“WE, THE MACEDONIANS”:
THE PATHS OF MACEDONIAN SUPRA-NATIONALISM
(1878-1912)

The present paper sheds light on the most important patterns of Macedonian political emancipation from the period subsequent to the Congress of Berlin (1878) and prior to the Balkan wars (1912-1913). This timeframe is not an arbitrary one: while the so-called ‘Macedonian Question’ was generally perceived, already in this period, as a result of a political setting provoked by the decisions taken in Berlin, the context that followed the first division of region brought about different political commitments deserving another special attention and survey. In fact, the Ottoman region that was named ‘Macedonia’ did not constitute a geographical or administrative entity whatsoever but, quite soon after 1878, local mappings projected this designation over parts of three administrative units or vilayets inhabited by various populations. The Muslims (classified as ‘Turks’, ‘Albanians’, ‘Muslim Slavs’, ‘Gypsies’ etc.) cohabited with Sephardic Jews (mostly in Salonica) and with Christians, amongst whom there were ‘Greeks’, ‘Vlachs’, ‘Slavs’ and others. The ‘identity’ of Slavic population, often seen as the largest ‘ethnic group’, was nevertheless far from being a single one: it included, according to different categorizations and/or self-identifications, ‘Greeks’ or ‘Slav-/Bulgarian-speaking Greeks’, ‘Bulgarians’, ‘Serbs’, the ‘Macedonian Slavs’ having also their place on certain mappings by the end of the 19th century.

The Macedonian autonomy: towards a separate political loyalty

One basic distinction between the political agendas of local intelligentsias seems to be justified: if the Macedonian ‘Greeks’ and ‘Serbs’ followed, in general, the directives coming from their respective centers of national agitation, the same does not entirely hold true for the ‘Bulgarians’. In their case, the term ‘Macedonian’ was acquiring the significance of a certain political loyalty that progressively constructed this particular ‘spirit of local patriotism’ that was described by observers like the British Henry Brailsford.

After 1878, within the Macedonian political organizations in Bulgaria and shortly after on Macedonian terrain, two general tendencies crystallized, opposed and competed each other, but also intermingled and experienced mutual transmutation. This was, on the one hand, a scenario hardly successful from an international relations’ point of view: the unification of whole the region with the ‘liberated’ Bulgarian Principality following the imagery of the ‘Greater Bulgaria’ temporarily proclaimed by the famous San-Stefano preliminary treaty. On the other hand, the

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1 The terms ‘Slavic population’ and ‘Slavs’ are used here as a reference to people speaking certain vernacular tongue without predilection of their ethnic or national allegiances. However, one should take into account the fact that this was not an indigenous self-designation even if it was used by certain local intellectuals, mostly in the 19th century.

alternative option seemed much more plausible and advocated the creation of ‘autonomous Macedonia’ within the Ottoman Empire – a scenario, which was partially facilitated by the 23rd article of the Treaty of Berlin albeit the latter was not specific for Macedonia. In general, the ‘autonomous’ or ‘self-governing’ status was presumed to imply a special kind of Constitution of the region (an Organic law), a reorganization of gendarmerie, broader representation of the local Christian population in it as well as in all the administration. In particular, this meant a nomination of a Christian governor general, similarly to what happened in Crete or in the short-lived East Rumelia.

But the idea of autonomy was not necessarily an autochthonous or ‘purely Macedonian’ one. It must be stated that, in the 1880s, diverse political parties and milieus in the Bulgarian Principality (and, initially, in East Rumelia) promoted the idea of ‘autonomous Macedonia’ and sponsored political activity in this sense with a long-term aim at ‘national unification of Bulgarian people’. According to one of the long-terms projects that were developed by Macedonian militants, the autonomous status of the region may serve as a first step towards its eventual unification with Bulgaria. This idea seemed a bit more plausible after the successful precedent of 1885 when, despite the provisions of Treaty of Berlin, East Rumelia was united with (or was occupied by) the Bulgarian Principality. But another tendency within the Macedonian movement envisaged the ‘autonomous Macedonia’ as a basis for the creation of a pan-Balkan (con)federation: in this case, the neighbors’ territorial appetites would be permanently neutralized. Today, the Macedonian mainstream historiographic narrative is based exactly on this distinction: the first tendency is condemned as ‘pro-Bulgarian’, the second one – praised as the ‘genuinely’ Macedonian, both of them being identified as clear-cut political fractions.

In fact, the political activism of Macedonian diaspora in the Principality acquired somewhat more independent character only at the late 1880s: meanwhile, the government of Stefan Stambolov sought to restrain the militants in order to obtain certain privileges for the Bulgarian Church and national cause in Macedonia through a political rapprochement with the Ottoman Empire. Thus, even if it may be seen as a product of a certain political conjuncture, the oppositional Macedonian autonomism suggested a separate allegiance based on supra-national categories of belonging.

The first clearer ‘draft’ of the supra-national ideology is given by the anonymous article “An Opinion Concerning the Resolution of Macedonian Question” published in 1889 in the Makedonija newspaper, edited by the Ohrid native, Bulgarian provincial clerk and Macedonian activist Kosta Šahov. Its author promotes the idea of independent struggle of the entire population of the region against Ottoman domination and, for this task, recommends the common denominator ‘Macedonians’ (makedonci) for every member of this population. Regardless of their ‘nationality’ (narodnost) – be they ‘Bulgarians, Turks, Vlachs etc.’ – all of them have ‘the same interests’ and should work for the ‘political liberty’ of their ‘land’.

The autonomist agenda was given a new impetus after 1893 when six activists founded in Salonica the famous Macedonian revolutionary organization referred to quite often as the ‘Internal organization’. In several years, it became an important internal and even international political factor of the ‘Macedonian Question’ while in long term it was transformed in one of the basic ‘myths’ claimed both by Bulgarian

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4 “Mnenie za rešavanie Makedonskija vâpros”, Makedonija, August 19, 1889.
and modern Macedonian nationalism. However, the first official designation of this Organization is still object of historiographic controversies not only between Bulgarian and Macedonian historians but also within the Macedonian historiography itself.

According to the Macedonian specialist Ivan Katardžiev, the Organization firstly bore the name ‘Bulgarian Macedono-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Committees’ (BMORK) but, already in 1896, it changed this designation in favor of ‘Secret Macedono-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Organization’ (TMORO)⁵. For obvious reasons, a part of nowadays’ Macedonian historians reject the authenticity of the first designation which – moreover – does not exist in the memories of Organization’s founders. Referring to this fact as well as to other sources that confirm the Bulgarian ethnic restriction of the first statute of the Organization⁶, the Bulgarian historians assume that the founding documents of the latter are still not discovered and that the name BMORK dates back to 1896-1897⁷. All these debates are not so inconsequential as, for the Bulgarian and for Macedonian historians like Katardžiev, the stake at this case is to know when exactly the Organization abandoned its ‘narrowly Bulgarian’ character.

