

2018 ANNUAL REPORT

**ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF THE MACEDONIAN
MINORITY IN BULGARIA AND THE RIGHTS OF BULGARIAN
CITIZENS WITH A MACEDONIAN CONSCIOUSNESS**

2018: 11 years since Bulgaria became a member of the European Union, 29 years since it became a democracy, 55 years since the beginning of the policy of denial, assimilation and discrimination of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.

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INTRODUCTION

The denial of the very existence of the Macedonian minority, as well as of Macedonian identity, language, culture and history continued in general to be official state policy. Bulgaria ignores all requests to recognise the minority and grant it its basic rights by taking advantage of existing restrictions which do not allow European institutions to intervene in matters relating to the recognition of minorities, the rights of minorities and the use of their languages, decisions about which are within the domain of the powers of individual

member states.¹ By taking advantage of the artificially created atmosphere of intolerance, the Bulgarian state successfully keeps representatives of the minority isolated from the political and social life of the country - both individually and collectively (by not registering Macedonian parties and organisations)². Given that the European Commission can only intervene in the case of discrimination, the Bulgarian state has put in place measures to ensure that the Commission Against Discrimination completely ignores all instances of discrimination against the Macedonian minority and deprives this body of formal proof that the Macedonian minority is the subject of discrimination.³

The Republic of Bulgaria has in particular strived to make the raising of this issue within the European Union impossible and has even made the abandonment of the Macedonian minority by the Republic of Macedonia a condition of Macedonia's membership of European institutions - it has demanded guarantees from Macedonia that it will not seek to defend this minority by threatening that that it will block its candidacy of such institutions if it does so (see below).

The effects of such organised state policy are felt in all areas. There are no (and there have not been) any Macedonian representatives on the Commission on Minorities. When ethnic groups in Bulgaria are officially spoken and written about, Macedonians are not mentioned at all and Macedonian culture, language and history are not represented in any government publication or official site. Macedonians are not included in any programs concerning ethnic communities and do not receive any type of assistance from the state for the preservation and development of their culture and identity.

Not one of the rights stipulated in the Framework Convention on National Minorities has been granted to the Macedonians. In schools children do not only learn anything about the Macedonian minority and nation, but on the contrary are imparted knowledge in such a way that it omits any mention of the Macedonian nation and minority. The Macedonian literary language continues to not be learnt. On television and in the media, there is a continuous and varied presentation of the view that there is no Macedonian nation and that everything Macedonian is Bulgarian. The Macedonian point of view is not included in lectures and discussions about history. Macedonian consciousness itself ("Macedonianism" as it is labelled in Bulgaria) is looked upon as an artificial anti-Bulgarian ideology. Macedonian consciousness in Bulgaria (and quite often the Macedonian nation as a whole) is considered to be a product of a Communist experiment or the result of hostile foreign propaganda. A climate of intolerance reigns in society against Macedonians and

¹ EN E-003308/2018 Answer given by Mrs Jourová on behalf of the European Commission (21.9.2018): „the Commission lacks general powers to act on minority issues in particular on matters related to the recognition of the status of the minorities, their self-determination and autonomy or the rule that frames the use of regional or minority languages. In these cases, the Member States retain the general powers to take decisions on minorities since, in accordance with Article 51 (1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the provisions of the Charter are addressed to the Member States only when they apply Union Law. Therefore, it is up to the Member States to ensure compliance with their obligations regarding fundamental rights, as they arise from international agreements and their domestic legislation.”

² There is not one politically or socially influential personality in the country that publicly states that he/she possesses a Macedonian consciousness, which shows that such persons are unable to obtain such a status or that they are forced to cover up their self-determination as Macedonians because of a fear of negative consequences.

³ See our reports for the last two years. Unfortunately, the European Commission does not accept as proof of discrimination the verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights or other documentation from the Council of Europe, as they are not institutions of the European Union, Compare the reply of the European Commission to a question by the European MP Francois Alfonsi (Ref. Ares(2017)5892035-01/12/2017), with EN E-003308/2018- a reply provided by Mrs Jourová on behalf of the European Commission (21.9.2018).

they are the object of hate speech, which is often given wide exposure through the media without being sanctioned by the institutions of the state and without encountering any condemnation by the wider society.

Not one Macedonian organisation and party is officially registered⁴. Not one of the registered parties in Bulgaria defends the rights of the Macedonians in Bulgaria. Despite the large number of recommendations by international bodies Bulgarian authorities persistently continue to refuse to enter into a dialogue with the Macedonian minority.

Representatives from across society with the exception of a small section of civil society⁵ treat Macedonians as non-existent and do not take them seriously.

This year as well neither the Commission Against Discrimination, nor any other organisation adopted an official stance regarding the situation of the Macedonians in Bulgaria, despite the fact that at the beginning of 2018 the number of verdicts against Bulgaria at the European Court of Human Rights had risen to 14. In 28 years of democracy not one Bulgarian official institution has done so.

During 2018 the Bulgarian state did not undertake any measures to improve the situation of the Macedonian minority. On the contrary, it made efforts to prevent the recognition of a Macedonian minority (see below).

DENIAL OF THE EXISTENCE OF A MACEDONIAN MINORITY

The denial of the very existence of the Macedonian minority has been official Bulgarian state policy since 1963 to the present.

The denial of the Macedonian minority has become an official court practice and was used this year as well as the basis for the refusal to register OMO „Ilinden“; namely that *„the goals of the organisation in question relating to „unrecognised national minorities“ should not have any place in society and should not be given any credence“* (see below). In some instances, people who answer „Macedonian“ when asked by judges about their ethnicity, are reprimanded and the judges declare that such persons do not exist and enter them as Bulgarians in court documents and verdicts or deliberately avoid indicating any ethnicity at all (see below in the case of Kiril Tilev).

This denial is often encountered in the media and is carried out by high state officials and influential social figures. Such denial does not encounter any condemnation or criticism. We can divide them up into two groups, which are nevertheless closely linked: one which denies the Macedonian nation and Macedonian identity and its attributes in general and the other which denies the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.

⁴ Krassimir Kanev, cited in Vanya Simeonova, the Blagoevgrad Court tripped up the Macedonianists in their attempt to condemn the state for its refusal to register them as an association, 26/8/2018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>.

⁵ Here one should include the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the people grouped around the editorial board of “Marginalia”.

One of the ways in which that is done is by ignoring the self-determination of the Macedonians in Bulgaria and considering them to be „Bulgarians“ or by calling them not Macedonians, but „Macedonianists“⁶, even though that is offensive to them.

On 17 January Velizar Enchev, a former officer of the communist security services, ambassador, parliamentary deputy and commentator on foreign political issues called the Macedonian nation „*an invented ethnicity, like that of the Macedonianists*“ on national television.⁷

In the bulletin entitled „Bulgarians in the Balkans and Around the World“ of February 2018, the long-time Bulgarian diplomat Lyubcho Toharov wrote the following: „*that on this territory (Republic of Macedonia, author’s note) there is no historically formed „Macedonian nation“ and national minorities which belong to it in the neighbouring states*“⁸. On 12 February the editor-in-chief of the national daily newspaper “24 Chasa“, Borislav Zyumbyulev, stated that „*the idea that Macedonians exist is completely anti-Bulgarian*“ and also that „*in essence what do we seek from the Vardar river valley? - that they enter the EU and preserve their Bulgarian feelings so as to in that way unite with Bulgaria*“⁹.

On 25 February in the regional daily *Struma*, Nikola Stoyanov published an article in which the Macedonian minority was treated as a foreign hostile fantasy that the Republic of Macedonia would have to renounce as a consequence of the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness if it wished to enter NATO and the EU. He expresses his regret that this matter was not resolved in the Agreement which should have imposed on Macedonia constitutional changes through which „*it abandons its fantasies about a „Macedonian minority“ in Bulgaria*“.¹⁰ On 21 March this same person once again attacked the „*Stalin-Tito-Dimitrov legacy regarding a Macedonian „nation*““ and stated that, “*one resolution imposed the idea of a „Macedonian nation*“.¹¹

On 2 April 2018 the program, History of Bulgaria, on Bulgarian National TV was dedicated to the topic „*55 years since the Plenum on the Macedonian Question*“. This program portrayed the recognition of the Macedonian minority by Bulgaria in 1946 as treason, while the policy of discrimination and assimilation of the Macedonian minority begun by Todor Zhivkov was said to be something positive.¹²

⁶ “The Inconvenient Ones”, “They are Bulgarians” <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412772695828808>:“ in Vanya Simeonova , the Blagoevgrad Court tripped up the Macedonianists in their attempt to condemn the state for its refusal to register them as an Association,26/8/2018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>

⁷ Velizar Enchev on the future of Macedonia, 17/1/2018, <https://www.slavishow.com/велизар-енчев-за-бъдещето-на-македони/>, cited on 02.04.2019.

