IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OHRID FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT: TRENDS IN TOLERANCE AMONG THE YOUTH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Avirovic Bundalevska Irena, PhD[1]
Dragovic Ivana, MA[2]

Abstract: *The Republic of North Macedonia is a multicultural country composed of various ethnic and religious groups. Macedonia was the only ex-Yugoslav state to gain its independence without a violent clash within the country or against other post-Yugoslav republics. However, in 2001 the two major ethnic groups, the Macedonians and Albanians fought against each other in an armed conflict, which resulted in the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and promoted minority rights in the republic. Almost two decades after the conflict, ethnic tensions have been limited to sporadic hostilities usually prompted by sporting events and political rallies. Today, promoting tolerance among ethnic groups is one of the key issues in the political agenda of the main political parties, both Macedonian and Albanian. This paper will examine tolerance in the Republic of North Macedonia by analyzing the implementation of the Framework Agreement in the area of education, languages and minority rights. Moreover, the paper will present a research on trends in tolerance among youth from urban areas in North Macedonia conducted during the autumn of 2019.*

Keywords: tolerance, ethnic groups, youth, Framework Agreement, Republic of North Macedonia

[1]   Institute of Family Studies, Faculty of Philosophy - UKIM – Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia
     avirovic@fzf.ukim.edu.mk
[2]   Institute of Family Studies, Faculty of Philosophy - UKIM – Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia
     ivana@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

Introduction

Religion is found in all known human societies and the concept of religious tolerance was not earned easily in the modern era. Ever since men and women have lived next to each other, they had to accept their differences and find a way to live together, otherwise they had to fight in order to assimilate the others. Historic clashes between Pagans and Christians, Christians and Muslims, Catholics and Protestants etc. have only proved that the only way of living is mutual acceptance and coexistence.

After the bloody 20th century, which saw millions of people die during the two world wars and many other conflicts, people expected that religious and ethnic intolerance would lose their importance by the 21[st]century. Undoubtedly, many steps forward have been done in the past decades to improve human's rights, to celebrate multiculturalism and ethnic and religious diversity. However, the bloodshed caused by the wars following the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, proved again that history repeats itself and that past lessons have not been learned. The Republic of North Macedonia was the only republic, which succeeded peacefully from the Yugoslav federation. Nevertheless, in 2001 the two major ethnic groups, the Macedonians (mainly Orthodox Christians) and Albanians (mainly Muslims) clashed in an armed conflict, which ended with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which promoted minority rights in the country. The conflict had a rather ethnic character, however, some religious buildings were destroyed during the armed clashes.

Today, North Macedonia is a multiethnic country, a state of all its citizens, where civic equality and permanent co-existence of all ethnic groups is guaranteed. With a population of 2.0022.547 people, there are six major ethnic groups living the country: Macedonians (64.15%), Albanians (25.17%), Turks (3.85%), Roma (2.66%), Serbs (1.78%), Vlachs (0.48%) and other minor groups (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2004). Moreover, North Macedonia is a multiconfessional country, where freedom of religion is guaranteed by its Constitution. Christianity (predominantly Eastern Orthodoxy) is the main religion of the country, with 64.8% followers, mainly composed of ethnic Macedonians, Serbs, Vlachs etc. 33.3% of the population in North Macedonia practices the Islam, mainly Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks and Roma people.

This paper will present the current trends in ethnic and religious tolerance in North Macedonia by analyzing the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which represents a legal basis in providing stability and security in the country. Our analysis will focus on the area of education, languages and minority rights, which were the main claims by the Albanian ethnic group for ending the 2001 conflict. Finally, the paper will focus on a quantitative research on trends in tolerance among youth in North Macedonia conducted from October to December 2019.

1. Tolerance and toleration in the Balkan context

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, one of the definitions of tolerance in religious context is "sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own" or "the act of allowing something: toleration". In Germany, the world 'tolerance' appears during the Reformation period and hence its religious connotation. It becomes a legal concept after the toleration edicts towards oppressed religious minorities from that period (i.e. Papists, Lutherans etc.). In the English language there is a minor distinction between tolerance and toleration, with the second word being a legal act that allows the practice of a particular religion (Habermas, 2004). In the Macedonian language besides the words 'tolerancija' (толеранција) and 'tolerantnost' (толерантност), which equal the English 'tolerance' and 'toleration', it can be noted that the synonym word 'трпеливост', which means 'patience', is used more frequently when referring to the religious and ethnic context. In this regard, solely for linguistic reasons, in this study we will use the term 'tolerance' in its wide-ranging connotation of cultural toleration.

