

The Bulgarian-Yugoslav Dispute over the Macedonian Question as a Reflection of the Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy (1968–1980)

Abstract: During the Cold War, relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were marred by the Macedonian Question. Bulgaria challenged the historical roots of the Macedonian nation, whereas Yugoslavia insisted that Bulgaria should recognise the rights of the Macedonian minority within her borders. The Soviet Union capitalised on its influence over Bulgaria to impair Yugoslavia's international position. Bulgaria launched an anti-Yugoslav campaign questioning not only the Yugoslav approach to Socialism, but also the Yugoslav solution of the Macedonian Question. This antipathy became evident in 1968, in the wake of the events in Czechoslovakia. In the years 1978/9 the developments in Indochina gave a new impetus to the old Bulgarian-Yugoslav conflict.

Keywords: Macedonian Question, Brezhnev's doctrine, Macedonian minorities, Soviet-Yugoslav relations, Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, Zhivkov, Tito, Gromyko, Dragoicheva, Indochina

When Benedict Anderson decided to deal with matters of nationalism and to write his book *Imagined Communities*, he was astonished by the developments in Indochina in 1978/9, the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia, the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime, and China's subsequent limited invasion of Vietnam. The main question he was facing consisted in determining how Communist countries could dispute the questions of nationalism, identity and national borders, and the "onerous legacy" of capitalism. However, Anderson did not notice that another conflict of a similar nature was affecting the intra-Balkan relations at the same time. It was the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over the Macedonian Question which had been reopened ten years earlier and reached its peak in 1978/9.¹

¹ For the Yugoslav solution of the Macedonian Question with intra-Balkan implications, see Stephen E. Palmer Jr. & Robert R. King, *Yugoslav Communism and the Macedonian Question* (Hamden, CT: The Shoe String Press, Inc. Archon Books, 1971). The Bulgarian army of occupation was hailed in the Serbian part of Macedonia in April 1941 as an army of liberation, and during the first stage of occupation pro-Bulgarian feeling ran high. There was no Communist Party of Macedonia, because the Yugoslav Communist Party's decision of 1934 to form one had been impossible to carry out. The local Communists, under Metodija Satorov broke away from the Yugoslav Communist Party and joined the Bulgarian Workers' Party. There was little support for Tito's resistance movement in Yugoslav Macedonia. The Communist Party of Macedonia was formed by

From 1948 to 1962 the Bulgarian Communist Party tried to balance the ideological components of Macedonism with Bulgarian state interests, but unsuccessfully.² It did not deny the process of configuration of a new Slav identity in the People's Republic of Macedonia within the framework of Yugoslav Federation from 1944 onwards, but it called its historical roots into question. According to the Bulgarian thesis, the Slav population in Yugoslav Macedonia cut off the umbilical cord with the Bulgarians due to the political developments in the Balkans after the First and Second World Wars and tied its fate to the Yugoslav peoples. The new Macedonian nation should not have been built upon an anti-Bulgarian basis. The Slav population in the Bulgarian part of Macedonia was an integral part of the Bulgarian nation, since it had been included in the Bulgarian state after the Balkan Wars and did not share the experience of the Bulgarians in Yugoslav Macedonia. Thus, according to the Bulgarian thesis, Yugoslavia's demand for the recognition of a Macedonian minority by the Bulgarian authorities was unfounded.

Tito's envoy to Yugoslav Macedonia, Svetozar Vukmanović aka Tempo, in March 1943. But Bulgarian administration proved to be unsuccessful and caused discontent. After Italy capitulated (September 1943) and it became obvious that Germany and Bulgaria would be defeated, there was armed resistance. The Yugoslav Communist Party pushed for the Communist International's earlier notion of a separate Macedonian nation and the formation of a united Macedonia (comprising the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian parts) within a Yugoslav federation. The first session of the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) announced, on 2 August 1944, the establishment of the People's Republic of Macedonia as a Macedonian Piedmont. After the creation of the state, a nation-building process was inaugurated for the configuration of a Macedonian identity (applicable only to Slavs), mainly on an anti-Bulgarian basis. Yugoslavia's expansionist intentions in the name of Macedonism were blatantly apparent in her plans for the creation of a South-Slav federation or in its embroilment in the Greek Civil War. After Tito's rupture with the Cominform in June 1948, the Yugoslav leadership abandoned its plans for a conclusive solution of the Macedonian Question and concentrated on the cultivation and consolidation of the new national identity of the Slav population of Yugoslav Macedonia and on stamping out rival influences. At the same time, the Yugoslav leaders were raising the issue of respect for the rights of putative Macedonian minorities in the neighbouring countries.

² For general information, see Spyridon Sfetis, *Το Μακεδονικό και η Βουλγαρία. Πλήρη τα απόρρητα βουλγαρικά έγγραφα 1950-1967* [The Macedonian Question and Bulgaria. Classified Bulgarian documents 1950-1967] (Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies - Bulgarian State Archives, 2009). Iva Burilkova & Tsocho Biliarski, eds., *Makedonskiat Vupros v bulgaro-iugoslavskite otnosheniia 1950-1967 g. Dokumentalen sbornik* [The Macedonian Question in Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations 1950-1967. A collection of documents] (Sofia: State Archives Agency. "Archives are speaking", 2010). Djoko Tripković, "Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi 50-ih i 60-ih godina 20.veka", *Tokovi istorije* 1-2 (2009), 84-106.

Nevertheless, Bulgaria's policy on the Macedonian Question was contingent on the developments in relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The Soviet historical and linguistic science accepted Macedonism as a new parameter in Balkan politics. The Communist International had propagated the notion of an explicit Macedonian nation in 1934; the theoretical argumentation for the existence of a Macedonian nation in the 1930s had been based on Stalin's concept of nation,³ and on his thesis that ethnic groups could become Socialist nations by achieving statehood and developing their culture in a Socialist society. Of course, there is no historical evidence for the existence of the Macedonian nation. In fact, the political notion of Macedonism neutralised the old Serbian-Bulgarian antagonism over the identity of the Slavs in Macedonia and offered a new alternative for the settlement of the Macedonian Question, patterned after the Soviet model for the Belarusian or the Moldavian nation.

Irrespective of historical or political dimensions of Macedonism, the Soviet Union instrumentalised the Macedonian Question in the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute, according to its interests, playing one side against the other. After Stalin's breach with Tito (1948), the Soviet Union tolerated Bulgaria's campaign against the Yugoslav leader, who was branded by Sofia as "traitor of the interests of the Macedonian people, enslaved to Tito's clique and Western imperialists". The Bulgarian Communist Party portrayed the Bulgarian part of Macedonia as the only liberated part of Macedonia, stressed the affinity and historical bonds between Bulgarians and Macedonians and called upon the Macedonians in Yugoslav Macedonia to rise up against Tito. When the process of normalisation of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations began in 1955–56, Bulgaria was compelled to get accustomed to the new situation, and it watered down its campaign against Yugoslavia. Under Yugoslav pressure, it gave signs of its willingness to recognise a Macedonian minority, as it had in 1946–47. The census of 1956 showed that more than 180,000 people in the Bulgarian part of Macedonia declared themselves as Macedonians. Even if Bulgaria did not see the Macedonians as a national minority, but rather as a cultural group closely linked to the Bulgarian people, the simple fact that Macedonians were mentioned in Bulgarian statistics gave Yugoslavia the justification to demand that their rights be respected. Had Bulgaria officially recognised a Macedonian minority within her borders, she would in fact have accepted the thesis of the existence of a Macedonian nation as a historical entity, since minorities were regarded as integral part of nations in the Balkans. Besides, Bulgaria feared Yugoslavia's

³ See Spyridon Sfetas, *Η διαμόρφωση της Σλαβομακεδονικής ταυτότητας. Μια επώδυνη διαδικασία* [The configuration of Slavo-Macedonian identity. A painful process] (Thessaloniki: Vaniat, 2003), 91–138.

territorial claims in the name of Macedonism. The fear of territorial expansionism was not without a precedent, given the events of 1944–48.

In 1956–58 a new friction marred Soviet-Yugoslav relations, mainly because of the Hungarian issue. But Soviet-Yugoslav relations entered a new phase of improvement because of Yugoslavia's determination to support Soviet positions on international issues. Showing flexibility, Tito endorsed the Soviet position on the German issue and condemned China's adventurism and the American spy war against the Soviet Union. Thus, another noticeable rapprochement between Belgrade and Moscow took place in 1961–62.⁴

When Todor Zhivkov, First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, took office as Prime Minister in 1962 and consolidated his positions, he decided to carve out a clear policy on the Macedonian Question, no matter what Yugoslav-Soviet relations were or would be like in the future. Under Zhivkov's prodding in March 1963, the Plenum of the Bulgarian Communist Party elaborated some theses that would serve as a basis of the Bulgarian policy on the Macedonian Question, irrespective of the state of Soviet-Yugoslav relations: 1) There is no Macedonian nation as a historical entity. 2) The falsification of Bulgaria's history by the historians in Skopje and the creation of the Macedonian nation on an anti-Bulgarian basis are unacceptable. 3) There is no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. 4) A Macedonian national awareness is being built in the People's Republic of Macedonia, but it is due to political conditions that favoured the mutation of the Bulgarians into Macedonians.⁵ According to Zhivkov, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had not been informed about Bulgaria's decision to raise this question at the Bulgarian Communist Party's Plenum.⁶

These tenets were the cornerstone of Bulgaria's policy on the Macedonian Question in Zhivkov's era. Moreover, the Bulgarian leader raised the question of those Bulgarians in Yugoslav Macedonia who opposed Macedonism; i.e. he hinted at the existence of a Bulgarian minority as a counterbalance to the supposed Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. Since Soviet-Yugoslav relations were noticeably improved, both Sofia and Belgrade decided to avoid discussing the Macedonian Question at official bi-

⁴ See Djoko Tripković, "Poboljšanje jugoslovensko-sovjetskih odnosa 1961/62. godine", *Tokovi istorije* 3-4 (2008), 76–97. For some aspects of Yugoslavia's foreign policy in the Cold War until 1961, see *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, ed. Aleksandar Životić (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2010), and Vojislav G. Pavlović, ed., *The Balkans in the Cold War. Balkan Federations, Cominform, Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2011).