⁸ Quoted from the article: The Bulgarian position on the dispute regarding Macedonia’ name”, <http://www.mni.bg/2018/02/kakvo-triabva-da-znaem-za-bulgarskata.html?m=1> , used on 13 April 2019.

⁹ Borislav Zyumbyulev, Bulgaria must be on the side of the truth, Editor’s column, <https://www.24chasa.bg/mnenia/article/6711390>, cited on 2/4/2019.

¹⁰ Nikola Stoyanov, Why Premiers Tsipras and Zaev will receive the Nobel Peace Prize while their Bulgarian colleague misses out on this opportunity, *Struma*, 25/2/2019), <https://struma.bg/защо-премиерите-ципрас-и-заев-ще-получ/>, cited on 18 March 2019.

¹¹ Nikola Stoyanov, How the “Macedonian language” appeared and how the current Janissaries realized the Stalin-Tito-Dimitrov Comintern project,“*Struma*”,21/3/2018),<https://struma.bg/как-се-пръкна-македонскиот-јазик-и-как/>, cited on 15 March 2019.

¹² <https://www.bnt.bg/bg/a/55-godini-ot-plenuma-za-makedonskiya-vpros-26032018> .

The signing of the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness between Macedonia and Greece once again awakened fears in Bulgaria that this may lead to demands for the recognition of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. On 13 June Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva stated the following before the Commission on Foreign Policy: „*We maintain that the new name does not lead to territorial pretensions or pretensions to an identity, culture, history etc. In our Agreement on Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation which has already been ratified there are enough such guarantees*“¹³. She added that in the agreement which was about to be signed there would be a provision for changing the Macedonian Constitution and removal of the clause which obliged Macedonia to intervene on behalf of Macedonian minorities. „*With its removal they will not be able to advance any claims against our country*“ said the minister.¹⁴

On 16 June Macedonian identity and the Macedonian minority were once again in the focus of the media's attention due to the signing of the Agreement between Macedonia and Greece and the refusal of the Bulgarian premier to meet the Macedonian president during his visit to Bulgaria. The national television network BTV raised this issue with three politicians and commentators. The former ambassador to Macedonia and president of the National Assembly Alexander Yordanov commented as follows: „*the Macedonian side defends the Macedonianist thesis that the Macedonians represent a separate people, language and nation with a different language, culture and history*“ and reminded viewers that according to the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness, the two countries have a joint history and that „*a joint history makes for one people*“. Velizar Enchev voiced the fear that in future negotiations with Macedonia, Bulgaria would have to „*henceforth negotiate about history with the biggest anti-Bulgarian Macedonists who have on their side an international agreement according to which they are a distinct people*.“¹⁵. Deputy Premier Krassimir Karakachanov replied to their criticisms and stated that „*The agreement on Good Neighbourliness between Bulgaria and Macedonia contains guarantees that Skopje will not advance claims regarding territories and minorities*.“¹⁶

On 18/6/2018 Nikola Stoyanov once again appeared in „Struma“ by commenting as follows on Article 11 of the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness which is directed at separatist and subversive activities: „*That may indeed become a fact when those articles from the Macedonian Constitution which „defend“ the imaginary „Macedonian minorities“ in Pirin and Aegean Macedonia are removed*“¹⁷. On 3 October this same person spoke of the „*bloody genocide committed via the political and administrative denationalisation*

¹³ In the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness there were sufficient guarantees that Macedonia would not advance any claims , 13/6/2018, Actualno.com https://www.actualno.com/politics/v-dogovora-za-dobrosyedstvo-imalo-dostatychno-garancii-che-makedonija-njama-da-predjavjava-pretencii-news_679561.html , used on 15/3/2019.

¹⁴ We insist that there be guarantees from the Republic of North Macedonia that the new name will not lead to territorial and cultural claims, http://novini247.com/novini/darjim-da-imame-garantsii-ot-republika-severna-makedoniya-che-novoto_1003056.html , used on 15/3/2019

¹⁵ Former Diplomats: Greece and Macedonia achieved their goals, Bulgaria failed, 16/6/2018, [btvnovinite.bg, https://btvnovinite.bg/predavanja/tazi-sabota-i-nedelia/bivshi-diplomati-garcija-i-makedonija-postignaha-celite-si-balgarija-se-provali.html](https://btvnovinite.bg/https://btvnovinite.bg/predavanja/tazi-sabota-i-nedelia/bivshi-diplomati-garcija-i-makedonija-postignaha-celite-si-balgarija-se-provali.html) , used on 15/3/2019.

¹⁶ Krassimir Karakachanov, "It's doubtful that the agreement on "North Macedonia" will become a reality", 16/6/2018, https://www.webcafe.bg/id_1867495956, used on 15/3/2019.

¹⁷ Nikola Stoyanov, "Our "diplomacy", by arrogantly not paying enough attention to the name "North Macedonia" places us into the trap set by Panhellenism and Macedonianism.,18/6/2018, <https://struma.bg/надменно-неглижирайки-името-северна/> used on 15/3/2019.

which led to a perfidious erosion of Bulgarian consciousness, by means of the poisonous hashish of Macedonianism“¹⁸

The Macedonian minority would once again find itself in the focus of attention at the beginning of December. On 10 December the Deputy Premier Krassimir Karakachanov stated the following on Bulgarian National Television in relation to the Republic of Macedonia: „*We cannot support them in their quest to join the EU and NATO, while they continue to assert that there is a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. We have no interest in bringing into the EU and NATO a state which tomorrow will create even bigger problems for us*“.¹⁹ He condemned the „*falsification of history and the efforts of the Macedonian leadership to impose a Macedonian consciousness and language not only on the population in its own country, but on countries outside of it*“... „*In Skopje they forget themselves and it is not bad from time to time to keep them on the straight and narrow*“, added the deputy Premier²⁰. He was especially angry as „*they continue to claim that there is a Macedonian minority on the territory of Bulgaria*“²¹.

An example of the denial of the existence of the Macedonian language and identity in general was apparent in the interview conducted by Liliya Chaleva with Associate Professor Kocheva entitled: „*What is the „Macedonian language“ and can it be officially recognised within the EU?*“.²² In this interview the existence of a Macedonian identity and culture was directly negated as a lie, plagiarism and a replacement of Bulgarian cultural values by the „*disciples of the doctrines of the Comintern*“²².

Similar statements by officials show that Bulgaria continues to attempt to impose a renunciation of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria as a condition for the integration of Macedonia into the European Union and continues to seek guarantees that no one will stand up for rights of the minority which continues to be denied, discriminated and assimilated. That in itself shows what types of problems representatives of the Macedonian minority are faced with in Bulgaria when they attempt to demand that their rights be respected.

Denial of the Macedonian Language

Part of the denial of the Macedonian minority is the denial of the very existence of the Macedonian language.

The Macedonian language was learnt in Bulgarian schools, used on Bulgarian national radio and represented in the works of Bulgarian philologists in the past (such as in the work of Academician Ivan Lekov). However, after 1963 a purge of academics who recognised the Macedonian language took place

¹⁸ Why did the referendum on the Macedonianism supposedly castrated by Zaev lead to a “yellow card” from Athens and Sofia, 3/10/2018, <https://struma.bg/защо-референдумът-на-уж-скопения-от-за/>, used on 15/3/2019.

¹⁹ Karakachanov angry: How are we to accept the claims made by Skopje, that Samoil fought against the Bulgarians, 10 December 2018, <http://epicenter.bg/article/Krasimir-Karakachanov--Makedoniya-e-vazhna-za-nas--no-Skopie-se-samozabravyat/170333/2/0> , used on 15/3/2019.

²⁰ Karakachanov convinced that Skopje sometimes has to be kept on the straight and narrow, 10/12/2018, <https://news.bg/politics/karakachanov-ubeden-che-skopie-tryabva-da-se-vkarva-v-patya-ponyakoga.html> , used on 15/3/2019.

²¹ Karakachanov convinced that Skopje sometimes has to be kept on the straight and narrow, 10/12/2018, <https://news.bg/politics/karakachanov-ubeden-che-skopie-tryabva-da-se-vkarva-v-patya-ponyakoga.html> , cited on 15/3/2019

²² Liliya Chaleva, “What is the „Macedonian language“ and can it be officially recognised within the EU?”, 12 December 2018, <https://dnes.dir.bg/obshtestvo/shto-e-to-makedonski-ezik-i-mozhe-li-da-bade-ofitsialno-priznat-v-es>, cited on 19.03.2019

(for example-Dina Stanisheva-the mother of the former premier) and the language was proclaimed to be non-existent. After the fall of communism, the Macedonian language continued to not be learnt either by the Macedonian minority or in Bulgarian universities, while its existence was denied and even became a reason for the years-long dispute with Macedonia. In 2018 as well it became the object of denial in Bulgarian public life at the highest of official levels. The fundamental task was to not allow the Republic of Macedonia to impose the study of Macedonian in Bulgaria.

