

# ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SITUATION WITH THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE MACEDONIAN MINORITY IN BULGARIA – 2025

*2025: 19 years of the Republic of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, 35 years of democracy, 62 years since the beginning of the policy of denial, assimilation and discrimination of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *The situation of the Macedonian minority and major events in 2025.*

The situation of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria in 2025 remains unchanged. Not a single one of the rights provided for in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has been granted to the Macedonian minority; the trends in this regard are negative.

In schools, children learn nothing about the Macedonian nation and minority; on the contrary, they receive information in a manner that leaves no room for the existence of the Macedonian nation and minority. The Macedonian literary language, literature and history continue not to be studied.<sup>1</sup> On television and in the media, a single point of view is constantly and in various ways presented, according to which a Macedonian nation does not exist and everything Macedonian is Bulgarian, and every different opinion is "anti-Bulgarian". In historical programmes and debates, the Macedonian point of view is not represented. Macedonian self-awareness itself ("Macedonism", as it is labelled in Bulgaria) is treated as an artificial anti-Bulgarian ideology. Macedonian self-awareness in Bulgaria (but also the Macedonian nation as a whole) is treated as a product of violent communist experiment or as a result of foreign hostile propaganda. In society, intolerance towards Macedonians continues to prevail, and they

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 'Post-monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria: Explanatory memorandum by Mr Frank Schwabe and Mr Zsolt Németh' (3 June 2019) Doc 14904, para 160 <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=27711&lang=en> >accessed 20 June 2026: "There is no Macedonian language or history in schools."

are a frequent object of hate speech, often widely circulated through the media, without sanctions from state institutions and without encountering condemnation in society.

Taking advantage of the artificially created atmosphere of intolerance, the state successfully keeps representatives of the minority out of the political and public life of the country, individually<sup>2</sup> and collectively, by refusing registration to parties and organisations defending the rights of Macedonians.

The number of pending Macedonian cases in the ECtHR continues to grow – they are mainly for violation of the right to association, but there are also some for the right to peaceful assembly.

The Bulgarian authorities consistently emphasise that the decisions of the ECtHR and of the Committee of Ministers do not provide for automatic registration of Macedonian organisations and point out in detail the measures they have taken to remove obstacles to the registration of Macedonian organisations, but at the same time they show no concern about the fact that these "measures" of theirs have 0% effectiveness and have achieved absolutely nothing (something noted also in the decisions of the Committee of Ministers). They also consistently avoid taking the necessary measures that would truly remove the existing obstacles, neither on their own initiative nor when they are petitioned, and this has been requested of them. Such as, for example, petitioning the Constitutional Court to give interpretative rulings on the articles of the Constitution which are abused by the courts as argumentation for the non-registration of Macedonian organisations, or the same court to revoke/give an interpretation of its decision of 29 February 2000, which mentions, among other things, that "in the Republic of Bulgaria there is no distinct Macedonian ethnos" and which is one of the main arguments in the refusals of registration given by the courts. The authorities also do not take any steps to withdraw the official positions in parliament or the ministries that there is no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria; on the contrary, the same are actively supported. The authorities also show exceptional slowness and reluctance to implement the measures recommended to them by the Committee of Ministers, remaining largely at the level of formal expressions of desire.

In 2025 as well, the state did nothing to improve the situation of the Macedonian minority. On the contrary, the government demonstrated a concern to prevent the recognition of a Macedonian minority and even every possible demand in this direction.

Macedonians are not represented in state institutions, either through elected representatives (due to the lack of a registered party) or through organisations. Not a single registered party in Bulgaria protects the rights of Macedonians. Representatives across the entire public spectrum, with the exception of a small part of the civic sector,<sup>3</sup> treat Macedonians as something non-existent and non-serious, at best, and at worst, as a danger to national security and traitors. There are no (and have never been) Macedonian representatives on the Commission for Minorities. When ethnic groups in Bulgaria are officially spoken of and written about, Macedonians are not mentioned, and Macedonian culture, language, and history are not represented in any government publication, official website, institution or government-funded NGO as Macedonian. When Macedonian culture, language, and history are featured, they are misrepresented as Bulgarian, with songs, dances, and historical narratives altered to align with the Bulgarian national identity and narrative, which by extension forms part of its ongoing denationalisation policy for the Macedonian minority. Macedonians are not included in any programme for ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> There is not a single politically or publicly significant figure in the country who openly declares a Macedonian self-awareness, which shows either that such people cannot rise to such status, or that they are forced to conceal their self-determination due to fear of negative consequences.

<sup>3</sup> Here we should place the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the people around the editorial office of "Marginalia".

communities and do not receive any kind of assistance from the state for the preservation and development of their culture and identity.<sup>4</sup>

And this year, neither the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Justice, nor any other state institution has taken measures regarding the situation and the problems of the Macedonians in Bulgaria, regardless of the fact that the number of ECtHR judgments against Bulgaria has grown to 14. In 35 years of democracy, not a single Bulgarian official institution has done so.

Despite the large number of recommendations from international institutions, the Bulgarian authorities firmly continue to refuse to initiate a dialogue with representatives of the Macedonian minority.

The Republic of Bulgaria shows a marked aspiration to make it impossible to raise this issue in the European Union.

### *Important Events During the Year*

At the request of the Committee of Ministers and in connection with the Macedonian cases, on 4 February 2025, Daniela Ilieva, Executive Director, sent a response pointing out three organisations as models with perfect documents, but also stating that all organisations registered and included in the electronic register can serve as such a model and are available online to everyone.

On 4–6 March, a new meeting of the Committee of Ministers was held regarding the monitoring of the implementation of the ECtHR judgments on Macedonian cases in Bulgaria. It was decided to postpone the review in order to allow the dialogue with the Bulgarian government to bear fruit.

On 25 April, during an attempt to attend an all-Macedonian assembly in Melnik, Tihomir Stojanovski, a Macedonian artist, cultural worker in a state institution, and professor, was banned from entering Bulgaria. He is known for his visits to the Macedonian assemblies for Jane Sandanski and the Kresna-Razlog Macedonian uprising, and for recording the memories and statements of Macedonians from Pirin Macedonia, but he has never shown aggression, broken laws, or engaged in hate speech against Bulgaria. He received a 10-year ban on entering Bulgaria. This is the beginning of a new trend of pressure against people in Macedonia who show support for Macedonians in Bulgaria.

On 11 May, the General Assembly of the European Free Alliance in Nantes, Brittany, adopted a declaration in defence of the Macedonian language in the European Union and of Macedonian identity in the EU and in candidate countries. The declaration was proposed by OMO "Ilinden"-PIRIN and the Macedonian Alliance for European Integration, presented by the delegate of PIRIN and adopted unanimously.

On 6 July, in the locality of Papaz Chair in the Pirin Mountains, the 11th National Conference of OMO "Ilinden"-PIRIN was held, with the presence of guests from all Macedonian organisations in the country. The delegates accepted the reports of the Presidency and the Control Commission for the past 4 years, elected new central bodies of the party, and adopted a declaration condemning Bulgaria's policy against the Macedonian nation and expressing full support for the rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria.

On 23 June, Macedonian organisations in Bulgaria reacted through the EFA against the demands of the Bulgarian MEPs to remove from the Macedonia Progress Report<sup>5</sup> all texts defending the Macedonian identity. These were OMO "Ilinden"-PIRIN, OMO "Ilinden", Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria,

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<sup>4</sup> *PACE: Post-monitoring dialogue*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament, Report on the 2023 and 2024 Commission Reports on N Macedonia (2025/2021(INI)) A10-0118/2026, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Rapporteur: Thomas Waitz.

Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance, the Association for the Protection of Basic Human Rights, Civic Initiative for the Recognition of the Macedonian National Minority in Bulgaria, and the Human Rights Committee Tolerance. (The EFA published their press release on 17 June 2025).<sup>6</sup>

On 27 June, the Registry Agency adopted the Guidelines for the registration of non-governmental organisations, as one of the measures carried out by the government to satisfy the requirements of the Committee of Ministers regarding the Macedonian cases.

On 9 July, the EFA – Greens parliamentary Group published a press realise about the attack against Macedonian identity in the European parliament.<sup>7</sup>

On 9 July, the European Parliament adopted by resolution the progress report on Macedonia but removing all texts formerly passed by the AFET Committee that protected and respected the Macedonian identity in the accession process.<sup>8</sup>

On 17 July 2025, the Bulgarian authorities sent a letter to the Committee of Ministers requesting the closure of the Macedonian group of cases, claiming without any foundation that there were already registered Macedonian organisations, that the rest were not registered because they themselves deliberately prepared faulty documents, and that this was due to political interference from Macedonia.

In response to the letter from the EFA to the European Commission, expressing concern about the threat to the Macedonian identity in the process of European integration, a formal reply was received on 24 July from the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, stating that Macedonia is supported, but it is required to carry out all necessary reforms and to implement the agreements on good neighbourliness, pointing out more specifically the one with Bulgaria.

On 5 September, Macedonian organisations sent a position paper to the Committee of Ministers, in which they argumentatively refuted the claims of the Bulgarian authorities in their letter of 17 July 2025 to the Committee of Ministers.

In September, the Committee of Ministers once again decided to postpone the discussion so that the new guidelines could be implemented.

On 1 October, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) concluded the post-monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria, but at the same time called on Bulgaria to demonstrate progress in the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, more specifically those relating to the refusal of registration of associations of persons identifying as ethnic Macedonians.<sup>9</sup> PACE will continue to monitor the situation through periodic reports, not through the mechanism of special observation.

PACE also adopted Resolution 2620 (2025) which called on the “authorities to continue to co-operate with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with a view to making tangible progress in the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, in particular as regards cases

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<sup>6</sup> European Free Alliance, 'EU enlargement under pressure: Bulgaria jeopardises European project for nationalist blackmail against Macedonians' (European Free Alliance, 17 June 2025) <https://efaparty.eu/news/eu-enlargement-under-pressure-bulgaria-jeopardises-european-project-for-nationalist-blackmail-against-macedonians> accessed 25 June 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Nikolaus Riss, 'North Macedonia vote advances country's EU path in face of far-right attacks' (EFA-Greens Press Release, 9 July 2025).

<sup>8</sup> (n 5) see amendments 11-13.

<sup>9</sup> Ivan Hristov, 'Съветът на Европа призова България да признае „македонците“ и ОМО „Илинден“' [The Council of Europe urged Bulgaria to recognise the "Macedonians" and OMO "Ilinden"] (Eurocom, 9 October 2025) <https://eurocom.bg/2025/10/09/savetat-na-evropa-prizova-balgariya-da-priznae-makedontsite-i-omo-ilinden/> accessed 25 June 2026.

concerning [...] and refusals to register associations of persons asserting a Macedonian ethnic consciousness (UMO Ilinden and Others v. Bulgaria and similar cases).”<sup>10</sup>

On 3 November, the Human Rights Committee Tolerance sent a statement on the situation of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria to the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

On 3 November, the EFA sent its letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on minorities in connection with their planned visit to the European Union. In the letter, Macedonians are mentioned in 8 places: regarding the Macedonian minorities in Bulgaria and Greece, their denial and the non-allowance of education in the Macedonian language. In Bulgaria specifically, regarding the barring of parties on an ethnic basis, the non-representation of the Macedonian minority and the abuse of "objective criteria" by Bulgaria in order not to apply the Framework Convention for national minorities.

On 13 November, at the proposal of OMO "Ilinden", the EFA issued a declaration in connection with the meeting of the Committee of Ministers regarding the Macedonian cases in December and against Bulgaria's request to stop the monitoring.<sup>11</sup> The EFA also issued a press release on the situation on 20 November 2025, calling on the Council of Europe to continue closely monitoring minority rights in Bulgaria.<sup>12</sup>

After requesting the prosecution to raise the issue of the genocide of Macedonians in Bulgaria, on 26 November, the leader of the Repressed Macedonians, Stoyan Gerasimov, was summoned to SANS (State Agency for National Security) under false pretences and subjected to a long interrogation, during which they tried to make him say that he is Bulgarian and to find grounds for his request to be rejected.

At the United Nations Eighteenth session of the Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva on 27 November, the chairman of the Human Rights Committee Tolerance gave a speech on the situation of Macedonians in Bulgaria and on the constant violations of the rights of Macedonians.

On 28 November, a representative of the Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria gave a speech at the same UN session on minorities on the theme of Amplifying minority voices regarding the situation of the repressed Macedonians and their discrimination by the state.

In December, the Committee of Ministers decided once again to postpone the review of the Macedonian cases.

In December, a Bulgarian lobbying campaign was covertly launched, using the same domestic methods used to deny political representation, but on a European level, employing the regulator to force the EFA to remove OMO "Ilinden"-PIRIN from its membership. The campaign failed.

## **DENIAL OF THE MACEDONIAN MINORITY, NATION AND IDENTITY**

Since March 1963, the denial of the existence of the Macedonian minority has been an official state policy and doctrine. On 29 February 2000, the Constitutional Court proclaimed this in its Decision No.