⁵ See Sfetas, *To Μακεδονικό και η Βουλγαρία*, 102–128.

⁶ See Todor Zhivkov, *Memoari* (Sofia: Siv Ad, 1997), 455.

lateral meetings. It was historians' task to investigate the historical aspects of the Macedonian Question and the roots of the Macedonian nation. This was confirmed during the meeting between Todor Zhivkov and Krste Crvenkovski, President of the League of Communists of Yugoslav Macedonia (May 1967, in Sofia), and between Tito and Zhivkov (June 1967, in Belgrade) as well.⁷

In the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War (June 1967) Yugoslavia behaved as if she were a member of the Warsaw Pact. Tito gave permission to Soviet airplanes to fly over Yugoslavia's airspace to provide military assistance to Arabs, and to use Yugoslavia's military airports to refuel. Like the other socialist countries, Yugoslavia broke diplomatic relations with Israel.⁸

However, after Alexander Ranković's removal from power (July 1966), a decentralisation process was in full swing in Yugoslavia. The Federal Republics were granted more autonomy, which resulted in the resurgence of nationalism with ethnic and economic undertones.⁹ In Croatia, the movement known as the "Croatian Spring" occurred.¹⁰ In Yugoslav Macedonia, an "Autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church" was established by the Communist authorities in July 1967. Undoubtedly, it was a political move and served the nation-building process. (The Macedonian Orthodox Church has not been recognised by the other Orthodox Churches till this day.¹¹) The same year the foundations of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts were laid. Although Bulgaria did not protest strongly in 1967 due to Yugoslavia's pro-Soviet attitude towards the developments in the Middle East, it was keeping track of the new developments in Yugoslav Macedonia and decided to give a cultural response. In December 1967 the Politburo of the Bulgarian Communist Party worked out some theses on the

⁷ See Veselin Angelov, "Dokumenti. Makedonskiiat vupros v bulgaro-iugoslavskite otnosheniia spored provedeni razgovori i razmeni poslaniia mezhdu Todor Zhivkov i Josip Broz Tito (1965-1973 g)", *Izvestiia na Durzhavnite Arkhivi* 87(2004), 83.

⁸ See Dragan Bogetić, "Približavanje socijalističkom lageru tokom arapsko-izraelskog rata 1967. godine", *Tokovi istorije* 3-4 (2008), 89-116.

⁹ On the internal situation in Yugoslavia, see Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988*, vol. 3 *Socijalistička Jugoslavija 1945-1988* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988), 388-417.

¹⁰ See Ludwig Steindorff, "Der Kroatische Frühling. Eine soziale Bewegung in einer sozialistischen Gesellschaft", in Jürgen Elvert, ed., *Der Balkan. Eine europäische Kriegsregion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), 197-210.

¹¹ On this subject, see Charalambos K. Papastathis, "L'autocéphalie de l'église de la Macédoine yougoslave", *Balkan Studies* 8 (1967), 151-154.

patriotic upbringing of the Bulgarian youth.¹² An essential element of the new national doctrine was the proclamation of the Third of March and the Second of August as Days of National Celebration, the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano (3 March 1878) and the anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising (2 August 1903) respectively. Both events were associated with Macedonia. According to the Bulgarian interpretation, under the Treaty of San Stefano Bulgaria's ethnic borders coincided with its state borders. The revision of this Treaty at the Congress of Berlin (13 June – 13 July 1878) had been a historic injustice since the Bulgarians in Macedonia had been abandoned to the Ottoman yoke.¹³ The Ilinden Uprising was also claimed as a Bulgarian historical legacy. The manifestations in Bulgaria on the occasion of the Third of March were branded in Belgrade and Skopje as “a revival of Greater-Bulgarian chauvinism” and as an expression of its territorial claims on Yugoslav Macedonia. In February 1968, Radio Sofia ceased broadcasting in the Macedonian language which, according to the Bulgarian interpretation, was a Bulgarian dialect. The events in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 shrouded the Bulgarian-Yugoslav conflict over Macedonia with ideological and political terms.¹⁴

Bulgaria participated in the Warsaw Pact's intervention in Czechoslovakia to put an end to Alexander Dubček's open-minded policy for socialism with a human face. In contrast, Yugoslavia and Romania supported Dubček's reforms and condemned the Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia.¹⁵ It was a matter of principle for both countries to speak out against foreign intervention. The Warsaw Pact's ruthless attitude towards Czechoslovakia caused alarm in Yugoslavia. Tito ordered partial military mobilisation and Yugoslav troops were on alert. When, in September 1968,

¹² Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia, hereafter AJ], Kabinet Predsednika Republike [Office of the President of the Republic, hereafter KPR], fond 837/1-3-a/14-17: Information on the state of Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 May 1969, p. 73.

¹³ See “Das Mazedonien Problem-neu gestellt?”, *Wissenschaftlicher Dienst Südosteuropa* 12/3 (1968), 34.

¹⁴ For general information on the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over the Macedonian Question after 1967, see Spyridon Sfetas, *Ο Ακήρυκτος Πόλεμος για το Μακεδονικό. Βουλγαρία-Γιουγκοσλαβία 1968-1989* [The undeclared war on Macedonia. Bulgaria-Yugoslavia 1968-1989] (Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies & Bulgarian States Archives, 2010). See also, Stojan Germanov, *Makedonskiiat vupros 1944-1989. Vuznikvane, evoliutsiia, suvremennost* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchen institut, 2012), 169-250. For a still useful old monograph, see Stefan Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse um Makedonien 1967-1982* (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 1983).

¹⁵ For Yugoslavia's reaction, see Djoko Tripković, “Medjunarodni položaj Jugoslavije i vojna intervencija u Čehoslovačkoj 1968”, *Istorija 20. veka* 1 (2008), 115-130.

Leonid Brezhnev announced his doctrine of the limited sovereignty of socialist countries and the irreversibility of socialism, the Yugoslav government drew up a law on general people's resistance and guerrilla war in case of the Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia.¹⁶ The bill was passed in Parliament in November 1968, and Yugoslavia accused the Soviet Union of hegemony.

Under these circumstances, Bulgaria embarked on a large-scale anti-Yugoslav propaganda campaign, placing the Macedonian Question at its centre. Articles in the Bulgarian press on the Bulgarian army's great contribution to the liberation of Serbia and Yugoslav Macedonia in 1944 caused consternation in Belgrade. The Yugoslav leadership was aware that the Soviet army had liberated Belgrade and parts of Serbia in October 1944. During his hasty visit to Moscow in September 1944, Tito had asked Stalin and Molotov for military aid,¹⁷ since the Yugoslav partisans were unable to defeat the well-equipped German forces in Serbia, where the royalist chetniks of Draža Mihailović had influence. Stalin had granted Tito's request in order to gain ground in the new Yugoslavia, but he insisted that the Bulgarian army, already under Soviet control, should participate in the military operations in a bid to free this army of the stigma of being a fascist army. Indeed, the Soviets contributed heavily to Belgrade's liberation in October 1944, and Bulgarians, though undesirable for the Yugoslav partisans, fought in the battles for the liberation Skopje in November 1944. According to the Yugoslav interpretation, by raising these old issues Bulgaria aimed to write off the atrocities that Bulgarian troops had committed in occupied Yugoslavia. In the light of Brezhnev's doctrine, she wanted to pave the way for military intervention in Yugoslavia to wrest Macedonia away from the Yugoslav federation on the pretext of saving socialism from deviations, Yugoslavia's non-aligned foreign policy and self-management socialism being alien to the Soviet Union.

In November 1968, the Institute for History of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences issued a historical-political essay on the Macedonian Question. It recycled the well-known Bulgarian positions: 1) that two-thirds of the population of Vardar-Macedonia are of Bulgarian ethnic origin, and subjected to a policy of national mutation for the sake of one artificial Macedonism at all levels; 2) that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia

¹⁶ See Mile Bjelajac, *Diplomatija i vojska. Srbija i Jugoslavija 1901-1999* (Belgrade: Medija Centar "Odbrana" & Akademija za diplomatiju i bezbednost, 2010), 241-250.