The TMORO statute is indeed supra-national and grants the right of membership to every ‘Macedonian or Adrianopolitan’. Already the ‘Adrianopolitan’ part of the Organization’s name indicates that its agenda concerned not only Macedonia but also the (geographically distant) Adrianople (Edirne/Odrin) vilayet in Thrace whose Bulgarian population is by no means claimed by modern Macedonian nationalism. But the statute appeals for unification of all the ‘unsatisfied elements’, both in Macedonia and in the region of Adrianople, regardless of their ‘nationality’ (narodnost). The general political objective is declared as a ‘revolution’ presumed to achieve the ‘complete political autonomy’ of the two regions⁸.

This autonomist ideology was by no means a sophisticated one. As the Bulgarian historian Kostadin Palešutski emphasizes, in the language of the Internal organization, the terms ‘political autonomy’, ‘complete political autonomy’ and ‘liberty’ represented ‘abstract concepts’ that were in diverse documents used in an interchangeable way⁹. In general, there was not a coherent political theory behind Organization’s supra-nationalism. The Bulgarian historians would emphasize likewise that there was not a clear idea of separate statehood behind these slogans either. Initially, the Organization was largely dependent on Bulgarian state and army

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⁵ Ivan Katardžiev, “Nekoi prašanja za ustavite i pravilnicite na VMRO do Ilindenskoto vostanie”, Glasnik na Institutot za nacionalna istorija, 1961/1, 156, 162. This version is accepted likewise by Manol Pandevski, Nacionalnoto prašanje vo Makedonskoto osloboditelno dvizhenje, Skopje: Kultura, 1974.


assistance that was mediated by some of the future champions of Macedonian autonomism like Goče Delčev and Gjorče Petrov.

Nevertheless, the idea of a Macedonian state makes its first steps: this seems confirmed by a letter of Delčev from 1895 where he uses the expression ‘a small free state’ when speaking of the imagined outcome of possible insurrection in Macedonia. Moreover, the political emancipation of Internal organization was catalyzed soon after its creation when a series of conflicts broke out between the local ‘élite’ of Bulgarian Church ‘communes’ in Macedonia and the ecclesiastic authorities of Bulgarian Exarchate that tried to centralize the organization of church matters, the local school system as well as the nomination of commune chiefs. The Organization took decisively the side of local communes and advocated their self-governing.

In 1894, one of the revolutionary leaders – Petar Poparsov – edited on behalf of the Organization a brochure\textsuperscript{10} where he expressed quite a sharp criticism towards the ‘authoritarian’ and ‘corrupted’ course of action of the Bulgarian Church in the region. The Exarchate was directly accused of a dictatorial suppression of the deliberative ‘liberties’ of local population. In the same time, the clerks of the Exarchate opposed the revolutionary agenda of the Organization, the latter being seen as adventurous and harmful to the process of national integration. The Bulgarian Exarch Josif himself considered that the revolutionaries would only complicate the political status quo and hinder the formation of a powerful Bulgarian intelligentsia in Macedonia.

Moreover, violent conflicts followed between the activists of the Organization and those who were loyal to the Exarchate. The latter were provoked, according to the Bulgarian historiography, by the differences in their tactics with regard to the idea of ‘liberation’ from Ottoman regime: revolutionary and based on provoking of large-scale political tension and, respectively, evolutionist and centered on cultural strengthening of ‘Bulgarian nation’ in Macedonia\textsuperscript{11}. However, it is undoubtedly striking that one of the first armed conflicts of the Internal organization was with the followers of the Bulgarian Exarchist policy in the region. Referring to this fact, the Macedonian historiography interprets them in national terms as an ‘ethnic conflict’ between ‘Macedonians’ and ‘(pro-)Bulgarians’. Some other specialists, by no means unilaterally pro-Macedonian in the modern national sense, also consider that these controversies and reciprocal murders indicate a kind of differentiation of a separate Macedonian identity\textsuperscript{12}.

Still, this interpretation must face some problems: from its perspective, it is difficult to explain for instance the fact that the almost exclusive ‘national’ basis of the Organization was namely the Exarchist population. The same holds true for the clear domination of the Exarchist social élite within its leadership and of the practical support given to it by the local institutions of the Exarchate. Bulgarian teachers in Macedonia constituted the backbone of the Internal organization while, according to their social profile, its leaders were quite often themselves former Exarchist

\textsuperscript{10} Vardarski (Petar Poparsov), Stambolovštinata v Makedonija i nejnite predstaviteli, Vienna (Sofia): Pečatnica na Br. Popevi, 1894.
\textsuperscript{11} Cf. Siljanov, Ibid., 119-128.
\textsuperscript{12} Fikret Adanır, Makedonskijat vápros, Sofia: Amicitia, 2002 (Bulgarian translation of Idem, Die Makedonische Frage: Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1908, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), 146.
teachers. Though their divergent and conflicting visions, the benevolent attitude of the Organization towards the Exarchate as a ‘national’ institution is expressed by as fervent autonomist as the revolutionary Gjorče Petrov. The lack of diverse ‘ethnic’ motivations seems to be confirmed by the fact that, in his brochure, Poparsov generally uses the designation ‘Bulgaro-Macedonians’ and ‘Macedonian Bulgarians’ in order to name his ‘com patriots’. All that comes to confirm the difficult translatability of these events in the terms of ‘ethnic’ conflict: the Macedonian revolutionaries actually sought to prevent the Bulgarian church authorities from any interference in what they saw as the political field while the Exarchate had its ‘legitimate’ place in the narrowly national development.

And yet, the separation between ‘political’ (Macedonian) and ‘national’ (Bulgarian) loyalty was already outlined in the discourse of the Macedonian revolutionaries. It was even further confirmed in their armed conflict with another institution – this time an ‘external’ one and established by Macedonian émigrés in Bulgaria. In 1895, number of diasporic political associations merged into a Sofia-based ‘Macedonian Committee’ that was later named ‘Supreme Macedonian’ and ‘Supreme Macedono-Adrianopolitan Committee’. In the dominant Macedonian historiographic vision, the Committee and its activists – the so-called ‘supremists’ (vrhovisti) – are opposed to the ‘internals’ or the ‘centralists’ (centralisti) from the Internal organization and stigmatized as instruments of the ‘Greater-Bulgarian’ policy of Sofia.