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<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 'Post-monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria' (1 October 2025) Resolution 2620 (2025), para 14.

<sup>11</sup> European Free Alliance, 'Declaration by the European Free Alliance Party' (13 November 2025) <https://content.efaparty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Declaration-by-the-European-Free-Alliance-Party.pdf> accessed 25 June 2026.

<sup>12</sup> European Free Alliance, 'EFA calls on the Council of Europe to continue closely monitoring minority rights in Bulgaria' (European Free Alliance, 20 November 2025) <https://efaparty.eu/news/council-of-europe-monitor-closely-minority-rights-in-bulgaria> accessed 25 June 2026.

1, which banned OMO "Ilinden"–PIRIN; since then, this has been one of the primary grounds and arguments used to violate the Macedonians' right to freedom of association. It was turned into an official condition for the European integration of the Republic of Macedonia. As early as the autumn of 2019, Bulgaria took the position that one of the conditions for Macedonia's European integration is for Macedonia to renounce the Macedonian minority.<sup>13</sup> This was done on October 9, first in a Framework Position of the government,<sup>14</sup> and on October 10 in a declaration of the parliament, which demands that Macedonia: 'refrain from actions associated with attempts to support and promote claims for recognition of the so-called "Macedonian minority" in Bulgaria, including in international organizations such as the Council of Europe and multilateral formats.'<sup>15</sup> Bulgaria adheres to this position<sup>16</sup> and it was one of the reasons for blocking its EU membership negotiations.

The term "Macedonian minority" is always placed in quotation marks in publications and is regularly accompanied by the phrase "so-called", both in official documents and across the media and internet forums. Any demand in this direction is perceived as a hostile act, and even the hypothetical possibility of someone raising the issue is met with anxiety.

The denial of the very existence of the minority, which is an official state position, also found its place in various court rulings this year. For example, on 8 October 2025, the Sofia Court of Appeal, as an argument for refusing to register OMO "Ilinden", stated: "The objectives and means formulated in this manner create the impression of the presence of a disenfranchised or harmed Macedonian minority ethnicity on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, opposing the rest of the Bulgarian citizens and repressed by the state; therefore, the establishment of an association with such objectives is aimed at dividing the nation and creating conditions for ethnic confrontation, thereby contradicting Article 44, Paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria."<sup>17</sup>

In connection with demands for the recognition of the Macedonian minority, lies are regularly circulated claiming that, according to the Constitution, there are no minorities in Bulgaria. Thus, we read in *24 Chasa*: "According to our Constitution, Bulgaria is a mono-national state, and a Macedonian minority

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<sup>13</sup> Министерство на външните работи: България подкрепя започването на преговори с Република Северна Македония и Република Албания, но ще настоява да спазват добросъседските отношения, 09 Октомври 2019, <https://mfa.bg/bg/news/23065>: „The Republic of North Macedonia should cease and refrain from conducting a policy, regardless of its form, of supporting and promoting claims for the recognition of the so-called 'Macedonian minority' in Bulgaria.“ (visited 07.07.2026).

<sup>14</sup> Рамкова позиция относно разширяване на ЕС и процеса на стабилизиране и асоцииране: Република Северна Македония и Албания. Позиция относно разширяване на ЕС и процеса на стабилизиране и асоцииране: Република Северна Македония и Албания. 09.10.2019. <https://www.gov.bg/bg/prestentat/novini/ramkova-pozitsia>: „The Republic of North Macedonia should cease and refrain from conducting a policy, regardless of its form, of supporting and promoting claims for the recognition of the so-called 'Macedonian minority' in Bulgaria. The Republic of North Macedonia must unreservedly and promptly align its positions and actions in international organizations and forums with Article 11 of the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness, clearly declaring that there are no historical or demographic grounds to seek minority status for any group of citizens on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria. Multilateral formats and the monitoring mechanisms of the Council of Europe must not be instrumentalized by the Republic of North Macedonia to exert pressure on Bulgaria on matters related to the rights of persons belonging to minority groups.“ (visited 07.07.2026).

<sup>15</sup> Декларация на Четиридесет и четвъртото Народно събрание на Република България във връзка с разширяването на Европейския съюз и Процеса на стабилизиране и асоцииране на Република Северна Македония и Република Албания, 10.10.2019: <https://parliament.bg/bg/declaration/ID/157188>. (visited 07.07.2026).

<sup>16</sup> Министерство на външните работи: България потвърди позицията си относно европейската перспектива на Република Северна Македония и е отворена за конструктивен диалог с предстоящото Словенско председателство за намиране на взаимно приемливи решения, 22 юни 2021, <https://mfa.bg/bg/news/30201>. (visited 07.07.2026).

<sup>17</sup> Judgment Number 499 SCA of 08.10.2025.

does not exist."<sup>18</sup> *Euronews*: "According to the Bulgarian Constitution, there are no minorities in Bulgaria."<sup>19</sup>

The denial not only of the Macedonian minority, but also in principle of the presence of minorities in the country, is viewed as an argument for the non-registration of minority organisations, treated as being directed against the territorial integrity of the country. On 15 October, "Euronews" defined the statements of the Macedonian Prime Minister—that there is a Macedonian people in Bulgaria and that Bulgaria must recognise the Macedonian identity and comply with international law—as "yet another unneighbourly and hostile manifestation against our country."<sup>20</sup>

Every raising of the question regarding the Macedonian minority is accepted as a provocation. Regularly, such materials are published by various associates of the communist security services and the same are republished in many internet portals. For example, on 25 May of this year, Velizar Enchev wrote that, "Contrary to the 'Macron' plan (24 June 2022) and by trampling upon the Treaty of Friendship with Bulgaria (1 August 2017), the Macedonian Prime Minister ... makes minority claims against us, ... we are faced with aggressive minority claims, which, however, invoke already issued judgements by the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, concerning Bulgaria's refusal to register Macedonianist associations in the Pirin region. In fact, from Washington, the Macedonian Prime Minister has declared a minority war on us for the second time. For the first time, he did so two months ago in Brussels."<sup>21</sup> (The same text was published in "Svobodno slovo" and "Fakti", "Glasove" and various Facebook pages.)

The demand for the recognition of the denied minority is also defined as a mockery of Bulgaria.<sup>22</sup>

The denial of the minority is part of the denial of the entire nation. From the rostrum of the National Assembly, Kostadin Kostadinov read a declaration of the Vazrazhdane party: "A Bulgarian minority in Macedonia... does not exist. All inhabitants of Macedonia who speak a Bulgarian dialect there are Bulgarians. Regardless of their self-determination at the present

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<sup>18</sup> Toni Maskrachka, Police occupied Melnik due to a gathering of OMO "Ilinden" near the grave of Yane, 24 Chasa, 26.04.2025, <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/20388977>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-azmXAmlDqE#bottom-sheet>, Oct 15, 2025, Euronews TV.

<sup>20</sup> Euronews Bulgaria, 'Димитър Русков: Политическа реторика на Християн Мицкоски срещу България е за вътрешна употреба' [Dimitar Ruskov: Hristijan Mickoski's Political Rhetoric Against Bulgaria is for Domestic Consumption] (15 October 2025) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-azmXAmlDqE> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>21</sup> Velizar Enchev, *Skopje reopens the "Macedonian question" in the Balkans and claims a "Macedonian minority" in Bulgaria. Athens reacts, as always Sofia remains silent*, 30 May. <https://svobodnoslovo.org/2025/05/30/%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D0%BC/>

<sup>22</sup> Kaloian Hristov, 'Until when will Northern Macedonia continue to make a mockery of Bulgaria?' (*Taralezh*, 7 December 2025) <https://taralej.bg/bodli/do-koga-severna-makedoniq-shte-prodaljava-da-se-podigrava-s-balgariq> accessed 7 July 2026.

moment, as they are Bulgarians by blood, Bulgarians by language<sup>23</sup> and Bulgarians by culture."<sup>24</sup>

## HATE SPEECH

The denial of the Macedonian minority is the basis of the hate speech to which the minority is subjected. Without the denial, all remaining accusations would not be possible. The accusations against the Macedonians that they are anti-Bulgarian elements, traitors, renegades, foreign agents, enemies of the nation, a threat to its unity, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country, are based precisely on the dogma that such a minority "does not exist", and claims to the contrary can be interpreted only as a hostile act and treason against the state and the nation, made only by people denying "their own" people.

The treatment of Macedonians as traitors, separatists and enemies of the state systematically instils hatred towards them among the majority of citizens.

One of the techniques used to impose stereotypes against the Macedonians is the terminological degradation of the Macedonian nation, minority, identity and self-determination. For this purpose, instead of the correct concepts used by the Macedonians themselves, "Macedonism", "Macedonists" and the like are used, containing the insinuation that it is not a matter of ethnic affiliation, self-determination and identity, but of an artificial ideology and its adherents. But often even this is not considered sufficient, so these concepts are additionally loaded with negative meanings and are accompanied by degrading adjectives.

A good example of the language used against the Macedonians are the reactions at the end of February regarding the nomination of lawyer Yonko Grozev to the Constitutional Court, as he was attacked for having defended a Macedonian organisation in Strasbourg. In connection with this, the following qualifications are used for the Macedonian organisations: "The anti-Bulgarian Macedonian party OMO 'Ilinden' ... refusal to officially register this party, because of separatism, unconstitutionality and anti-Bulgarian activity. ... anti-Bulgarian 'Macedonists' among us!? ... We all know well whose work the ideology of #Macedonism is, created and imposed by the #Comintern, the #communist satraps, Serbian chauvinism and Russian interests in the Balkans. ... bloody imposition of 'Macedonian' national consciousness upon the Bulgarians, ... hundreds of thousands killed, sent to camps, repressed and harassed Bulgarians, ... the criminal ideology. The poison from the infection and the imposition of Macedonism ... today continues to serve mainly Russian and Serbian interests in the Balkans and in Europe, aiming at disintegration, mutual hatred and conflicts."<sup>25</sup> On 26 February, Anton Ivanov chimes in: "The anti-Bulgarian Macedonian party OMO 'Ilinden' ... The ultimate goal of the association is the formation of an independent Macedonian state, through the tearing away of Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Here it deserves to be reminded that Bulgarian science alone in the world considers that there is no Macedonian language, and the Macedonian language is part of the Bulgarian dialects, and this is also the position of the state.

<sup>24</sup> Kostadin Kostadinov, 'ENOUGH already There is no Bulgarian minority in Macedonia' (17 September 2025) <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=785490774271593> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>25</sup> Kiril Petkov: 'Yonko Grozev will be our nominee for constitutional judge.'" 23 February 2025, Bivol, , <https://www.facebook.com/bivolnews/posts/pfbid02W4JTQ5kvjXYUFXmbmf8e5n7GYGrLamZwtiMQEEicjsqAtnz9pVaXvpD6j57jQKujl>. (visited on 25 May 2026).

<sup>26</sup> Anton Ivanov, Several cases regarding OMO "Ilinden", but the devil is in the details and the money: A candidate for constitutional judge who convicted Bulgaria speaks, 26 February, <https://www.actualno.com/crime/njakolko->

Hatred also comes from people with high positions in society. The MEP Angel Dzhambazki defined on his Facebook profile the celebration of the Macedonians in memory of the Macedonian (Kresna) uprising as the "annual gathering of the health facility in Karlukovo" (meaning a madhouse).<sup>27</sup>

Iordan Petrov Velichkov, a party leader, former MP, associate of the communist state security, university lecturer, wrote an article on 11 June, circulated by the most influential national dailies under the title: "How the Stalinist-Titoist brat 'Macedonian nation' was born?" There he speaks about how allegedly "The fabrication of the Macedonian nation is a crude political act, serving narrow, selfish ideological interests at that historical moment. ... Stalin, figuratively speaking, conceives the Macedonian nation, and Tito and the Serbs rear and raise it in a spirit of frantic hatred towards everything Bulgarian – parents, kin, fatherland. This is the inexorable historical truth and reality of the spawning of Macedonianism. Any other claims are clumsy and foolishly fabricated Serbian inventions." Finally, he claims that "only people with seriously impaired mental capacities can circulate other versions of the spawning of Macedonianism. And the authors loudly propagandising the existence of the 'ancient' Macedonians should be provided with emergency psychiatric help."<sup>28</sup>

The Bulgarian media also give the floor to Bulgarian nationalists from the R of Macedonia, in order to insult the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. Thus, on 21 November, Petar Kolev, the chairman of a Bulgarian party in Macedonia, writes about the Macedonian organisations, calling them "separatist", "which have designated themselves as representing minority groups, but are in fact conduits of hostile interests towards their host country", and Macedonian self-determination and identity as "falsification and separatism". According to him: "The European Union is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between democracy and self-determination, on the one hand, and falsification and separatism, on the other." The occasion is the position of the European Free Alliance in support of minorities in Bulgaria and especially the Macedonian one. The object of attack is OMO "Ilinden"-PIRIN, whose members, as well as the Macedonians in Bulgaria, are called "the minions from the animation of the same name", who "do not exist beyond the screen ... they exist in someone's immature imagination, but not on the street" (with "Macedonians" being placed in quotation marks). The EC is accused that, through the European public funding mechanism, it gives money to the European Free Alliance and thus gives money to "separatist formations". OMO "Ilinden"-PIRIN is accused of being funded by the Macedonian Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski. The article ends with the following sentences: "If the European Free Alliance grabs OMO-Ilinden by the legs and shakes it upside down, Macedonian denars will fall from the pockets of Hristijan Mickoski. Because there may be no Macedonians in Bulgaria, but there are denars with which to pay for separatism."<sup>29</sup>

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[dela-po-omo-ilinden-no-djavolyt-e-v-detajlite-i-parite-govori-kandidat-za-konstitucionen-sydija-osydil-byulgarija-news\\_2401965.html](https://delapozemle.com/dela-po-omo-ilinden-no-djavolyt-e-v-detajlite-i-parite-govori-kandidat-za-konstitucionen-sydija-osydil-byulgarija-news_2401965.html).