¹⁷ See Nikola Popović, "Prvi Titov susret sa Staljinom", in *Oslobodjenje Beograda*, ed. Aleksandar Životić (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2010), 147-158, and in the same volume: Momčilo Mitrović, "Beograd 20. oktobra 1944. godine", 159-167; cf. also Georgi Daskalov, "Sporazumenieto v Kraiova ot 5 oktombri 1948 g.", *Istoričeski pregled* 6 (1980), 62-74.

adopted the thesis of the Serbian bourgeoisie that the Macedonian Slavs are a separate nation, abandoning its former and correct position, which is a United and Independent Macedonia of the Macedonian people, i.e. all nationalities living in Macedonia; 3) Bulgarian historians admitted the mistakes the Bulgarian Communists made in 1944–48 when they, acting under pressure, instructed the population in Pirin Macedonia to declare themselves as Macedonians during the census of 1946, thus enforcing upon them a type of cultural autonomy. The Bulgarian Communist Party corrected the mistakes. During the census in 1965 everybody in Pirin Macedonia had the right of self-determination, but very few people declared themselves as Macedonians.¹⁸

The conclusion was quite striking. It sent a political message as part of the psychological war Bulgaria waged against Yugoslavia.

The Bulgarian Communist Party regards the Macedonian Question as an onerous legacy of the past, as a result of the machinations of the Imperialist Powers. But nowadays the crucial question affecting the relations between the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of Bulgaria is not the Macedonian Question, but their cooperation in building Socialism. It is necessary to work on the consolidation of friendship between the peoples of our countries, on the unity of all Balkan Socialist countries, it is necessary to approach the Soviet-Union. On this depends our success on the way to progress, to peace, to democracy, to socialism, on this depends the containment of NATO's and international imperialism's plans in the Balkans.¹⁹

Capitalising on the tension in Soviet-Yugoslav relations, Bulgaria, as an active member of the Warsaw Pact, highlighted her own role in defending the interests of the socialist camp in the Balkans and the Middle East. In a Bulgarian military review Bulgaria's role was commented as follows:

The Warsaw Pact is a guarantee of the preservation of the achievements of the socialist countries. Their armies, with the invincible Soviet army, are a gigantic power against imperialism. They prevent imperialism from stirring up a new, third world war. The Bulgarian People's Army, as one of the Warsaw Pact member countries, defends the interests of socialism in the Balkans and in the Middle East, fulfilling her mission, national as well as international...²⁰

¹⁸ *Istoriko-politicheska spravka po Makedonskiiat Vupros* (Sofia: Institut za istoriia pri BAN, 1968), 1–26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 32.

²⁰ See Velko Palin, "Vissh printsip v stroitelstvo na BNA", *Armeiski komunist* 23/9 (1969), 14.

On 2 August 1969 in Skopje, Tito, speaking in Parliament, characterised Bulgaria's refusal to recognise the Macedonian nation as a continuation of her old policy and sent a stern warning that "every attack on the Macedonian people is an attack on all Yugoslav peoples. Every attack on the Socialist Republic of Macedonia is an immediate attack on the Socialist Yugoslavia as a whole".²¹

Tito's reference to Soviet hegemony, even after the "normalisation" of the situation in Czechoslovakia, provoked Soviet reactions. In September 1969 Andrei Gromyko visited Belgrade to clear up the misunderstanding. Speaking to the Soviet foreign minister, Tito condemned the Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia and pointed out that the crisis in that country should have been settled by political means. Gromyko replied that the Soviet leadership had thought of a political solution in Czechoslovakia, but opted for a different one after anti-Soviet protests.²² Tito did not fail to mention the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over the Macedonian Question, criticising Bulgaria's negation of the Macedonian nation and the claims expressed in the Bulgarian press that Bulgaria had put up resistance to fascism as early as 1941 and that the Bulgarian army had liberated Yugoslavia.²³ Gromyko replied that the Soviet Union was following the Bulgarian-Yugoslav controversy over Macedonia, but did not want to interfere in their bilateral relations. At any rate, the Soviet foreign minister stressed that the polemic between two socialist countries did not serve the interests of socialism.²⁴

Gromyko's visit to Belgrade did not improve Soviet-Yugoslav relations, since Tito was still suspicious about Moscow's plans regarding Yugoslavia. Following Gromyko's visit to Yugoslavia, Ivan Bashev, Bulgarian foreign minister, came to Yugoslavia in December 1969 at the invitation of the Yugoslav foreign minister, Mirko Tepavac. He was received by Tito on 12 December. Yugoslavia's leader made it clear to Bashev that the Macedonian nation existed, that it had proved its existence in the resistance against fascism and in the creation of socialism. He saw a political expediency behind the articles in the Bulgarian press about the alleged contribution of the Bulgarian army to Yugoslavia's liberation. Bulgaria tried to play down

²¹ See J. B. Tito "Preku osloboditelna borba i socijalistička revolucija makedonskiot narod izrazuvaže vo slobodna nacija", *Glasnik na Institutot za nacionalna istorija* 13/3(1969), 10.

²² AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3a/101-113: Note on the talks between Tito and the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko in Brioni 4 Sept. 1969.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Yugoslavia's resistance, Tito concluded.²⁵ Bashev replied that Bulgaria did not intend to underestimate Yugoslavia's resistance against fascism; on the contrary, she highly appreciated the common Bulgarian-Yugoslav struggle against fascism, but many publications in Yugoslavia failed to draw a clear distinction between the Bulgarian fascist government and the Bulgarian people. As for the Macedonian Question, he referred to the oral agreement, reached by Tito and Zhivkov in 1967, that the Macedonian Question should not affect bilateral relations, and stressed the need for a new meeting between the two leaders.²⁶

Negotiations between Bashev and Tepavac did not yield any results. Bulgaria was not interested in improving her relations with Yugoslavia as long as Soviet-Yugoslav relations were stalled. The proposal Zhivkov made to Tito in the following period with the view to bypassing the Macedonian Question was as follows: Bulgaria was to accept that the Macedonians in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia had already shaped their national identity, and Yugoslavia was to give up any claim to the Bulgarian part of Macedonia, and to stop raising the question of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.²⁷ But Yugoslavia rejected this deal. Even if Bulgaria accepted that the Slavic population in Yugoslav Macedonia had developed a national identity after 1944, the Bulgarian historical science contested the historical dimension of the Macedonian nation. The burning question was that history intertwined with politics. On the other hand, the Macedonian minority was perceived in Yugoslavia as an integral part of the Macedonian nation and, therefore, Yugoslav authorities could not help broaching this matter.

To counterbalance the potential Soviet threat, Tito boosted Yugoslavia's relations with the US and China. Soviet-Chinese relations were particularly tense in 1969–70, and not only for ideological, but also for territorial reasons. The US was already on track to normalise relations with China.²⁸ In August 1970, Chinese-Yugoslav diplomatic relations were elevated to the ambassadorial level. In September 1970, US President Richard Nixon visited Yugoslavia. It was the first ever visit of a president of the United States to Yugoslavia. Tito and Nixon discussed international questions, focusing

²⁵ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3-a/14-17: Note on the talks between President Tito and the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Bashev, 12 Dec. 1969.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3-1-a/14-18: Foreign Affairs Group. Reminder. Audience of the Ambassador of PR Bulgaria with Comrade President. Ambassador bringing the reply of the Prime Minister and First Secretary of the CPB CC Todor Zhivkov to Comrade President's letter of 10 Dec. 1970, Brioni, 22 Dec. 1970.

²⁸ See Yafeng Xia, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969 – February 1972", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8/4 (2006), 3–28.

particularly on the Middle East after Nasser's death, and on China. Tito reiterated the well-known Yugoslav position on the settlement of the Palestinian issue (Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories, the creation of a Palestinian state, but also recognition of Israel by Arabs), and expressed dissatisfaction with the presence of the American 6th Fleet as well as the Soviet fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁹ At a personal meeting with Nixon, Tito called on the American President to boost American-Chinese relations and to help China overcome her isolation and become a member of the United Nations, but not to the detriment of the Soviet Union.³⁰ With the support of the non-aligned countries, China became a member of the General Assembly of the United Nations and a Permanent Member of the Security Council in October 1971. The American-Chinese rapprochement brought about the resumption of Greek-Albanian and Greek-Chinese diplomatic relations as well. Greece and Albania had been in a state of war since 1940. In view of Brezhnev's doctrine, the Greek military regime did not rule out Soviet intervention in Albania after her formal withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. In case of the Eastern European countries' invasion of Yugoslavia by land and air, and the simultaneous naval operations of the Soviet fleet on the Albanian coast, Greece's security would be in jeopardy. In that case, the Albanian communist government expected that Greece, under the pretext of protecting the Greek minority in North Epirus, could invade south Albania to safeguard strategic positions.³¹ Early in 1971, Greece and Albania started covert negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations, which resulted in the restoration of Greek-Albanian diplomatic relations on the ambassadorial level in May 1971. However, the state of war was not lifted, and neither were the rights of the Greek minority recognised in a special Greek-Albanian treaty. Security reasons overrode the outstanding bilateral questions. In fact, Greece renounced any territorial claims to Albania and believed that the new situation would benefit the Greek minority. Complying with the American policy, Greece established diplomatic relations with China in June 1972. Greece also gave the right to the American Sixth Fleet to harbour permanently in Greek ports in the Aegean. Greece's Balkan policy served NATO's interests and had a clear-cut anti-Soviet connotation. Albania stood on its Yugoslav positions

²⁹ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3-a: Note on the talks of the President of the Republic with US President Richard Nixon on 1 Oct. 1970 in Belgrade.