On 17 January Velizar Enchev stated the following on Bulgarian National TV: *“the so-called Macedonian language-here I must make one remark-is a southwestern Bulgarian dialect”*.²³

On 4 June 21 scholars and professors published an open letter addressed to the Bulgarian government in which they raised the alarm as follows: *“With the acceptance of the name North Macedonia, geography has provided a sharp outline of history. It opens the way for new inventions and political speculations. The claim that the “centuries-old desire of the Macedonian people to speak the Macedonian language” has come about is a clear confirmation of what awaits us”*.²⁴

On 8 December Deputy Premier Karakachanov made an official statement in which he threatened the Macedonian premier: *“Mr Zaev, do not misuse the matter of the Macedonian language. That could cost you membership of the EU and NATO!”*²⁵ *“North Macedonia is a geographical name which includes present territories of Bulgaria. Mr Zaev with this move may tomorrow request that the currently used, completely identical Bulgarian dialect be learnt as an official foreign language in our country. That is inadmissible, that is a provocation”*.²⁶

On 10 December on Bulgarian National Television Deputy Premier Karakachanov rounded off his view on this matter: *“Macedonia.... is imposing some sort of language, not only on its territory, but on ours as well. You cannot say that in Greece one must study the Macedonian language. They have been saying that about Bulgaria more than 20 years. I don't want to feel like an idiot as we support them to enter NATO and the EU, while they cook up such nonsense for us”*.²⁷ His anger in this regard was especially provoked by the fact that *“they continue to claim that there are Macedonian minorities on Bulgarian territories, who must learn their language”*.²⁸

His views led to a discussion on this matter. On 11 December 2018 the former ambassador to Macedonia, Alexander Yordanov, made the following statement on BTV television: *“The Macedonian language is a*

²³ Velizar Enchev on the future of Macedonia , <https://www.slavishow.com/велизар-енчев-за-бъдещето-на-македони/> , cited на 19.03.2019

²⁴ Our professors and academicians raise the alarm:” North Macedonia opens the door for new pretensions”, 4 July 2018, <http://epicenter.bg/article/Profesori-i-akademitsi-preduprezhdavat---quot-Severna-Makedoniya-quot--otvaryavratata-za-novi-pretentsii-/158386/2/0> , cited on 19/3/2019

²⁵<https://www.24chasa.bg/novini/article/7190571>, <http://epicenter.bg/article/Karakachanov-kam-Zaev--Ne-zloupotrebyavayte-s-makedonskiya-ezik--Shte-Vi-kostva-chlenstvoto-v-ES-i-NATO-/170228/2/48>, cited on 19/3/2019.

²⁶Karakachanov: The Macedonian lands are Bulgarian and that is a historical fact, , https://fakti.bg/bulgaria/348334-karakachanov-makedonskite-zemi-sa-balgarski-i-tova-e-istoricheski-fakt?mobile_full_version=1 cited on 19/3/2019.

²⁷Karakachanov angry: How can we accept Skopje's claims that Samoil fought for...<http://epicenter.bg/article/Krasimir-Karakachanov--Makedoniya-e-vazhna-za-nas--no-Skopie-se-samozabavyat/170333/2/0> cited on 19/3/2019

²⁸ Karakachanov convinced that Skopje has to be put on the straight and narrow sometimes, 10 December 2018,<https://news.bg/politics/karakachanov-ubeden-che-skopie-tryabva-da-se-vkarva-v-patya-ponyakoga.html> cited on 19/3/2019

*norm, a dialect of the Bulgarian language and from an academic point of view such a language does not exist, but that is not so from a political point of view”.*²⁹ On 12 December Liliya Chaelva interviewed Associate Professor Kocheva on the topic “*What is the “Macedonian language” and can it be officially recognised in the EU?*” In this interview the interviewer noted that “*such a language does not exist” and “the language is Bulgarian”*. For her part the Associate Professor called the Macedonian language a “*Vardarsko-Macedonian recodification of the literary Bulgarian language” carried out in the Republic of Macedonia*”, “*a recodified and partially constructed Bulgarian language of the Western variety*” and “*the so-called Macedonian language and its composition during 1944*” which “*by means of an internal linguistic translation has turned into plagiarism*” in attempting to present it as the product of “*continuous and consecutive attempts for the name of the Bulgarian nationality and Bulgarian language to be substituted for*” and as a process whereby through “*the division (glototomy) of one language, a division has also been carried out of a people (nationotomy), of history (historiotomy), of art (artetomy), of folklore (folklotomy) etc*”.³⁰

On 16 December the Deputy Premier once again raised this topic by stating the following to journalists in Plovdiv: “*Bulgaria has never recognised the Macedonian language, and no one can demand that of us. The fact that the authorities in Skopje have written in their constitution that their language is called Macedonian does not mean that we have to give them the opportunity to one day impose this language, which they think exists contrary to all linguistic science throughout the world, as some sort of language on the minorities in Bulgaria. I expressed my dissatisfaction about several matters - firstly Zaev’s statement that a so-called “Macedonian “language” would be taught in Greece. It is their right to learn whatever language they like in their own country, however the presumptions of some politicians from the time of Tito cannot become a norm for sovereign nations such as Bulgaria and Greece*”.³¹

One of the figures who most actively attacked the Macedonian language during this year was Nikola Stoyanov. On 21 March he published an article with the provocative title “*How the “Macedonian language” appeared*³² and how the current Janissaries realised the Stalin-Tito-Dimitrov project”. In this article he spoke of a “*non-existent language*” and that “*the Premier hardly suspects that in approving the ratification of the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness he has fulfilled the wish of Stalin-Tito-Dimitrov regarding a Macedonian ‘nation’ and Macedonian ‘language’*”³³. On 18 June he once again published a text according to which the Macedonian nation “*speaks a Western Bulgarian dialect, artificially infected*

²⁹ Yordanov knows that from an academic point of view there is no Macedonian language, but that there is from a political point of view, <https://news.bg/politics/jordanov-znae-che-makedonski-ezik-nyama-ot-nauchna-glednatochka-no-ot-politicheska-ima.html> sited on 19/3/2019.

³⁰ Liliya Chaleva, “What is the „Macedonian language“and can it be officially recognised within the EU“?, interview with associate professor Kocheva, 12 December 2018, <https://dnes.dir.bg/obshtestvo/shto-e-to-makedonski-ezik-i-mozhe-li-da-bade-ofitsialno-priznat-v-es>, cited on 19.03.2019

³¹ Minister Krassimir Karakachanov, Almost one and a half years after the signing of the Agreement on Friendship , Macedonia continues to provoke with its so-called “history”, !6 December 2018, <http://m.focus-news.net/?action=news&id=2602450> ; Каракачанов: Македонија провокира с т. нар. си „историја“, <https://standartnews.com/balgariya-politika/karakachanov-makedoniya-provokira-s-t-nar-si-istoriya-380819.html>, cited on 19.03.2019.

³² The used word in Bulgarian is demining and offensive slang that is impossible to translate.

³³ Nikola Stoyanov, How the “Macedonian language” appeared and how the current Janissaries realized the Stalin-Tito-Dimitrov Comintern project, “Struma”, 21/3/2018), <https://struma.bg/как-се-пръкна-македонскиот-јазик-и-как/>, cited on 15 March 2019.

with many Serbian words” while “the Macedonian language”, is based on the Bulgarian lexicon, but ,as some people say, is printed on a Serbian type writer”. Its de jure recognition by means of the signing of the Agreement was “consumed treason”³⁴. On 3 October he would once again claim that the Agreement on Good Neighbourliness between Macedonia and Bulgaria was “anti-Bulgarian because it de facto recognises the ‘Macedonian’ language”³⁵

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION

On 11 January 2018 the European Court of Human Rights brought down three new verdicts against Bulgaria for the violation of the freedom of association and assembly of the Macedonian organisation OMO “Ilinden”³⁶. This brought the total number of decisions regarding the violation of the rights of the Macedonians in Bulgaria to 14³⁷.

From 2014 onwards Bulgaria has been subjected to stronger monitoring by the Committee of Ministers due to its refusal for the past 29 years to register organisations of Bulgarian citizens which have a Macedonian consciousness and for the non-implementation of a series of verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights relating to this matter. In order to remove the monitoring Bulgaria adopted the measure of changing the Law on Registration of Non-Government Organisations by transferring their registration to the Agency for Registration. The law was voted in in 2016 but its entry into force was delayed until 1 January 2018 and in the interim the Committee of Ministers was requested to remove its monitoring. That did not occur due, to a large extent, to the reactions of a series of Macedonian and human rights organisations which clearly pointed out that the changes in the law did not at all solve the problem of the non-registration of Macedonian organisations (see our reports of 2016 and 2017).

