

Conflict and Accommodation: the 'Other' in Political Discourse



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Abstract¹

In order to look at each other in a multiethnic state with greater understanding, acceptance, respect and affinity, there must be favorable social and political climate: adequate political framework, political will among the leading people of the political parties who participate in the process of building integrated multiethnic society, as well as participation of all citizens, regardless of the national background in the public, cultural, social and economic life. Integration is a two-way process that requires participation and responsibility of all. If we do not share the same liberal values (beliefs in freedom, righteousness, justice, democracy, solidarity), and if we do not cherish the culture of peace, and if we are not all proud of the fact that for almost two decades we have been living in peace, in a society where difference is not a reason for systematic discrimination, but is recognized and respected, making our life better, then what would hold us in a community like this? This presentation will be dedicated to the policies that favor integration of democratic multiethnic societies or lead to conflict.

Key words: conflict, accommodation, Ohrid Framework agreement, power-sharing model

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I would like to thank the Institute for inviting me at this conference. I especially thank the colleague Sefer Tahiri, who acknowledged that I have strived for multiculturalism – *policy of acknowledgement as a positive approval of differences* – for a long time.² What more can a professor wish for? This inspired me to give a personal tone to my presentation.

To speak of the “other” in political context, especially bearing in mind the recent past in the Balkans, is not such a pleasant topic as, perhaps, the “other” in culture or art. Politics by definition contains conflict and cooperation. I apologize if I renew some unpleasant memories, but I will start with a conflict.

Conflict...

Early 1990s. The dissolution of Yugoslavia just begun. The previous year, the Berlin Wall, as a physical and symbolical obstacle of the division between the West and the East, fell... Unfortunately, at that moment, the political freedom in some countries caused more suffering than happiness. Ethnic conflicts and wars for national unification, territories and new borders began. Staying in the United States between 1993 and 1997, I was a witness to how the common citizens, and especially the scientific circles were interested in and discussed the reasons for the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the victims and the ethnical cleansing. The American public was flooded with information about the developments in the war in Bosnia, and the CNN reporter from Sarajevo entered a public dispute with the then president of the USA, Bill Clinton because of his restrained policy toward the Balkans. In fact, the American public and the public of the other democratic states put strong pressure on their governments to stop the bloodshed in Bosnia. At Princeton University, during a lecture for postgraduate students, the philosopher and activist Michael Walzer stared with the rhetorical question: “To intervene or not to intervene”, and ended with the words, “if we the honest people do not do it, who else will?” Another popular professor from Harvard and Senator Patrick Moynihan in his book *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* wrote that the idea to research ethnicity did not come from unemotional contemplation of the scientists in their cabinets, but from the great

² Most probably he had in mind my book “Ethnic Conflicts and Accommodation”, published in 1987 by “Kultura” (Skopje) and since then, many other scientific papers and public lectures.

concern and sympathy for the victims; from the desperate need to understand these conflicts and prevent them in the future.

Such pro-active attitude is expected of intellectuals, especially professors, and it affected not only politics, but also science: a separate discipline developed within the international relations – “Ethnic Conflicts and Prevention”. When I returned in Skopje, I was surprised to encounter silence. Even worse, indifference, as if nothing happened in our closest neighborhood. No one wanted to know or talk for example, of Srebrenica.³ The book *Endgame* by the *Christian Science Monitor* journalist David Rohde about the Srebrenica genocide was already published, and he won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative journalism. I addressed him in order to get approval for translation of a part of the book into Macedonian so that we publish it in *New Balkan Politics*, a journal that I founded and edited. He gladly agreed, but surprised me when he wrote that he offered the manuscript in Bosnia, but there was no interest there. At least not at the moment when we had this correspondence.