³⁰ Ibid. For Nixon's visit to Yugoslavia in general, see Dragan Bogetić, "Niksonova poseta Jugoslaviji 1970 – novi američki prilaz politici i pokretu nesvrstanih", *Arhiv* 8/1-2 (2007), 165–178.

³¹ Bekir Meta, *Shqipëria dhe Grecia. Paqja e vështirë* [Albania and Greece. The uneasy peace] (Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese Koçi, 2004), 217–218.

regarding the Macedonian Question. No wonder that Bulgaria saw China's international role as a threat to Soviet interests in the Balkans.³² Albania was China's outpost in the Balkans. The Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha, had inaugurated an "egalitarian cultural revolution", taking his cue from Mao's China.³³ However, due to the distance between Albania and China, Peking was not bound by any military agreement to defend Albania in case of an emergency.

Brezhnev, realising that Yugoslavia's pro-western orientation could endanger Soviet interests, rushed to Belgrade in September 1971, in a bid to come to terms with Tito. He made it clear to Tito that the so-called Brezhnev's doctrine was not applicable to the Yugoslav case, and proposed a Soviet-Yugoslav treaty of friendship without insisting on Yugoslavia's membership in the Warsaw Pact. Tito turned down Brezhnev's proposal, arguing that friendship should be proven in practice.³⁴ He did not fail to mention the Macedonian Question. He drew Brezhnev's attention to the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute on the Macedonian Question, pointing out that Bulgaria's negation of the Macedonian nation was pointless.³⁵ Brezhnev's visit brought no results. Yugoslavia's leader did not rule out the possibility that the Soviet Union could exploit Yugoslavia's internal crisis in 1971 ("Croatian Spring" had reached its peak, and, in general, the Federal Republics were heading for decentralisation and liberalism; the Croatian emigration was active in its anti-Yugoslav, anti-communist policy). On the eve of Brezhnev's visit to Yugoslavia, military manoeuvres conducted in Eastern Europe were a cause of concern in Yugoslavia. In October 1971, Tito visited the United States. In his meeting with Nixon he discussed international matters, such as relations between India and Pakistan, the Middle Eastern situation, Vietnam, China etc. Regarding Soviet-Yugoslav relations, Tito stressed that Yugoslavia's independent policy was a thorn in the Soviet side, but, little by little, the Soviets were coming to adjust themselves to change, without, however, allowing the members of the Warsaw Pact to leave their orbit.³⁶

³² Ivan Bashev, *Politik, durzhavnik, diplomat*, eds. S. Bakish et al. (Sofia: Universitetsko izd. Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 2009), 147-149.

³³ Valentina Duka, *Histori e Shqipërisë 1912-2000* [History of Albania 1912-2000] (Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese "Kristalina-KH", 2007), 281-287.

³⁴ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3-a/14-18: Speech of President Tito at the meeting of the Executive Bureau of the LCY Presidency of 3 Oct. in Brioni.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Memorandum for the President's files, Washington, 30 Oct. 1971. Subject: Meeting between President Nixon and President Tito, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], 1969-1976. Vol. XXIX. *Eastern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean 1969-1972*, eds. J. E. Miller et al. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2007),

Although Soviet-Yugoslav relations were still stalled, Brezhnev's visit to Yugoslavia, if unsuccessful, indicated Moscow's willingness to improve the situation. The main reason was Yugoslavia's increasing role in the Middle East and in the non-aligned movement. After Nehru's and Nasser's death, Tito became the only leader of the non-aligned movement. Besides, the situation in the Middle East was deteriorating after the "Black September" of 1970. The Soviet Union's naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean became more impressive. The Soviets needed Yugoslavia's airspace to assure the provision of military supplies to Arabs in case of a new war in the Middle East. After Belgrade, Brezhnev visited Sofia in late September 1971, where he drew Zhivkov's attention to Yugoslavia's pivotal role in the non-aligned movement and the fact that it sided with the Soviet Union in the common struggle against imperialism and colonialism.³⁷ He hoped that the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia would establish closer relations in view of the preparations for the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.³⁸ For obvious reasons, Yugoslavia supported the Soviet initiative to discuss security and co-operation issues within the framework of an international conference. For the Soviets, it was an opportunity to allay Western suspicions about Brezhnev's doctrine. But in his meeting with Zhivkov, the Soviet leader did not refer to Tito's scathing criticism of Bulgaria regarding the Macedonian Question. Seeking to bridge the gap between Moscow and Belgrade, Brezhnev obviously did not want to stir up new troubles in relations between Sofia and Belgrade. Even so, Brezhnev's visit to Yugoslavia had an impact on Bulgaria. In late 1971, Bulgaria's public anti-Yugoslav campaign gradually subsided, but the Bulgarian leadership persisted in its stance on the Macedonian minority. When Stane Dolanc visited Bulgaria in February 1973, Todor Zhivkov reiterated the well-known rigid Bulgarian theses, without showing any sign of flexibility.³⁹

Marshal Tito, taking into account the global economic crisis in 1972–73, avoided pushing Soviet-Yugoslav relations to the edge. The convertibil-

593. For Tito's visit to the United States in general, see Dragan Bogetić, "Razgovori Tito-Nikson 1971 – politička implikacija Vašingtonske deklaracije", *Istorija 20. veka* 29/2 (2011), 159–172.

³⁷ Tsentralen Durzhaven Arkhiv [Central State Archives, hereafter CDA], fond 1B, opis 60, arkhivna edinica 83: Meeting between Dr. Todor Zhivkov – First Secretary of the CPB CC and Dr. Leonid Brezhnev – Secretary General of the SUCP CC, Sofia, 27/9/1971.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ CDA, f. 1B, op. 60, a.e. 106: Talks between Dr. Todor Zhivkov, First Secretary of the CPB CC, and Dr. Stane Dolanc, Secretary of the Executive Bureau of the LCY Presidency, 20 Feb. 1973.

ity of the dollar to gold had underlain the international monetary system since the Breton Woods Agreement of 1944. After the US government suspended the convertibility of the dollar to gold in 1971, there ensued a wave of competitive devaluations, which contributed to inflation in many European countries. The international oil crisis in 1973 forced Tito to show more flexibility, since the Soviet Union was Yugoslavia's basic trade partner. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, Arab states failed to boycott some countries that were seen as supporters of Israel, but succeeded in pushing up the price of oil. In the last three months of 1973, the oil price quadrupled. The oil price rises had severe effects on the countries that had few internal sources of energy. Besides, Tito had smashed the "Croatian Spring" by late 1971. In 1972, the liberal opposition in Yugoslavia was totally defeated. Yugoslavia overcame its internal crisis, but only temporarily, since the main cause of the crisis was the chronic, simmering national question under the guise of decentralisation. When Tito visited Moscow in June 1972, the focus of his talks with Brezhnev was on economic matters.⁴⁰

Sensing an incipient thawing in relations between Belgrade and Moscow, Bulgaria decided to tighten its political, economic and cultural bonds with the Soviet Union to counterbalance a possible Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement. This spirit permeated the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party held in Sofia in July 1973. However, the Resolutions of the Plenum did not raise the question of Bulgaria's union with the Soviet Union.⁴¹

In the aftermath of the July Plenum, Brezhnev visited Bulgaria again in September 1973. In a private meeting at the "Voden" residence, Zhivkov and Brezhnev discussed many issues concerning bilateral relations and Bulgaria's Balkan policy.⁴² In this context, Zhivkov's aggressiveness against Yugoslavia and Tito seemed striking. The Bulgarian leader accused Yugoslavia of laying territorial claims to Bulgaria after the Second World War. He described the Bulgarian-Yugoslav negotiations about a South-Slav federation, conducted in 1944-48, as an attempt by Yugoslavia to swallow Bulgaria, since the federation was not planned on the principle of equality. Even

⁴⁰ AJ, KPR, f. I-2/53: Steno notes of the talks between SFRY President Josip Broz Tito and CPSU CC Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev of 6 June 1972 at 11 a.m. at Kremlin.

⁴¹ CDA, f. IB, op. 58, a.e. 81: Steno notes from the plenary session of the CPB CC, 17-19 July 1973. In 1963, Zhivkov had suggested to the Soviet Union that Bulgaria should become a Soviet Republic. See Iskra Baeva, *Bulgaria i Iztochna Evropa* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), 111-117.

⁴² CDA, f. IB, op. 58, a.e. 90: Talks of Dr. Todor Zhivkov and Dr. Leonid Brezhnev at the government residence "Voden", 20/9/1973.