However, both the relations between the Bulgarian governments and the Committee as well as the relations between the latter and the Internal organizations seem more complex that that. Actually, the two centers of Macedonian activism initially cooperated, especially during the time when the Bulgarian army officer Boris Sarafov was in charge of the activists in Sofia. Ironically, even before the Internal organization, the first statute of the Supreme Committee declared as a general task of its activity the achieving of a ‘political autonomy’ of Macedonia. The latter was however seen as the ending of a legal, non-revolutionary action soliciting the Great Powers to stand for and guarantee the autonomy of region. In the supremist slogans, the long-term future of the autonomous administrative entity of Macedonia is often indeed not clear but this lack of precision is by no means limited to the supremists.

The relations between the Organization and the Supreme Committee drastically deteriorated only about six years after the setting-up of Sofia’s institution, especially around the ill-fated uprising in Gorna Džumaja (today Blagoevgrad) incited in 1902 by the activists from Sofia and fiercely opposed by the ‘internal’ ones. In the same year, activists of the Internal organization offered a more coherent declaration of its (supra-)national ideology.

The political separatism of the Internal organization

14 Božinov et alii, Ibid., 557.
16 Cf. Paleštutski, Ibid., 288.
In the article “Political separatism”\textsuperscript{17}, the revolutionaries promoted as a basic slogan William Gladstone’s expression ‘Macedonia for the Macedonians’ \textit{(Makedonija za makedoncите)} held to express the principle of autonomy and of ‘political separatism’. Already the beginning of the text clearly states the meaning of these terms: it is a question of separation of Macedonia vis-à-vis ‘the idea of Greater Bulgaria, or Greater Serbia, or Greater Greece’. The concrete stakes of this agenda are also explained: Macedonia is endangered by ‘greater or smaller states’ and while the ‘small states of the Balkan peninsula’ could not solve the Macedonian question, which is of ‘European importance’, they only create conditions that would enable their territorial expansion and the partitioning of Macedonia. ‘Greeks’ and ‘Serbs’ are directly accused of such ambitions. However, the Bulgarian Principality is also condemned of ‘speculating’ with the ‘unhappy Macedonia’ in favor of its ‘ephemeral’ political interests. In front of the ‘harm’ which the Balkan states are doing to the cause of ‘Macedonian freedom’, the Macedonian population \textit{(makedonskoto naselenie)} is considered to be a partisan of an idea other than ‘Greater Bulgaria’ of San-Stefano.

However, contrary to the impression of researchers who believe that the Internal organization espoused a ‘Macedonian national consciousness’\textsuperscript{18}, the local revolutionaries declare their conviction that the ‘majority’ of the Christian population of Macedonia is ‘Bulgarian’. They clearly reject possible allegations of what they call ‘national separatism’ vis-à-vis the Bulgarians and consider it even ‘immoral’. Though they declare an equal attitude towards all the ‘Macedonian populations’, the activists’ tolerance has however at least one significant limit: they denounce particularly the pretensions of Serbia, according to them, creating ‘proselites’ where she has no ‘compatriots’.

The text suggests that the integrity of the region implies the ‘conservation’ of the ‘national unity of Bulgarian tribe’ \textit{(bâlgarskoto pleme – a term having also a positive meaning in Bulgarian)}. Paradoxically, through the realization of autonomous Macedonia, it is deemed to remain whole and united through its ‘spiritual culture’, even though politically divided. The other options entail the risk that a part of ‘Bulgarian tribe’ fall under Greek, Serbian or other domination. Nevertheless, by the very abandoning of the Bulgarian united nation-state project, the article attempts to trace a kind of distinct supra-national ideology based on modern liberal principles. Considering themselves ‘protagonists of liberty and culture’, the activists of Internal organization oppose what they call ‘denationalization’ not only of their own but also of other ‘peoples’ \textit{(narodi)}. The article gives also long-term aspects of Macedonian autonomy that has at stakes the ‘higher idea’ of an eventual establishment of a ‘Balkan confederation’.

However, some basic ambiguities should be taken into account: for instance, the ‘guarantee’ for the preservation of the others’ culture stems from ‘the character of the Bulgarian tribe’ that, according to Macedonian revolutionaries, could be ‘proud of its tolerance’ in opposition to ‘Romanians, Serbs and Greeks’. Hence, the administration of ‘autonomous Macedonia’ will rely on a ‘tolerant’ majority, thanks to which all the ‘Macedonian populations’ would be united in ‘one political entity’. In

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\bibitem{17} “Političeski separatizâm”, \textit{Pravo}, June 7, 1902. Edited by the Macedonian activists Nikola Naumov and Toma Karajovov, the newspaper \textit{Pravo} is unofficial tribune of the Internal Organization. Cf. Božinov et alii, \textit{Ibid.}, 456-459.

\bibitem{18} Karakasidou, \textit{Ibid.}, 100.
\end{thebibliography}
This text presents the unpublished result of research carried out at CAS. It has not undergone language editing and is not to be cited.

In this manner, the activists of the Internal organization implicitly consider that the ‘Bulgarians’ should represent a kind of ‘dominant nation’ taking up the role of the ‘good master’ that will generously manage to consolidate all other ‘populations’, ‘nationalities’, ‘minorities’, ‘peoples’, ‘tribes’ (these terms being more or less synonymous). Thus, on the one hand, the activists of the Organization trace a principal distinction between ‘national’ and ‘political’ in the sense that the political ideal of common ‘prosperity’ entails a supra-national compromise with the narrowly national, ethnic or confessionalloyalties. But, considering the idea of the ‘special character’ of ‘Bulgarians’, one may be tempted to ask the question to what extent this was a ‘sincere’ declaration of intentions.

According to the mainstream Bulgarian historiography, the idea of autonomy represented a pure ‘tactics’ of the revolutionary movement in Macedonia and in Adrianople Thrace aiming at the eventual unification with the Bulgarian state. Thus, according to some Bulgarian historians, the project of autonomy did not imply a separatism whatsoever, which maybe indicates that the same are either not acquainted or intentionally neglect the article from 1902. Yet, the text of the Organization’s activists suggests more or less that the ‘political separatism’ is a contingent solution, imposed by international setting, as the Macedonians are apparently ‘conscious of the utter impossibility of realizing the idea of Greater Bulgaria’. This may indeed leave the impression that the autonomy represents just ‘the plan B’ of Bulgarian ‘unification’. Moreover, as long as the article is simultaneously published in French, one must take into account the possibility of intentionally reinforced separatism for purely foreign propaganda reasons: as a rule, the Macedonian activists were adamantly trying to convince European public opinion that the Internal organization was by no means a Bulgarian political pawn even in the periods of close cooperation with Sofia.