As was to be expected, the entry into force of the new law did not solve any problem associated with the registration of Macedonian organisations. The Agency for Registration consecutively refused all attempts to register Macedonian organisations. In 2018 the state refused on 12 separate occasions the applications for the registration of Macedonian organisations; namely, OMO “Ilinden” and the Association of Repressed Macedonians, Victims of Communist Terror. Of those 12 refusals, two were by the Blagoevgrad District and Sofia Appeals Court and eight by the Agency for Registration.

OMO “Ilinden”

On 15 May 2018 OMO “Ilinden” also submitted documentation for its registration and on 25 May it was rejected by the Agency for Registration on the basis that the documentation had not been correctly filled out and was not complete. Ostensibly the goals of the organisation and the way in which they were to be

³⁴ “Our “diplomacy”, by arrogantly not paying enough attention to the name “North Macedonia” places us into the trap set by Panhellenism and Macedonianism.,18/6/2018, <https://struma.bg/надменно-неглижирайки-името-северна/> cited on 15/3/2019

³⁵ Nikola Stoyanov, Why did the referendum on the Macedonianism supposedly castrated by Zaeв lead to a “yellow card” from Athens and Sofia, 3/10/2018, <https://struma.bg/защо-референдумът-на-вж-скопения-от-за/>, cited on 15/3/2019.

³⁶ *Kiril Ivanov v. Bulgaria* (Application no. 17599/07); *Yordan Ivanov and Others v. Bulgaria* (Application no. 70502/13); *United Macedonian Organisation Ilinden and Others v. Bulgaria* (No. 3), (Application no. 29496/16)

³⁷ „The Problem “OMO „Ilinden“, 19 January 2018, svmargaritova, <http://www.pravanachoveka.com/problemat-omo-ilinden/4609/> cited on 19 March 2019.

achieved had not been clearly enunciated. In this regard the Agency was aware of court practice on this matter and observed that the goals of the organisation relating to “*non-recognised national minorities*” were inappropriate and should not be given any credence.

Such an argument has been condemned several times by the European Court of Human Rights. At the session of the Committee of Ministers in June 2018 it was pointed out that the remarks of the court in relation to the ideas of OMO “Ilinden” raised serious questions regarding the capacity of the new registration mechanism to provide opportunities for the registration of Macedonian organisations and about the correct application of Article 11 of the Convention as it relates to the right of free association. Concerns were expressed in Strasbourg by the fact that the remarks of the Agency did not provide any opportunity to determine exactly the nature of the mistakes and omissions made in the application which had led to the organisations not being registered. On the contrary, that was done in very general terms which made it very difficult for those organisations to correct their documentation. Such an approach is not at all in keeping with the Convention on Human Rights. The Committee stated that as this matter related to a very old case and to a fourth refusal dating from 2006, Bulgaria should take all possible and necessary measures so that the appeal or the next attempt at registration be carried out in full compliance of Article 11 of the Convention.³⁸

On 11 September 2018 the District Court in Blagoevgrad issued Decision No 4141 which upheld the decision of the Agency to refuse the application for registration of OMO “Ilinden”. It did this even though the court admitted that the official at the Agency did not fulfil the requirement of article 22, line 5 of the Law on the Commercial Register and Juridical Entities with a Non-Economic Goals,³⁹ namely, to indicate which documents the applicant should provide and “*that such a perversion of process would possibly reflect negatively upon the legality of the refusal consequently issued, in that it would be independently a ground for its revocation if the refusal being appealed against is based only on the non-presentation of this document*”. However, by referring to the two other grounds for the refusal-namely, the lack of clarity as to who was representing the organisation before the court (something clearly indicated in the constitution of the organisation), the fact that the organisation stipulates putting up independent candidates at elections and that the specified goals, in the court’s opinion, were political and not typical of NGO organisations, the court upheld the original refusal to register.

On 1 October 2018 OMO “Ilinden” appealed the decision of the District Court-Blagoevgrad at the Appeals Court in Sofia. By virtue of Decision No 2549/5/11/2018 of 31 October 2018 the Appeals Court in Sofia upheld the decision of the Blagoevgrad District Court. By virtue of this decision the Appeals Court in Sofia accepted as valid only the third ground for the refusal, while it rejected the second ground stressing that “*the complaint in the appeal has a reasonable basis*” and that “*there is no doubt that there is no contradiction between the decisions of the founding members and that which is stipulated in the constitution regarding the formal representation of the association. It is evident that the desire of the founding members is for it to be represented by the president of the governing council*”. Nevertheless, it upheld the decision as the putting up of independent candidates at elections “*points to the conclusion that the association is going to carry out political activities*”, which a civic association cannot be involved in. The association’s arguments that it would only support such candidates, were not considered valid. This decision was final and could not be appealed. The organisation has lodged an appeal at the European Court of Human Rights.

³⁸ CM/Notes/ 1318/H46-5-rev, 5-7 June 2018 (DH).

³⁹ The Law on the Commercial Register and Juridical Entities with Non-Economic Goals

Association of Repressed Macedonians, Victims of Communist Terror

On 19 March 2018, the Association of Repressed Macedonians, Victims of Communist Terror submitted an application for registration. The employee at the Agency carefully examined the documentation and established that nothing was missing. However, during the scanning of the Constitution at the Agency certain pages were deleted while other were only partially copied or mixed up. On 23 March a rejection of the application was received as the documents submitted were not in keeping with the law and, more concretely, as the goals indicated in the registration form were not in keeping with those indicated in the constitution. In addition, the persons who represent the organisation were not indicated and certain documents had not been submitted. The Association decided not to appeal, but rather to lodge a new application.

On 14 May the Association lodged a new application for registration, prepared by a lawyer. On 23 May the Agency rejected the application on the basis that in the list of founding members submitted, personal details had been revealed and since this list had to be published in accordance with the law, in order for the personal details of the founding members to be protected *“a copy of the decision for founding the association in which personal details of the founding members- except those which are required by law- had been deleted”* should have been submitted. Such a correction was not requested of the association before the rejection, as required by law.

On 6 June the Association of Repressed Macedonians, Victims of Communist Terror submitted a new application with corrected documentation and with the personal details of the founding members deleted. On 12 June the application was rejected. The reason this time was that the decision to found the Association was not signed by each member of the body.

On 20 June the documentation was submitted again, however on 27 June the application was once again rejected. On this occasion the reason indicated was that the constitution was signed by only the three members of the leadership and not by all founding members and there was uncertainty as to whether it was exactly the same constitution, despite the fact that in the protocol regarding the founding of the Association it was stated that a constitution had been adopted.

Another rejection which focused on formal matters was received by the Association on 11 July.

The Agency refused to provide copies of its decisions and the Association was forced to find out about them via the Internet. This is why it was forced on 30 July to request by special letter copies of the four decisions relating to its non-registration. It received them on 2 August with the comment that the Agency was sending such documents *“again”* to the association, which was untrue and sought to cover up that it had not sent them until that time.

On 6 August the Association submitted an appeal to the Blagoevgrad District Court, in which it accused the Agency of having *“from the very beginning, without indicating any legal motives, considerations or competency, and despite our requests to date (having received five consecutive refusals), refused to clarify the way in which we could defend our rights; that is, by informing us in writing of all necessary requests for information which we should have submitted to the Agency for registration of our Association in accordance with the requirement in Article 22, line 5 of The Law on the Commercial Register and Juridical Entities with Non-Economic Goals”*. Apart from this flagrant violation of the law the Agency committed

another - it always issued an immediate rejection instead of providing the opportunity for the error to be corrected. The Association also demanded that the court rule that the Agency cover the Association's costs.

The Blagoevgrad District Court presided over by Liliya Maseva, in decision No 3933 of 21/8/2018, rejected the Association's appeal. She completely ignored the fundamental complaint and demand, namely, that the Agency had systematically violated the law by not informing the Association of errors made or giving it the opportunity to correct them and then issuing final decisions. Instead of doing this the court upheld the initial decision.

On 29 August the decision of the Blagoevgrad District Court was appealed against at the highest judicial level available - the Appeals Court in Sofia. On 27 September 2018 the Sofia Appeals Court in Decision No 3128 upheld the decision of the Blagoevgrad Court in relation to the Association of Repressed Macedonians, repeating the reasoning of the Blagoevgrad court and ignoring the arguments of the Association.

On 7 November the Association lodged another application for registration. In Decision No 20181107114629 of 9/11/2018, the Agency rejected the application for registration. The concrete reasons for the rejection were indicated in the decision and the Association, taking that as a basis for preparing a new application, as well as all other remarks made by the Agency and court beforehand, made another application for registration, this time carefully prepared by a lawyer and with the additional assistance of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.

On 29 November 2019 a new application for registration was made and the Agency immediately indicated that new changes were required. These new changes, however, were merely a repetition of those indicated in previous documents lodged by the Association when applying earlier and had no relevance to the new documentation lodged in which all those errors had been corrected. Despite the fact that this was pointed out to the Agency, on 4 December 2018 it issued a further rejection in which it referred to the previous documentation and totally ignored the new documentation submitted.⁴⁰ . The matter has been referred to the courts.