Georgi Dimitrov had been unable to see through Yugoslavia's game; he had granted cultural autonomy to the Bulgarians in the Pirin region to convert them to Macedonians and allowed agents from Skopje to launch nationalistic agitation there, Zhivkov stressed. It was Stalin who had thwarted Tito's plans and saved Bulgaria from sinking into the Yugoslav federation under unfavourable conditions, he concluded. Switching to the issue of Yugoslavia's present Balkan policy, Zhivkov underscored that she tried to undermine Soviet policy and to force some countries to join the non-aligned movement.⁴³

In the light of the developments in 1973, it is not difficult to understand the reasons that motivated the Bulgarian leader to launch this onslaught against Yugoslavia. Given the improvement of relations between Moscow and Belgrade, and Yugoslavia's increasing geostrategic role in the Middle East, Zhivkov feared that Yugoslavia, now able to speak from an advantageous position, might urge the Soviet Union to exert pressure on Bulgaria to recognise the Macedonian minority. Besides, Yugoslavia intended to raise the minorities question at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki in July 1973.

Even if Brezhnev was taken aback by Zhivkov's attack on Yugoslavia, he seemed neither to agree nor disagree. At any rate, he thanked Zhivkov for providing this information and promised to update Alexei Kosygin on the situation in the Balkans pending his visit to Yugoslavia and his first meeting with Tito.⁴⁴ It is clear that Brezhnev did not give up the Soviet policy of equidistance from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in their dispute over Macedonia; i.e. to accept the Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia, like the Moldavian nation in the Soviet Union, but to deny the existence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. Moscow strenuously opposed Yugoslavia's plan to broach the question of minorities in Helsinki.

In late September 1973, the Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin visited Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Skopje. In the meeting between Kosygin and Tito on the island of Brioni, many questions were raised regarding international and bilateral relations.⁴⁵ The Soviet Union was ready to supply Yugoslavia with oil and natural gas, which was of paramount importance for Yugoslavia in view of the approaching world energy crisis. A Soviet loan for the growth of the Yugoslav industry was also announced.⁴⁶ Keeping in mind

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3-a/101-148: Note on the talks between President of the Republic Josip Broz Tito and President of the Soviet Government Alexei Kosygin of 28 Sept. 1973 in Brioni.

⁴⁶ See Milan Skakun, *Balkan i velike sile* (Belgrade: Tribina, 1982), 158.

the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over the Macedonian Question, Kosygin praised the achievements of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia during his visit to Skopje, but avoided any reference to the Macedonian people.⁴⁷

In the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, Yugoslavia gave permission to Soviet airplanes to fly over her airspace and to use her airports. During Tito's visit to the Soviet Union in November 1973, the improvement of Soviet-Yugoslav relations was noticeable. Brezhnev expressed his gratitude to Tito for Yugoslavia's attitude during the Middle East crisis and assured him of the Soviet Union's determination to boost economic cooperation with Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ In the following years the Soviet Union was the main trade partner of Yugoslavia, through the system of clearing.

As for the Macedonian Question, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia held their own respective positions. Yugoslavia kept raising the question of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, and in Greece as well. Under the new Yugoslav Constitution, which entered into force in early 1974, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was granted broader powers and was entitled to raise the Macedonian Question independently of the federal government. In fact, foreign policy was framed in the Yugoslav republics, and the federal government was only to implement it.

Zhivkov met Tito and Edvard Kardelj in Helsinki, on the occasion of the signing of the Final Act of the CSCE on 1 August 1975. The Macedonian Question was raised again. Kardelj admitted that Bulgaria had recognised the Socialist Republic of Macedonia as a state, but the crux of the matter was Bulgaria's reluctance to recognise Macedonian identity and its historical roots.⁴⁹ Zhivkov replied that Bulgaria had in fact recognised both the Macedonian state and identity, but only within Yugoslavia; she rejected Yugoslavia's claim on the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria because such a group was non-existent. Eventually, both sides agreed to set up a scientific commission to research the historical dimension of the Macedonian Question and the roots of the Macedonian nation. The two parties were to take into consideration the views and proposals of historians. Since Zhivkov had not visited Belgrade for a long time, the two foreign ministers of the two countries were to re-establish contact to prepare a summit meeting be-

⁴⁷ "Aleksij Kosygin posetio Makedoniju. Jugoslovenska ostvarenja – deo borbe za socijalizam u svetu", *Politika*, Belgrade, 27 Sept. 1973, p. 1.

⁴⁸ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-2/55: Steno notes of the talks between President of LCY and SFRY Josip Broz Tito and Secretary General of CPSU Leonid Brezhnev of 12 and 13 Nov. 1973 in Kiev.

⁴⁹ Novica Veljanovski & Jan Rihlik, eds. *Čehoslovački diplomatski dokumenti za Makedonija (1939–1975)* (Skopje: Državen arhiv na Republika Makedonija, 2008), vol. III, 460.

tween Tito and Zhivkov.⁵⁰ Judging by the past experience, this gentleman's agreement in Helsinki was not meaningful; neither side could wait for the verdict of historians to carve out its policy. Bulgaria precluded every effort of Yugoslavia to internationalise the question of the Macedonian minority after the Final Act of Helsinki under the pretext of the human rights issue. The definitive settlement of the Trieste question between Yugoslavia and Italy in November 1975 contained some terms regarding the protection of the rights of the Italian and Slovenian minorities respectively. It was a precedent for Bulgaria.

In November 1975, the Bulgarian foreign minister Petur Mladenov visited Belgrade. He suggested to his Yugoslav counterpart, Miloš Minić, that Bulgaria and Yugoslavia might sign a mutual agreement on territorial integrity, inviolability of the borders, and non-interference of one country into the internal affairs of the other.⁵¹ In January 1976, Belgrade accepted the Bulgarian proposal in principle, provided that the Parliaments of both countries issue a joint declaration on the protection of the rights of the Bulgarian minority in Serbia and of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.⁵² It was unacceptable for Bulgaria. Her initiative met with no response in Belgrade and proved to be a stillborn policy. Under Bulgaria's pressure, political and national matters were not addressed at the First Balkan Conference held at Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis's initiative in Athens in January-February 1976.

A mixed Bulgarian-Yugoslav commission set up in 1976 to tackle bilateral issues did not yield any results. The Macedonian Question overshadowed all other questions.⁵³ The Soviet Union stayed away from the dispute. Although the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs confidentially made the Soviet stance that there was no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria clear to Belgrade,⁵⁴ the Soviet Union did not exert pressure on Yugoslavia to refrain from campaigning against Bulgaria regarding the Macedonian Question. When Brezhnev visited Yugoslavia again in September 1976, his talks with

⁵⁰ Ibid. 460-461.

⁵¹ CDA, f. 1B, op. 35, a.e. 5535: Information on the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PR Bulgaria Petur Mladenov to SFR Yugoslavia on 11-13 Nov. 1975, Sofia, 17 Nov. 1975.

⁵² See the brochure prepared by the Yugoslav Tanjung Agency, *Jugoslavenski stavovi i dokumenti za odnosi so Bugarija* (Skopje, July 1978), 17-21.

⁵³ See Stojan Germanov, "Bulgaro-ugoslavskite razgovori po makedonskii vupros. Stenografski protokoli, september 1976g.," *Makedonski pregled* 2 (2007), 107-128.

⁵⁴ AJ, KPR, f. 837/1-3-a/101-148: Information on the USSR and Yugoslav-Soviet relations for the occasion of the audience of the Prime Minister of the USSR A. Kosygin with Comrade President, Brioni, 19 Sept. 1973.

the Yugoslav leadership focused only on matters of economic and military cooperation. Brezhnev distanced himself from the so-called “Cominformists”, an anti-Titoist group recently smothered by Yugoslav authorities, and raised the question of home-porting for Soviet warships in the Adriatic Sea.⁵⁵ Soviet warships should be allowed to anchor in Yugoslav harbours for the purpose of maintenance and repair. Yugoslavia made this concession. In August 1977, Tito visited the Soviet Union. The Yugoslav delegation discussed matters of economic cooperation and international relations with the Soviets; only Stane Dolanc referred briefly to Bulgaria’s negation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.⁵⁶ Since the Soviet Union pursued a balanced policy towards Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, the two countries had toned down their usual harsh language. In September 1977, on the eve of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was to be held in Belgrade in October 1977, Bulgaria warned Yugoslavia of negative consequences, should Yugoslavia capitalise on its role as the host country and raise the Macedonian Question with her terms on an international level.⁵⁷

However, the celebrations in Bulgaria in March 1978 of the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of San Stefano and their international implications made the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute flare up.

Bulgaria had celebrated the Third of March as the day of her liberation from the Ottomans with the essential support of the Russian army. The blame for the revision of the Treaty of San Stefano by the Congress of Berlin (1878) was placed on the imperialistic Western powers. In the new political circumstances, the celebrations in Bulgaria turned into a manifestation of traditional Bulgarian-Russian friendship and of the contemporary Soviet-Bulgarian alliance. In Yugoslavia, any Bulgarian reference to San Stefano was perceived as a revival of the Bulgarian dream of a Greater Bulgaria, with Macedonia as a bone of contention. Yugoslavia was not afraid of Bulgaria, but of the Soviet Union, which stood behind her as a reliable ally. In this respect, airing the Macedonian minority issue was a self-defence policy for Yugoslavia. In June 1978, the 11th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia called upon Bulgaria to respect the rights of the Macedonian

⁵⁵ AJ, f. 837, K-176, KPR I-2/101-103: Note on the talks between the President of the SFRY and President of the LCY Comrade Josip Broz Tito and Secretary General of the CPSU CC Leonid Brezhnev of 15 Nov. 1976 at Beli Dvor.