<sup>27</sup> Angel Dzhambazki, 'Годишният събор на здравното заведение в Карлуково в няколко снимки' [The Annual Gathering of the Health Facility in Karlukovo in a Few Photos] (17 September 2025) <https://www.facebook.com/Djambazki.VMRO/posts/1378104470340696/> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>28</sup> Iordan Velichkov, 'Доц. д-р Йордан Величков: Как се роди сталинско-титовото отроче - македонска нация' [Assoc. Prof. Dr. Iordan Velichkov: How the Stalinist-Titoist Brat - Macedonian Nation Was Born] (*Fakti*, 11 June 2025) <https://fakti.bg/mnenia/977775-doc-d-r-iordan-velichkov-kak-se-rod-stalinsko-titovoto-otroche-makedonska-nacia> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>29</sup> Petar Kolev, 'Защо ЕС финансира сепаратистки организации?' [Why Does the EU Fund Separatist Organisations?] (*Taralezh*, 21 November 2025) <https://taralej.bg/mnenia/zashto-es-finansira-separatistki-organizacii> accessed 11 May 2026. It is worth noting that when he was called upon on a Macedonian television

Every piece of news regarding pressure from the outside to improve the rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria is presented as some kind of threat. Any demand for rights of Macedonians, or even simply noting that they do not have them, is called a provocation. Thus, on 20 November, the portal "Taralezh" came out with a piece entitled "Mickoski with a provocation: Macedonians in Bulgaria do not have the opportunity to express their language, identity and traditions."<sup>30</sup>

The activity itself of the Macedonians is seen as scandalous, even when it comes to the laying of flowers. The regional newspaper 'Struma': "Scandalous event" of the "illegitimate organisation", which had always been obstructed by the services. On 13 September, 'Blitz', relays news from "Struma" and gives its own commentary on the celebration of a historical date by a group of Macedonians. The laying of flowers before the monument of Gotse Delchev in Blagoevgrad is called a "scandalous event", an "outright provocation" by the "illegitimate organisation", and the question of why it was permitted this year is specially investigated, unlike other years when they "were always obstructed by the law enforcement organs and the services." The media places the attempts of the Macedonians to register their ("Macedonist" and "pro-Macedonist", according to the language of the media) organisation "against the backdrop of the unceasing anti-Bulgarian rhetoric in neighbouring North Macedonia and the refusal to include Bulgarians in the Constitution", presenting them as a third "anti-Bulgarian" manifestation and provocation.<sup>31</sup>

Participants in Macedonian activities are placed in opposition to good citizens and Bulgarian patriots. For example, the counter position of categories such as "omovtsi" (i.e. Macedonian activists) and "Bulgarian patriots" as mutually exclusive opposite phenomena is characteristic.<sup>32</sup>

We observe a distorted relaying of information aimed at inciting indignation against the Macedonians. Thus, the demand of the Prime Minister of Macedonia, Hristijan Mickoski, for Bulgaria to implement the ECtHR decisions and to register the Macedonian organisations, and to have a Macedonian representative in the council for minorities, is presented as a demand for "representatives of the unregistered separatist group 'OMO-Ilinden' to participate in the Bulgarian government".<sup>33</sup>

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channel by a leader of the same OMO 'Ilinden'-PIRIN – Stoyko Stoykov, as two representatives of minorities to express their support for both minorities, with Stoykov expressing his support for granting all rights to the Bulgarian minority in Macedonia, and proposing that Kolev, then leader of a Bulgarian party there, express principled support for the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, Kolev refused to do so. We see here that the latter denies the very existence of such a minority

<sup>30</sup> Мицкоски с провокация: Македонците в България нямат възможност да изразят своя език, идентичност и традиции' [Mickoski with a Provocation: Macedonians in Bulgaria Do Not Have the Opportunity to Express Their Language, Identity and Traditions] (*Taralezh*, 20 November 2025) <https://taralej.bg/balkani/mickoski-s-provokaciq-makedoncite-v-balgariq-nqmat-vazmojnost-da-izrazqvat-svoq-ezik-identichnost-ezik-i-tradicij> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>31</sup> 'Скандална провокация! Шепа активисти на ОМО „Илинден“-ПРИРИН поднесоха цветя на паметника на Гоце Делчев в Благоевград за да почитат „жертвите на геноцида над македонците“ в България' [Scandalous Provocation! A Handful of Activists of OMO 'Ilinden'-PIRIN Laid Flowers at the Monument of Gotse Delchev in Blagoevgrad to Commemorate 'the Victims of the Genocide against Macedonians' in Bulgaria] (*Struma*, 13 September 2025) <https://struma.bg/скандална-провокация-шепа-активисти/> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>32</sup> Toni Maskrychka, *Macedonian MPs at a gathering of OMO "Ilinden" in Melnik*, 24 Chasa, 27.04.2025 < <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/20392261>> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>33</sup> 'Северномакедонският премиер поиска „ОМО Илинден“ да има представител в българското правителство' [The North Macedonian Prime Minister Demanded That 'OMO Ilinden' Have a Representative in the Bulgarian Government] (*BGNES*, 26 September 2025) <https://www.bgnes.bg/severnomakedonskiqt-premier-poiska-omo-ilinden-da-ima-predstavitel-v-balgarskoto-pravitelstvo> accessed 7 July 2026.

Through the dissemination of untruths regarding the past of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria or its organisations, hatred towards them is instilled. Thus, BGNES disseminates untruths, presenting the Macedonians in Bulgaria as a homogeneous whole and a hostile element, an organisation which "in its early period declared as its goal the formation of an independent Macedonian state, through the tearing away of Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria, moreover without the founders excluding the use of violence as a means to achieve this goal. ... in its later period, a deliberate and systematic failure to meet the criteria in the legally established procedure is observed, with the aim of ensuring a refusal of registration."<sup>33</sup> The results of the census conducted under special measures for legality and freedom in 1956 are also brought into question, at which 187,000 self-identified as Macedonians in Bulgaria as "conducted by the repressive communist authorities".<sup>34</sup>

### *Calls for violence in the media and internet*

Sometimes national dailies spread calls for violence. Thus, '24 Chasa' on 26 April published, within the framework of its article, a call from the internet to stop the pan-Macedonian gathering in Melnik by organised Bulgarian patriots from all over the country: "Bulgarophobes have no place in Melnik! ... Anti-Bulgarian provocateurs, paid by Skopje, will attempt to defile the memory of Yane Sandanski and to poison the Bulgarian land. We will not allow paid puppets to stain Melnik!" The newspaper calls the organisations "Macedonist".<sup>35</sup>

The permanent campaign of blackening the Macedonians in Bulgaria, continuing for decades, has created deep and widespread hatred against them, which is particularly massive and extreme in various internet portals and profiles, where threats and calls for reckoning with the Macedonians are openly poured out. It is impossible to cover them all, so we will give an example with one specific Facebook post. On 28 April, "Grubovtsi, Enidze Vardar - native Macedonia" published a text, shared 175 times, receiving 705 likes and 353 comments, which speaks of "the evil Macedonism in Bulgaria" and raises a demand for one of the organisers of the traditional Macedonian gathering "to have his Bulgarian citizenship stripped and to be expelled ignominiously from Bulgaria", because he was the root of the evil Macedonism in Pirin and because he was "the paid agent of the oligarchy in Skopje". The gathering itself is defined as a "shameful sight... of those who fan the hatred towards Bulgaria and of the poor enticed old people". The author makes a proposal: "Let us submit, with our names and our details, a proposal to the Minister of Justice, to propose the stripping of his citizenship, if there is a second ... or a case for slander and anti-state activity, evaded military service, let him understand that the two red cards apply only in FYROM. And to all the rest!"<sup>36</sup>

In the comments, the same person is defined as "trash, mediocre incompetent person, miserable small traitor, PediGripal, a shame for Bulgaria, a piece of shit, pseudo-intellectual", bribed with "cash", "Peasant shoe", "a small link of the large treacherous ensemble that rules Bulgaria",

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<sup>34</sup> 'Северномакедонският премиер поиска „ОМО Илинден“ да има представител в българското правителство' [The North Macedonian Prime Minister Demanded That 'ОМО Илинден' Have a Representative in the Bulgarian Government] (BGNES, 26 September 2025) <https://www.bgn.es.bg/severnomakedonskiqt-premier-poiska-omo-ilinden-da-ima-predstavitel-v-balgarskoto-pravitelstvo> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>35</sup> 'Полиция окупира Мелник заради събор на ОМО „Илинден“ край гроба на Яне' [Police Occupies Melnik Because of a Gathering of ОМО 'Илинден' Near the Grave of Yane] (24 Chasa, 26 April 2025) <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/20388977> accessed 7 July 2026.

<sup>36</sup> 'Ще бъде директен, след това, което видях в Мелник...' [I Will Be Direct, After What I Saw in Melnik...] (Facebook post by Грубовци, Енидже Вардар - родна Македония, 28 April 2025) <https://www.facebook.com/grubovci/posts/pfbid02owVuVnYhAAS8ZEBYFyjbXVxMPYoCQszwc4p65cfsVsrrztusJbAzhZcNqpFSFLhnl> accessed 7 July 2026.

"Filthy low coward" (Kalin Nikiforov), "traitor ... a piled combination of impudence, greed, betrayal and sycophancy – betrays the memory of those heroes who gave their lives so that we have today – the Fatherland, a miserable wretch" (Athina Andromeda), "made-up person" (Nikolai Nanev), while MEP Angel Dzhambazki calls him "SerboSlave".

Support is expressed for the call to strip his citizenship and chase him out of Bulgaria "for anti-Bulgarian hateful activity, lies and falsification of facts publicly" (Lucy Virnot-Youroukova), "Let them arrest him for anti-state activity!" (Dimitar Terziev), "This idiot should have his Bulgarian passport stripped and be banned from setting foot in Bulgaria forever!" (Yordanka Buteva), "Traitor, this person must be sentenced,... Shame that the authorities do not take measures!" (Snezhanka Ivanova Aleksandrova), "This one is a disgrace for Bulgaria! Can we make a petition for expulsion??" (Stoyan Shkodrov), "An insolent and miserable Serbianised omovska monkey and a proven alcoholic... such proven provocateurs must be entirely banned from access to Bulgaria... a special resolution for all Bulgarophobes!!" (George Molnar).

Threats are made with demands to say what the person's name is and where he is located, there are calls for him to be beaten with clubs (Serpiko Frank, Stoyan Richkov), and an insinuation "why don't they just bury him somewhere...?" (Nikola Nikolov).

The Macedonians at the gathering are called "Serbophiles...", "grandsons of Serbian fascist beasts – Chetniks of Draža Mihailović" (Zivko Chavdarov), "monkeydonians", "Serbian macedonist Serbophiles", "Bulgarophobes", "Sell-out anti-Bulgarians who sell themselves for pennies... Shame and disgrace!!!" (Nikola Yordanov Maslarski), "These current macedonists are BULGARIANS usurpers and criminals!" Their organisations are called "homo Ilinden" and "Homo Ilinden – Pirin", and the gathering – a "mob gathering". The services are called upon to deal with them: "Where are the services to embitter their lives...?" (Nikola Yordanov Maslarski), and there are also calls for their execution: "Slaughter them with stones, do not speak to them..., they should be slaughtered with stones wherever they manifest their lying propagandas." (Ivan Kostov), while Vasil Naydenov called: "Those old perguishi are for execution by firing squad".

(Apart from the cited profiles, hate speech on this forum is also poured out by: Svetla Draganova, Desislava Yordanova, Todor Enchev, Andonov Georgi, Nenko Dedyov, Mihail Emanuilov Emanuilov, Tatiana Stefanova, Plamen Postolov, Iliya Petrov, Veselin Migdalov, Antoaneta Radeva, Tsvetan Iliev, Ali Bali, Emil Kostadinov, Anton Ivanov, Hristo Popov, Lyudmil Naumov, Kimon Dimitrov, Kristiyan Kochev, Vaselein Vasilev).