The basic argument used in the rejections was that the applications contained "technical errors". The established process prescribes that if there are such errors the Agency has to indicate what they are and to seek their removal which it in most cases did not do or did only partially. The fact that the critical comments and recommendations were heeded and adhered to did not at all help the organisation obtain registration- the end result was always a rejection. The most drastic example of the refusal of registration of the Association of Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria, Victims of Communist Terror was that which occurred on 4 December 2018 when the Agency for Registrations completely ignored the documentation submitted by the Association on 28 November 2018 and based all of its criticisms and the very refusal on documents submitted in relation to a previous attempt at registration.

Characteristically, both the Agency and the courts highlight as problems things which are not specifically stipulated in the law and which are not usually required of other organisations. In addition, the relevant legislation is interpreted and applied by the courts in an arbitrary fashion and in contradiction with previous

⁴⁰ See the Refusal No 20181128121115 of the Agency for Registration of 4/12/2018 and the appeal by Stoyan Gerasimov Vasilev at the Blagoevgrad District Court of 14/12/2018 against the refusal of the Agency for Registration of 4/12/2018, The Blagoevgrad Court also ignored the new documents submitted and on 5/3/2019 under presiding judge Liliya Maseva, who is well known for her multiple rejections of applications for registration by Macedonian organisations, upheld decision No 1083/5/3/2019 of the Agency.

court practice so as to be able to uphold the rejections issued by the Agency. The courts take the liberty of basing their decisions on arbitrary and untrue assertions, incorrect documents and consider the goals of the organisations to be allegedly political, while also pointing to non-existent contradictions. In at least one case arguments which have been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights were used (as in the Agency's rejection of 24 May 2018 of OMO "Ilinden's" application). The various decisions of the Agency, Blagoevgrad District Court and the Sofia Appeals Court often contradict and refute one another.

In particular, concern was raised by Decision No 3933 of 21/8/2018 by the Blagoevgrad Regional Court. Judge Maseva commented on the goals of the Association of Repressed Macedonians as follows: "*the goals of the future association are not in keeping with the norms established by Article 38 of ZYULNTS*"⁴¹. This article stipulates that that associations use their property for generally humane, humanitarian, cultural and socially useful goals".⁴² On the basis of her assertion that the goals of the Association do not fall within this group, Judge Maseva ruled out a whole range of activities related to the defence of the rights of the Macedonians and development of their culture⁴³ by excluding them from the category of noble, human rights defence and humanitarian activity and not compatible with the law without advancing any other reason, apart from the fact that they are activities carried out by Macedonians.

In its decision of 4-6 December 2018 the Committee of Ministers "noted with satisfaction that in a judgment of September 2018 the Sofia Court of Appeal considered that the goals pursued by an association similar to OMO Ilinden were lawful and compatible with public utility status and that this is a significant step forward...."⁴⁴. That optimism appeared overstated. Even though the reasons for rejection may have changed and while some appear more moderate than others, the fact remains that the result is always the same. That approach remained in force in the case of the Sofia Appeals Court which despite all upheld the rejection issued by the Agency.

The reason why the changes in the law did not led to a solution of the problem of the violation of the rights of the Macedonians is that in Bulgaria there is a social, political and ideological consensus that Macedonian organisations must not under any circumstances be registered. This is an unofficial state policy, something which is clearly noted and recognised in Bulgaria including by those who support this policy.⁴⁵ The phrase "technical errors" is merely the last mask under the cover of which the attempt is made to continue an

⁴¹ Decision No 3933 of 21/8/2018 by Judge Liliya Maseva of the Blagoevgrad Regional Court, pp 2-3.

⁴² This article stipulates that associations use their assets to promote the following goals: "1. development and strengthening of civil society, civic participation and good governance; 2. development and strengthening of spiritual values, health care, education, science, culture, equipment, technologies or physical culture; 3. Support for children, disabled persons and for persons and communities at risk of social exclusion; 4. defence of human rights or the environment; 5. other goals stipulated by the law.

⁴³ As stated in decision No 20180620172319/27/6/2018 of the Agency for Registration to refuse registration, pp 1 and 2, the Association's goals include provision of care for those repressed persons and assistance in solving their problems, defence of the rights of the Macedonians, efforts aimed at the preservation of the historical truth, development of cultural and educational activities, publication of books, giving of lectures, collection of archival material etc.

⁴⁴ Supervision of the execution of the European Court's judgments, 1331st meeting, 4-6 December 2018 (DH), H46-7 United Macedonian Organisation Ilinden and Others group v. Bulgaria (Application No. 59491/00), 6.

⁴⁵ Vanya Simeonova, The Blagoevgrad Court frustrated the attempt of the Macedonianists to denounce the country because of its refusal to register them as an association, Struma, 26/8/2018, , <https://struma.bg/благоевградският-съд-спяна-македонци/> cited on 1/4/2019.: Judge Maseva's decision to refuse registration publicly enters a new phase-incorrect documentation", Similarly as in "The Inconvenient Ones". At one moment they very sincerely express their horror at the Macedonians' claims that they be defended by a Bulgarian court, even when this same court has refused to register their organisations. (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412772695828808>).

organised state policy of discrimination.⁴⁶ The reason for the application of this new tactic is the pressure coming from the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers and the fact that hitherto Bulgarian arguments have been condemned by them.

State policy continues to be aimed at bringing about a cessation of monitoring while simultaneously not granting registration to Macedonian organisations.

The larger problem of denial of the Macedonian minority and the desire for it to be assimilated is what lies behind the problem of the violation of the right of association of the Macedonians. The state does not wish to allow Macedonians to participate in the social and political life of the country. It is obvious that this discrimination enjoys support from a large part of the elite, that there is no opposition to it, while the voices of reason are rare.⁴⁷

NEGATIVE SOCIAL STEREOTYPES, HATE SPEECH AND SYSTEMATIC DEHUMANIZATION

The Macedonians in Bulgaria and their organizations are guilty until they prove otherwise. It is characteristic that no Macedonian activist or organization have been charged or condemned for violations against the state or society. Despite that, through systematic hate speech and unpunished defamation, a “*public opinion*” has been formed that Macedonian activists and their organizations are anti-Bulgarian, against the state, seditious, separatist, treasonous and criminal. Macedonians have no opportunity to defend themselves and become victims of artificially created negative stereotypes by being discredited in the media with a right of reply which is frequently denied to them or curtailed and without sanctions being applied for hate speech used against them, accompanied by judicial protection for all those who defame or insult them.

Media attitude towards Macedonians: scandals and provocations

The Bulgarian media displays a strong unwillingness to familiarize themselves with the object of their attacks. Despite the fact that at present there are 6 active Macedonian organizations, 1 political party, 1 newspaper and 1 bulletin, all of them are treated as if they are one and the same structure, without making any distinction as to their goals, ideas and activities. In the Bulgarian media the Macedonians are portrayed as a hostile and ugly entity.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Lyubomir Markov, A new stage in the struggle of Macedonian organisations for registration, Narodna Volya, November , December 2018, <http://www.narodnavolja.com/articles2018/11/txt04.php>, <http://www.narodnavolja.com/articles2018/12/txt06.php> ,cited on 20 March 2019. In this article apart from the very approach employed, the very change of the law was also considered to be “theatre”.

⁴⁷ Amongst such voices the following merits a mention “The Problem of OMO “Ilinden” by svmargaritova, <https://www.pravanachoveka.com/problemat-omo-ilinden/4609/> , cited on 5 April 2019.

⁴⁸ For example: “*The Association of Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria, Victims of Communist terror,*” ‘under which name OMO Ilinden has recently ventured... From 2003 onwards OMO stopped making attempts to register as a political party’, in connection with which 3 different political subjects are portrayed as one and the same: The Association of Repressed Macedonians, the organization OMO Ilinden and the political party OMO Ilinden PIRIN, which since 2008 has actually ceased its attempts at registration (in: Vanya Simeonova, The Blagoevgrad court stopped

That represents a systematic and tendentious lack of will to inform society about the subject and the lack of objective information is substituted for with lies through which Macedonian organizations and their members, as well as the minority as a whole, are dehumanized. The dehumanization constitutes an important component of the policy of discrimination - it serves to justify, cover up and gain social support for this policy.