In the Balkans under the Ottomans, religious denomination was in fact the main feature of self-determination, more important than national and ethnic provenience. Though Muslims had dominance and control over the non-Muslim population, there was limited religious freedom for the latter, especially in the Christian millets, the autonomous self-governing religious communities in the Ottoman Empire. Macedonia was probably the most problematic and "complex ethno-linguistic area left to the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878" (Magosci, 1995, p.87) and even today it remains deeply divided among ethnic and religious lines.

Nationalism and national identities in the Balkans from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were built on a fragile basis; even the well-established neighboring Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian identities were somehow susceptible by the emerging Macedonian identity. Religion and language remained main attributes of self-determination of ethnic identities in the Balkan Peninsula in the interwar period, as well. The stability of the Macedonian identity was a difficult mission, taking into account the contested region where it came from (Glenny, p.158). Only within the Yugoslav federation, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia gained all aspects of self-determination nations, such as history, religion, language and ancestry. Thus, the very strict correlation between the Macedonian identity and the Macedonian state and the need of the Macedonian people to be explicitly mentioned in the Preamble of the 1991 Constitution, leaving the other ethnic groups with a sentiment of a subordinate position (Brunnbauer, 2002).

In former Yugoslavia secularist ideas had shifted religion to the private sphere of the individuals. Religious practices were not forbidden, nonetheless rarely practiced in the public sphere. The new socialist-egalitarian spirit and the ideals of liberation of religious consciousness were characteristic for post-war Macedonian society as well, though some historians claim that those ideas penetrated the traditional and patriarchal world of Muslim communities with difficulties, especially in the rural regions

of the country (Ачковска, 2003, p. 255). In this context, there was a tacit and subtle discrimination of Muslims, mainly due to the Ottoman past and unresolved religious and ethnic conflicts among Muslims and Christians from World War II. De jure, religious freedom was guaranteed and there were only occasional elements of fundamentalism in the public sphere. De facto, one of the main reasons of the conflicts after the break-up of Yugoslavia was religious and ethnic intolerance among Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosnians and Catholic Croats (Bosnian War, 1992-1995), Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Kosovo Albanians (Kosovo War, 1999) and Orthodox Macedonians and Muslim Albanians (Macedonian conflict, 2001), though in the Macedonian case claims to linguistic rights were dominant. In the post-war Balkan context, the concept of toleration was understood as being based on the principle of justice and dealing with cultural variety and ensuring religious and ethnic toleration required a process of recognition of minority rights and mechanisms to ensure cultural protection. In the Bosnian and Macedonian cases it was achieved by Framework Agreements for Peace, respectively the Dayton and the Ohrid Agreements, whilst in the Kosovar case it required a territorial secession. The theory of justice by moral and political philosopher John Rowls is a liberal theory that understands societies where equality and liberty are honored and where religious freedom follows the principle of equal liberty or in his words "*The aim of a well-ordered society, or one in a state of near justice, is to preserve and strengthen the institutions of justice*" (Shapiro, Kymlicka p.73) and by doing so to preserve stability and unity of a country, which was the main objectives of the above-mentioned Agreements.

The German philosopher and political theorist, Rainer Forst, develops an understanding of toleration which is not merely chronological and he distinguishes four conceptions of toleration, which we intend to include in our further writing. The first one is the *permission conception,* which considers toleration as a relation between an authority or a majority and a different minority or minorities. This vertical relation of tolerance applies to the Macedonian case, where the Macedonian majority was in a superior position of authority, as expressed in the Preamble of the 1991 Constitution (Устав на Република Македонија, 1991):

(...) National state of the Macedonian people, which guarantees the full civic equality and permanent co-existence of the Macedonian people with the Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and the other nationalities (...).

This part of the Preamble of the 1991 Constitution was one of the contested parts by the Albanian minority during the 2001 conflict, whilst at the same time the national state of ethnic Macedonians was the reason they fought for centuries and its change was a very unpleasant compromise. The second is the *coexistence conception* and understands mutual toleration as the best tool to end or avoid a conflict. In this context, peaceful coexistence is possible with a horizontal relation of tolerance and the tool to ensure it in the Macedonian case is the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which will be examined in details in the following part. The third is the *respect conception,* which promotes tolerance as respect in a reciprocal sense. According to this conception, religious, ethnic and cultural differences should not lead to conflicts in the political sphere and should

be confined to the private one. This is the opposite of the Macedonian reality where minorities' cultural differences (clothing, language, practices, behaviors etc.), religious symbols (wearing the cross, hijab, queleshe[3] etc.) and other ethnic portrayals are not only visible in the public sphere, but practiced seldom by politicians, as well. The fourth conception of toleration is the *esteem conception,* which implies demanding even deeper respect for the other. This concept requires developing ethical believes for the members of other cultural and religious groups. As in the case of the third conception, we believe that the esteemed conception is not fully practiced in North Macedonia, where different values are partially recognized, but not completely accepted.