The same primary profile openly preaches that Macedonians cannot have equal rights with Bulgarians in Bulgaria, even if they have Bulgarian citizenship, and if they manifest their activity, they should be prosecuted by the law. It is by no means the only one. Similar actions are also carried out by the portals "Kuber's Warrior", Foundation "Macedonia" and many others.

## **LACK OF LEGAL PROTECTION**

In connection with the violation of the right to free expression (see our report for 2024) during the all-Macedonian assembly in Melnik on 21 April 2024, when the police confiscated all flags and posters, even clothes with Macedonian symbols (attempts to wave the flag were prevented by force), checked the documents and cars of everyone arriving, all attendees were filmed up close by plainclothes police

officers without reason or explanation, without any document or an order being shown on the basis of which this was being done. This, along with the large presence of police and plainclothes agents, stressed the assembly attendees and largely ruined their celebration. The flags were returned only after the assembly, at which the confiscation documents given during the first collection were taken back so that no evidence would remain – yet of 7 of them were made photos and used in the complaint lodged against the police.

The Blagoevgrad Administrative Court did not hear the parties until 11 February 2025. Here, witnesses from the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) – Blagoevgrad tried to defend the thesis that these were routine actions aimed at preventing a possible crime, that the flags were seized because their poles could be used as weapons<sup>37</sup> (untrue, since even those without poles were taken, as witness Bozhinov states, and clothes and posters were also taken), and they also strongly insisted that the flags had been handed over voluntarily, which is also untrue, since the choice before the people was to hand them over or not be able to attend the assembly. It is denied that people were filmed or harassed (even though the checks, the taking of identity cards, the car checks, and the photographing of identity cards are precisely that).

Questions regarding the lack of an order or the failure to show it to the organisers were avoided. The police's thesis is that it was an event "with a high degree of danger", and from the explanations, it appears that this was assessed as such precisely because Macedonian organisations were organising it, and not for any other reason.<sup>38</sup> However, this assessment is unwarranted because no past cases have ever taken place where violence was inflicted by Macedonians at their celebrations.

The MoI, through its legal advisor, insisted that only what had been previously declared by the organisers and correspondingly permitted by the mayor was allowed, and since the waving of flags had not been declared, consequently, no permission had been received for it. Both the MoI and the Prosecutor's Office want the claim to be dismissed.<sup>39</sup>

By Decision No. 1199 of 05.03.2025, the court dismissed the complaint, claiming that "from the evidence gathered in the case, it is not established that non-pecuniary damages were caused to the claimant by unlawful actions of police officers at the Regional Unit (RU) – Sandanski, manifesting as mental pain and suffering, deterioration of health, experienced negative emotions, physical and psychological adverse effects on his psyche and physical discomfort – fear, anxiety. According to the court, during the assembly held on 21.04.2024 on the territory of RU – Sandanski, the police officers exercised their powers in accordance with Art. 14, para. 1 of the Law on the Ministry of Interior (ZMVR) and Art. 30, para. 1, items 2 and 5 of the ZMVR and did not commit unlawful actions in relation to the claimant."<sup>40</sup>

The same was confirmed by the Sofia Administrative Court with Decision No. 12962 of 16 December 2025, which confirmed the decision, adding: "The seizure of the flags with the Vergina Sun was done with protocols and for the reason that the demonstration of these flags was not included in the plan of the held event. Flags with long wooden handles were seized due to the danger of assaults with them.

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<sup>37</sup> Witness for the MoI, police officer Iliev: "All the flags that were handed over by the people had long handles, and in order to prevent a breach of public order and provocation, we took actions for their voluntary handover."

<sup>38</sup> Witness Iliev: "Before the event, we were briefed and informed that a large number of visitors were expected to attend the events, including those from the Republic of North Macedonia, organised by the movements OMO 'Ilinden' and OMO 'Ilinden' – Pirin, which predisposes to the emergence of provocative actions and breach of public order during the holding of the event. Therefore, the event was designated with a high degree of danger." The same is confirmed also by the witness for the MoI, police officer Tasev.

<sup>39</sup> Protocol, 11.02.2025, Administrative Court Blagoevgrad – IV panel, judge Ivan Shekerinski.

<sup>40</sup> Decision No. 1199 of 05.03.2025 of the Administrative Court Blagoevgrad.

None of the examined witnesses indicates a fact that would lead to a conclusion that unlawful actions were committed by the police officers, which caused the claimant any non-pecuniary damages."

It turns out that since the use of means of self-expression such as flags was not specifically declared, it appears that it can be violated. What has been encroached upon is not only the right to expression, but also the identity of the victims, since it is a matter of banning the use and the seizure of symbols of their identity.

The court abuses its power; instead of condemning the flawed practice, it consciously avoids the fact that the institutions evade providing any document whatsoever regarding the committed violation. Thus, the police issued protocols for voluntary handover when the flags were seized against the will of the citizens. Similar are the cases with the summoning of Stoyan Gerasimov to SANS (State Agency for National Security), when he was refused a written invitation (see below). The chairman of OMO "Ilinden", Kiril Tilev, constantly faces the same problem: every time he has to argue with the police to be issued a subpoena.

The court denied justice also regarding the mayor of the Kresna Municipality's ban on permitting a traditional peaceful event of the Macedonians. It is precisely against letter No. 4700-25/1/08.10.2024 of the mayor of Kresna Municipality, with which he refused to permit the planned event of "OMO-Ilinden-Pirin" and "OMO-Ilinden", stating that "the activity of OMO 'Ilinden' and OMO 'Ilinden' – PIRIN, which is in contradiction with the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'directed against the territorial integrity of the country', Kresna Municipality does not allow the holding of any events on its territory." (see the report for 2024). On 23 October 2024, the Blagoevgrad Administrative Court dismissed the complaint without consideration, invoking the fact that the same letter had been repealed and replaced by another refusal on a different ground and therefore "the object of the challenge is lacking".<sup>41</sup>

This year, this decision was also supported by the administrative court in Sofia, which states that while the first ban cannot be challenged because it was repealed, the second one cannot either, because it did not contain a ban.<sup>42</sup> The circumstance that officially false and humiliating statements were made in the first letter based on disagreement with the beliefs and activities of the two minority groups, and that with the second one a traditional event was banned for which the date is of great importance and cannot simply be changed arbitrarily, while the refusal is not reasonably justified, since the only thing requested was the laying of flowers in front of a monument in the town—all this was ignored by the court.

Another example of a denial of justice is the case with the attempt by the chairman of the Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria to raise the issue of the non-physical Genocide committed against the Macedonian ethnicity in Bulgaria. Following a public statement by Bulgarian politician, the leader of Movement for rights and freedom – New beginning, Delyan Peevski, who promised punishments for the perpetrators of the "Revival Process", i.e. the assimilation and prosecutions of the Turkish minority in 1980s, the chairman Gerasimov submitted a signal to the Military District Prosecutor's Office in Sofia with a request to initiate an investigation and conduct a fair trial against those responsible for prosecution and assimilation of Macedonian minority in the communist period (1963 – 1989) too. On 7 October 2024, the prosecution refused to carry this out because the signal "does not contain data on a specific act and perpetrators, but rather general statements, and there is a lack of any assertion of unlawful actions by persons specified in the regulation." (The cited article refers to criminal prosecution only of persons working for the military forces).

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<sup>41</sup> Decision No. 3239/23.10.2024 of the BAS (Blagoevgrad Administrative Court).

<sup>42</sup> Ruling No. 1935 of 26.02.2025 of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Gerasimov appealed. On 24 June 2025, the Military Appellate Prosecutor's Office of Bulgaria confirmed this in Decree No. 131/25.<sup>43</sup> In order to refuse the initiation of proceedings under Art. 416 of the Penal Code (for genocide), this prosecutor's office invoked:

1. **Supposed** lack of data on organised physical genocide against the Macedonians during the period of communism.
2. The enforced sentences against "persons possessing a Macedonian self-awareness, for acts persecuted as anti-state during the communist regime" in the period 1966 – 1977, according to the prosecutor, do not fall into this category, as "the state had the same behaviour also towards persons with Bulgarian self-awareness, who had different political views from those proclaimed and protected by the government."
3. "The asserted violations during the census of the population conducted in 1965 also do not objectively cover the elements of the crime 'genocide'."
4. "It is a generally known fact that the 'Revival Process' affected only persons of Turkish ethnicity, but not of Macedonian ethnicity, because of which the complaint is groundless that the treatment of the communist state towards the Turkish and Macedonian ethnicity should be treated equally."
5. The state has adopted a law on compensating the repressed during communism.
6. The persons who governed the state during communism are dead.

Thus, the prosecutor ignores the commission of non-physical genocide, including the undeniable administrative one, which brought the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria from 187,000 to around 1,000 in less than 60 years. It equates the commission of persecution on the grounds of ethnic affiliation of people to one based on personal beliefs and refuses equal treatment of the two ethnic groups based on its interpretation of the scope of the concept of the "Revival" process, which is not generally accepted in the country at all.<sup>44</sup> The only positive thing in it is the admission that a Macedonian ethnicity exists in Bulgaria.

The Military Cassation Prosecutor's Office on 3 September overturned the two decisions of the lower instances and returned them for reconsideration.<sup>45</sup> The motives for overturning the two decisions are as follows:

Regarding the Resolution of the District Prosecutor's Office:

1. The prosecutor incorrectly "accepted that the file does not contain data on specific acts but general statements. On the contrary – in the signal of Stoyan Vasilev, the existence of a specific crime is asserted – under Art. 416, para 1 of the Penal Code."
2. If the prosecutor considers that this is not true, they must rule with a decree as provided by law, and not as they did with a resolution invoking an instruction. The decree constitutes a valid

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<sup>43</sup> Decree No. 131/25 of the Military Appellate Prosecutor's Office, prosecutor Maria Doycheva.

<sup>44</sup> Михаил Груев, Алексей Кальонски, Възродителният процес. Мюсюлманските общности и комунистическия режим, Институт за изследване на близкото минало, Сиела, София, 2011, <https://www.marginalia.bg/mihail-ivanov-ikonomikata-na-vazroditelniya-protses-e-znachimo-izsledvane/>, <https://desebg.com/knigi/1039-2013-01-13-14-14-26>, <https://faktor.bg/mneniya/lacheni-tsarvuli/koy-iska-da-bade-zabraven-vazroditelniya-protses-1330>. Възродителен процес, Уикипедия, [https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D1%8A%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD\\_%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B5%D1%81](https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D1%8A%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD_%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B5%D1%81) (Visited on 265 May 2025)

<sup>45</sup> Decree No. 9473/2025 of 03.09.2025, Military Cassation Prosecutor's Office.

procedural act, which is accordingly subject to institutional or judicial control. The resolution, on its part, "is not a valid prosecutorial act upon which judicial control can be carried out."

3. "in Art. 211 para 2 of the Penal Code (NPK) it is explicitly provided that for the initiation of pre-trial proceedings, data from which conclusions can be made regarding the persons who committed the crime, or regarding its legal qualification, are not required".

The Appellate Prosecutor's Office unlawfully confirmed the resolution because:

1. "The main point is that there is a lack of motives as to why it is accepted that the act under Art. 416 para 1 of the Penal Code asserted in the signal of Stoyan Vasilev was not committed, just as there is a lack of an operative part for the refusal to initiate pre-trial proceedings. The lack of motivation in decisions violates the law and the Constitution (Art. 121 para 4)."
2. "In the decree of the SVOP [Sofiyska Voennno-Okrazhna Prokuratura / Sofia Military District Prosecutor's Office] there is a lack of any factual findings, discussion of the applicable law, as well as specific legal conclusions."
3. It failed to indicate that the decree is subject to appeal.

The use of a resolution by the district prosecutor's office and the failure to indicate the appeal procedure by the appellate prosecutor's office "lead to a restriction of the rights of the person who made the communication to appeal under the procedure of Art. 213 para 4 of the Penal Code."

As a result of this remand, Gerasimov was unlawfully summoned to SANS [State Agency for National Security] (see the section on Harassment against Macedonian activists).

## **VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO ASSOCIATION**

### ***Introduction***

During this year, the attempts of the Macedonians to register their organisations continued to be completely unsuccessful. For its part, the efforts of the state were directed towards convincing the Committee of Ministers to stop the monitoring of the ECtHR judgments against Macedonian organisations in Bulgaria and to accept that the same have been implemented without achieving any registration whatsoever. Opposing this were the victim organisations, either directly (such as the Repressed Macedonians) or through the Human Rights Committee Tolerance and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. Upon the closure of the human rights monitoring in Bulgaria by PACE (1 October 2025), a resolution was also adopted regarding the execution of the ECtHR judgments on Macedonian cases in Bulgaria.<sup>46</sup>

Due to the immense lack of clarity that reigns in court decisions regarding Macedonian organisations, the Committee requested Bulgaria to point out organisations with faultless documents (model organisations) which could be used by the Macedonians in their attempts at registration. In response in February 2025, the executive director of the Registry Agency (AV) sent a reply in which they gave as an example three recently registered associations with documents that can serve as a model for newly established associations: "Bulgarian Dragon Boat Rowing Federation" (UIC 207874029), "Rotary E-Club Sofia Nextum" with UIC 206931930, and "National Pharmacy Branch Organisation" with UIC 207862742, stating also that "...all associations with an open electronic account in the register of non-

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<sup>46</sup> See no's 9 and 10.

profit legal entities can serve as examples of correctly prepared registration documents that are publicly available." Despite the fact that the applications or guidelines are not the real obstacle for registering organisation but the ethnic identification of those trying to register, it is worth noting that the three model organisations provided to the Committee are categorically different types of organisations (sport, professional and Rotary) than the types Macedonians have been trying to register (cultural, political and human rights) for over 30 years. Unfortunately, as we will see, the use of documents from registered organisations remains useless in practice, because the courts invent entirely new problems with the documentation and ignore, or deem irrelevant, the fact that documents from a registered organisation were used.