However, in 1902, this ‘independence’ was quite the case and the international setting undoubtedly exercised an indirect pressure in this sense. Many political events were capable to reinforce the supra-national ‘Macedonian’ aspect of Macedonian activists. In 1902, they were, for instance, scandalized when a Serbian bishop was finally nominated in the Patriarchist diocese of Skopje: the article states overtly Macedonian revolutionaries’ indignation from Belgrade but, through its presumed inactivity, the russophile Bulgarian government was likewise suspected of preparing a ‘brotherly’ South-Slavic partition of Macedonia. Thus, ironically, the declaration of ‘political separatism’ was in the same time an expression of Bulgarian ethnic self-identification. This basic ambiguity of political visions may only be acknowledged: undoubtedly, the Macedonian revolutionaries ‘dwelled much more on the process... rather than on the question of the precise political form’ of the autonomy.

**Patterns of ethnicization of the Macedonian supra-national autonomism**

Despite this supra-national aspect of Macedonian ‘political’ identity, one may find easily writings that bestow this identity also with certain ‘ethnic’ or ‘cultural’ contents. As a political tribune of ‘the Macedonians’ in Bulgaria, Makedonija (later named Glas makedonski – ‘The Macedonian Voice’) published by the aforementioned Kosta Šahov asserted a fervent identification with the native land. The newspaper searched for a particular Macedonian historical tradition and

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20 Perry, Ibid., 202.
promoted the images of ancient Macedonia and of Alexander the Great. The latter is even proclaimed by Šahov a ‘national proud’ of Macedonian people\textsuperscript{21}. 

This kind of ‘national’ emancipation should not be however overestimated: it should be enough to say that, in 1895, Šahov addressed a telegram to the Russian count Ignatiev in order to congratulate him as the inventor of the Greater Bulgaria of San-Stefano\textsuperscript{22}. Makedonija newspaper not only regarded all the Macedonian Slavs like Bulgarians but even tried to convince its public that the same holds true for all the population of Serbia’s South Morava region (Niš, Vranje etc.)\textsuperscript{23}.

Similar is the case of a review published by upcoming Macedonian revolutionaries whom Šahov collaborated with: Macedonian historiography refers often to the group of young activists (in particular, ex-students in Belgrade) who founded in Sofia an association called ‘Young Macedonian Literary Society’. In 1892, the latter began publishing the review Loza (‘The Vine’) which promoted certain dialectal characteristics of Macedonian dialects. In the same time, the activists, called after the name of their review ‘Lozars’, ‘purified’ the Bulgarian orthography from some rudiments of Church Slavonic and brought it closer to Vuk Karadžić’s Serbian phonetic script. They expressed likewise a kind of Macedonian patriotism attested already by the first issue of the review: its materials greatly emphasized identification with Macedonia as a genuine ‘fatherland’. The editors of Loza also referred to the ‘ancient’ dignity of their native region: Phillip of Macedon and Alexander the Great appear already on page 5 of the first book of the review. All these elements were enough for the governmental press in Sofia to accuse the young Macedonian intellectuals of ‘separatism’ and of possible pro-Serbian stance.

The Lozars did not delay to disperse these accusations and gave up their particular ‘reformed’ language and orthography. Albeit they did not agree so enthusiastically with the character of standard Bulgarian language that was quite distant from Macedonian dialects, the editors of the review suggested that, according to their language, the Macedonians ‘may be only Bulgarians’\textsuperscript{24}. In any case, it is hardly surprising that the Lozars demonstrated both Bulgarian and Macedonian loyalty: what is more interesting is namely the fact that their Bulgarian nationalism was somehow harmonized with a Macedonian self-identification that was not only a political one but demonstrated also a certain ‘cultural’ contents (language traits, particular history and an emphasized particular geography of the ‘homeland’). The Lozars’ case only confirms the Fredrick Barth’s idea that the patterns of self-identification are to a large extent the contingent result of a specific interaction within a particular setting.

These activists had afterward different political careers: amongst them, one finds leaders of the Macedonian revolutionary movement (both from the Internal organization and the Supreme committee), Bulgarian intellectuals and even one future prime minister of Bulgaria. Some of them undoubtedly retained their more pronounced local patriotism: for instance Petâr Poparsov with his aforementioned brochure where he criticized the nomination of ‘North Bulgarians’ in Macedonian schools as well as the Exarchist one-sided policy of – according to the conspicuous expression of Poparsov – ‘making Bulgarians’\textsuperscript{25}.

\textsuperscript{21} Makedonija, November 11, 1888, March 17, 1889.
\textsuperscript{22} Iva Burilkova, Coço Biljarski, eds., Ot Sofija do Kostur. Spomeni, Sofia: Sineva, 2003, 68.
\textsuperscript{23} Makedonija, August 19, 1889.
\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Loza, 1892, 56, 58.
\textsuperscript{25} Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 333-336.
Thus, the national discourse of some Macedonian revolutionaries may seem to be marked – although quite rarely – by a situational ethnicization in a Macedonian sense. Ironically, such cases are maybe more often with activists related to the Supreme committee than with those of the Internal organization, the latter, contrary to the former, considered by Macedonian historians as the ‘genuinely Macedonian’ one. The Bulgarian colonel and activist of the Committee Anastas Jankov mentions in his memoirs how, in an attempt to convince a Serbian captain of the need of Macedonian autonomy, he opposed the latter’s assertions that a Macedonian Slavic ‘nationality’ has never existed and gave as a historical proof the medieval state of Samuil. Accordingly, some data, another revolutionary (incongruously resented by the mainstream Macedonian historiography) – the both supremist and centralist Boris Sarafov – declared the Macedonians as a distinct Slavic ‘nationality’.

Two ideological currents – the socialists and the anarchists – went even further in their demarcation from the mainstream Bulgarian nationalism. The idea of self-governing Macedonia was emphasized in the very first program of the Macedonian socialists led by Vasil Glavinov and was made more explicit in their newspaper Političeska svoboda (‘The Political Liberty’). The newspaper severely criticized Bulgaria for its ambitions at territorial expansion in the region and appealed for the creation of an independent ‘federative Macedonian republic’, conceived as a kind of ‘Balkan Switzerland’. The latter presumed a cantonal organization of all local ‘national elements’ that would have the possibility to choose the official language in the cantons where they constitute the ethnic majority. In the same time, the independent Macedonian republic was supposed to play the role of fundament of another one, broader federation – namely, the one of all the Balkan ‘peoples’.