The indifference and silence did not help the Macedonian society face the difficult challenge that awaited us only few years later. I think that is one of the reasons why the ethnic conflict in 2001 was experienced as “coming out of nowhere”. If we had wanted to know, we would have seen that an intervention in Kosovo was being prepared, and that it was certain to affect Macedonia, where there is a significant number of ethnic Albanians. I don’t remember any debate at the University about possible intervention in our neighborhood. In Princeton, for example, in 1999 there were extensive debates about the NATO intervention in Kosovo. The State Secretary at that time, Richard Holbrooke, invited us, the Fulbright scholars and the Princeton professors for a discussion. It was important to the administration to receive as extensive support as possible for the intervention, especially the legal aspects, because there was no approval from the UN Security Council. If we do not intervene, the US president Clinton was explaining to the public, the conflict in Kosovo will spill over in Macedonia and the other neighboring countries as a deck of card... It was clear what direction the developments took. Near the end of 2000, I participated at a conference in Ohrid, dedicated, although greatly belated, to the interethnic relations in the country. Out of all those present, only the journalist Iso Rusi

³ There were no publications at that time in the country or research on the subject of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, ethnic conflicts and civil war in Bosnia.

and I pointed to the possibility of a conflict. My thesis was that a huge ethnic community, such as the Albanian, which feels excluded from the government, outvoted or neglected, will exert a strong pressure; the regional context was favorable for them and therefore constitutional and political changes are necessary. There was talk of weapons being smuggled from Albania and of training camps, but none of those present believed in a spillover of the conflict from Kosovo to Macedonia, because the NATO troops were already placed along the border. It was a sunny late-autumn day, and we were sitting in a nice hall with glass windows from where we could see the Ohrid Lake. Someone mockingly asked: ok, so where will those armed groups come from? Even I was surprised when Iso looked toward Shar Mountain and said: from there!

The conflict indeed spilled over and in the following months received support from the local Albanian population. In a short while a spiral of violence developed, first from verbal aggression, called ethnic homogenization and mobilization, as a preparation for an armed conflict. The “Other” in such circumstances always becomes an epitome of evil: the Albanians for the Macedonians, and I assume vice versa. “In the beginning was the word...” and the word in the media in Macedonian language (I cannot speak of the media in Albanian language) was not responsible enough, most often it was not objective and was offensive. The facts were twisted or silenced: all that is “ours” suddenly became good, imposing and patriotic, and all that is “yours” – ugly and hostile. The foreigners who attempted to help end the conflict were also considered undesirable.⁴ The military nationalism demands that everyone gets in their “herd” and behind their leader. Here is an example from personal experience: during the conflict, I wrote that the Prizren Declaration was acceptable, and I offered the text for publication to a well-known

⁴ In 2001 I led the Macedonian team, as a part of a joint project with Moldova. This project resulted with the publication “Confidence Building Measures and Conflict Strategies in Divided Societies: Macedonia and Moldova”, Chisinau, 2001, ARC Publishing House. In his article, the Director of the publication “Delovaya Gazeta”, Ion Coretchi, writes:” Everything was allowed that was not forbidden and the press took 100% advantage of this possibility....It should be admitted that each furious word, each striking headline, the material blaming the opponents, slowly and steadily brought the society close to confrontation”(p.187). The conclusions of the Macedonian journalist Agim Poshka in the same book, about deeply divided society in conflict, are similar. He writes: ...

”Some mass media in Macedonian language considered NATO troops’ presence in the Republic of Macedonia as aggression, while the mass media in the Albanian Language considered it a liberation of Albanians.”

journalist, who teaches at SEEU in Tetovo today. He refused me with the words: “All of us, Macedonians, think differently. If you want to publish it, make your own newspaper!”⁵

NATO intervened twice militarily, in Bosnia in 1995 and in Kosovo in 1999, and it entered Macedonia at the end of 2001 to collect the weapons and to guarantee the just established peace. For almost three decades, EU countries and NATO actively, with diplomacy and funds, participated in the stabilization and renewal of the Balkans and today their leaders and governments consider that they invested too much to allow changing the borders and possible new conflicts. It is no coincidence that the Ohrid Framework Agreement, whose implementation is guaranteed by the Western countries, starts with the words: “There are no territorial solutions to ethnic problems...”

Accommodation....