In its endeavour to convince the Committee of Ministers of its goodwill, the Bulgarian government formed its own group in 2024 to analyse the problem and find a solution. Not a single one of the affected organisations, nor any Macedonian organisation or their lawyers, were included in the respective group, nor were they consulted about anything. The expected conclusion of this commission of the convicted state about itself was – “completely innocent”. This conclusion was presented to the Committee of Ministers in June 2025. According to it, Bulgarian legislation maintains one of the most ‘liberal’ frameworks among EU Member states for non-profit registrations, and the problem lies not with the state, but with the victims, who do not wish to register and deliberately allow errors in the documents, inspired by the political elite in the Republic of Macedonia. Throughout the entire year, the state deliberately avoided explaining *how* exactly the Macedonian organisations made deliberate “errors”, when the “errors” that the courts find for them refer to identical texts in the documents of registered organisations, including those proposed by the state itself as a model. No reasonable explanation was offered as to *why* the Macedonians would deliberately and at their own expense sabotage their own registrations. Likewise, no reasonable explanation was offered for the motives of the Macedonian state to attempt to compromise Bulgaria in this way, nor what the eventual goals and benefit would be, nor before whom, when Bulgaria is a fully associated member of NATO, the EU, and the Schengen zone. On all these issues, no evidence whatsoever was attached; nevertheless, the state continued to attempt to interpret even the very endeavour of the Macedonian organisations to follow the institutions' remarks as evidence that they do not wish to register.<sup>47</sup>

Instead, the state attempted to mislead the Committee of Ministers that Macedonians are not discriminated against at all and, in fact, there were already two registered Macedonian organisations. For this purpose, it referred to two registered in 2019, one of which with Macedonian goals (Committee for the Protection of Fundamental Rights), was immediately subjected to a registration revocation procedure and de-registered in 2021 (something that the state keeps silent about in all its letters to the committee and, despite being debunked, continued to refer to it), and the other – Ancient Macedonians, has no Macedonian goals, but historical ones, yet was nevertheless also subjected to a registration revocation procedure and a police investigation, which to this day have not concluded. Despite all this being clearly and repeatedly pointed out by the organisations and by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), the state continued to refer to these “two registered Macedonian organisations”.

In June, the Registry Agency published the Instructions for registration. The true value of these Instructions will be examined in conclusion.

Following the publication of the Instructions, in the second half of 2025, there were 7 attempts to register 3 organisations that strictly followed the Instructions all of which were rejected. With this, the refusals over the past year became 19 for 5 Macedonian organisations. OMO "Ilinden"-Plovdiv received 6

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<sup>47</sup> See Observations of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee on the execution of the group of judgments “UMO Ilinden and others v. Bulgaria”, 23 January 2026, § 6.

refusals, OMO "Ilinden" – 5, The Repressed - 4, Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance – 2, Human Rights Committee Tolerance – 2.

Since it was repeatedly reproached by the Committee of Ministers for using as a motive for refusal one condemned by the ECHR itself, namely the alleged non-existence of the minority, Bulgarian courts, after the middle of 2024, avoid using this motive, covering up their refusals entirely with “technical errors”. Nevertheless, the true motive – the denial of the minority – surfaced this year as well in a Sofia court of appeal in October 2025.

### ***Registration attempts – summary.***

In 2025, five organisations attempted to register and received 19 refusals.

#### ***Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance***

This organisation won a case in Strasbourg due to a prior refusal to be registered, and this constitutes its second attempt to register, relying on the ECHR judgment. The club uses the documents of a registered organisation – Boxing Club NIBO. None of this helped, and in 2024 it received a refusal from the Registry Agency (RA). In its appeal to the Blagoevgrad District Court (BDC), the Club explicitly points out that it uses the statute of association and documents of a registered organisation. Despite this, it was refused on 31 January 2025.<sup>48</sup>

The BDC applies a “full review” approach (comprehensive verification – full review) and finds 3 new grounds for refusal based on texts that differ from those of the RA and are also present in the documents of the model organisation. To the argument that the statute of association of a registered organisation are used, the BDC replies: "The circumstance that the Registry Agency has registered another association is irrelevant to the legality of the appealed refusal."

On 4 June 2025, the Sofia Court of Appeal (SCA) dismissed the Club's appeal.<sup>49</sup> It does not conduct a full review and accepts the BDC's arguments, adding two more. It does not address the argument that the statute of association of a registered organisation are used, thereby bypassing the fact that all the “violations” mentioned are also present in the boxing club's documents.

The organisation has not made any new attempts to register but has lodged an application with the ECtHR.

#### ***Association of Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria, Victims of Communist Terror***

An organisation with a 16-year history and numerous registration attempts, as well as a case won in Strasbourg. After being refused registration by the RA and the BDC in 2024 for various pecuniary reasons, the organisation received a refusal from the SCA on 7 February 2025 as well.<sup>50</sup> In this attempt, it used the documents and statute of association of a registered organisation – Boxing Club NIBO - only changing the goals, the means of achieving them, and the core activity. To justify its refusal, the SCA applies a “full review”, which allows it to dismiss two of the BDC's motives, but to add three new ones, through formalism and distortion of the law, as all the attacked texts exist in the statute of association of the registered organisation.

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<sup>48</sup> Judgment No. 17 of 31 January 2025 of the BDC.

<sup>49</sup> Judgment No. 319 of 04.06.2025 of the SCA.

<sup>50</sup> SCA, Judgment No. 81/07.02.2025.

The organisation makes its next registration attempt as late as August, this time using other documents – those of one of the organisations recommended by the RA, the Dragon Boat Rowing Federation, whose statute of association again differ only in goals, means, and activity. This circumstance is explicitly pointed out in the application for registration. The same strict procedure is followed in accordance with the Agency's new Instructions, effective from June 2025. The result was a refusal on 7 August,<sup>51</sup> with 3 remarks that are not provided for by law and exist in the exact same form in the model organisation.

This decision is of great importance, as the same agency found completely different problems in its refusals to another organisation using identical documents – OMO "Ilinden" - and likewise, a third organisation with identical documents received completely different remarks in Plovdiv.<sup>52</sup>

The decision was appealed, but on 19 August the Blagoevgrad District Court fully accepted the Agency's motives and, without comment, dismissed the Repressed's argument that identical provisions exist in the Statute of Association of the recommended model organisation.<sup>53</sup>

The decision was appealed, but the refusal and its motives were upheld by the Sofia Court of Appeal on 29 December, with the court making a completely new finding. In doing so, the SCA attempted to protect the arbitrary requirement for a time and address in the minutes, by referring to Art. 19 of the NPLEA (LELNPO) = ЗЛОЖИЛ, which however does not mention a requirement for a time and address, but only specifies the minimum number of founders and also that these are "persons who associate to carry out non-profit activity". The court completely ignored the argument of the Repressed that they had used documents of a registered organisation recommended by the Agency itself.<sup>54</sup>

### ***OMO "Ilinden"-Plovdiv***

This organisation continued its attempts to register in 2025 as well, using, at the beginning of the year, the documents of Boxing Club Nibo, but received many remarks that differed from those received by the other Macedonian organisations using the same documents in Blagoevgrad.

The first refusal was received from the Registry Agency on 16 January.<sup>55</sup> The three arguments presented here are completely different from those of the Tolerance Club and the Repressed, despite the use of the same statute of association. Not only are the challenged provisions in the statute of association identical to those of the model organisation, but they are also consistent with the law, while the arguments used against them from the Agency are arbitrary, including outright manipulations, speculation with the law, and even untruths.

They appealed, pointing out that they use the statute of association of a registered organisation. On 19 February, the Plovdiv District Court (PDC) upheld the agency's motives and deemed irrelevant the fact that these deficiencies were not found in the statute of association of the model organisation.<sup>56</sup>

The Plovdiv Court of Appeal decided to conduct a full review of the appeal of OMO "Ilinden"-Plovdiv, upheld the motives of the lower instances, and dismissed the remaining grievances of the organisation, including the claim that it uses documents of a registered organisation, as irrelevant. In this decision, the Plovdiv Court of Appeal pronounced on the incorporating documents in the following manner: "The minutes of the inaugural meeting establish the consensus reached among the founders regarding the

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<sup>51</sup> Refusal No. 20250806135244/07.08.2025, RA.

<sup>52</sup> Compare Refusal No. 20251031111955/04.11.2025, RA Blagoevgrad, and the refusals of RA Plovdiv: No. 20251119120409/20.11.2025, No. 20251201123140/03.12.2025, No. 20251212132349/16.12.2025.

<sup>53</sup> Decision No. 143 of the Blagoevgrad Gr. Court, 19.08.2025.

<sup>54</sup> Judgment No. 658, Sofia, 29.12.2025, SCA.

<sup>55</sup> Refusal No. 20250115120356, 16.01.2025, RA Plovdiv

<sup>56</sup> Plovdiv District Court, Judgment No. 72 of 19. 02. 2025.

creation of the association... as well as the resolutions adopted to approve the articles of association and to elect the members of the board of directors“, something regarding which their colleagues from Blagoevgrad and Sofia take a categorically opposite stance, despite the identity of the documents.

In November, the organisation submitted a new application for registration, this time using the documents of the Dragon Boat Rowing Federation, which was recommended by the Agency and registered in 2024, and strictly in accordance with the Agency's new Instructions. They received a refusal that focuses entirely on the financial aspects of the statute of association, which are identical to those of the model organisation.<sup>57</sup>

The organisation decides to resubmit the documents, taking into account the Agency's remarks. Nevertheless, on 3 December they received a refusal.<sup>58</sup> Since one of the remarks is that the chairperson was declared an organ of the association, which, according to the Agency, should not have been done (even though it exists in the model organisation), they again decided not to appeal but to act in accordance with the Agency's remarks. Yet, they received a refusal for the third time, with the Agency again asserting, groundlessly, that the chairperson had been declared an organ, even though this had been changed, and pointing out new modified remarks regarding the statute of association, they did not find before. These attempts by OMO "Ilinden" – Plovdiv show a firm desire for registration, but, on the other hand, they reveal the complete dishonesty of the Registry Agency – after three reworkings of the documents, taking into account the remarks, the organisation receives refusals again and again with new remarks.<sup>59</sup>

### ***OMO "Ilinden"***

This marks the 35th year of this organisation's attempts to register. It has won numerous judgments in Strasbourg (the first dating back to 2001) and forms the cornerstone of the monitoring process against Bulgaria for its failure to implement judgments concerning Macedonian cases. During the current year, the organisation received 5 refusals.

OMO Ilinden initiated proceedings on 27 April,<sup>60</sup> utilising documentation from the Dragon Boat Rowing Federation—a model recommended by the Registry Agency (RA). The statute of association differed only regarding the organisation's objectives, activities, and the means of achieving them. Nevertheless, it received a refusal from the agency, which identified 4 “fatal flaws”—none of which had been flagged in the model organisation that the agency had previously recommended as ideal.<sup>61</sup>

On 16 July, the organisation lodged an appeal with the Blagoevgrad District Court (BDC), pointing out that it had used the documentation of an already registered organisation whose submission had raised no objections from the RA. On 30 July 2025, the BDC upheld the refusal on formalistic grounds; however, instead of the RA's original four objections, the court identified 7. Six of these seven arguments related to provisions that were absolutely identical to those in the model statute of association. The seventh issue concerned a handwritten addition of the name of one of the founders on the list of constituents. The law contains no restrictions or guidance on this matter, and it is a practice that has occurred frequently in the past—indeed, it could easily have been rectified by submitting a fresh list of founders had the RA granted

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<sup>57</sup> Refusal No. 20251119120409/20.11.2025.

<sup>58</sup> Refusal No. 20251201123140/03.12.2025, RA Plovdiv.

<sup>59</sup> Refusal No. 20251212132349/16.12.2025, RA Plovdiv.

<sup>60</sup> Krasimir Kanev, Refusals to Register Macedonian Associations in 2025, 02/04/2026, <https://bghelsinki.org/statii/otkazi-makedonski-sdruzhenia-2025/> Accessed on 01.06.2026.