Yet, the socialists’ emphasis on a separate political agenda of ‘Macedonian people’ was based on class-ideological aspects which bestowed it with a-national aspects. The ambitions of what is labeled as ‘a stupid chauvinism and patriotism’ and especially of the ‘Bulgarian chauvinism’ are opposed by the socialists to the idea that ‘the Macedonian’ (makedonecât) has to realize, at the first place, ‘his’ class-ideological tasks. That is why, according to Političeska svoboda, ‘the Macedonian’ should by no means be regarded as a Bulgarian, Serb or Greek as ‘he’ is, on the first place, a political ‘slave’ (rob). In some articles of the newspaper (as well as in party documents of the Macedonian socialist group) the term ‘Macedonian people’ (makedonski narod) is contrasted to the ‘Bulgarian people’ (bâlgarski narod). For instance, according to one conspicuous expression, ‘the Bulgarians’ are ‘close in every respect’ to ‘the Macedonian people’ which actually asserts the contrast between these two ‘national’ categories.

It will be nevertheless far-fetched to say that the ‘Bulgarian’ character of Macedonian Slavs is completely rejected. For instance, Političeska svoboda opposed the Serbian idea that the Macedonians are a kind of Serbo-Bulgarian ‘paste’ and asserted their ‘Bulgarian’ belonging. However, in the socialist rhetoric, this ethnic characteristic is definitively not discursively dominant. The political and class

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26 Burilkova, Biljarski, Ibid., 155.
27 These data are however second- and ever third-hand: cf. Pandevski, Ibid., 33.
28 Političeska svoboda, February 6, 1898 and November 29, 1898, 1-2.
29 Političeska svoboda, April 19, 1899.
30 Cf. Političeska svoboda, April 19, 1898, 2, 5.
31 Političeska svoboda, March 29, 1898. The Macedonian socialists likewise advocated the liberation cause of Adrianople region.
imperatives of ‘liberty’ rather emphasized the distinct political tasks of ‘Macedonian people’, uniting – contrary to what is seen as ‘Bulgarian people’ – not only ‘Bulgarians’ but number of other ‘nationalities’. This terminological imbroglio makes the socialist ‘national’ categories quite incommensurable with the nowadays strict nationalistic Macedonian or Bulgarian concepts. Hence, while the Bulgarian historians sometimes condemn the ‘national nihilist’ positions of Macedonian socialists, the Macedonian ones express their frustration that the latter were not sufficiently ‘aware’ of the distinct character of Macedonian nation32.

But, paradoxically, the a-national ‘nihilistic’ aspect could acquire, in some moments, a distinct national or ethnic meaning. Such an ethnicization of Macedonian identity is more visible in the anarcho-socialist newspaper Malěševski Balkan that appeared in 1897. In some articles like “At Least do not Hinder Us!” the newspaper treats the Macedonians as distinct from both Bulgarians and Serbs, these nations otherwise seen as the ‘closest to us’33. However, neither in Maleševski Balkan this Macedonian nationalism seems consistent as the newspaper offers also articles claiming Bulgarian identity of Macedonian Slavs. This paradoxical fact may indicate that, by the turn of the 20th century, the patterns of ethnicization of Macedonian ideology in general remained firmly associated to a political agenda opposing at the first place the nation-states’ aspirations and did not claim so much a distinct ‘core’ culture.

Such an impression seems confirmed by the mixture of strong internationalist, a-national and Macedonian ‘ethnic’ aspects that is to be found also in the ideology of Macedonian anarchist committee formed at the end of the 1890s by students in Geneva. The anarchists promoted likewise the idea of Macedonia for all the Macedonian ‘nationalities’ and appealed for its complete independence. For this reason, the activists of the committee recommended a ruthless struggle not only against the Greek and Serbian ambitions but also against the ‘Bulgarian chauvinism’ and its aspirations at ‘unification’ of Bulgaria and Macedonia34.

One should nevertheless take into account the following paradox: the anarchist organization in Geneva included mostly militants who were natives from Bulgaria and not from Macedonia. The Macedonian historian Ristovski emphasizes likewise that their program of ‘Macedonian state’ comprised also the region of Adrianople which actually ‘does not presume [the idea of] a distinct Macedonian national entity’35. These aspects are undoubtedly difficult to explain from the point of view of Macedonian historiography but they present a challenge for the Bulgarian one also. The fact that even people from ‘non-Macedonian descent’ espoused a strong Macedonian ‘identity’ shows a considerable degree of development of a distinct political loyalty, emancipated from the pan-Bulgarian national project.

Ilinden and after: the Macedonian left autonomism against the Bulgarian ‘state nationalism’

Both the supra-national ideology of the Internal organization and the internationalist program of socialists are often held to be put into practice during the

33 Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 364-366.
34 See the letters of Petâr Mandžukov and Slavi Merdžanov published in Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 372-375.
most important revolutionary event in the turn of the 20th century Macedonia – the anti-Ottoman Insurrection of Ilinden (August 1903). According to the traditional Bulgarian and Macedonian narratives, towns of mixed Christian populations like Kruševo in the vilayet of Manastır were transformed in ephemeral ‘republics’ with temporary revolutionary authorities where different ‘national elements’ cooperated. The famous ‘Kruševo republic’ was led by a local activist of the Organization with socialist orientation – Nikola Karev – and was supposed to incarnate the principle of supra-national equality. With regard to the latter, the most emphasized moment seems to be the elaboration of the so-called ‘Kruševo Manifesto’ – a letter announcing the creation of ‘Autonomous Macedonia’ that was addressed by the local militants to neighboring Muslim villages in order to convince them that the revolutionary activities were not directed against the peaceful ‘Turkish’ population but solely against the Sultan’s ‘tyranny’. However, the original of this manifesto is not conserved: nowadays’ Macedonian historiography refers to a text that was suggested about twenty years after by a Kruševo-born playwright.

Regardless if such a document existed or not, the ‘Kruševo republic’, which survived only about ten days, was certainly far from being an ‘oasis’ of inter-communitarian cohabitation. Greek sources attest an aggressive or provocative attitude of the insurgents towards the local ‘Greek’ population while, despite the presumably ‘tolerant’ attitude towards Muslim population, the rebels of Ilinden attacked Muslim villages and number of ‘Turkish’ peasants became victims of revolutionary terror. The cruel response of Ottoman authorities and the final catastrophe of the ill-fated uprising only increased the controversies existing within the Internal organization. Two ideological wings, which were partially structured already before the summer of 1903, finally took shape.