2. The Ohrid Framework Agreement: A Dual Perception

The implementation of the Framework Agreement, which ended the 2001 conflict between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, has been a difficult process in terms of its perception from different ethnic groups in North Macedonia. As far as Albanians are concerned, the 2001 conflict is labeled as fight for human and minority rights, whilst for the majority of Macedonians it was a clash between Albanian extremists and the Macedonian National Army (Phillips, 2004). Having in mind that not much has been done to overcome this dual view of the armed conflict, the process of reconciliation has been even more challenging.

The Framework Agreement was signed in Ohrid in August 2001 and it is composed of three parts: (1) amendments to the Macedonian constitution, (2) legal modifications and (3) a strategy to end the conflict. The basic principle of the Agreement is to promote democracy and stability in the Republic of Macedonia, by providing peaceful political solutions for all ethnic and religious groups living in the country and by preserving its territorial integrity at the same time (Framework Agreement, Basic Principles). The main principles of non-discrimination regards particularly the employment in the public administration and enterprises where equitable representation of all communities is required, including the election of judges in the Constitutional Court and the Public Attorney (Framework Agreement, Non-Discrimination and Equitable Representation).

The Agreement is important in the area of education and languages, as well, since it provides instruction in student's mother tongues in primary and secondary schools in separate ethnic grades. Macedonian remains the official language in the country, but any other language that is spoken by at least 20 percent of the population is also an official language. The same formula applies to the local self-government i.e. the municipalities where an ethnic group represents more than 20 percent of the population, they can use their native language, besides Macedonian. Translation in the native languages according to this formula (>20%) is provided in personal documents, judicial proceedings etc. (Framework Agreement, Education and Use of Languages). In this regard, the Agreement has been mainly criticized, because it favors to a certain extend only the Albanians, being

---

3   Queleshe is a felt cap traditionally worn by Albanian men.

the only minority in the country that have fulfilled the conditions from the time the Agreement was signed to the present. Finally, the Agreement put an end to the Albanian university problem, by recognizing the University of Tetovo as a state university in 2004 (Brunnbauer, 2002).

In religious context, the Framework Agreement promotes further rights to all religious groups living in North Macedonia by giving religious com munities the right to establish schools and by separating the state from the church. The latter change, as well as many other principles in the Framework Agreement (particularly the use of languages and the change in the Constitution regarding the civic concept of the country) have been opposed mainly by the Macedonian population and to certain extend by other minorities living in North Macedonia. The main reasons of such perceptions for ethnic Macedonians are to be found in the loss of security, the feeling of threat of the national existence and fear of Albanian secessionism. At the same time, minorities have generally felt as guests with limited rights, due to their smaller percentage representation according to the formula >20% (Brunnbauer, 2002).

In conclusion, the principles of the Ohrid Framework Agreement represent the multiethnic character of the country and an important document of peace and reconciliation. It represents a framework for providing fair and appropriate representation for all ethnic groups in all public institutions, provides protection of communities in the field of education, use of languages, ethnic, cultural and religious symbols. The Framework Agreement has been criticized in part over the years by certain ethnic groups and has been perceived as a successful story by others. The dual perception of the Framework Agreement is also a consequence of the different perception of the 2001 conflict itself. Macedonian citizens were dissatisfied the way the conflict ended, whilst Albanians, though "winners" in the conflict, are displeased with the timeline of its implementation (Ristevska, Daskalovski, 2011, p. 161). However, it is undoubtedly a 'tool' which has proved effective in providing stability and security in the country and today, almost two decades after the 2001 conflict, ethnic and religious tensions in the Republic of North Macedonia have been limited to sporadic hostilities usually prompted by sporting events and political rallies.