<sup>61</sup> Refusal No. 20250714102819/16.07.2025, RA.

the opportunity. However, although the Agency itself had no issue with this detail, the BDC deemed it a problem.<sup>62</sup>

The BDC also stated that “the circumstance that the Registry Agency has registered another organisation with identical content in its statute of association and the minutes of its inaugural meeting is irrelevant and holds no weight regarding the legality of the challenged refusal.”

In their appeal to the Sofia Court of Appeal (SCA), they again pointed out that they were using documentation from a registered organisation, and they also requested the recusal of the judge-rapporteur on grounds of bias, given that the judge had ruled against them in the past; however, the court dismissed this request without any serious argument.<sup>63</sup> The SCA conducted a full review and found 9 problems, compared with the BDC's 7 and the RA's 4. Only one of these details i.e. the handwritten addition naming of one of the founders - was different from the model organisation's paperwork.

The court also took it upon itself, entirely unconstrained by the objectives stated in the statute of association, to uncover the "actual intent of the founders" - a formulation, inherited from old, discriminatory rulings against Macedonians, that is formulaically inserted here unnecessarily. This is evident because in the subsequent text, the court cited the very objectives of the statute of association to justify a discriminatory ruling: "the formulated goals and the means for achieving them create the impression of the existence of a disenfranchised or harmed Macedonian ethnic minority on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, standing in opposition to the rest of the Bulgarian citizens and repressed by the state, which is why the establishment of an association with such goals is aimed at dividing the nation and creating prerequisites for ethnic confrontation, thereby violating Art. 44, para. 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria."<sup>64</sup>

This is the only honest text written by a Bulgarian judge in a Macedonian case in 2025, and it serves as an admission of the true, underlying motive behind all the refusals.

OMO "Ilinden" initiated a new procedure, this time following the new June Instructions, but received yet another refusal containing 3 “fatal and uncorrectable flaws” for matters identical to those in the model organisation's documents.<sup>65</sup> The organisation decided that, instead of appealing, it would submit new documents that complied with the Agency's remarks. The fact that they decided not to appeal was used by the Bulgarian government to argue before the Committee of Ministers that the applicants were not seriously interested in registration.

On 7 December, they submitted a new application but were refused once again on 10 December. This time, the Agency found two new fatal flaws that it had failed to notice in its previous refusal, and which had not been an issue for the model organisation.<sup>66</sup> This refusal has been appealed.

### ***Human Rights Committee Tolerance***

The final organisation to attempt registration this year is the Human Rights Committee Tolerance. This organisation was established in 2013, but was denied registration, prompting it to lodge a complaint with the UN, which it subsequently won.<sup>67</sup> In its registration attempt, the Committee used the statute of

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<sup>62</sup> Judgment No. 130 of 30. 07. 2025, BDC.

<sup>63</sup> "for each specific application, the court is bound by what is stated by the applicants in the application and the attached documents, which is why it cannot be accepted that it is biased regarding the current application"

<sup>64</sup> Judgment No. 490 SCA of 08.10.2025, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Refusal No. 20251031111955/04.11.2025, RA Blagoevgrad.

<sup>66</sup> RA Refusal No. 20251207143222/10.12.2025.

<sup>67</sup> On 6 April 2026, the UN Human Rights Committee ruled in its favour and condemned the state for human rights violations.

association of a registered organisation - the Association of European Journalists in Bulgaria (AEJ-Bulgaria) - altering only the objectives, activities, and means.

On 17 October, it received a refusal from the Agency with no opportunity for resubmission or rectification.<sup>68</sup> Three grounds were invoked, none of which had posed an issue for the model organisation. The most bizarre among them was the assertion that participation in projects - a widely established and lawful practice for organisations in Bulgaria, including AEJ - can only be undertaken by commercial companies. Another peculiar point claimed that during the election of the leadership in the minutes of the inaugural meeting, the national identification numbers (EGNs) of those elected were not specified. This was despite the fact that their full names and EGNs were clearly listed alongside all attendees at the end of the minutes, leaving no room for confusion. No such requirement exists in either the law or the Instructions. Furthermore, although both by law and under the statute of association the Management Board has the right to determine the representative authority of its members (including the chairperson), the Agency found issue with the fact that the chairperson had not been authorised to represent the body before physical and legal entities, but only before state authorities and for registration purposes. This requirement is not only redundant and easily adjustable at any moment but is also not required by law.<sup>69</sup>

Ironically, the appealed case fell into the hands of the very same judge who had denied registration in 2014 - Lilia Maseva— leading to Bulgaria's condemnation by the UN.<sup>70</sup> On 26 November, she upheld the refusal, unnecessarily applying a full review only to parrot the Agency's arguments. Tellingly, the primary, standalone, and sufficient ground cited for the refusal was an argument later rejected in another case by the Sofia Court of Appeal<sup>71</sup>, namely, that merely citing the law regarding supplementary economic activity is insufficient. The judge concluded that "the circumstance that the Registry Agency has registered another association is irrelevant to the legality of the appealed refusal."

When appealing the decision through the Blagoevgrad District Court, the Committee encountered petty, undignified tactics designed to delay the case. This included waiting for the currency to switch from the lev to the euro, only to be charged an additional 1 euro due to the newly emerged exchange rate differential.

### ***Unequal Application of the Law to Macedonian Organisations in Bulgaria***

With a single exception, this year we are witnessing judicial mimicry, in which discriminatory motives are masked by sham technical pretexts fabricated for the occasion.

All Macedonian organisations used the documentation of already registered organisations, altering only the objectives, tasks, and the means for achieving them. What stands out across these refusals is that, with perhaps one or two exceptions, all the objections raised relate to matters that exist in an identical form in the original documents of registered and even officially recommended organisations yet posed no obstacle to their own registration.

### ***Documents of Registered Organisations Utilised***

At the beginning of the year, Boxing Club Nibo's model documents were used, whose documentation resulted in 6 refusals. After February, Macedonian organisations primarily used those recommended by the state, from the Dragon Boat Rowing Federation, but even with documentation of this model

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<sup>68</sup> Refusal No. 20251015191734/17.10.2025.

<sup>69</sup> Compare Par. 26, BHC letter to Committee of ministers, December 2025.

<sup>70</sup> Judgment No. 44022.10.2014, BDC. See Human Rights Committee, Views adopted by the Committee under the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 3717/2020, 11 March 2026.

<sup>71</sup> Judgment No. 170, Sofia, 07.04.2026, SCA.

organisation, 11 refusals were received. In the autumn of 2025, the Human Rights Committee Tolerance used the documents of the Association of European Journalists in Bulgaria and received 2 refusals.

All organisations that initiated the registration procedure after July strictly followed the Registry Agency's instructions, yet this did not help them succeed. Every single refusal consisted entirely or predominantly of objections to matters that exist in the documents of the registered organisations used as a model but were not specified in the Instructions.

The Association of Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria, the Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance, and OMO Ilinden Plovdiv used the documents of Boxing Club Nibo at the beginning of the year. The courts identified 14 fatal flaws in these documents, none of which had been found during the registration of Nibo. Furthermore, the Plovdiv courts uncovered 6 entirely different problems from those found in Blagoevgrad and Sofia. Indeed, Blagoevgrad and Sofia identify different problems for different Macedonian organisations, and even for the very same organisation at different levels of the judicial proceedings.

Four organisations submitted documents after June 2025: OMO Ilinden, the Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria, OMO Ilinden Plovdiv, and the Human Rights Committee Tolerance. Three of them used the documents of the Dragon Boat Rowing Federation, while one, the Human Rights Committee Tolerance, used those of the Association of European Journalists in Bulgaria. The courts found 17 fatal flaws in the documents of the registered Federation given as an example, which had not posed a problem and had not been noticed during its own registration. Four flaws were flagged regarding the Association, which had also gone unnoticed during its registration.

The three organisations using identical documents do not receive equal treatment from the court. The contradiction between the two judicial districts is particularly obvious regarding the requirement to state the exact time and address in the inaugural minutes. While Sofia and Blagoevgrad find the mention of the date and city insufficient, and the absence of the exact time and address fatal to establishing a common intent to found the entity,<sup>72</sup> the Plovdiv Court of Appeal finds that “From the minutes of the inaugural meeting, the consensus reached between the founders is established regarding the creation of the association, its name, its seat, its management address, as well as the decisions taken to adopt the statute of association and to elect the members of the management board.”<sup>73</sup>

It must be noted that the demand for an exact time and address is not based on any legal requirement.

### ***Different Schools of Legal Application in Bulgaria***

According to the reasoning advanced by the Bulgarian courts in 2025, two distinct legal schools emerged, with differing applications of the law, aligned only by their discrimination against Macedonians: the Plovdiv school and the Sofia-Blagoevgrad school.

#### ***Plovdiv Judicial School of Legal Application***

The Plovdiv school is represented by its Registry Agency, District Court, and Court of Appeal, with decisions taken against a single Macedonian organisation (OMO Ilinden Plovdiv). It demonstrated dramatic change in the motives used for refusals to register Macedonian organisations at the beginning and end of the year.

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<sup>72</sup> Sofia Court of Appeal, Judgment Number 81/07.02.2025.

<sup>73</sup> Judgment Number 96 of 28.03.2025.

### *Motives in the decisions from January to March 2025*

1. If, according to the law and the Statute of Association of the organisation, the Management Board represents the organisation, and the Management Board, on the basis of the Statute of Association and the law, authorises the Chairperson by a Decision to perform representative functions, the court can conclude that it is not clear which is the competent body to represent the association before third parties. (3 decisions from three levels).<sup>74</sup>
2. Even if the Statute of Association provide on the one hand for regular annual financial reports on expenses incurred, their connection to the goals and programmes of the Association, and the size and type of income, and on the other hand provide for an annual presentation to state institutions of information regarding its activity and financial status in accordance with current applicable legislation, the court can still find this insufficient because “The Statute of Association do not determine rules for the type, size, value, and purpose of donations received, nor information regarding the donors.”<sup>75</sup>
3. Even if the Statute of Association provide for the preparation of an annual report within the framework of which a financial report is included, and the adoption of the same by the General Assembly, the court can assume that the Statute of Association do not regulate which body adopts the annual financial reports, taking advantage of the fact that this report is not mentioned separately.<sup>76</sup>
4. If the Statute of Association do not provide that the adoption of the annual financial report must take place after a financial audit is carried out (which is exactly the same way as in the model organisation), then if the Statute is stating that it will be done “in accordance with all prescription of the law” is not seen as sufficient by the court.<sup>77</sup>

### *Decisions from November to December 2025*

1. Although the scope of supplementary economic activity is specified in the Statute of Association and the Inaugural minutes accepted the Statute of Association, the court still finds an issue insofar as a decision to adopt the scope of supplementary economic activity was not specifically taken in the inaugural minutes.<sup>78</sup>
2. Insofar as the organisation uses the traditional formulation that matters not settled in the Statute of Association shall be settled in accordance with the law, the court views this as an “ambiguity” or that “it is not indisputably established whether the statute of association provide for another order, different from the legal one.”<sup>79</sup>
3. The court can argue that the manner of carrying out the liquidation was not unambiguously determined in the Statute and simultaneously to object the very fact that such is even provided

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<sup>74</sup> Refusal Number 20250115120356, 16.01.2025, Decision Number 72 of 19. 02. 2025 of the Plovdiv District Court, Decision Number 96 of 28.03. 2025 of the Plovdiv Court of Appeal.

<sup>75</sup> Refusal Number 20250115120356, 16.01.2025, Decision Number 72 of 19. 02. 2025 of the Plovdiv District Court, Decision Number 96 of 28.03. 2025 of the Plovdiv Court of Appeal.

<sup>76</sup> Refusal Number 20250115120356, 16.01.2025 of RA Plovdiv, Decision Number 72 of 19. 02. 2025, Plovdiv District Court, Decision Number 96 of 28.03. 2025 of the Plovdiv Court of Appeal.

<sup>77</sup> Refusal Number 20250115120356, 16.01.2025 of RA Plovdiv, Decision Number 72 of 19. 02. 2025, Plovdiv District Court, Decision Number 96 of 28.03. 2025 of the Plovdiv Court of Appeal.

<sup>78</sup> Refusal Number 20251119120409/20.11.2025, RA Plovdiv.

<sup>79</sup> RA Plovdiv: Refusal Number 20251201123140/03.12.2025, Refusal Number 20251212132349/16.12.2025.

in the Statute of Association, because it supposedly did not correspond to the type of legal entity the organisation is.<sup>80</sup>

5. The Agency may rely on an argument from its former refusal when that specific issue has been resolved in the new submission.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Sofia Blagoevgrad Judicial School of Legal Application***

Regardless of changes to the documentation of registered organisations used throughout the year, these did not materially affect the nature of the arguments used for refusal.

1. The leading argument used to deny registration with the greatest consistency since 2024 is the lack of an exact address and founding date for the founding assembly. The court in the western part of the country finds that this absence prevents the establishment of the simultaneously expressed common will of the founders.