Gjorče Petrov became the spokesman of the independentism of the Organization with regard to the ‘nationalistic propagandas’ of Balkan states, including Bulgaria. In the same time, other important activists like Dame Gruev were still inclined to a close political cooperation with Sofia. While activists from the so-called ‘right wing’ insisted on the reinforcing of what the latter called ‘national color’ (nacionalen kolorit) of the Organization, the ‘leftists’ opposed the Bulgarian ‘nationalistic line’ (nacionalističeski kurs). According to them, a more pronounced Bulgarian stance could be only harmful to the supra-national ideals and incite a further internal division of Macedonian population due to a similar intensification of Greek and Serbian ‘propagandas’ in the region.

The general Congress of the Organization in 1905 (the so-called ‘Rila Congress’) turned the general political line decisively to the ‘left’ by the adopting the main visions of the revolutionaries from Serres department led by Jane Sandanski. The Organization changed it’s name into VMORO (‘Internal Macedono-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Organization’) and it’s statute reasserted the ideology of supra-nationalism: member of the Organization could be ‘everybody’ from

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36 Ristovski regrets the fact that the ‘government’ of the ‘republic’ (nowadays held to be a symbol of Macedonian statehood) was actually composed of two ‘Greeks’, two ‘Bulgarians’ and one ‘Romanian’: cf. Ristovski, Ibid.
37 Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 432-434.
39 Cf. Adamr, Ibid., 213.
‘European Turkey’ independently from his/her ‘sex, religion, nationality and conviction (ubeždenie – i.e. partisan orientation)’. The statute specified that ‘The Organization opposes the aspirations for partition and conquest of these regions [Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace] without regard of what state do they originate’\(^{40}\).

Quite indicative for the leftists’ ideology seems likewise the attitude formulated by the Rila Congress vis-à-vis the Bulgarian Exarchate: the Organization declared its intention to counter the activities of the latter ‘that are led in the spirit of the Bulgarian state nationalism’. Just as the Bulgarian historian from the Interwar period (and Macedonian activist) Hristo Siljanov, the Bulgarian specialists of nowadays do not find a real explanation of the ‘anti-naturality’ and the ‘lack of reason whatsoever’ in such formulations. The activists of the revolutionary departments of Serres, Strumica and Salonica nonetheless stipulated that the ‘Macedonian Question’ could not be resolved if it is formulated as a part of a Bulgarian national question. In this manner, the policy of Sofia was completely identified to the adversary character of Athens and Belgrade: Bulgaria was clearly treated by the Serres activists as a ‘foreign, hostile force’\(^{41}\) and Sandanski condemned what he called the ‘Bulgarian imperialism’. According to him, the Macedonians had to emancipate themselves as a ‘self-determining people’\(^{42}\).

To what extent all these declarations mean that, subsequent to the Ilinden catastrophe in 1903, the supra-national program of Macedonian revolutionaries gave birth to a Macedonian nationalism? Most of the Macedonian mainstream specialists on the history of local revolutionary movement like Katardžiev consider that the political separatism of Internal organization represented indeed a form of Macedonian nationalism\(^{43}\). However, the first problem before such an interpretation stems in particular from the ‘Macedono-Adrianopolitan’ character of the Internal organization during its ‘classical’ period, i.e. the one prior to the Balkan wars. The statutes and directives of the Central Committee as well as the other official documents of the Organization (written in Bulgarian language) concern not only the ‘Macedonian people’ but also the ‘Adrianopolitans’ or ‘the Adrianopolitan people’, i.e. the Bulgarians and (at least in theory) other ‘nationalities’ inhabiting the vilayet of Adrianople. This fact, as well as the acceptance of Bulgarians from Bulgaria and from the Adrianople region into the leading ranks of Internal organization not only corroborates the fact that the Macedonian activists did not insist on any own ‘ethnic’ peculiarity and difference with regard to the Bulgarians but may also undermine the idea of a distinct national emancipation on a purely ‘political’ basis.

Besides, the natives of territories outside Macedonia often demonstrated a much greater criticism, independentist fervor and even hostility vis-à-vis Sofia than the local militants. It could seem quite paradoxical that it was exactly the polemical declarations of leaders like Hristo Černopeev\(^{44}\) that provoked the greatest indignation within Bulgarian public opinion as well as among the (pro-)Bulgarian intelligentsia of

\(^{40}\) Siljanov, Ibid., 393-394.
\(^{42}\) Siljanov, Ibid., 498.
\(^{43}\) Ivan Katardžiev, Makedonija sto godini po Ilindenskoto vostanie, Skopje: Kultura, 2003, 54-69.
\(^{44}\) Hristo Černopev, revolutionary leader of the Strumica department, champion of the Macedonian autonomism and fighter against the attempts of Sofia to control the revolutionary movement, was actually born in Northern Bulgaria (Dermanci) and was a former feldwebel of the Bulgarian army.
Macedonia with the flat identification of official Bulgarian policy to that of Serbia and Greece. Hence, one may hardly discover a correspondence between the place of origin of the Internal organization’s activists and their political visions, in particular, their attitude towards the ideas of Macedonian autonomy. That is why, for some specialists, even the most ‘separatist’ trend within the Internal organization could be seen as an extreme form of the Bulgarian leftist movement from that period.

Similar problems appear when one takes into account the aforementioned rank and file relations between the Organization and the Bulgarian Exarchate. On the one hand, even in their conflicts with Exarchist activists, the Macedonian revolutionaries were not really interested in confessional matters: the latter were related to the ‘national’ development which had its place inside the community while the political agenda of common action of all the ‘Macedonian people’ transcended the confessional particularities. This idea is asserted by the socialist Dimo Hadžidimov who stated that the Organization ‘holds above all religious and national aspirations the banner of the liberation struggle’.

On the other hand, on the Macedonian terrain, the Internal organization often took the side of the Bulgarian Exarchate against the Greek-speaking Constantinople Patriarchate as well as against the Serbian church ‘propaganda’. All these aspects of Organization’s activity make visibly difficult its translation into the terms of Macedonian nationalism. However, albeit they do not contradict the idea of Bulgarian ethnicity and of Bulgarian nation within Macedonia, the aforementioned autonomist and independentist stances may hardly be seen as an expression of a mainstream Bulgarian nationalism or, to put it into indigenous terms, of a ‘Bulgarian state nationalism’. The separatist motives in Organization’s ideology, emphasized after Ilinden, rather reinforced the supra-national agenda.