3. Trends in Tolerance among the Youth in North Macedonia

In order to analyze trends in tolerance among youth in North Macedonia almost two decades after the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, from October to December 2019 we conducted a research focusing on the level of religiosity of youth, ethnic distance and coexistence among communities, as well as tolerance towards diverse groups of people. Our research includes 60 respondents from the main urban areas in North Macedonia: Skopje (29 respondents), Debar (7), Kavadarci (1), Ohrid (2), Delchevo (1), Kumanovo (4), Makedonska Kamenica (1), Shtip (2), Prilep (1), Gostivar (1). The majority of our respondents come from the capital Skopje since it is the most multiethnic city in North Macedonia, nonetheless, we wanted to include a certain number

of respondents from ethnically and religiously predominantly homogeneous cities, such as Debar, Gostivar (ethnic Albanian majority), Prilep, Delchevo and Makedonska Kametnica (ethnic Macedonian majority), in order to receive a wide palette of responses and opinions. Our respondents were young people aged 19-30, distributed as follows: 19 years old (6), 20 years old (6), 21 years old (5), 22 years old (16), 23 years old (10), 24 years old (4), 25 years old (5), 26 years old (5), 27 years old (2) and 30 years old (1). The choice of young people as a target group is due to the fact that this generation (born from 1990-2001) was very young to remember the conflict vividly, but is currently playing a role in the building process of a more tolerant and understanding society. The majority of our respondents (58.3%) are female and the rest are male (41.7%). 46.7% of the respondents declared themselves to be ethnic Macedonians, followed by 23.3% of ethnic Albanians. The rest of the interviewees are members of other ethnic groups living in North Macedonia: Turks (8 respondents), Bosniaks (4 respondents), Serbs (3 respondents) and other (3 respondents). The data analyzed in this paper is presented as one-way analysis of variance, using percentages. We used a closed questionnaire as a methodological tool for collecting data with different set of questions (single choice, multiple choice, Likert type), however, due to limitation in space, in this paper we will present only part of our research outcome.

In the following table we can observe the distribution of the respondents by gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation. According to the religious affiliation, 50% of the respondents stated that they believe in the Islamic religion, whilst 46.7% belong to Orthodox Christianity. Only two respondents or 3.3% of the sample stated to be atheists. According to their answer, our respondents at large live in ethnically homogenous families (73.3%) with only 26.7% living in ethnically heterogeneous families.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation

Signs of respondents	Percentage (%)	Number (n)
Gender		
Male	41.7	25
Female	58.3	35
Ethnicity		
Macedonian	46.7	28
Albanian	23.3	14
Serbian	5.0	3
Turk	13.3	8
Bosniak	6.7	4
Other	5.0	3

Religious affiliation		
Christian/Orthodox	46.7	26
Islam	50.0	30
Atheists	3.3	2
Family		
Ethnically heterogeneous	26.7	16
Ethnically homogeneous	73.3	44
Total	100.0	60

Source: Research on Trends in Tolerance among Youth in North Macedonia (2019)

3.1. Religious beliefs and level of religiosity among the youth in North Macedonia

As specified in the previous sections of this paper, the most common religion in the Republic of North Macedonia is Orthodox Christianity, whilst Muslims represent the second largest religious group in the country. Prior to the independence of the country from the Yugoslav federation in 1991, the practice of religion was not prohibited, nonetheless secularism and atheism were encouraged. After 1991, religion became more visible in the public space and it regained its importance among believers. Today, freedom of religion in North Macedonia is guaranteed and all religious communities have the right to establish schools.

In order to identify the inclusion of religion in their everyday lives, the respondents were asked to give their opinion on religious-related statements. We consider this set of questions very important to our research, since revival of religiosity in post-Communist societies was often perceived as declared religiosity, i.e. followers that state to belong to a certain religious group without believing in it (Hart, Dekker, Halman, 2013). The detailed answers are presented in Table 2. Most of the respondents or 56.7 percent partially agree with the statement „I strictly adhere to the doctrine and principles of the religion in which I believe", whilst 28.3 percent fully accept this opinion. Only a small number of respondents partially or completely disagree with this statement. The figures suggest a very high level of actual believers, which is close to the number of respondents who declared to belong to a certain religious group, hence our conclusion that there is an actual growth of religiosity in post-Communist North Macedonia. Additionally, some analysts support the idea that *"religious beliefs make people more tolerant towards other religions"* (Hart, Dekker, Halman, 2013, p. 236) and in this regard, the increased religiosity and faith among youth might lead to positive trends in tolerance in our society and religion does not necessarily have to cause tensions between different groups.