Because of such an attitude all the activities and views held by Macedonian organizations, as well as their very existence, are considered to be scandalous or provocative by the Bulgarian media. News items about them are published in the “Scandal” and “Provocation” sections or such terms are included in their titles. For example: “Scandal! An episode of the Inconvenient Ones delved into the scandalous text of the Annual Report of OMO Ilinden.”⁴⁹ Or the claim by Zoran Zaev, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, that there is a Macedonian language (official language of that country) is depicted as “the latest provocative statement by Zoran Zaev.”⁵⁰

Dehumanization of the minority

During March 2019 the “Inconvenient Ones” TV program, developed jointly by *Blagoevgrad News* and *Top Presa*, broadcast the 19th episode of its second season under the title “A scandal! An episode of the Inconvenient Ones delved into the scandalous text of the Annual Report of OMO Ilinden!”⁵¹. It dealt with the 2016 Annual Report on the Rights of the Macedonian Minority in Bulgaria in which several programs and newspaper publications connected to those media organizations are cited as examples of hate speech.⁵² They were unhappy that they had been mentioned in the Report although they did not say what specifically was inaccurate, nor whether they had been quoted out of context. They threatened to lodge a lawsuit for slander. They claimed that their insults on grounds of ethnicity represented “*expressions of objective opinion*,” that everything said by them was “*sincere*” and “*the full truth*” and then threatened to continue to comment in the same way about OMO Ilinden. The “Inconvenient Ones” portrayed themselves as victims of our report and compared it to the reports provided by the Communist security services and the repression of “*political jokes*” in the past. They claimed that their mention in the Report represented hate speech against them and on the contrary characterized the protests against hate speech in the Report as a repressive demand for limiting freedom of speech and an “*attempt to judicially legitimize journalistic criticism as repression.*”

the Macedonianists in their attempt to sue the country for the refusal to register them as an association, 26.08.2018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>. Also: an example of that is: Strasbourg ordered us to pay €33 000 to OMO – Ilinden (<https://www.dnes.bg/temida/2018/01/11/strasburg-ni-osydi-da-platim-33-000-na-omo-ilinden.364780>), and citing the history of UMO Ilinden PIRIN which did not participate in that case. Also: Margarita Koleva, Bulgaria ordered to pay 33,000 Euros to OMO Ilinden,” 11th January 2018, <https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/bylgariia-osydena-da-plati-33-000-evro-na-omo-ilinden-2071956>; The non registered OMO Ilinden sued Bulgaria for 33,000 Euros <https://pik.bg/нерегистрираната-омо-„илинден“-осъди-българия-за-33-хиляди-евро-news718799.html> , cited on 19 March 2019.

⁴⁹<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412772695828808>

⁵⁰<http://epicenter.bg/article/Karakachanov-kam-Zaev--Ne-zloupotrebyavayte-s-makedonskiya-ezik--Shte-Vi-kostva-chlenstvoto-v-ES-i-NATO-/170228/2/48>, used on 19th March 2019.

⁵¹<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412772695828808>, used on 19th March 2019.

⁵²See our Annual Report for 2016 http://omoilindenpirin.org/news/2017/may31_e.php

One of the themes of this program was that those who were offended should be happy that “*someone considers them to be humans*” and to be “*grateful*” since this program was the only one which pays them any attention.

Apart for having to be grateful for being mocked, three demands were made of the Macedonian organizations: to prove they were not alcoholics, that they had not been involved in financial irregularities and to disband themselves immediately.

The members of the organization were called upon to refute accusations of alcoholism and declare that “they do not use alcohol” and prove that they abstained from the use of alcohol. The Inconvenient Ones suggested that the Macedonians be tested for their alcohol usage. The Macedonian activists were “*drunkards which they do not even deny,*” “*when we comment on alcohol dependence, let’s say their pain on behalf of Macedonia which is drowned in alcohol, no one denies that in the Report.*” “*They are all drunk and aggressive,*” “*proud drunkards*” with whom it is impossible to discuss, because they are aggressive and do not accept others’ opinions.” To say that they are not alcoholics is to say that, “*the Pope is a Muslim,*” “*if they come here, I would ask them to be a little less drunk*” and they should take medication for sobering up in the morning.

Macedonian activists were dehumanized: they were called “*those creatures*” and their dignity was denigrated in various ways. “*The leaders serve as an example of what type of members they have, what a disgrace.*” When one takes into account that the party leadership contained and contains professors, engineers, physicians, teachers, city counsellors, businessman, newspaper editors, dissidents that served time in Bulgarian jails for their opinions and the like and that none of them have ever been charged for reasons of criminal activities or are known to have engaged in immoral activities, such statements clearly demonstrate hatred based on ethnicity as that is the only thing that that the authors of the broadcast knew about them.⁵³

The program is an example of an extremely primitive and vulgar level of conduct which is considered acceptable when talking about Macedonians in Bulgaria. Moreover, it is also considered to be quite normal and even praiseworthy. This was not the only example for this year.

The hate speech used against Macedonians at times displays fascist characteristics as for example in an article from 6th September in *Trud*, one of the most prestigious dailies in Bulgaria, in which the author defines herself as a “*Bulgarian with Aryan roots.*” The article speaks about “*Macedonianism*”⁵⁴ – a “*sadistic utopia, which has taken the lives of tens of thousands Bulgarians on the other side of the border and changed the destinies of hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians from Pirin Macedonia,*” people with Macedonian identity are called “*people with severed Bulgarian roots*” who now (with the treaty) have been granted an identity and legitimized as “*Macedonians*”. The author made an appeal for us “*to look upon the territory to the west of Ograzhden (that is, Republic of Macedonia) as a violently severed off part of*

⁵³“The “Inconvenient Ones” even accuse the authors of the Annual Report of having a “dirty subconsciousness” because of the mention of a homophobic cartoon of OMO Ilinden PIRIN members published in the newspaper *Top Presa* which portrayed the members of the Macedonian party as headless backsides with a sign “homo” on them. According to “The Inconvenient Ones” the intention of the cartoon was to point out that they are people, part of the species homo sapiens, and the backside is simply a part of the human body so “*what is the problem?*” The problem, according to them, was not the existence of such a cartoon and its publication in newspapers but rather its depiction in a Report because the words used was “uncensored”. They have very significantly reminded people of the cartoon several times when talking about Macedonian organizations.

⁵⁴ Macedonianism is a term used in Bulgaria to denote the idea of the existence of a Macedonian nation.

*Bulgaria containing a Bulgarian population and self-consciousness which has lived there for more than 1300 years. A population of millions forced to renounce its Bulgarian roots and to consider itself Macedonian. After 1944 over 150,000 Bulgarians escaped from Yugoslav Macedonia, over 100,000 were imprisoned in camps and jails and over 35,000 were murdered for refusing to identify as Macedonians. That genocide... “, “The Genocide of the Bulgarians.” Because of Bulgaria’s support for Macedonian NATO membership the Minister of Foreign Affairs was accused of “forgetting her Bulgarian roots.”*⁵⁵

So far there have been no documented cases of someone being killed or imprisoned for refusing to declare that they were Macedonian, however similar hate generating myths are considered normal and self-evident “truths” in Bulgaria.

On 12 February Zyumboulev, the editor in chief of the influential daily *24 Chasa*, also showed that he was not lacking in radical nationalistic rhetoric by claiming in an “editorial column” that “*it is true that the so-called Macedonians are an invention of Tito and Stalin to de-Bulgarianize the Vardar region*” (Republic of Macedonia) and that “*the idea that Macedonians exist is entirely anti-Bulgarian*”. The people that support the existence of a Macedonian nation are labelled as “*Titoist-Comintern fiends*” and a “*Titoist-Comintern clique*” which “*steals identity not only from Greece, but also from Bulgaria.*”⁵⁶

Such hate speech is transferred from the media to online blogs and regular conversations. Illustrative of the way in which the Macedonian nation and identity is spoken of in the Internet sphere can be found in the publication at blog.bg of 27/6/2018 entitled: “*The ethnic composition of the contemporary Macedonian “nation”*” (in brackets) in which the Macedonian nation is portrayed as composed of other “*real*” ethnicities in contrast to the “*strange Macedonianist ethnicity*” which is a “*stupidity*” and “*the false ethnicity of Macedonianists*” who are a “*denationalized mob.*”⁵⁷

Indicative of the prevailing reality in Bulgaria is that in the last 10 years a whole specialized group of jokes, ridiculing and degrading Macedonians as illiterate megalomaniacs and stupid Bulgarians lacking self-awareness has appeared.

Denigrating the ideas and activities of Macedonian organizations

Part of the process of dehumanization is the substitution of the ideas and goals of the Macedonians with others. They are described as separatists and as enemies of Bulgaria. For example, Vanya Simeonova calls the Association of Repressed Macedonians a “*separatist party*” despite the fact that the activities of the association are to care for the rights of people who were imprisoned in Bulgarian Communist jails because of their Macedonian self-awareness.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Svetlana Tilkova – Alena “Humiliated Bulgaria! Until when? What is going on after a year of the signing of the agreement with Macedonia,” *Trud* of 06. 09. 2018, <https://trud.bg/унизена-българия-докога/> used on 20th March 2019.

⁵⁶ Borislav Zyumbulev, Bulgaria should be on the side of the truth, a column by the editor, 12.02.2018, <https://www.24chasa.bg/mnenia/article/6711390> used on 19th March 2019.