**The Macedonian ‘Ottomanism’ on the left**

It would be quite misleading to try to explain all aforementioned ideological phenomena as a ‘purely’ autochthonous trend regardless of ‘external’ influences and transfers. The revolutionary means, structure and discourses of Macedonian movement were undoubtedly under the strong impact of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition. Even the anti-Exarchist pathos of Macedonian movement is partially inspired by previous anti-clerical revolutionary slogans in Bulgaria. All these influences on the ideology and activity of Internal organization are well described by the Bulgarian historians some of whom refer also to the impact of international socialist movement, of Russian anarchism and of Armenian anti-Ottoman revolutionary movement. However, one basic impact remains occulted by both Bulgarian and Macedonian national historiographies – the Ottoman one, as paradoxical as the existence of such may seem.

A comparison of Macedonian autonomist rhetoric with the official Ottomanist discourse would demonstrate striking typological similarities and could make more understandable the supra-national character of Macedonian revolutionary ideology. Here are the main common points: the appeal for brotherly cohabitation of different ‘peoples’ and ‘faiths’ for the sake of the common ‘prosperity’ and ‘progress’, hence, the idea itself of converging common interests of diverse populations as an instrumental argumentation in favor of a supra-national political project. Also, the

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60 Adanır, Ibid., 146.
46 Andonov-Polanski et alii, Ibid., 519.
47 The favorable attitude of Macedonian revolutionaries towards the Exarchist church affiliation is confirmed by Ristovski, Ibid., 53.
48 Cf. Alexander Vezenkov’s contribution in this collective volume.
idea of justice and of equal treatment of every national and/or confessional group, guaranteed by the essential tolerance of the ‘leading’ element – the Moslem religion as a ‘religion of tolerance’ in the Ottomanist discourse and the ‘tolerant Bulgarian national character’ claimed by the aforesaid article on Macedonian political separatism. Quite indicative are number of terminological coincidences as ‘regardless of religion and sect’ in the Ottomanist discourse and ‘regardless of nationality’ in the statute of TMORO as well as ‘regardless of sex, religion, nationality and conviction’ in VMORO’s statute. Last, but not least, there is another one important characteristic of Ottomanism as well as of both the Macedonian supra-nationalism and nationalism in the long run: the distrust to ‘foreigners’ or the basic rejection of adversary ‘foreign interests’. While the Ottomanist rhetoric opposed harshly the intrusion of Europeans in the internal affairs of the Empire, the Macedonian autonomist slogans implied similarly that it was only ‘internal’ people who could deal in a proper way with the problems of the region.

Considering all these elements, the Macedonian supra-nationalism may seem to be a kind of ‘mini-Ottomanism’, i.e. a translation of Empire’s ideology into the smaller scope of Macedonia (and Adrianople region) as well as into the language of a liberation movement. Ironically but – from this point of view – not surprisingly, in 1908, it was exactly the stubborn left autonomists from Serres department who found a common language with their hitherto enemies in the face of the Young Turks’ Committee of Union and Progress. During the first days of Young Turks’ revolution, the collaboration of the Macedonian leftists with the Ottoman activists was stated in a special ‘Manifesto to all the nationalities of the Empire’ by which Sandanski called his ‘compatriots’ to discard the ‘propaganda’ of official Bulgaria in order to live together in a peaceful way with the ‘Turkish people’\(^49\). The loyalty to the Empire declared by Sandanski repeated to a large extent the political principles of the Committee of Union and Progress and deliberately blurred the distinction between Macedonian and Ottoman political agenda. This ideological transition was quite smooth as long as the rhetoric of Macedonian autonomist supra-nationalism was already quite close to the Ottomanist idea of the so-called ‘unity of the elements’.

The ‘anti-Bulgarian’ character of Sandanski’s ‘Manifesto’ still did not mean a Macedonian nationalism not only because of the loyalty declared to the Empire but also because its author was in fact Pavel Deliradev – a socialist who was too non-Macedonian by origin\(^50\). During the ‘honeymoon’ of Serres revolutionaries and Ottoman authorities, it was the ‘internationalist’ ideas of Bulgarian socialist activists that left their stamp on Sandanski’s as well as on Černopeev’s agenda: what was seen as ‘national interests’ had to be subdued to the pan-Ottoman ones in order to achieve a supra-national ‘union’ of all the ‘nationalities’ within a reformed Empire. Thus number of classical liberal ideas, put forward in the Young Turks’ constitutionalism, intermingled with some characteristics of socialism ‘imported’ from Bulgaria.

Such principles were for instance announced by a Project of political program, issued in August 1908 on behalf of Serres, Strumica and Salonica revolutionary activists. It emphasizes on the popular sovereignty and appeals for a democratic constitutional regime based on it and supposed, in the same time, to enable further decentralization and local autonomy within the Empire\(^51\). As to the statute of Macedonia and Adrianople vilayet, the document is not specific. It only emphasizes

\(^{49}\) Adanır, Ibid., 258.
\(^{50}\) MNI, Ibid., 228.
\(^{51}\) Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 543-546.
on the ‘wider autonomy’ of ‘the provinces’ in the framework of the Empire as well as of all the ‘districts’ and ‘communes’ within them. This autonomy is presumed in a way to guarantee the equality of all ‘nationalities’ and confessions, the right to use the mother tongue in school education (the primary one being compulsory) while the Turkish remains the official language of the whole Empire.

In fact, the leftist agenda replaced the slogan of ‘autonomy’ with the idea to federalize the Ottoman Empire albeit its integrity was to be maintained. In the same time, it was ironically the rightist activists, closely aligned to Sofia, who defended the idea of Macedonian autonomy. In the conditions of the new constitutional period of Ottoman Empire, the activists from both wings of the (meantime quasi-dissolved) Internal organization formed diverse political parties aspiring to a parliamentary representation.

Of all the political trends, the Macedonian historiography refers once again mostly to the fraction of Sandanski that took the name ‘People’s Federative Party’: contrary to the others, the latter is regarded as the ‘authentically’ Macedonian one. Yet, Sandanski’s party was supposed to comprise in its framework number of ethnic sections, each one representing a distinct ‘nationality’ of Macedonia. Its agenda expressed the federalist visions of the revolutionary left wing that addressed all the communities of ‘European Turkey’.

This federalist project however failed and the only section that was set up within the ‘People’s Federative Party’ was the one of Sandanski himself and of his ‘co-nationals’, which was actually called ‘Bulgarian section’. Moreover, the political and parliamentary representation of the leftist revolutionary activists only ‘revived’ their Bulgarian national identification as Sandanski’s fraction advocated the particular interests of the ‘Bulgarian nationality’ in the Empire. Meanwhile, the gradual conflict of the activists’ aspirations and the Ottoman ‘national’ or quasi-national project of the Young Turks’ régime invigorated the revolutionary idea of a ‘complete political autonomy’ of Macedonia and Adrianople region that led to the reestablishing of the Internal organization in 1911. Hence, it would be exaggerated to see a manifestation of Macedonian nationalism where the main pathos was rather an ambiguous supra-national opening that remained volens nolens ethnically restricted to the ‘Bulgarian’ community.

