presence of the entire leadership of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as with the non-governmental organization "Tsar Boris III" in Ohrid, as well as with the announcement that new clubs and NGOs will be established in other cities with different names. The question arises why controversial personalities were chosen and who should we expect as the name of Bulgarian clubs and organizations. Can clubs bear the names of controversial figures who committed crimes in Macedonia? Can they bear the names of fascists, pro-fascists and people who committed crimes in the Second World War? Can the commander of the youths who were shot in Vataša also appear as a name, so that his shooting can be interpreted as southern, Serbian-communist or similar?

With the values set in this way, it goes against the values of civilization and the values on which the EU rests, as well as against a large number of domestic and international documents. In relation to the Macedonian people, who sided with the Anti-Fascist Coalition and openly opposed all the countries that were part of the Fascist Coalition, including Bulgaria, which was occupied by it and against which it openly fought, it is offensive to place persons who were on the side of the Fascist Coalition. Precisely from the Bulgarian side, through the Bulgarian historical interpretations in this case we see the assimilation policy by presenting the occupation as liberation, the war between the fascist and anti-fascist forces as a civil war, and the Bulgarian fascist army is presented twice as a liberator: the first time when they occupied Macedonia in 1941, and the second time when Bulgaria capitulated, after which the army became anti-fascist and started fighting against Germany. In both cases, although the people in Macedonia who were

¹³ Ibid.5.

¹⁴ IHRA-International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

anti-fascists called themselves Macedonians, they were confirmed as such by the Anti-Fascist allies (USA, Great Britain and the USSR) for the Bulgarians today, they were not Macedonians, but Bulgarians. In other words, there is no end to the Bulgarian attempts to assimilate the Macedonians.

III. Consequences of the agreements with Bulgaria for the Macedonian state and Macedonians

"If you take money from the Bulgarian government in today's political conditions, it would mean engagement, commitment... The Bulgarian government will want to manage Macedonia. Once he starts supplying us with money, he will know how to use the situation created by the help given, and he will not be satisfied with a platonic relationship, but only with real benefit. What's more, what other Balkan and European countries already claim, that the Organization is inspired by Sofia's governing circles... All those circumstances require us to look for other means, but always independent of Bulgaria."¹⁵

Goce Delchev

The key is the fact that all the listed documents, agreements, strategies and positions of Bulgaria are consecutive, that is, the documents follow up and refer to each other. This speaks of the unique and permanent policy of Bulgaria towards Macedonia, regardless of who is in power in Bulgaria.

The second key fact is that all documents, agreements, strategies and attitudes of Bulgaria contain education as a key field of work and through which influence should be exercised in achieving their goals. At the same time, in the first document "the joint declaration of the Minister-President of the Republic of Bulgaria and the President of the Government of the

¹⁵ Laura Bet Sherman – Feldman. *Fire in the mountain. The Macedonian revolutionary Movement and the Kidnaping of Elen Stoun*. Columbia University New York, 1922, 24. And Vancho Gjorgjiev. *Freedom or death, Macedonian revolutionary national liberation movement in the Thessaloniki province 1893-1903*, Tabernakul, Skopje, 2003, 343.

Republic of Macedonia" is only mentioned, in the strategy "Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia - recommendations for the development of good neighborly relations after the admission of Bulgaria to the EU and context of the expansion of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans" the guidelines for education have been developed and worked out in detail, for in the "Agreement on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria" from 2017 education is developed and accepted (by both countries) as in the Bulgarian strategy, so that finally the Agreement of 2017 becomes part of the negotiations for the entry of the Republic of Macedonia into the EU, with special reference to education.

The third key element is history, to which special attention is paid and which is mentioned in the strategy as a request for "rewriting history through education and the media", for in the "Treaty on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria" from 2017 year to accept from both sides the establishment of a "Joint multidisciplinary expert commission on historical and educational issues, on a parity basis, to contribute to an objective and based on authentic and evidence-based historical sources, scientific interpretation of historical events." In this context the basis of the demands are a change in history in general, a change in education mostly in relation to the subjects Macedonian language, history and geography, then a change in the history textbooks by adding contents that are a Bulgarian point of view on the history of Macedonia and carrying out propaganda on the students, teachers and the wider community.

The fourth fact and perhaps the most important point of this paper is the Bulgarian effort, and the Macedonian acceptance of the "Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria" from 2017 to become part of the negotiation framework, where perhaps the most unacceptable of all is the request for change of education, of history, i.e. accepting the work of the "Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues" to become part of the negotiation framework.