⁵⁷ Ethnic composition of contemporary Macedonian “nation,” <http://bojil.blog.bg/politika/2018/06/27/etnicheski-systav-na-dneshnata-makedonska-quot-naciiia-quot.1614539?reply=5129416>. Cited on 15.03.2019.

⁵⁸ Vanya Simeonova, The Blagoevgrad court frustrated the Macedonianists in their attempt to sue the country for the refusal to register them as an association, 26.08.1018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4->

The “Inconvenient Ones” has been especially brutal in attacking the ideas of Macedonian activists. Their ideas and policies are denigrated, their policies labelled as “*similar to that of separatists, traitors and fascism.*” The question “*Where do you see logic in the existence of OMO Ilinden?*” is often posed rhetorically. The expression of views by Macedonian organizations is categorized as “*let them bark, let them bark and talk.*” The Annual Reports on the Human Rights of the Macedonians are labelled as “*their latest stupidity.*” Those who would dare to defend the Macedonians are also subjected to attacks. For example, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee is called “*the only fierce protector of the Macedonists in their dispute with the Bulgarian judicial system*“.⁵⁹

An important part of slandering Macedonian organizations is depicting them as being paid by treasonous foreign states, as people without ideas, but whose organizations have concrete financial aims.

On the 4th of January *Top Presa* published the manipulative “news” item entitled “*Macedonia will stop the financing of OMO Ilinden?*”. The author claimed that “*authorities in the Republic of Macedonia had decided to stop the financing of pro-Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria - such as OMO Ilinden and UMO Ilinden – PIRIN.*“⁶⁰

For the “Inconvenient Ones”: Macedonian activists “*don’t have corporate interests, only ideas for petty financial gain, have no coverage and nothing to fight for*”. They simply comply with some sort of directive, which “*is clear.*” They have insisted several times that Macedonian organizations and their leaders “*prove*” publicly that they have not engaged in financial irregularities, where the money they have has been spent and “*how much alcohol (grape brandy)*” they have bought with this money. They must according to them do that because this view of them by the public was “*common*” and “*known.*” That request was the main theme of the program and said to be its only purpose.⁶¹

In the newspaper *Struma* journalist Vanya Simeonova alleged that “*conducting of law suits in Bulgaria and Strasbourg had become the main activity*” (of OMO “Ilinden”) and that “*to date our country has paid out 35,000 Euros which went to lawyers and leaders of the separatist party.*”⁶²

This phenomenon is quite typical of the Bulgarian public discourse - Macedonians are regularly defamed and slandered with impunity on various grounds and without evidence, and they are subsequently expected to justify themselves and prove that they are not guilty. So far there have been no reports of charges being

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⁵⁹Vanya Simeonova, The Blagoevgrad court frustrated the Macedonianists in their attempt to sue the country for the refusal to register them as an association, 26.08.2018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>

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⁶⁰ Todor Todorov, Macedonia stops financing of UMO Ilinden? <http://toppresa.bg/131808/македония-спира-финансирането-на-омо>,

⁶¹ “Scandal! An episode of the Awkwards was included in a scandalous text in the Annual Report of UMO Ilinden!” <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412772695828808> cited on 19th March 2019.

⁶² Vanya Simeonova, The Blagoevgrad court frustrated the Macedonianists in their attempt to sue the country for the refusal to register them as an association, 26.08.1018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>,

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filed in courts or other institutions about misuse of funds in Macedonian organizations or by their leaderships. Neither have there been any details published in the public sphere about such abuses but evidently that does not seem to be a problem for some media in Bulgaria. Until recently (see the last two Annual Reports) the tactic employed was for the Public Prosecutor and police to initiate other fabricated investigations (non-financial) against members and organizations which were purposely fully publicized in the media. However, in not one instance to date has a violation of any sort been uncovered, but this fact has never been publicized in the media. In that way the idea that Macedonians in Bulgaria are enemies and criminals is continually sustained.

Macedonian organizations and self-determination “need to disappear”

One of the features of hate speech in 2018 was the appearance in certain media of the hope that Macedonian organizations would disappear, due to the fact that their membership was “old,” or that the Agreement with the Republic of Macedonia would eventually bring about their demise.

The first to express that hope on 4th of January was *Top Presa* where the following was stated: “Given the new trend in Macedonian-Bulgarian relations, the existence of pro-Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria - such as OMO Ilinden and OMO-Ilinden-Pirin, is, to say the least, absurd..... The Macedonian state will distance itself from similar organizations and their activities which will practically mean an end of such organizations.”⁶³

The on-line program “The inconvenient Ones” continued on in the same vein.” In it “Macedonianism” was viewed with unbridled hostility and the clear hope expressed that it would be destroyed, along with the removal from the political and historical stage of the organizations and parties of the Macedonians. The Good Neighbourly Agreement with Macedonia was viewed in the same light; as the “beginning of the end of Macedonianism,” and Macedonian organizations in Bulgaria are “at their end...they have no future”, “their existence is futile!” and they “should from today begin the process of ceasing their activities as they are unnecessary!” as well as “closing down their web sites”, “leave the public space”, “wipe themselves out...along with them”, because Macedonians are an “old scratched record that makes a lot of noise.” These demands were deemed to be “the best for them in their situation.”⁶⁴

On 02.04.2018 Bulgarian National TV (BNT) got involved. A “debate” relating to the topic “55 years since the Plenum (of the Bulgarian Communist Party) on the Macedonian Question” was held on the program History BG, however without the participation of holders of different views and Macedonian participants. In the program the only Macedonian newspaper in Bulgaria was attacked as a “ridiculous newspaper” (Grebearov) and OMO Ilinden was described as almost non-existent “with the exception of 2-3 marginalized people that get finances from somewhere”, “a marginalized organization which is on its way out, if not already finished”, because the Good Neighbourly Agreement between Macedonia and Bulgaria “should get rid of such organizations.”⁶⁵

On 26.08. 2018 Vanya Simeonova published an article in *Struma* newspaper about the judicial refusal to register the Association of Repressed Macedonians, in which the hope was expressed that the new method

⁶³ Todor Todorov, Macedonia stops financing of UMO Ilinden? <http://toppresa.bg/131808/македонија-спира-финансирането-на-омо>, used on 19th March 2019.

⁶⁴ “Scandal! An episode of the Inconvenient Ones was included in a scandalous text ,the Annual Report of OMO Ilinden!” <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=412772695828808> , cited on 19th March 2019.

⁶⁵<https://www.bnt.bg/bg/a/55-godini-ot-plenuma-za-makedonskiya-vpros-26032018> cited on 19th March 2019.

used by the court to not register Macedonian organizations would be “*successful, considering that only about 10 members of advanced age remain in OMO “Ilinden” and that it will be increasingly difficult for them to gather together, vote, receive and sign founding constitutions and deal with the courts.*”⁶⁶

On 6th September in an article in the daily *Trud*, the belief was expressed that with the Good Neighbourly Agreement “*the beginning of the end of Macedonianism has started.*”⁶⁷

ORGANIZED HARASSMENT

During 2018, as in all other years from 1990 onwards, civil agents of the State Security Agency attend in a particularly conspicuous fashion all public gatherings of Macedonian activists. Such was the case in 2018 at the all-Macedonian gathering in Melnik and the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Macedonian Kresna Uprising in the village of Stara Kresna. Another form of psychological pressure is the practice of police video recording every participant and the whole event taking place, something which is usually done at the all-Macedonian gathering and not only at that events. On 16th February 2018 during the visit of an EFA (European Free Alliance) delegation to the city of Sandanski to meet the representatives of Macedonian organizations, the local correspondent of the newspaper *Struma* provocatively recorded the faces of all present at the press conference. After doing so the journalist openly visited the police in the neighbouring building. Similar purposely demonstrative ways are used to intimidate those present at such events.

During 2018 the first judgments were issued, after a protracted two-year judicial process, in the case of the systemic harassment of Mr Kiril Tilev, an OMO Ilinden activist. He was insulted on ethnic grounds and threatened by a member of the ruling party and colleague Metody Hristov. After the director and the Public Prosecutor’s Office refused him protection, Tilev filed a complaint with the court. The process took 2 years during which time Mr. Tilev came under strong pressure to abandon the complaint, was “advised” that Hristov works for the security services and was backed by all local structures of the government.⁶⁸ Threats followed after it was noted that he was not discouraged from continuing. Events confirmed that Hristov had the strong backing of government institutions (see our 2017 Annual Report). Hristov then filed a counter suit for defamation. The court kept postponing Tilev’s suit and suggested stopping both cases if both parties decided to make peace. Mr. Tilev refused. On one occasion while he was in his vineyard shots were fired at him but the attackers were never found.⁶⁹ Hristov pressured colleagues to commit perjury against Tilev, and when the testimonies were not to his liking, moral and physical attacks followed.⁷⁰ Judge Filchev

⁶⁶ Vanya Simeonova, The Blagoevgrad court frustrated the Macedonianists in their attempt to sue the country for the refusal to register them as an association, 26.08.1018, <https://struma.bg/%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%8A%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8/>ползвано на 19 март 2019.