Does that mean that we are forced to live in a common country and to make a virtue out of it? Even so, from the point of view of some discontent groups and individuals, opposing Ohrid Framework Agreement⁶, I think that the majority of citizens believe in the idea for peace and democratic, multiethnic state. We invested almost twenty years to mutual accommodation as a community in a democratic (to an extent) atmosphere, which we did not know before, which even today is little understood perhaps, but still functions. The leaders of all parties – Macedonian, Albanian and others – agreed at the very beginning of independence on the strategic goals of the country – membership in NATO and EU. The consociational political

⁵ This article was published in “Lobi”, newspaper in Albanian Language.

⁶ “Utrinski Vesnik” from 17-18 November 2001 reported that, at its session on 16 November, after a 13 hour debate, at one o'clock in the morning and with 94 votes for and 13 against, the Macedonian Assembly adopted the changes in the Constitution that resulted from the Framework Agreement. The journalist of Utrinski Vesnik, O. Vojnovska, writes: "...The act itself was far from solemn. On the contrary, the atmosphere in the Assembly and the plenary hall, without exaggeration, was mournful. It was very obvious that the deputies were not happy to have pressed the green buttons, in fact, the sour expression on their faces spoke of their mood. Some of the deputies from the back rows, in the moment when Trajkovski (the President of the state) appeared in the hall, yelled “traitor!”

It is indicative to note that at president Trajkovski's annual address held in the Assembly on 21 December 2001, the hall was half-empty. The journalist of Utrinski Vesnik, O. Bojnovska, observed that the absence of deputies of VMRO-DPMNE was noticeable, that some of the party's deputies were laughing at him and that the overall atmosphere in the hall was very unpleasant. (Mirjana Maleska, “Painful Confrontations”, New Balkan Politics No5/2003 (<https://www.newbalkanpolitics.org.mk/item/Painful-Confrontations#.XcmWPIVKjIU>))

framework of power sharing⁷ (based on the experience of similar conflicts) and its rules teach us and oblige us to have cooperation, compromise and agreement. Sometimes that is blackmail and brutal exchange – but they are lessons, too; they teach us and oblige us to believe in consultation and dialogue, possibly in tolerance, loyalty and solidarity. The main source of discrimination and neglect – inequality – is removed, at least on the level of a system. A more just division of political power and social resources is made. Diversity is supported and stimulated through a government strategy for coexistence and various cultural and scientific projects for integrated society. A few weeks ago I was present at a sports competition of the kindergartens from Skopje in the “Penko” school, in the multiethnic municipality of “Butel”: first children’s Olympics, that is how they called this event! The mayor was one hour late – we were told that he had some ‘important things’ – but bravo for all the rest! This is the direction to go in building community: it was not important where each child comes from or what his/her name is, they all received a medal for participation, and they were all happy!

Of course, we should not idealize. In the past twenty or so years, the society several times failed the test of democratic governance. All surveys indicate that the citizens do not have confidence in the governing institutions, they feel excluded and not influential, which is due to the high corruption and crime, which goes to the highest governing centers. Here, the ethnical background plays no part. For example, On February 9, 2015, the opposition party, Social Democrat Alliance (SDSM) publicly released a total of 36 packets of audio-recorded telephone conversations, including the Prime Minister, government ministers, and holders of high public

⁷ In the academic circles, before and after 2001, the model of power-sharing was greatly rejected. Although the theories of Arend Lijphard and Donald Horowitz differ at some crucial points (the issue of federalization or party and electoral system, for example), they was not popular at all. Specially the idea that accommodation is necessary to get to integration .For example in 1998, a university professor, who later become the president of the state, Gorge Ivanov, defended his doctoral thesis where he refused the possibility of success of the consociational model in Macedonia, representing the general trend toward the demands of ethnic Albanians for changes. The debate about consociationalism gained in ferocity after 2001. Because the Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed after a violent conflict and with the mediation and guarantee of the EU and USA, the trauma surrounding its birth hampered its legitimacy at least in the beginning. In the academic circles, the voices against the „power-sharing model“ even today stretches from the „scream“, to rejection. Some most characteristic points of opposition are that „power-sharing“ is imposed by force and doesn’t lead toward integration and democracy but toward disintegration and regress (Vankovska B.2011. *Nova Makedonija*, 15.8.2011); Or, ‘The fundamental constitutional principle of citizen is replaced by collectivity’ (Siljanovska G.2006. *Globalisation, Democracy and Constitutional Engineering as Mechanism for Resolving Ethnic Conflict*. www.enelsyn.gr/papers/w6/ 2006). The arguments in favor of the OFA and „power-sharing“ mainly were coming from the scholars around the „New Balkan Politics“ journal.