This requirement is contained neither in the Law (NPLEA) nor in Article 33p of Ordinance Number 1 of 14.02.2007 on the keeping, storage, and access to the Commercial Register and the Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities.<sup>82</sup> It was therefore unsurprising that in none of the cases did the court cite a law or ordinance. However, this same requirement was introduced post factum into the Instructions. The time and place of holding the inaugural meeting were not specified in the inaugural minutes of Boxing Club Nibo or the Bulgarian Dragon Boat Rowing Federation, which were used as a model, but this was not viewed as a problem for its registration.<sup>83</sup>

This motive is found in 8 of 13 refusals in this judicial line. The victims of these were three organisations: the Repressed Macedonians in Bulgaria received 4, OMO Ilinden received 2, and the Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance received 2.<sup>84</sup> In three of the decisions for OMO Ilinden, this argument was not used - the Agency did not consider it an issue, while the subsequent decisions did.<sup>85</sup>

In this respect, Blagoevgrad and Sofia are in complete contradiction with Plovdiv, which not only never once relies on this motive despite the use of the same documents, but even directly states: “From the minutes of the inaugural meeting, the consensus reached between the founders is established regarding the creation of the association, its name, its seat, its management address, as well as the decisions taken to adopt the statute of association and to elect the members of the management board.”<sup>86</sup>

It must also be noted that, despite the claim of the Agency and the court that it demands this because it is concerned with the simultaneously expressed common will of the founders specifically and only in Macedonian cases, no attempt has ever been made nor a way sought to request confirmation of the simultaneity and commonality of the will. The remark serves merely as an excuse for a refusal.

2. Since Article 25 of the law stipulates that the General Assembly admits new members, but the latter meets only once a year, if, in accordance with the practice in Bulgaria for the sake of

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<sup>80</sup> RA Plovdiv Refusal Number 20251212132349/16.12.2025.

<sup>81</sup> Refusal Number 20251212132349/16.12.2025, RA Plovdiv.

<sup>82</sup> Decision Number 194/15.05.2024 of the Court of Appeal Plovdiv on case Number 225/24.

<sup>83</sup> UIC 207874029 (Application A15 with incoming registration Number 20240613013555).

<sup>84</sup> SCA, Decision Number 81/07.02.2025 (Repressed), Decision Number 17 of 31 January 2025 of the BDC (Tolerance Club), Decision Number 319 of 04.06.2025 SCA (Tolerance Club), Refusal Number 20250806135244/07.08.2025 RA (Repressed), DECISION Number 143 Blagoevgrad, 19.08.2025 (Repressed), Decision Number 658, Sofia, 29.12.2025 SCA, (Repressed), Decision Number 130 of 30. 07. 2025 BDC (OMO Ilinden), Decision Number 499 SCA of 08.10.2025 (OMO Ilinden).

<sup>85</sup> Refusal Number 20250714102819/16.07.2025 RA, REFUSAL Number 20251031111955/04.11.2025,

<sup>86</sup> Plovdiv Court of Appeal, Decision Number 96 of 28.03. 2025.

flexibility, it is written that “the admission of members to the Association shall be done via a written application to the Management Board”, but the adoption itself (or rejection) is “based on a decision of the General Meeting”, the court finds this to be an “ambiguity”. Five refusals were issued on this ground against 3 organisations (the Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance, OMO Ilinden, and the Repressed Macedonians), which used two different statutes of registered associations.<sup>87</sup>

3. A play on words – since the statute of association of the two registered organisations used as a model contain synonymous usage of General Assembly and Annual Assembly (the General gathering is annual), which is completely obvious from the text, the court sees an insurmountable problem and ambiguity as to which body is the leadership organ. Two organisations suffered on this ground: the Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance and the Repressed, with two refusals each.<sup>88</sup>

The next group of motives was used in two refusals against a single organisation – the Human Rights Committee Tolerance.

4. If in the Inaugural minutes regarding the decision to elect a Management Board, those elected are specified with three names but without their national identification number (EGN), then despite the fact that the same individuals signed with three names and their EGN at the end of the minutes, and it is specified that they were elected from among the attending members, the Agency and the court find that they are not “properly and unambiguously individualised” as required by law.<sup>89</sup>
5. If, following the law, the Statute of Association provide that the association is represented by its Management Board, and the Management Board determines the representative authority of its members, and accordingly the Inaugural meeting resolves that the chairperson shall represent the Management Board on registration matters (as is the case with most organisations in Bulgaria), the court in a Macedonian case may decide that the chairperson does not actually represent the association itself or that “the content of the Statute of Association prevents an assessment of who represents the association”.<sup>90</sup>
6. If the organisation includes project work in its economic activity, which is common practice in Bulgaria and is the case in the model organisation, the court finds that such a definition is characteristic only of commercial companies.<sup>91</sup>

The following motives are found in only one decision each. Given that these are appealed decisions, this fact alone demonstrates their groundlessness, as they have not been reviewed or upheld by higher instances in any of the cases.

7. In its decision against the Repressed Macedonians, the Blagoevgrad Court finds that if the statute of association provide for the Management Board to appoint an auditor and accept their financial

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<sup>87</sup> Judgment Number 81/07.02.2025 of the SCA, Judgment Number 17 of 31 January 2025 of the BDC, Judgment Number 319 of 04.06.2025 of the SCA, Judgment Number 130 of 30. 07. 2025 of the BDC, Judgment Number 499 of 08.10.2025 of the SCA.

<sup>88</sup> Judgment Number 81/07.02.2025 of the SCA, Judgment Number 17 of 31 January 2025 of the BDC, Judgment Number 319 of 04.06.2025 of the SCA, Refusal Number 20250806135244/07.08.2025 RA.

<sup>89</sup> Refusal Number 20251015191734/17.10.2025 of RA Blagoevgrad, Judgment Number 191 of 26.11.2025 of the BDC.

<sup>90</sup> Refusal Number 20251015191734/17.10.2025 of RA Blagoevgrad, Judgment Number 191 of 26.11.2025 of the BDC.

<sup>91</sup> Refusal Number 20251015191734/17.10.2025 of RA Blagoevgrad, Judgment Number 191 of 26.11.2025 of the BDC.

report, which it then submits to the General Assembly for approval, this contradicts the legal rights of the General Assembly, even though the text of the law merely provides for the right of the General Assembly to “adopt the budget of the association (25.9)”.<sup>92</sup>

Regarding the same organisation, the higher instance modified this argument into two others:

8. If the statute of association provide that the Management Board appoints an auditor and accepts the auditor's financial report, the court finds this contradicts the law, specifically Article 25.2, which grants the General Meeting the right to "adopt other internal acts". This is inherently incomprehensible, since the report is not an internal act and is accepted and approved by the General Assembly anyway (see the next argument).<sup>93</sup>
9. The second is that if the statute of association provide that the Management Board appoints an auditor and accepts their financial report, while separately stating that the financial report is accepted by the General Assembly, the court considers this a "contradiction regarding the powers of the bodies".<sup>94</sup>

OMO “Ilinden” encountered similar speculative interpretations.

10. If the Statute of Association provide that the Management Board appoints an external auditor when preparing a financial report, the court finds this incorrect and deems it a right of the General Assembly, even though the law does not state any such thing and it was not an issue for the model organisation recommended and registered by the Registry Agency.<sup>95</sup>
11. The same decision finds that upon liquidation, it is insufficient to simply copy the text of the law into the statute of association regarding "the manner of distribution of assets after satisfying the creditors", because "The formal copying of statutory provisions does not constitute the determination and implementation of legal provisions."<sup>96</sup> Besides the fact that the exact same provision exists in the model organisation and that the court's assertion is arbitrary and declares the law itself insufficient, this view was completely justifiably rejected by the Sofia Court of Appeal: "This judicial panel finds that, contrary to the ruling of the court of first instance, Article 18 of the statute of association explicitly lays down the order and manner for distributing the assets remaining upon liquidation by repeating the rule provided for in Article 44 of the NPLEA, which, in the event that this order is not settled in the statute of association or the constitutive act, specifies the manner of distribution of the remaining assets."<sup>97</sup>
12. When, in implementation of Article 31.1 of the law,<sup>98</sup> the Management Board resolves that the chairperson shall represent it for registration purposes, the court may interpret this as "ambiguity regarding the scope of the representative authority of the chairperson of the Management Board" because "the scope is not explicitly defined".<sup>99</sup>
13. Insofar as, following the documents of the model organisation, the signatures are placed not directly beneath the Statute of Association and the Minutes but on a separate page with an explicit indication that they refer to the Statute of Association and the Inaugural minutes, the

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<sup>92</sup> Judgment Number 143 of 19.08.2025 of the BDC.

<sup>93</sup> Judgment Number 658, Sofia, 29.12.2025, SCA.

<sup>94</sup> Judgment Number 658, Sofia, 29.12.2025, SCA.

<sup>95</sup> Refusal Number 20251207143222/10.12.2025, RA Blagoevgrad.

<sup>96</sup> Refusal Number 20251207143222/10.12.2025.

<sup>97</sup> Judgment Number 170, Sofia, 07.04.2026, SCA.

<sup>98</sup> Article 31. The Management Board represents the association and determines the scope of representative authority of its individual members.

<sup>99</sup> Judgment Number 130 of 30. 07. 2025, BDC.

court finds that "This casts doubt on whether the signatures to the respective documents are part of them, as well as when they were affixed."<sup>100</sup>

14. If the list of founders is not additionally signed by the chairperson and the secretary of the Inaugural meeting, the court finds that the list consequently fails to certify that these persons attended the meeting.<sup>101</sup>
15. If the rights of the General Meeting include the temporary suspension of member rights, which is neither provided for nor prohibited by law, and the court has already registered organisations with such provisions in their statute of association, the court nevertheless finds it unacceptable when applied to Macedonian cases.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Remarks that are common to both judicial schools***

1. The use of "and others". Formulations such as "any activity not prohibited by law" or "other supplementary activity not contradicting the laws of the Republic of Bulgaria and international law", as well as "other activities related to achieving the objectives of the association defined in these statute of association" in relation to supplementary economic activity according to court make it indefinite, unclear, and contrary to Article 3.3 and 4 of the law, an assertion that is an outright lie.<sup>103</sup> This argument is typical of the registry agency, found in court decisions and characteristic of the Sofia Blagoevgrad school, but it appears once in Plovdiv too.<sup>104</sup>
2. There are no clearly drafted rules in the Statute of Association regarding the manner in which financial relations with excluded members should be settled, including upon termination of membership, upon other grounds such as death, placement under interdiction, and others. This concerns a motive used in 4 decisions<sup>105</sup> against three organisations (OMO Ilinden, Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance, and OMO Ilinden Plovdiv) that used statute of association copied from two registered organisations. In not a single one of the 15 other refusals in which any of these statutes of association were used was a similar fault observed.
3. The court exploits the circumstance that Article 3 (3) of the law determines that supplementary economic activity can be carried out "only if it is related to the scope of the main activity for which they are registered, and by using the income to achieve the objectives defined in the statute of association or the constitutive act" and since "means" are not mentioned here, it concludes that things like publishing books, newspapers, and calendars cannot be specified simultaneously as "means for achieving the goals" and as "supplementary economic activity". Economic activity

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<sup>100</sup> Judgment Number 499, SCA of 08.10.2025.

<sup>101</sup> Judgment Number 499, SCA of 08.10.2025.

<sup>102</sup> Refusal Number 20251031111955/04.11.2025, RA Blagoevgrad.

<sup>103</sup> Compare: Article 3 (3) Non-profit legal entities may perform supplementary economic activity only if it is related to the subject of the main activity for which they are registered, and by using the income to achieve the goals specified in the statute of association or the constitutive act. (4) The subject of economic activity shall be determined in the statute of association or the constitutive act of the non-profit legal entity.

<sup>104</sup> Refusal Number 2050714102819 of RA on 16.07.2025, RA Blagoevgrad, Refusal Number 20251031111955/04.11.2025 RA Blagoevgrad, Refusal Number 20251015191734/17.10.2025 RA Blagoevgrad, Refusal Number 20251119120409/20.11.2025 RA Plovdiv, Judgment Number 191 Blagoevgrad, 26.11.2025 BDC.

<sup>105</sup> Judgment Number 319 of 04.06.2025 SCA, Judgment Number 130 of 30. 07. 2025 BDC, Judgment Number 499 SCA of 08.10.2025, Refusal Number 20251119120409/20.11.2025 RA Plovdiv.

"is different and does not overlap in meaning with the means /methods/ through which the legal entity... has directed its main activity."<sup>106</sup>

4. If it is requested that registration be granted as one of the bodies of the association, in addition to the General Assembly and the Management Board, also the chairperson, as is the case in the documents of the model organisation recommended by the agency, this is found to be contrary to the law.<sup>107</sup>

We see that the Sofia Blagoevgrad school is represented with its unique 14 remarks, the Plovdiv school with 8 unique ones, while their common ones are only 4. This makes it very clear that these are fabricated pretexts for refusing registration and are an example of unequal application of the law in Bulgaria. It is unequal not only because two different judicial regions apply it differently, but also because they discriminate against Macedonian organisations finding faults that prevent registration that otherwise are not barriers for other organisations bearing identical documents. The court consistently, implicitly or explicitly, dismisses the significance of the fact that organisations have been registered with identical documents and even recommended as ideal by the agency, labelling it as “irrelevant”.