There is a general stereotype that young people are less religious then elderly (Arts, Halman, 2014, p. 246). In this regard, the results for the statement „I prefer universal

values that are not religion-related and do not cause conflicts and divisions between people", are anticipated with 65 percent of respondents strongly agreeing and 20 percent partially agreeing with it, as opposed to only 8.4 percent who disagree with this view. The answers of this section show an evident inclination towards universal values, as opposed to the values that are significant only to the religion to which the respondents belong. Similar is the outcome of the next question „I do not accept values that do not fit my personal and religious beliefs" where 65 percent of the respondents partially or totally disagree, as opposed to 30 percent who support it. With regard to the statement „I want to live by values and norms that are universally accepted by all people but are reinterpreted according to my religious views" almost two thirds of the respondents expressed their agreement (26.7 percent fully agree and 33.3 percent partially agree), 21.7 percent have no opinion on this matter, whilst 18.3 percent disagree.

Our results suggests that Macedonian youth generally respects other people's religious beliefs and identifies at the same time with universal values that do not cause conflicts and divisions among people. In this context, we consider that there is reciprocal tolerance among young Orthodox Christians and Muslims in North Macedonia, at least in the private sphere. At the same time, we can note that the high percent of respondents accepting universal values follow the influence of contemporary social processes, such as globalization, secularization and individualization which along with the long transition process have changed notable present-day Macedonian society, its values, family structures, spiritual trends etc. In general, contemporary societies cultivate less traditions, at the same time as they reinforce secularism at the expense of religious beliefs (Ташева, 2004). Nonetheless, religion remains an important feature for the citizens of North Macedonia and its significance is equally important as their ethnic identity.

Table 2: Youth's opinions on religious-based statements in North Macedonia

Statements	Totally agree	Partially agree	Have no opinion	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
I strictly adhere to the doctrine and principles of the religion in which I believe	28.3 % (17)	56.7 % (34)	6.7 % (4)	5.0 % (3)	3.3 % (2)
I want to live by values and norms that are universally accepted by all people but are reinterpreted according to my religious views	26.7 % (16)	33.3 % (20)	21.7 % (13)	10.0 % (6)	8.3 % (5)

I do not accept values that do not fit my personal and religious beliefs	15.0 % (9)	15.0 % (9)	5.0 % (3)	35.0 % (21)	30.0 % (18)
I prefer universal values that are not religion-related and do not cause conflicts and divisions between people	65.0 % (39)	20.0 % (12)	6.7 % (4)	1.7 % (1)	6.7 % (4)

Source: Research on Trends in Tolerance among Youth in North Macedonia (2019)

3.2. Ethnic distance among the youth in North Macedonia

Social or ethnic distance represents the non-acceptance of certain types of relations with other ethnic communities. More precisely, it measures the acceptance of personal and social inter-ethnic relations and the readiness to interact with different ethnic groups (Петровски, Мирасчиева, 2013). As social and ethnic distance decrease, tolerance among different communities increase, thus the importance of the following set of questions, which examine how members of certain ethnic groups behave, accept and interact with members of other communities.

Table 3: Ethnic distance among the youth in North Macedonia

Statements	Totally agree	Partially agree	Have no opinion	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
Members of other ethnic groups enrich the culture of my country	50.0 % (30)	30.0 % (18)	13.3 % (8)	5.0 % (3)	1.7 % (1)
The presence of people from other ethnicities (other than mine) is one of the reasons for the instability in North Macedonia	6.7 % (4)	10.0 % (6)	8.3 % (5)	31.7 % (19)	43.3 % (26)

The presence of people from other ethnicities (other than mine) is one of the reasons for unemployment in North Macedonia	5.0 % (3)	10.0 % (6)	3.3 % (2)	21.7 % (13)	60.0 %(36)
People of different ethnic backgrounds from mine which respect different traditions and customs should not live in North Macedonia	5.0 % (3)	3.3 % (2)	5.0 % (3)	20.0 % (12)	66.7 % (40)

Source: Research on Trends in Tolerance among Youth in North Macedonia (2019)

According to the answers, four fifths of the respondents (50 percent completely agree and 30 percent partially agree) support the statement: „Members of other ethnic groups enrich the culture of my country." Regarding the following statement: „The presence of people from other ethnicities (other than mine) is one of the reasons for the instability in North Macedonia", 43.3 percent strongly disagree with this statement, 31.7 percent partially disagree and 8.3 percent have no opinion, whilst 10.0 percent partially agree, and 6.7 percent completely agree.

The statement „The presence of people from other ethnicities (other than mine) is one of the reasons for unemployment in North Macedonia" is supported by 15 percent of respondents. In contrast, 71.7 percent reject the link between unemployment and ethnic heterogeneity in our country. In the last statement, „People of different ethnic backgrounds from mine which respect different traditions and customs should not live in North Macedonia", we can observe that 66.7 percent of the respondents completely disagree. Also high is the percentage of those respondents who partially disagree (20.0 percent). The respondents who did not have an opinion and who completely agree have the same proportion, i.e. 5.0 percent.