⁶⁷ Svetlana Tilkova – Alena “Humiliated Bulgaria! Until when? What is going on after a year of the signing of the agreement with Macedonia,” *Trud* of 06. 09. 2018 <https://trud.bg/унизена-българия-докога/> used on 19th March 2019.

⁶⁸ Written testimony by Kiril Tilev, 25 October 2018, pp.3,6,7 (PKT Archive).

⁶⁹ See our 2017 Annual Report. .

⁷⁰ Complaint to the Regional Prosecutor of the city of Sandansky by Lyubenov Stoyan vs. Metodi Lyubomirov Hristov, pp. 1-2 (PKT Archive).

refused to take into consideration those indications of what was happening and to interrogate all parties involved.⁷¹

At all stages of the process Mr. Tilev encountered obstacles because of his Macedonian identity. He had even arguments with his attorney, Violeta Stankova: *“I told her that I am a member of the Macedonian organization OMO Ilinden. We argued a bit, she told me that there are no Macedonians, I said there are, I’m Macedonian and I’m standing in front of you. Another day we again started on the Macedonian Question, she threw me out and said, ‘get out of here, there are no Macedonians’... After several days she told me ‘you’re Macedonian, that is not a crime’.”* She advised him that *“we will not raise the Macedonian Question because the judge might not like it”*⁷². Similar problems arose at court. At one of the hearings, when it became apparent how he had been insulted by Hristov, one of the court officials exclaimed: *“So that is why problems between you arose, because of the Macedonian Question!”* Tilev then decided to present to the court a written explanation of how he was insulted and harassed on the basis of his ethnicity: *“At the second or third court session I described how Metodi Hristov had insulted me in front of colleagues, saying that there are no Macedonians, they are an invented nation, accompanied by swearing and other things. The judge examined it and told me he would not accept it.”* At the court hearing held on 17.09.2018 Hristov’s attorney, Parapanov, submitted the text of our annual report from last year which was published in the Macedonian newspaper “Narodna Volya” in which the Tilev case was detailed. *“Judge Filchev examined the newspaper and asked who published it? I replied that it is published legally in Blagoevgrad by OMO PIRIN. Judge Filchev declared that there are no Macedonians, all that is an invention of the Comintern, what sort of Macedonian are you, are you crazy?... After a short period of deliberation he said that you should think a little and that we cannot involve the Macedonian Question in this trial. You Kiro are a Macedonian, we cannot prosecute you because of that.”*⁷³ Nothing of this exchange was recorded in court documents.⁷⁴ This occurred despite the fact when asked Kiril Tilev replied he was Macedonian (for which he was rebuked and told that there were no Macedonians), however in the court records he was recorded as being Bulgarian. After that hearing his attorney declared the he was no longer acting for him due to a *“difference of opinion.”*⁷⁵ The attorney who then agreed to act for him requested a lot of money from Kiril Tilev which Tilev had great difficulty in providing. In the final verdict brought down by the same judge the matter of Tilev’s ethnicity was carefully avoided, while that of the defendant was specified as *“Bulgarian, Bulgarian citizen.”* On the other hand, in the verdict issued against Mr. Tilev by Judge Raya Manoleva, his ethnicity and nationality were recorded several times as *“Bulgarian, Bulgarian citizen.”*⁷⁶, despite his self-identification as a Macedonian.

On 22.10.2018 the Regional Court in the city of Sandanski ruled that Hristov was guilty of slander, but not on account of the insults and threats. The ethnically-motivated insults were totally ignored in the verdict. The court ordered that a payment of 2900 Levs (1450 euro) be made to Kiril Tilev.⁷⁷ On 30.10. the same court found Kiril Tilev guilty of having insulted Hristov. Even though the supposed insult was not proven

⁷¹ Written testimony by Kiril Tilev, p. 6.

⁷² Written explanation by Kiril Tilev, p.4

⁷³ Written explanation by Kiril Tilev..p.8

⁷⁴ Written explanation by Kiril Tilev from 03.10.2018, p.2

⁷⁵ Annex to the written statement by Kiril Tilev (Archive of PKT).

⁷⁶ Verdict № 2809 of 22.10.2018 of the Regional Court at the city of Sandanski, Judge Ivan Filchev 1, 2; Verdict № 2885 of 30.10.2018 of Regional Court at city of Sandanski, Judge Raya Manoleva, 1. According to Mr. Tilev’s explanation, when the matter of his ethnicity was raised, the judge deliberately distracted from it by posing other questions and did not allow him to reply.

⁷⁷ Verdict № 2809 ..., 1, 2.

to have been made⁷⁸, the court issued a guilty verdict against Tilev and ordered him to pay Hristov 1400 Levs (700 euro).⁷⁹ Therefore while Hristov was found not guilty for the majority of proven insults and threats, including those on an ethnic basis, Tilev was pronounced guilty for one unproven insult.

Tilev appealed the verdict in the Blagoevgrad County Court.

According to Tilev in the course of the 2-year process *“they tested me to see whether they could break me, whether I am a Macedonian and maintain that same conviction. I experienced great terror and harassment, both physical and psychological.”*⁸⁰

This case is illustrative of the way the courts treat Macedonians – they try to discourage them and at the same time defend those who have insulted them, while refusing to pay attention to the fact that often this is a question of insults or discrimination on an ethnic basis.

REFUSAL OF THE AUTHORITIES TO ENTER INTO DIALOGUE

A dialogue between the Bulgarian authorities and Macedonian minority organizations is a regular recommendation made in the reports of international organizations and institutions.⁸¹ Unfortunately the authorities categorically refuse to begin such a dialogue. The previous year was no exception. The attempts by the OMO Ilinden–PIRIN political party to organize meetings with the Commission Against Discrimination, the Commission for Minority Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Prime Minister and the President were unsuccessful. This year as well none of these institutions even took the time to reply to our requests for meetings and dialogue.

During the months of January and February of 2018 the European Free Alliance made several attempts to organize meetings with various Bulgarian institutions to discuss the situation the Macedonian minority. The meetings were requested on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Bulgaria’s EU membership and the forthcoming EU Presidency, but no response was received from the Prime Minister, the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Commission Against Discrimination and the National Minorities Council.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the existing situation in the country it does not appear probable that the situation of the Macedonians in Bulgaria can be improved without serious external intervention.

In order for the current problems of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria to be solved the following changes should occur:

⁷⁸ In the official Protocol of the meeting where insult is claimed to have been made such thing is not recorded. On the other hand, there are clearly recorded the insults and slanders made by Hristov against Tilev and others present on the meeting (Protocol № 2 / 10.10.2016 of the General Assembly and the regular session of the Pedagogical Council of the Climate College school in the city of Sandanski, signed by the director N. Markov and secretary B. Oreasharova, pp. 2-4).

⁷⁹ Verdict № 2885 ..., 1

⁸⁰ Written explanation by Kiril Tilev, p.1

⁸¹ Compare the reports of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the independent observer of the UN, ECRI, and the Commissar for Human Rights of Bulgaria over the last 15 years.

1. The decision of the Constitutional Court of 29 February 2000 and the Declaration of the Bulgarian Parliament of 6 March 1990, which officially postulate that in Bulgaria there is no formed Macedonian ethnic group, must be rescinded. These decisions serve as an ideological and legal basis for discrimination. The government should officially declare that the Macedonian minority will no longer be denied or discriminated against.
2. The state should officially recognise the existence of national minorities in the country and the concept “*national minorities*” should be included in the constitution. The state should take the necessary legal measures so that the principle of *the unity of the nation* cannot be interpreted to mean that ethnic and national minorities do not exist.
3. The law on the registration of non-government organizations should be changed and articles included in it which would make it impossible to interpret the self-determination of minority groups as an anti-constitutional, anti-state act which threatens territorial integrity and justifies denial of registration.
4. Measures should be taken so that the prohibition on forming organizations on an ethnic basis is not interpreted as being contrary to the right of minorities to form their own organizations.
5. The Census documents should contain a separate column for “Macedonian” and during the conduct of the Census it is to be publicly and officially announced that everyone who self-identifies as a Macedonian can freely do so.
6. An active dialogue must be initiated between the state and the representatives of the Macedonian minority in order to solve current problems. Macedonian organisations are to be registered and there must be a Macedonian representative on the Commission on Minorities.
7. Measures should be taken for the promotion of tolerance vis-à-vis the Macedonian minority and for its protection against hate speech and institutional discrimination.
8. The study of the Macedonian literary language, culture and history should be included in curricula for children belonging to the Macedonian minority. At the same time primary school curricula should be modified so as not to exclude references to the Macedonian nation and its history, culture and language (things which have been done in the past).

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