⁵⁶ AJ, f. 837/K-107/KPR I-2/140-141: Steno notes of the formal talks between the President of the SFRY and President of the LCY Josip Broz Tito and Secretary General of the CPSU CC Leonid I. Brezhnev in Moscow-Kremlin, on 17 and 18 Aug. 1977.

⁵⁷ See Veljanovski & Rihlik, eds., *Diplomatski dokumenti*, vol. IV 1976-1989 (2010), 101-106.

minority within her borders.⁵⁸ As a reaction, on 24 July 1978, the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a brochure entitled *Multilateral Development of Bulgarian-Yugoslav Relations*. It repeated the well-known Bulgarian view that there was no Macedonian nation as a historical entity and no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, that historians in Skopje distorted Bulgarian history, that Bulgaria was ready to sign an agreement with Yugoslavia on territorial integrity, inviolability of the borders and non-interference of one country into the internal affairs of the other country, leaving to historians the contentious questions.⁵⁹

Meanwhile the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute took international dimensions with China's involvement in the Balkan affairs. After the termination of the Vietnam War, China competed with the Soviet Union for influence in Indochina. In 1978 relations between the two countries were strained due to the developments in Indochina. China supported the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, whereas Vietnam relied on the Soviet Union. This antagonism was transferred to the Balkans, when China, after the total severance of relations between China and Albania in July 1978, began to pursue a Balkan policy on an anti-Soviet basis.⁶⁰ In August 1978, Hua Guofeng visited Romania and Yugoslavia to get acquainted with socialism in these countries and to improve economic relations.⁶¹ His visit to Yugoslavia took place on 21 August. On that day, ten years earlier, the Warsaw Pact had invaded Czechoslovakia. The date of the visit was not a matter of coincidence. Hua Guofeng did not fail to visit Skopje and raise the Macedonian Question. He expressed his admiration for the Macedonian people for their ancient history and glorious historical traditions, paid homage to their resistance to foreign occupations in the Second World War under Tito's leadership and praised the modern Socialist Republic of Macedonia for its achievements.⁶² Mihailo Apostolski, President of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, presented the Chinese leader with

⁵⁸ Hans-Joachim Hoppe, "Der bulgarisch-jugoslawische Streit um Makedonien", *Ost-europa-Archiv* 5 (1979), 302.

⁵⁹ *Za vsestranno razvitiè na bulgaro-ìugoslavskite otnoshenia. Deklaratsia na Ministerstvoto na Vunshnite Raboti na Narodna Republika Bulgaria*, Sofia 1978.

⁶⁰ For the causes of Albania's rupture with China, see Hysni Myzyri, ed. *Historie e Shqipërisë dhe e shqiptarëve* [History of Albania and Albanians] (Prizren: Sirint, 2001), 347-351.

⁶¹ "Eine Zwischenbilanz nach Hua Kuo-fengs Staatsbesuch in Rumänien und Jugoslawien. Chinas Präsenz in Südosteuropa", *Wissenschaftlicher Dienst Südosteuropa* 22/8-9 (1978), 203-217.

⁶² "Makedonskiot narod ima drevna istorija i slavni revolucionerni tradiciji", *Nova Makedonija*, Skopje, 25 Aug. 1978, p. 3.

a three-volume *History of the Macedonian People*. In Sofia, Hua Guofeng's Balkan tour was perceived as an attempt by China and the US to encircle Bulgaria. On the eve of Hua Guofeng's visit to Romania and Yugoslavia, Zhivkov had met Brezhnev in the Crimea. The Bulgarian leader assured Brezhnev that Bulgaria supported Vietnam materially due to China's aggressiveness. He characterised the situation in the Balkans as complicated, given the conspiracy against Bulgaria and the Soviet Union hatched by the US, NATO and China.⁶³ As for Albania after its rift with China, Zhivkov suggested that Bulgaria should win over this country in her search for allies in the Balkans against China. Obviously, Zhivkov envisaged a common Bulgarian-Albanian front against China and Yugoslavia. Albania stood up for the right of the Kosovo Albanians to have their own federal republic in Yugoslavia. Given the new circumstances, she might adopt the Bulgarian position on the Macedonian Question, Zhivkov might have calculated, since China's flirtation with Yugoslavia was one of the causes of the severance of Albanian-Chinese relations. Brezhnev shared Zhivkov's concerns about China's policy in Indochina, and in the Balkans as well, but discouraged Zhivkov from approaching Albania, unless this country sought Soviet tutelage first.⁶⁴ There were, however, no signs of Albania's willingness to forge a common Albanian-Bulgarian front as an anti-Yugoslav spearhead.

In September 1978, Bulgaria responded again by the publication of the volume *Macedonia. Documents and Material*, a collection of documents from the medieval period to the Second World War, translated into English, aiming to prove that Macedonians were Bulgarians and that there was no evidence for a Macedonian nation. When Tito, in his speech in Skopje on 6 October 1978, called upon Bulgaria and Greece to respect the rights of the Macedonian minority, Bulgaria reacted with a double-edged offer. She proposed to Belgrade that an independent foreign commission be set up to establish if there was a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, but also to inquire into the fate of the Bulgarians in Yugoslav Macedonia after the Second World War.⁶⁵ Expectedly, Yugoslavia declined the proposal as inconceivable.

The Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute was highly politicised when, in December 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia to topple the ruthless Khmer Rouge regime. China responded by invading Vietnam in February 1979. Whereas Vietnam's troops remained in Cambodia for some ten years, China's invasion was not a large-scale operation and after some days her troops

⁶³ CDA, f. I B, op. 66, a.e. 1373: Information on the friendly meeting between Todor Zhivkov and Leonid Brezhnev of 14 Avg. 1978 in the Crimea.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See Veljanovski & Rihlik, eds., *Diplomatski dokumenti*, vol. IV, 159-167.

pulled out of Vietnam. Bulgaria characterised Vietnam's military action in Cambodia as a "liberation movement" and condemned China's invasion of Vietnam; Yugoslavia, in contrast, identified both military events as aggression. Yugoslavia's flirtation with China and reluctance to draw a distinction between Vietnam's international solidarity with Cambodia and China's beligerence aroused concerns in both Sofia and in Moscow. In January 1979, Brezhnev visited Sofia to take a break for a few days, but also to discuss the situation in the Balkans and in Indochina with the Bulgarian leadership. In his meeting with Brezhnev, Zhivkov expressed his concerns over the unholy alliance of Yugoslavia, Romania, China, the United States and NATO against Bulgaria: "It is a perturbing process. It unfolds on an anti-Soviet and, more naturally, an anti-Bulgarian basis. We can already recognise their effort to isolate Bulgaria in the Balkans. Of course, they cannot do it yet, but we might become isolated at a given moment. Obviously, measures should be taken by both countries, and by the brotherly socialist countries, to reinforce our positions in the Balkans."⁶⁶ Raising the Macedonian Question from the Bulgarian point of view again was a self-defence policy for Bulgaria. During Brezhnev's stay in Sofia, Tsola Dragoicheva, a former partisan and now member of the Politburo of the Bulgarian Communist Party, published her memoirs.⁶⁷ Dragoicheva referred to the conflict between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav Communist Parties during the Second World War and afterwards. She criticised the Yugoslav Communist Party for turning the Macedonian Question into a purely Yugoslav question, working towards the unification of the entire region of Macedonia within the Yugoslav federation. In fact, she argued, a fair solution to the Macedonian Question would be a united and independent Macedonia. She stressed that the population in Vardar Macedonia had hailed Bulgarian soldiers as liberators and that the Regional Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party had joined the Bulgarian Communist Party. She rebuked the Yugoslav Communists for their territorial aspirations for the Bulgarian part of Macedonia. The political message was the following: 1) Bulgaria cannot cut her umbilical cord with Vardar Macedonia; 2) the process of the formation of the Macedonian nation is a long-term and complicated one, but it does not mean that people in Vardar Macedonia should be oblivious of their past and historical bond with Bulgaria. In other words, Dragoicheva questioned the legitimacy of

⁶⁶ CDA, f. IB, op. 60, a.e. 248: Steno protocol of the meeting of the CPB CC Politburo with Dr. Leonid Ilich Brezhnev – Secretary General of the CPSU CC and President of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, 13 Jan. 1979.

⁶⁷ Tsola Dragoicheva, "Na klasovi i internationalisticheski pozitsii", *Septemvri* 32/1 (1979), 5–80.

the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia and implied that the process of the creation of the Macedonian nation was not irreversible.