Based on the answers we analyzed, we are free to note that the respondents do not see their or other people's ethnicity as an obstacle. There is a certain level of ethnic intolerance, when it comes to employment's positive discrimination, however, we can note that the youth in North Macedonia has a high level of ethnic tolerance. In fact, we can observe that in the majority of our respondents' answers respect and esteem components towards different ethnicities are fulfilled in their private sphere.

3.3. Ethnic coexistence among communities in North Macedonia

In the following section we analyzed how much young people in North Macedonia are conscious about ethnic differences and how they cope with them. Our respondents were firstly asked which ethnic group they interact the most with and the majority (91.7 %) answered that they communicate with members of all ethnic groups in the country. Then, we asked them a set of question, in order to seek more detailed opinions on ethnic coexistence and Table 5 presents the respondents' answers to the statements that evaluate their ethnocentricity.

Table 4: Youth's perception on ethnic coexistence among communities in North Macedonia

Statements	Totally agree	Partially agree	Have no opinion	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
You cannot fully trust someone who belongs to another ethnic group	1.7 % (1)	10.0 % (6)	10.0 % (6)	16.7 % (10)	61.7 %(37)
Different ethnic groups work in their own separate worlds	6.7 % (4)	31.7 % (19)	26.7 % (16)	16.7 % (10)	18.3 % (11)
I have no problem interacting with members of another ethnicity (other than my own)	70.0 % (42)	16.7 % (10)	5.0 % (3)	5.0 % (3)	3.3 % (2)
When I am in a different ethnic environment (other than mine) I feel insecure	1.7 % (1)	21.7 % (13)	3.3 % (2)	16.7 % (10)	56.7 % (34)
Avoiding contact with people who speak a language other than my native language	17.7 % (1)	13.3 % (8)	3.3 % (2)	8.3 % (5)	73.3 % (44)
I get angry at the fact that there is positive discrimination (employment by ethnic quotas, getting scholarships for studies, etc.) for other ethnic groups other than mine	2.7 % (16)	25.0 % (15)	16.7 % (10)	8.3 % (5)	23.3 % (14)

Source: Research on Trends in Tolerance among the Youth in North Macedonia (2019)

Undoubtedly, trust among citizens in North Macedonia after the conflict in 2001 has diminished. Trust is a personal, sensitive category which is difficult to measure and depends on the situation one is faced with. Today, citizens in North Macedonia, work together, interact on a daily basis and try to build an inclusive multicultural society. The results from this block of question suggest that people in general trust and interact with persons belonging to other communities, as well. In fact, the largest percentage of our respondents (61.7 percent completely disagree and 16.7 percent disagree) do not support the statement „You cannot fully trust someone who belongs to another ethnic group." On the other hand, opinions are divided on the following statement „Different ethnic groups work in their own separate worlds" with 38.4 percent that agree, 25.0 percent that disagree, and 26.7 percent with no opinion.

Ethnic coexistence depends and is equally important as communication and interaction with persons belonging to all communities. Regarding the statement „I have no problem interacting with members of another ethnicity (other than my own)" 70.0 percent of the respondents completely agree with the statement. It is commonly known that people's stress and insecurity levels increase when they are in an unfamiliar environment and surrounded by strangers. 56.7 percent of the respondents completely disagree with the statement „When I am in a different ethnic environment (other than mine) I feel insecure". Respondents who partially agree represent 21.7 percent, while those who disagree are 16.7 percent. In the following statement „Avoiding contact with people who speak a language other than my native language", 73.3 percent of respondents strongly disagree, while 13.3 percent of respondents partially agree. The most captivating data comes from the statement „I get angry at the fact that there is positive discrimination (employment by ethnic quotas, getting scholarships for studies, etc.) for other ethnic groups other than mine" where answers completely agree, partially agree and strongly disagree almost evenly matched.

From the answers we can conclude that our interviewees in general do not discriminate people belonging to other ethnicities, they easily interact and communicate with members of other ethnicities, they do not avoid contact with people of different ethnicity, nor do they feel insecure among them. But when it comes to the matter of „positive discrimination (employment by ethnic quotas, getting scholarships for study, etc.)" they feel moderately threatened. The reason of this outcome might be found in the general economic instability in the country, the high unemployment rate in North Macedonia in the past three decades or the result of the somewhat rapid implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Finally, the outcome of this section i.e. high level of interaction and acceptance of different ethnic groups, suggests that the coexistence conception of toleration is present among the youth in North Macedonia, however, there is still potential to improve, both in the private and public sphere.