In the context of all of the above, immediately before the publication of the negotiation framework for the accession of the Republic of Macedonia to the EU, there appeared perhaps the most humiliating and aggressive document voted in the Bulgarian Assembly and accepted by all political parties in Bulgaria, and that is the document "Explanatory Memorandum on the

Relations of The Republic of Bulgaria with the Republic of North Macedonia in the context of the enlargement of the EU and the process of association and stabilization." The explanatory memorandum came from the Bulgarian Assembly, as an explanation of the previously mentioned documents, humiliating for the Macedonians. This memorandum was sent to all the countries in the European Union and represents the success of Bulgaria, under the guise of good neighborliness, to introduce bilateral issues of assimilation nature into the negotiation framework. This document demands a subject relationship of the Republic of Macedonia and is an expression of chauvinism. In it, we again have the Bulgarian definition of Macedonian history, with the intention of enmity and desire for humiliation on the part of Bulgaria. The historical context is unrealistic, that is, Bulgaria not only denies the Macedonians, but also regularly involves other nationalities in the Balkans. At the same time, we state that the Macedonians have clearly stated what they are, who they are, and at no point did they say that they are Serbs, Bulgarians or something else, but on the contrary, in history they fought against assimilation by Bulgaria and other countries. After all, it is a phenomenon that we see even today. Regarding the Macedonian identity, we can say that in the first moment when they were given the opportunity to declare themselves as Macedonians and to speak the Macedonian language, the Macedonians did it. As for who helped them and how, we think it is irrelevant, that is, that everyone was helped by someone and there is no need for Bulgaria to distort history and prove and connect different movements and personalities from Macedonian history with Bulgarian history. If you look at the historical facts like this, every country, including Bulgaria, can be said to be the creation of another country. Historical nebulos go so far as to claim that Bulgaria was not on the side of the fascist coalition in the Second World War, that it did not participate in the destruction of the Jewish community in Macedonia and many other facts that are contrary to the world's accepted historical truths. In addition to this, the same country which distorts historical facts and which selectively uses facts that suit it at the moment, claims that other countries do the same.

As an example, we give only a few world historical truths from modern history:

1. Bulgaria was a country from the fascist bloc or the Triple Alliance in the Second World War.
2. Bulgaria was an occupier and committed crimes in Macedonia (killing, shooting, sending people to labor and concentration camps).

3. Bulgaria fought against the Macedonian partisans, but not because of the different arrangement, but it was a national struggle of the Macedonian people.

4. Bulgaria enacted laws against the Jews of Macedonia.

5. Bulgaria deported the Jews to the Treblinka camp.

6. Bulgaria has never apologized, which means that it does not accept that killing, shooting, sending people to concentration and labor camps is a normal thing for it, and if it were possible, it would repeat the act, as the desire for assimilation repeats today modern time.

7. Bulgaria has always strived for the assimilation of Macedonians, and it is still doing so today.

In the "Current situation" section, Bulgaria presents falsehoods without any facts regarding the current support of the Republic of Macedonia, and with a great deal of arrogance emphasizes that they will force the Macedonians to be Bulgarians before entering the European Union, which is a violation of all international and human rights. As in the previous Bulgarian interpretation of history, with claims of "ethnic engineering to create a Macedonian identity and Macedonian nation", where the terms identity and nation are put in quotation marks, as well as with claims of "borrowing" parts of history and claiming to correct it according to the Bulgarian view, Bulgaria in the XXIst century acts assimilating and does not respect the Macedonian nation and the declaration of an entire people. The following quote in this section is noticeable, which firmly links education, in a much wider range than the previously mentioned areas: "However, the process of identity building was limited only to the territory of the then SRM, and after 1991 to the Republic of Macedonia. Although Bulgarian citizens did not participate, the authorities in the Republic of North Macedonia still claim that there is a "Macedonian minority" in Bulgaria. Official history and geography textbooks, literature, visual arts, as well as some media, are also used to reinforce these claims and create antagonism with Bulgaria by spreading stereotypes. In the further part, the main unresolved issues are highlighted, among which are history, the joint commission for educational and historical issues, the language, i.e. the Macedonian language, the minority claims, also interpreted unilaterally and now emerging for us and for Bulgaria, the "problem with the name". All are as in the previously mentioned context of the overall memorandum.

At the same time, this is a document that further stirs up the Macedonian public, which does not accept the Bulgarian attempts to assimilate the Macedonians, following the example of

all the others that Bulgaria has assimilated over the years. Hence the reactions of the entire Macedonian public, led in the political field by VMRO-DPMNE, Levica and others, in the scientific field by MANU, UKIM, the Institute of History at the Faculty of Philosophy, the Institute of National History, etc. for rejecting the "Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria" from 2017 and all other documents that deeply offend the feelings of Macedonians, their national identity and history.

And as I stated at the beginning, if this is the moment when the Bulgarians should impose their demands and causes, for the Macedonians this is the moment when they should not succumb to the Bulgarian demands. After all, assimilation does not belong to the XXIst century, it is part of previous centuries, and assimilation of the Macedonians is even less possible because if it was not done when they did not have a state, institutions and their own education, at a time when they have all of the above, it is simply impossible. That is why real good neighborly relations, facing the historical truth accepted by the world, apologizing for historical crimes, mutual respect and putting an end to the endless demands to highlight one's own at the expense of others are the solution for permanent reconciliation in the Balkans.

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