One aspect of the brief collaboration between the left-wing activists and the Committee of Union and Progress seems obvious: while the Balkan national historiographies tend to eliminate any possible Ottoman influence on the ‘national’ movements claimed by them, the case of Macedonian supra-nationalism only shares the peculiarities of Ottomanist propaganda before and during the Young Turks’ régime. And, just like the Ottomanism, which was interpreted as a full-fledged nationalism by West-Europeans even before it acquired the same meaning for the Ottoman Muslims themselves, from a ‘Western’ perspective, the Macedonian supra-national emancipation was (and still is) sometimes seen as a Macedonian nationalism. However, this does not mean that there were no alternative paths.

**From political to national separatism?**

Already before the period under scrutiny, certain writings attest the existence of a Macedonian nationalism. Here, the first most illustrative case is the one of the autodidact Gjorgjija Pulevski who, in the beginning of the 1870s, published the first
short dictionaries of ‘Slavo-Macedonian’ language. Later, in other writings, he asserted the ‘Slavic’ character of ancient Macedonians and, *vice versa*, the ‘ancient’ descent of nowadays Macedonian Slavs. Thus in 1870s-1880s, began the first manifestations of a Macedonian national ideology that referred explicitly to a particular Macedonian language, descent or folk culture, distinct from those of Bulgarians, Serbs etc.

Macedonian historians refer also to some data from the anti-Ottoman movement for national ‘liberation’ which presumably confirm a certain attempt of emancipation vis-à-vis the neighbor nations and a more ‘ethnic’ usage of the term ‘Macedonians’. The latter is to be found in the so-called ‘Rules-Constitution’ of a ‘Committee of the Macedonian Uprising’ as well as in its ‘Military directives’ that are deemed to be composed during the ill-fated uprising of Kresna-Razlog in the autumn of 1878. These documents trace a project of administrative structure of a future autonomous Macedonian state while the Slavs from the region are named ‘Macedonians’ instead of Bulgarians or Serbs.

The Bulgarian historians denounce the authenticity of both documents. But even if one assumes that they are authentic, they were literally ‘excavated’ by modern historians: the marginal influence of theirs is confirmed by the fact that they left virtually no trace in the public sphere of the late 19th century. There are nevertheless some cases, which had a public impact.

In 1891-1892, the Bulgarian bishop of Skopje Teodosija Gologanov disrupted his allegiance to the Exarchate and asserted in a similar way an ethnic difference between Macedonians and their Orthodox Christian neighbors. By the time of the Balkan wars and the first division of Macedonia, these ideas were most fervently defended by a group of activists who already in 1903 had founded in St. Petersburg a ‘Slavo-Macedonian Scholarly Literary Society’. Its leader – Dimitrija Čupovski – is the author of number of articles and memoranda appealing for an independent Macedonian state that were published in his newspaper *Makedonskij golos* (‘The Macedonian Voice’ in Russian). This political project was no more a supra-national one as Macedonia was at the first place conceived as the state of ‘Macedonian Slavs’, both non-Bulgarian and non-Serbian by ethnicity. It is exactly this ideological trend that was generally (self-)identified as a national separatism and may be regarded as a ‘full-fledged’ Macedonian nationalism. The most important theorist of the latter is the philologist and journalist Krste Misirkov, an activist of Čupovski’s circle, who formulated its basic principles in his political pamphlet “On the Macedonian matters” (*Za makedonckite raboti*), published in Macedonian in Sofia shortly after the Ilinden uprising.

Referring to texts like the one of Misirkov, the nowadays’ Macedonian historiography assumes that the Macedonian supra-national ideology led ‘naturally’ to a distinct nationalism. But this transition is far from being non-problematic and the bridge between ‘political’ and ‘national separatism’ is everything but obvious. The Organization’s leaders rejected the ‘national separatist’ idea of promoting the Macedonian into a distinct language. They opposed Misirkov’s program and his book seems to have been burned in Sofia by TMORO activists. When, in 1905, Čupovski tried to organize a ‘pan-Macedonian conference’ in Veles, he was expelled from the town by a local chief of Internal organization. The Macedonian nationalists

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54 Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 267-284.  
55 Andonov-Poljanski et alii, Ibid., 595-605, 610-617.  
57 Ristovski, Ibid., 35.
did not recognize their program even in the allegedly ‘anti-Bulgarian’ autonomism of Sandanski and, in 1914, accused him of ‘non-Macedonian’ activity.58

And, on the other hand, the context of the Balkan wars and of the First World War resulted in a new transmutation of the political affiliations as all the revolutionaries, including the most leftist ones, sided with the Bulgarian state and army against the aspirations of the other Balkans countries in Macedonia. All this shows the inconsistent character of the autonomism promoted by the local activists for whom the idea of ‘Greater Bulgaria’ seems to have always been a possible alternative – especially, if such a ‘successful’ scenario promised to preserve the integrity of their Macedonian ‘fatherland’. What is more, in some cases, even Krste Misirkov defended the cause of Bulgarian nationalism and, after the First World War, switched several times from Bulgarian into Macedonian one and vice versa.

Nevertheless, contrary to the Bulgarian historiographic point of view, the autonomist revolutionary tradition undoubtedly contributed to the formation of modern Macedonian nationalism. It promoted in the long run a concurrent political loyalty that generated new symbolic boundaries and, in this manner and in certain contexts, also transformations of the sense of ethnicity. Already in 1903, the anarchist Pavel Šatev, future participant in (and victim of) the Yugoslav Macedonian state leadership, witnessed this process of ethnic or national differentiation. In Salonica’s prison Yedikule, he saw people who were feeling themselves ‘only as Bulgarians’ but there were also others who stated that, while they were Bulgarians by ‘nationality’, felt before all ‘Macedonians’.59

This and the hitherto mentioned cases actually reveal the shifting boundaries of Macedonian self-identification and the multiple régimes of its exclusivity vis-à-vis other identity options. Although Bulgarians by national self-identification and supranationalists as a political theory, the local revolutionaries ironically created some of the premises that the specific political setting after the First World War transformed into a more influential Macedonian nationalism, decisively generalized in federal Yugoslav Macedonia. Therefore, the idea that the Macedonian national ideology and ‘identity’ was created by political fiat only since 1944 is as misleading as is theoretically ignorant the question since when exactly a Macedonian nation exists.