Dragoicheva's Memoirs, which were translated into foreign languages, caused outrage in Yugoslavia. The fact that Dragoicheva, in her capacity as President of the Association of Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship, presented Brezhnev with a copy of her Memoirs, was interpreted in Yugoslavia as the Soviet endorsement of Bulgarian claims. The press in Yugoslavia stigmatised Dragoicheva's Memoirs as "the most outrageous anti-Yugoslav slander surpassing all anti-Yugoslav and anti-Macedonian slanderous publications in Bulgaria after Second World War".⁶⁸

Vančo Apostolski, editor-in-chief of *Nova Makedonija*, replied to Dragoicheva in a detached academic tone. His arguments were the following: 1) the Regional Committee in Yugoslav Macedonia unwittingly broke away from the Yugoslav Communist Party and joined the Bulgarian Communist Party; it acted under the pressure of Bulgarian communists, who condemned the Bulgarian fascist government only formally; they accepted the annexation of Yugoslav Macedonia by the Bulgarian authorities; 2) the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party coincided with that of the Bulgarian fascists; Bulgarian communists in Yugoslav Macedonia did not call upon people to rise up against the Bulgarian army, arguing that there were no conditions for armed resistance; 3) the Yugoslav solution of the Macedonian question could be explained by the fact that the Macedonian people identified their fate with that of the other Yugoslav peoples; 4) in 1944-48 the Bulgarian Communist Party favoured the creation of a South-Slav federation and the solution of the Macedonian Question within its framework; it accepted that the Macedonians were a separate nation, only to change its position after Dimitrov's death.⁶⁹

In 1979, there were no available primary sources to elucidate the relationship between Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists regarding the Macedonian Question in the period of 1941-48. Nowadays, it is evident that the Bulgarian Communist Party did not dissociate itself from the official Bulgarian policy in 1941-42, that it tried to play a decisive role in resolving the Macedonian Question in 1943, rejecting the Yugoslav solution and

⁶⁸ "Bugari dokazuju 'istorijsko pravo' na teritoriju Makedonije", *Politika*, 20 Jan. 1979, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Vančo Apostolski, "Na velikobugarski nacionalistički poziciji", *Pogledi* 16/1 (1979), 5-51. Tito's special envoy to the Balkans during the Second World War, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, replied to Dragoicheva in a series of articles published in *Politika* from 16 May to 6 June 1980, under the title "Borba za Balkan" [Struggle for the Balkans]. His main thesis was that the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party regarding Macedonia was the same as that of the Bulgarian fascist regime.

propagating a free, integral and independent Macedonia, and that it operated under the pressure of the Yugoslav communists in 1944–48.⁷⁰

Contrary to Vančo Apostolski, Mihailo Apostolski, President of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and former commander of the partisan resistance movement in Yugoslav Macedonia in 1943–44, responded curtly. In an interview for the Yugoslav weekly *Nin*, he indirectly characterised the Bulgarians as a servile people carrying evil in their genes, owing their freedom to foreign powers, but believing that they originated from the ancient Thracians and were able to impose their hegemony in the Balkans.⁷¹

Yugoslavia suspected that the Soviet Union had appropriated the Bulgarian standpoint on the Macedonian Question; the Soviet Union feared that Yugoslavia might side with China in international affairs. The suspicions of the Yugoslav leadership about Soviet partiality towards Bulgaria found corroboration in the fact that the Soviet press highlighted the official declaration of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry in July 1978, and Dragoicheva's Memoirs, without even mentioning the Yugoslav position. Moreover, Dragoicheva, as President of the Association of Soviet-Bulgarian Friendship, was awarded the Order of the October Revolution. There is no doubt that the Soviet Union instrumentalised the Macedonian Question as part of its psychological war against Yugoslavia at that time.

To clear up the situation, Yugoslavia's foreign minister, Miloš Minić, visited Moscow in April 1979. He met Andrei Gromyko who did not try to hide the Soviet Union's concern over Yugoslavia's attitude towards the events in Indochina, since Yugoslavia seemed to blur the distinction between Vietnam's action in Cambodia and China's military invasion of Vietnam.⁷² Minić replied that Yugoslavia was against foreign intervention in principle. Just as Vietnam invaded Cambodia on the pretext of Pol Pot's regime being a terrorist one, he stressed, so one could invade Yugoslavia under the pretext of Tito's regime being revisionary. Yugoslavia did not approve of China's intervention in Vietnam. To appease the Soviets, Minić disclosed that Tito had urged China to withdraw troops from Vietnam. In continuation, the Yugoslav foreign minister raised the Macedonian Question, blaming Moscow for not being impartial.⁷³ Gromyko replied that the

⁷⁰ Sfetas, *H διαμόρφωση της σλαβομακεδονικής ταυτότητας*, 147–166 and 215–243.

⁷¹ "Nemam dokaze, ali tvrdim", *NIN*, Belgrade, 4 March 1979, pp. 7–8.

⁷² AJ, f. 837, KPR/1-2/75: Note on the talks between member of the LCY CC Presidency Miloš Minić and member of the CPSU CC and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the SU Andrei Gromyko held in Moscow on 23 and 24 Apr. 1979. Talks of 23 Apr. 1979.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Soviet Union would remain neutral and did not desire any deterioration of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations over the Macedonian Question, a question on which historians could differ, just as Russian historians did on the issue of the origin of the Russian people from the Normans. Minić emphasised that he was not concerned over matters of history, but of current politics. Referring to Dragoicheva's Memoirs, published at the time of Brezhnev's visit to Sofia, he elucidated that Bulgaria called into question Socialist Yugoslavia's legitimacy as a state.

Hua Guofeng's visit cannot produce a "powder keg" in the Balkans, as Bulgaria's policy towards Yugoslavia does. Until now we believed that the contentious issue is that of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, now we see that the Macedonian people is proclaimed part of the Bulgarian people, that there is no Macedonian people, that Bulgaria lays territorial claims to Yugoslavia, especially to the national territory of the Macedonian people. Moreover, we are worried about the fact that Bulgaria is a member of the Warsaw Pact, whereas Yugoslavia is a non-aligned country. Our protection is both our readiness to defend our independence, our independent and not-aligned policy, and our broad cooperation with most countries worldwide. We are not asking the Soviet Union to embrace our positions, we have to settle the dispute with Bulgaria by ourselves, but we wish the Soviet side to better understand our point of view. If we solve this problem with Bulgaria, peace and security will be consolidated in the Balkans.⁷⁴

It was the first time that Yugoslavia articulated its position to the Soviet Union in detail. In fact, Yugoslavia called upon the Soviet Union to urge Bulgaria to tone down her anti-Yugoslav polemic pending Tito's visit to Moscow.

In May 1979, Tito paid his last visit to the Soviet Union. His main goal was to assure Brezhnev that Yugoslavia's policy towards China, which was trying to exit from isolation, had no anti-Soviet motives, that it was not detrimental to Soviet interests. As for the Middle East, Tito made it clear that Yugoslavia did advocate a conclusive solution for the Palestinian Question, irrespective of the Camp-David agreements. Tito did not fail to mention the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over Macedonia. The Yugoslav leader argued that Bulgarian positions were harmful to Yugoslavia's vital interests and that they implied territorial claims. By awarding Dragoicheva the Order of the October Revolution, Tito underscored, the Soviet Union seemed to have shared the Bulgarian point of view on the Macedonian Question as articulated in her Memoirs.⁷⁵ Brezhnev replied that Dragoicheva had been

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ AJ, f. 837, KPR/1-2/75: Steno notes of the talks between the President of the Republic and President of the LCY Josip Broz Tito and Secretary General of the CPSU CC Leonid Ilich Brezhnev held on 17-18 May in Moscow, Kremlin.

awarded the Order of the October Revolution for the simple reason that she was President of the Association of Soviet-Bulgarian Friendship and reached eighty years of age.⁷⁶ Gromyko, who had already discussed the matter with Minić, reiterated that the Soviet Union remained neutral as regards the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute, and called upon both countries to settle the question without external mediation.⁷⁷

After Tito's visit to the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia ended their public polemics. In Indochina, the Soviet Union seemed to gain the upper hand. China's military operation in Vietnam was limited and only an act of retaliation, whereas Vietnamese troops stayed in Cambodia until 1987. In June 1979, Pencho Kumbadinski, a member of the Politburo of the Bulgarian Communist Party, met Minić in Belgrade. They discussed the whole complex of bilateral relations retrospectively from 1944, but failed to find common ground on the past. Both sides demonstrated their differences, and the outstanding questions were referred to a new summit meeting of Tito and Zhivkov.⁷⁸ But this meeting never took place.

In late December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Early in January 1980, Tito was hospitalised for circulation problems, with little hope of recovery. In the Balkans, the Soviet invasion was expectedly hailed only by Bulgaria. Thus, the Bulgarian government was anxious about the attitude of the other Balkan states in so far as the Afghanistan War could impair Bulgaria's relations with the neighbouring countries. The memorandum on the impact of the Afghanistan events on the Balkan states prepared by the Bulgarian ministry of foreign affairs in February 1980, paid special attention to Yugoslavia's position. It was noted that Yugoslavia spoke of Soviet "military action", not explicitly invasion, nevertheless, the Soviet Union cut across the principles of International Law regarding the state sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁷⁹ At first Yugoslavia placed the responsibility for the new crisis only on the Soviet Union, but she later also held NATO responsible, on account of its decision to install missiles in Europe. In the Bulgarian view, the most important conclusion that Belgrade drew from the Afghanistan War was the Soviet Union's determination to settle outstanding questions by force. In this respect, with Marshal Tito being in hospital, the Yugoslav mass media, the Yugoslav diplomats abroad and the Yugoslav army in the country were struck by the obsession that Yugoslavia

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ CDA, f. 1B, op. 60, a.e. 254: Talks between member of the Politburo of the CPB CC Dr. Pencho Kubadinski and member of the LCY CC Presidency Dr. Miloš Minić.