offices, mayors, deputies, the parliamentary speaker, opposition leaders, judges, the public prosecutor, civil servants, journalists, editors and media owners. So far, the published materials reached about 500 pages of transcripts of the talks. SDSM claims that it has access to about 20,000 recorded calls and that these conversations have been made by the national intelligence services and given to the party by whistleblowers from the Ministry of Interior. “It was generally recognized, said the experts, that these recordings were made illegally over several years and are not part of the legal and court proceedings”.⁸ As a result of massive abuse of human rights, the government of Nikola Gruevski and Ali Ahmeti, was exposed to strong criticism: demonstrators went to the streets and international pressure increased. With the mediation of the EU and the USA, four parliamentary parties signed the so called Przino Agreement, in which they agreed that, beside the regular, Special Public Prosecutor's Office (SPPO) will be established for prosecuting criminal offences related to and arising from the content of the illegally intercepted communication. In September 2015, SPPO began with investigations.⁹

Beside corruption and abuse of official position and authorization, nationalism, although today, more moderate and more pragmatic, remains the greatest danger for multiethnic societies, especially in moments of crisis and uncertainty. The delay of the beginning of the negotiations with the EU has caused disappointment among the citizens, and it is possible for the nationalists to come back to power at the scheduled elections in 2020, and even form parliamentary majority with the help of the Albanian parties. Does that mean revision of the policy of the present government of Social-Democratic Alliance (SDSM) and its coalition partners? There are indications that point to such a possibility. For example, during the recent pre-election campaign of the party of “national unity” in opposition, VMRO-DPMNE for the presidential elections, the leading party officials and their presidential candidate put into question the Prespa Agreement with Greece, the Friendship Treaty with Bulgaria, and even some aspects of the Ohrid

⁸ The European Commission has established a group of independent experienced law experts in order to quickly analyze the situation and make recommendations on these issues in their report. The group was led by Reihard Priebe.

⁹ On its official page (www.jonsk.mk) from 2015 to 2017 there are 20 bills of indictments charging 131 state officials from the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition partners for: “criminal association”, “abuse of funds for financing an electoral campaign”, “abuse of official position and authorization”, “violation of right to vote”, “violation of the voter’s freedom of choice”, “corruption” and so on.

Framework Agreement and the law of the use of Albanian language. If this raises a spiral of discontent (in the neighborhood and among the ethnic Albanians), the country is on its way to face new instability.

Despite all problems, we can be proud of what we have achieved so far – legitimacy of the power-sharing system. As Canadian educator and philosopher Charles Taylor stressed, people, as well as groups, need respect, recognition and inclusion in the decision-making process. The Macedonian state after 2001 offered constitutional and legal guarantees in that direction. The values of democratic societies, such as belief in law, justice, equality and solidarity are acquired through the educational process, but also through the everyday life at all levels in society. Gradually, a feeling of pride will develop due to belonging to a multiethnic society.¹⁰ Integration is a two-way process: if we succeed, we will succeed together, just as we would be equally guilty for a possible failure.

In international and domestic politics all kinds of new situations are possible. We will be more prepared for them if we persistently, patiently, on daily basis build a culture of peace. What is culture of peace? The Belfast professor Adrian Guelke explained it in the best possible way: that every political issue that causes problems and antagonism can be resolved through dialogue and compromise, in some cases with external mediation; that there are no issues more important than a lost human life.

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¹⁰ The concept of “pride” was developed by the philosopher Will Kymlicka in his book “*Multicultural Citizenship*”.

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