3.4. Social distance and tolerance towards diverse groups in North Macedonia

The final figures show the outcome of a question inspired by the Bogardus social distance scale, which measures varying degrees of closeness in people towards other members of diverse social, ethnic or racial groups. It includes the respondents' answers regarding their choice of neighbor, which measures the social distance by the permissiveness of marginalized people (immigrants/foreign workers, people who have AIDS, homosexuals) or neighbors from different ethnic or religious groups. The purpose of this section was to analyze the perception of the 'other' and the level of tolerance towards different groups of people. The respondents could choose multiple answers and the numerical outcome is presented in Figure 1.

Picture 1: Percentage distribution of neighbor choice in North Macedonia
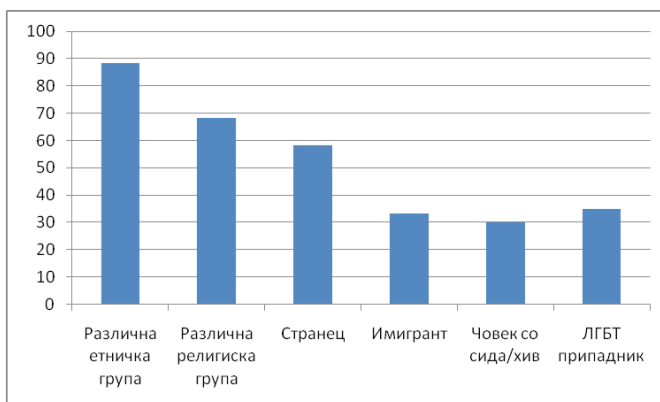
Source: Research on Trends in Tolerance among the Youth in North Macedonia (2019)

From the figures we can see that most of the respondents (88.3 percent) selected a neighbor from a different ethnic group, whilst 68.3 percent would choose a member of a different religious group, which confirms the high level of religious tolerance in our country. 58.3 percent would choose a foreigner as a neighbor, 33.3 percent an immigrant. The least that our respondents have selected were people who have AIDS/HIV (30 percent) and LGBT community member (35 percent). In this context, we would like to note once more how important the Framework Agreement has been in stimulating the coexistence conception of toleration by giving a legal framework to minority rights and peaceful coexistence of all communities in the country. Actually, the results show a significant higher level of tolerance towards members from different ethnic and/or religious groups in comparison to people with AIDS/HIV and/or LGBT members. In fact, these groups of people are greatly stigmatized and discriminated in Macedonian society and LGBT people still do not have the same legal and social rights as non-LGBT persons. It is interesting to indicate as well that there is notable higher level of tolerance

towards foreigners than immigrants. Our opinion is that foreigners in North Macedonia are usually perceived as people working in international organizations and companies, foreign embassies and generally wealthy and/or important persons, whilst there is a general accentuated prejudice towards immigrants since the Syrian refugee crisis and the worldwide accepted denomination of migrants instead of refugees.

Conclusion

In the last decades, the Republic of North Macedonia faced many challenges, including political and economic crisis, institutional instability, religious and ethnic tensions, continuous high unemployment etc. At the same time, North Macedonia is increasingly striving to build a more tolerant society. This is visible through measures, campaigns and activities in the field of education, through cultural development and institutional processes. The purpose of building tolerance among people is to foster coexistence between different ethnic groups, to facilitate their communication and overcome prejudice and discrimination.

Our research on trends regarding tolerance among the youth in North Macedonia showed that young people in our country show an evident inclination towards universal and collective values. Religion and faith are important to followers, but our respondents' answers did not show xenophobia or religiously based prejudices. However, there is still a certain level of ethnic, rather than religious intolerance among different ethnic groups present, especially when it comes to positive discrimination of minorities in the processes of employment, enrollment in educational institutions, as well as during domestic sport events. The majority of previous research shows that all ethnic groups are interested in economic prosperity in the country, better standard of living and financial stability (Ristevska, Daskalovski).