⁷⁹ CDA, f. 1B, op. 101, a.e. 346: Information on the impact of the developments in Afghanistan on the Balkans and the attitude of the other Balkan countries, 6 Feb. 1980.

would be the next victim of the Soviet invasion, that Soviet divisions were deployed along the Bulgarian-Yugoslav border. The Memorandum stressed that Yugoslavia sought support from Italy, Austria and Romania for the contingency of Soviet invasion, and exploited the alleged Soviet threat to get economic aid from Western countries.⁸⁰

Bulgaria branded Yugoslavia's allegations about a possible Soviet-Bulgarian military invasion of Yugoslavia as the figment of slanderous propaganda. Yet, both sides avoided raising the Macedonian Question in open polemics on the political level, as had been the case during the crisis in Indochina. Tito died on 4 May 1980. Brezhnev and Zhivkov attended Tito's funeral to sound out the new Yugoslav leadership about Yugoslavia's orientation in the post-Tito era. As Brezhnev disclosed in a meeting with Zhivkov in the Crimea in August 1980, the impression he had taken from Belgrade was that the new Yugoslav leadership (headed by Lazar Koliševski) would continue its balanced policy towards the Soviet Union.⁸¹ He now observed that no essential change had occurred in the Yugoslav policy; that the new Yugoslav leaders would not let Yugoslavia's relations with the socialist countries deteriorate. Zhivkov remarked that Bulgaria had been extremely patient with Yugoslavia, it did not reply to her slanders against the Bulgarian policy, the Bulgarian people and the Bulgarian Communist Party, it refrained from open confrontation. But he admitted that the anti-Bulgarian campaign in Yugoslavia had been subsiding in the last months.⁸² Obviously, Zhivkov realised that, given the new circumstances, the Soviet Union disapproved of the Macedonian Question affecting Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations.

After Tito's death, Yugoslavia faced enormous economic difficulties, she no longer had the international reputation she had enjoyed in Tito's lifetime, and ceased being a threat to Bulgaria. When Josip Vrhovec, Yugoslavia's new foreign minister, visited Sofia in November 1980, he and Petur Mladenov agreed on the following principles: 1) both countries should boost their bilateral cooperation; 2) the open issues should not hamper this process, as mutually acceptable solutions can be found through constructive dialogue.⁸³ Bulgaria followed the internal situation in Yugoslavia carefully, and did not rule out the possibility of its break-up. She paid special atten-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ CDA, f. 1B, op. 66, a.e. 2507: Meeting of Comrades Leonid Ilich Brezhnev and Todor Zhivkov, Crimea, 7 Avg. 1980.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Arkhiv na Ministerstvoto na Vunshnite Raboti [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereafter AMBnP], f. 115, op. 38, a.e. 3242: Petur Mladenov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Politburo of the CPB CC, with information on the visit and talks

tion to its domestic problem relating to the Muslim minority. The Macedonian Question was discussed on the margins of bilateral Bulgarian-Yugoslav meetings, but in a moderate tone. Each country insisted on its own position, but the war over Macedonia was gradually relegated to Bulgarian and Yugoslav historians, who, however, were unable to reach a middle ground.⁸⁴

It is evident that the Macedonian Question plagued Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations in the Communist era. The Soviet Union instrumentalised this issue according to its interests. Irrespective of the ideological and political dimensions of the dispute, the Macedonian Question evolved from being a matter of territorial security to a matter of identities. With this historical background in mind, it becomes easier to understand why Bulgaria was the first country to recognise the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name — the Republic of Macedonia — but not the Macedonian nation. From the Bulgarian point of view, to be a Macedonian means to be a Bulgarian from Macedonia. Bulgarians stick to the German model of nationalism, i.e. the emphasis is on blood and language, not on national awareness. But in the Balkans ethnicity partly overlaps national identity.

Greece stayed away from the Bulgarian-Yugoslav showdown over the Macedonian Question. Like Bulgaria, Greece did not recognise either the Macedonian nation as a historic entity or the existence of a Macedonian minority on her soil. It paved the way for a Greek-Bulgarian understanding. When the Bulgarian-Yugoslav conflict broke out in 1968, the Greek junta, in keeping with its anti-communist and anti-Slav ideology, had already downgraded Greece's relations with Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's role in the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) and the presence of political refugees (from the Greek part of Macedonia) in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, who acted there as a pressure group against Greece's territorial integrity, were stressed in official propaganda. Greece was concerned over the decentralisation process in Yugoslavia after Ranković's downfall, because it enabled the Socialist Republic of Macedonia to raise the question of a Macedonian minority and to embark on an anti-Greek campaign, with the central government being powerless to act as a deterrent. In May 1973, even during the military dictatorship, Greece signed a declaration on good neighbourliness with Bulgaria. After the downfall of the junta in July 1974, the Karamanlis government tried to improve relations with Bulgaria and with Yugoslavia as well, in view of the Cyprus crisis and the deterioration of Greek-Turkish relations in the Aegean Sea. A number of outstanding ques-

with Josip Vrhovec, Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the SFRY, in Bulgaria from 17 to 20 Nov. 1980.

⁸⁴ See Troebst, *Bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse*, 151–237.

tions in Greek-Yugoslav relations were settled (Free Yugoslav Zone in the port of Thessaloniki; the signing of a consular convention; exploitation of the waters of the river Axios/Vardar).⁸⁵ However, when Belgrade or Skopje raised the question of the Macedonian minority, Greece was affected too. Greek protests ensued both in the press and on the diplomatic level.⁸⁶ It forced the Karamanlis government to side with Bulgaria in denying the existence both of a Macedonian minority in Greece and of the Macedonian nation as a historic entity. By recognising the existence of Macedonian minorities on their soil, both Greece and Bulgaria would have legitimised the Macedonian nation in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Greece was reluctant to offset Yugoslavia's support on the Cyprus Question by making concessions over the Macedonian Question, as one might have calculated in Belgrade. Since the Macedonian Question turned into a matter of identities, the burning question for the Greeks was the distinction between the Greek and Slav inhabitants in a broader area of Macedonia. Under the term "Macedonians" the Greeks understand either the ancient Macedonians, with whom the Slavs share nothing in common, or a geographical term, i.e. all the inhabitants of Macedonia, including the Slavs who differentiated themselves from the Bulgarians and the Serbs in the twentieth century due to political and social circumstances, and forged another identity within a statehood. For this reason, the Greeks prefer the term Slavo-Macedonians to Macedonians.

Nevertheless, the Greek-Yugoslav dispute over the Macedonian Question was an academic one and did not damage bilateral relations. Economic and military cooperation superseded emotions over the Macedonian Question. Yugoslavia was dependent on Salonica's harbour to meet her need for oil and trade, and Greece's road to Central Europe passed through Yugoslavia. Greece did not rule out the likelihood of increasing Soviet influence in Yugoslavia after Tito's death. In this case, Athens feared that the Macedonian Question might be complicated by Soviet interference. When Evaggelos Averoff-Tositsas, Greek defence minister, visited Yugoslavia in October 1976, with Greek General Staff officers, a formal military agreement was discussed. Should the Soviets invade Yugoslavia after Tito's death,

⁸⁵ For a new era in Greek-Yugoslav relations after the downfall of the Greek military regime, see Spyridon Sfetas, *Η Τιτοϊκή Γιουγκοσλαβία και η μεταπολιτευτική Ελλάδα του Καραμανλή (1974-1979). Έγγραφα από τα γιουγκοσλαβικά αρχεία* [Tito's Yugoslavia and Karamanlis's Greece after the downfall of the junta 1974-1979. Documents from Yugoslav Archives] (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2012).

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Greek reactions to Marshal Tito's speech delivered in Skopje on 6 October 1978: "Δυσχεραίνει τις σχέσεις Αθηνών-Βελιγραδίου το 'θέμα της μειονότητας'" [The minorities question hampers relations between Athens and Belgrade], *Kathemerini*, Athens, 7 Oct. 1978, p. 1.

Greece would support Yugoslavia. If Turkey attacked Greece, Yugoslavia would condemn the Turkish attack and help Greece materially and military as well.⁸⁷ According to the Yugoslav army, Yugoslavia after Tito would be threatened not by its internal national contentions, but by a possible foreign invasion. However, it turned out that Yugoslavia collapsed under the burden of its contradictions, and after her break-up the legacy of the Macedonian Question is still alive.

UDC 327.5(497.1:497.2)1968/1980
323.1(=163.3:497.2)

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⁸⁷ *Ἰδρυμα Κ. Καραμανλή* [Karamanlis's Foundation], *Αρχείο Ευάγγελου Αβέρωφ-Τσοπίσα* [Archive of Evaggelos-Averoff-Tositsas], 28/11/4/1: Information to the Military Leadership on the negotiations between the Greek Minister of Defence and the Yugoslav leaders 5–8 October, Greek Defence Minister, Protocol no. 40521, Confidential, Athens, 16 Oct. 1976 (in Greek).

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This paper results from the project of the Institute for Balkan Studies *History of political ideas and institutions in the Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries* (no. 177011) funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.