Despite the fact that almost two decades after the 2001 conflict have passed, complete trust between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians has not been achieved yet. There have been sporadic ethnic hostilities in the past years with relatively low intensity. In this respect, we consider that the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, although partly criticized during the past years, embodies to a certain extent stability and security in the country. Furthermore, the European Union has evaluated positively the implementation of the Framework Agreement in its annual reports, as well as its application in the Constitution of North Macedonia. Optimistically, further economic development and common national political achievements of the country will additionally diminish ethnic and/or religious antagonisms. In this context, we have several conclusions and recommendations:

- Revision of some principles of the Framework Agreement towards a greater inclusiveness of all communities in North Macedonia, which are excluded in most segments, as the formula > 20% is only applicable to the Albanian minority. In this regard, we assess positively the establishment of the new Ministry of

Political System and Inter-Community Relations, which among its works and duties will guarantee the protection of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all communities living in North Macedonia. The improvement of rights of smaller communities in the country is very significant, nevertheless, its approach should be very sensitive to the remaining communities.

- Mutual dialogue between political parties to create a national strategy for the development of social, educational, cultural, economic and political systems, as only a stable and prosperous country can improve tolerance and acceptance among its citizens. At present, political parties in North Macedonia continue to have generally ethnically based agendas.
- Continuity of the work on the reconciliation process between Macedonians and Albanians.

Our general conclusion is that North Macedonia three decades after its independence and almost two decades after the 2001 conflict is still facing certain difficulties in implementing the concept of civil society. There is a general improvement in inter-ethnic communication, tolerance in everyday life and acceptance of different cultures. However, religious and ethnic discourses continue to be visible in the public space and underlined by political and spiritual leaders. In conclusion, we consider that the general outcome of our research is optimistic in terms of positive trends in tolerance among the youth in North Macedonia, as for every new generation, the load of the collective memory of the 2001 conflict will diminish, but only by building strong institutions in which they can trust. In the future, every community should be capable to identify itself with the country and feel secure and accepted.

References

Arts, W., Halman, L. (eds). (2014). Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-Day Europe, Painting Europe's Moral Landscapes. Leiden: Brill.

Avirovic, I. (2010). Patterns of Migration – Patterns of Segregation? A Macedonian Micro-study. Saarbrüken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.

Ачковска, В. (2003). Албанците во Република Македонија. In: Каранфиловски, М. (ed). Предавања на XXXV Меѓународен семинар за македонски јазик, литература и култура (Охрид, 5-23 август, 2002), Скопје: Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј", pp. 251-271.

Brunnbauer, U. (2002). The Implementation of the Ohrid Agreement: Ethnic Macedonian Resentment, JEMIE (Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe), Center for the Study of Balkan Societies and Cultures, University of Graz, Austria, Issue 1/2002. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26451552_ The_Implementation_of_the_Ohrid_Agreement_Ethnic_Macedonian_Resentments (10/02/2020)

Framework Agreement. Concluded at Ohrid, Macedonia, signed at Skopje, Macedonia on 13 August 2001. Retrieved from: https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622?download=true (10/02/2020)

Forst, Rainer, „Toleration", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/toleration/(10/09/2019)

Glenny, M. (2001). The Balkans, Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-1999. London: Penguin Books.

Habermas, J. 2004. Religious Tolerance – The Peacemaker for Cultural Rights, Philosophy, Vol. 79, No. 307 (Jan, 2004), pp.5-18. Cambridge University Press on behalf of Royal Institute of Philosophy. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3751823 (12/03/2020)

Karraker, Meg Wilkes (2008). Global Families. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Magosci, P.R. 1995. Historical Atlas of East Central Europe, University of Toronto Press.

Petrovska-Beska, V. Najcevska, M. 2004. Macedonia Understanding History. Preventing Future Conflict. US Institute of Peace. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12343?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents (12/03/2020)

Phillips, J. 2004. Macedonia Warlords and rebels in the Balkans, London, New York: I. B. Tauris

Петровски, В. Мирасчиева, С. 2013. Мултикултурализам, Интеркултурна комуникација, Универзитет Гоце Делчев, Штип.

Ristevska, M. Daskalovski, Z. (eds). (2011). One Decade after the Ohrid Framework Agreement: Lessons (to be) Learned from the Macedonian Experience. Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Center for Research and Policy Making Skopje 2011 Retrieved from:

http://www.crpm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/OneDecade.pdf (10/02/2020)

Shapiro, I., Kymlicka, W. (eds.). (1997). Ethnicity and Group Rights. New York: New York University Press.

State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia. 2004. Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002, Final Data, Book I – Total Population according to Reasons of Presence-Absence, Age, Sex and Ethnic Affiliation, State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia: Skopje.

Ташева, Марија (2004). Малите верски заедници, кон теоријата, легислативата, самовидувањето. Скопје: Филозофски факултет.

Đordano, Kristijan (2001). Ogledi o interkulturnoj komunikaciji. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek.UDC:27-9:2-78(4-15)