It is apparent that not even one of these remarks was included in the drafting of the Instructions, and therefore the Instructions are completely redundant on these matters.

### ***The Real Underlying Motive***

This year, only one judicial panel, namely that of the Sofia Court of Appeal – Chairperson: Hristo Lazarov, Members: Zhenya Dimitrova, Zhana Iv. Markova, had the courage to state the real underlying motive for refusal among a whole host of fabricated ones: “the formulated goals and the means for achieving them create the impression of the existence of a disenfranchised or harmed Macedonian ethnic minority on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, standing in opposition to the rest of the Bulgarian citizens and repressed by the state, which is why the establishment of an association with such goals is aimed at dividing the nation and creating prerequisites for ethnic confrontation, thereby violating Article 44, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.”<sup>108</sup>

The denial of the Macedonian minority is the sole reason for the refusal to register Macedonian organisations in Bulgaria; therefore, no Instructions could possibly help in this regard; a change in state policy and attitude towards Macedonians is required and specifically juridical decision prohibiting this kind of discriminatory reasoning.

### ***The New Instructions for the Initial Registration of Associations in the Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities from June 2025 – An Analysis***

These Instructions were presented as evidence of the state’s efforts to facilitate the easier registration of organisations and to clear itself of the accusation that ambiguities in the law and its interpretations are being used to deny registration to Macedonian associations. Our analysis of these Instructions and the experience gathered during the second half of 2025 from their application lead us to negative conclusions

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<sup>106</sup> Refusal Number 20251031111955/04.11.2025 RA Blagoevgrad, Refusal Number 20251201123140/03.12.2025 RA Plovdiv, Refusal Number 20251212132349/16.12.2025 RA Blagoevgrad.

<sup>107</sup> RA Plovdiv: Refusal Number 20251119120409/20.11.2025, Refusal Number 20251201123140/03.12.2025, Refusal Number 20251212132349/16.12.2025; RA Blagoevgrad: Refusal Number 2050714102819 of RA on 16.07.2025.

<sup>108</sup> Judgment Number 499 SCA of 08.10.2025.

similar to those of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, as presented in its letters to the Committee of Ministers in the autumn of 2025, and in January 2026, and in its annual report for 2025.

1. The very idea of resolving the problem through such Instructions is fundamentally flawed and seeks to circumvent rather than solve it. The refusals to register Macedonian organisations are not rooted in technical misunderstandings and weaknesses in the law, but in the policy of denying the Macedonian minority. The weaknesses and ambiguities in the law are merely used as a cover for the true motives when issuing a refusal. Therefore, any technical Instructions would be useless and would not lead to the registration of Macedonian organisations, as indeed has been the case. In the past and now, Macedonians have always used good lawyers and documentation from registered organisations, and the court did not find the “technical errors” in non-Macedonian cases as it discovered in the Macedonian ones. Consequently, we fully share the conclusion of the BHC that “they serve more to show the Committee of Ministers that the government is doing something to implement the ECHR decisions, rather than to provide practical guidance to newly established associations on how to prepare their documents so that they comply with the requirements of the law.”<sup>109</sup>
2. The Instructions offer interpretations that are doubtful and debatable from a legal point of view,<sup>110</sup> which in fact legitimise the controversial and even unlawful practice of the courts against Macedonian organisations in the past and provide justification for discriminatory decisions retrospectively. Some of the requirements even contradict the law, such as restricting the goals of private benefit organisations solely to the members of the organisation, whereas Article 2 Paragraph 1 of the NPLEA states that “Non-profit legal entities freely determine their goals and can self-determine as organisations for carrying out activity in public or private benefit.” Thus, the second function of these Instructions is to introduce a post facto justification for past unlawful decisions by turning them into lawful practice.
3. They introduce new conditions that have not been applied to other organisations and are absent from the law, conditions which the majority of registered organisations do not meet, including those given by the registry agency as organisations with “examples of good documents”.
4. Despite legitimising controversial and unlawful practices and interpretations, the Instructions themselves do not have regulatory force in the Bulgarian legal system and, consequently, are not binding on the agency or the court; as such, they were regularly ignored.
5. The Agency itself ignores its own instructions, and even when it received documents that fully complied with the Instructions and used documents from an organisation recommended by the Agency, it still regularly rejected them with the argument that the applications were not submitted in accordance with the law.

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<sup>109</sup> BHC Report for 2025, p. 70.

<sup>110</sup> In its report for 2025, p. 6, the BHC gives the following examples: a. “According to the Instructions, the goals of a private benefit association must serve to satisfy and protect specific interests extending to the circle of persons participating in the establishment of the association. This is in line with some of the decisions refusing registration to certain Macedonian associations, but in contradiction with other practice, as there are dozens of registered private benefit associations that have goals outside the specific interests extending to the circle of persons participating in the establishment of the association. b. Another example is the requirement introduced in the Instructions for the minutes of the inaugural meeting to include information not only on the date and the settlement where it was held, but also on the exact time and the specific location. In this way, the Instructions aim to justify a post factum requirement that is not found in any regulatory act, but which has turned into a ground for refusing to register several Macedonian organisations. This requirement does not serve as a ground for refusal in other cases, including in those specified as examples of good documents in the abovementioned letter of the Registry Agency from February 2025.

6. It is questionable whether the instructions should be considered guidance when there is little to materially support that title. The Instructions are brief, twice shorter than the law, repeating it for the most part, with little actual guidance on how it should be applied, and they offer nothing that was not known before. However, even if the guidance were developed, it would likely not include any of the specifics used to reject Macedonian applications, because none of the technical remarks are legitimate grounds for rejecting applications. This conclusion is supported by the treatment of existing non-Macedonian organisations which have been registered without the same level of scrutiny or challenge.
7. They are broad and leave many ambiguities<sup>111</sup> and unanswered questions,<sup>112</sup> thereby providing ample opportunities for exploitation by the courts through misinterpretation or gaps in explanation, as evidenced from the large number of new refusals.
8. They are of no real use. We find almost no guidance in the Instructions for any of the objections raised against Macedonian organisations by the courts and the Registry Agency in 2025 (with the exception of those serving as post factum justification for past refusals, such as the exact time and place of founding). This, in itself, makes them useless, but on the other hand, it demonstrates once again that the problem with the non-registration of Macedonian organisations does not lie in technical details, and that whatever Instructions are produced, new reasons for refusal will be fabricated immediately.
9. The Instructions are completely ineffective because they did not lead to a single registration. Their only effect was to create space for new grounds for refusal. Law enforcement regarding Macedonian organisations remains highly arbitrary, which is why any instructions on the application of the law are of negligible significance. A change in state policy is required.

### *Conclusion*

The situation appears as follows:

1. Despite using documents from three successfully registered organisations, all courts found numerous new problems in them. These concern matters identical to those in the registered organisations, which were not deemed problematic to be registered.
2. In none of the refusals does the agency or the court reproach the Macedonian organisations for altering the model documents negatively, but instead declare that the fact of using documents

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<sup>111</sup> For example, Article 10 (1) of the Law states that an NGO “is represented by its management body”, and later Article 31 (1) specifies that the Management Board “represents the association and determines the scope of representative authority of its individual members”. These assertions create ambiguities for applicants because most organisations in Bulgaria differ in the way they define representation in their statute of association, usually by one or two members of the Management Board (for example, the chairperson and deputy chairperson) for practical reasons. The wording in the Law can however be manipulated by the judicial authorities, as seen in the case of the “Association for the Protection of Fundamental Individual Human Rights 23” in 2024, when all judicial levels and the Agency found different ways to interpret the wording and use it against the registration of the association, despite the fact that their model was accepted and widely used by other organisations in Bulgaria. The same occurred in 2025 with the Human Rights Committee Tolerance, despite the law being followed literally in that case.

<sup>112</sup> For example, it is not explained a. whether specimens signed by the persons representing the organisation must be submitted during registration and b. whether the same must be notarised. According to the law, this is required only for foundations. Such a document exists on the website as one of the possible attachments for electronic submission of documents, but it is accessible for attachment during the registration of various types of organisations. Legal firms in Bulgaria provide differing advice on the internet regarding this matter.

from a registered organisation in whose statute of association the corresponding new “errors” were not found is irrelevant.

3. Courts in different judicial regions find different problems in the exact same model documents.
4. Courts within the same judicial region find different problems in different organisations, even when using the same organisation's documentation.
5. The different instances of the court find different problems in the documents of the exact same organisation.
6. When applicants take into account the Agency's or the court's remarks during a new attempt at registration, the agency and the court find entirely new problems that they had not noticed in the previous attempt.<sup>113</sup>
7. Frequently and without reason, a full de novo appeal is applied, whereby the higher instances do not feel bound by the motives of the lower ones, but perform a new, complete, independent review, during which the appellate instance can ignore the motives of the lower court and deliver a decision based on entirely different grounds. This allows for registration to be refused at every instance, including the final one, for reasons not given at all by the lower instances, and consequently, even if applicants succeed in proving the inconsistency of the motives for refusal by the lower instances, the higher court replaces them with entirely new ones. In this manner, the appellant courts take advantage of this legal mechanism so Macedonian applicants are confronted with different motives at different levels; where the court has the opportunity to completely ignore their arguments, rendering the appeal pointless, and, in the final instance, they are effectively left with no opportunity to challenge the court's new motives, which constitutes a denial of justice.<sup>114</sup> This new line will be widely applied throughout the year.
8. The arrogant attitude of the courts, convinced in advance that they must issue a refusal, is also evident in the exceptional level of carelessness and disregard shown in their decisions, including factually incorrect assertions, incorrect citations of Statute of Association, outright rejection of applications without reading them, and so forth.

Neither the new instructions nor the use of documents from registered organisations (including those provided as examples by the Agency) helped in any way to register a Macedonian association in Bulgaria. The Agency and the courts regularly and categorically ignored or dismissed as irrelevant the circumstance that documents of registered organisations were being used, and even ones suggested by the Agency itself as a model.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> For example, OMO Ilinden, after the refusal of the Registry Agency on 31 October, decides not to appeal but to make a new attempt complying with all the remarks given by the Agency, but on 10 December receives a new refusal, this time with 2 entirely different remarks which had not been noticed before. Similar is the case of OMO Ilinden Plovdiv: after the refusal on 3 December by the Registry Agency, they correct and submit new documents, but on 16 December receive a new refusal, where motives from the previous refusal are even incorrectly repeated, regardless of the fact that they were corrected, while new ones are added which had not been noticed in the previous refusal.

<sup>114</sup> See also the Position of the BHC to the Committee of Ministers of 4 August, Paragraph 22.

<sup>115</sup> Judgment Number 17 of 31 January 2025 of the Blagoevgrad District Court, Emilia Doncheva, against the Macedonian Club for Ethnic Tolerance: “The circumstance that the Registry Agency has entered another association is irrelevant to the legality of the challenged refusal.” Plovdiv District Court, Judgment Number 72 of 19. 02. 2025 also finds it irrelevant that these flaws were not found in the statute of association of the registered organisation. Similarly: Plovdiv Court of Appeal, Judgment Number 96 of 28.03. 2025, Judgment Number 44022.10.2014 of the Blagoevgrad District Court Lilya Maseva and many others.

There is no modicum of doubt that the underlying cause for the refusal of registration resides in the absolute denial of the existence of the Macedonian minority. By the Bulgarian Government's own admission, associations representing the Macedonian minority constitute the sole organizations of ethnic groups in Bulgaria consistently barred from obtaining registration, whereas other minority organizations, such as those representing Roma, Turks, and others, face no such impediments.<sup>116</sup> Contrary to the government's assertions attempting to demonstrate that Macedonian entities deliberately sabotage their own registration process, the direct nexus between a recognized minority obtaining registration, and a denied minority being subject to a systematic refusal of registration, remains indisputably self-evident

### **WALL OF SHAME**

Judges who issued discriminatory, unlawful rulings in 2025 against Macedonian organisations in Bulgaria.<sup>117</sup>

Blagoevgrad District Court: Milena Kamenova, Gyulfie Yahova, Emilia Doncheva, Lilya Maseva

Sofia Court of Appeal: Hristo Lazarov, Members: Zhenya Dimitrova, Zhana Iv. Markova, Bistra Nikolova, Todor Todorov, Milen Vasilev, Anelia Tsanova, Svetlana Stanimirova, Maria R., Hristo Lazarov, Zhenya Dimitrova, Zhana Iv. Markova,

Plovdiv Court of Appeal: Radka D. Cholakova, Valentin D. Boykinov, Antonia K. Rogleva

Sofia Administrative Court: Svetlana Borisova, Aglika Adamova, Chavdar Dimitrov

Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria: Svetlana Borisova, Aglika Adamova, Chavdar Dimitrov.

### **HARASSMENT AGAINST MACEDONIAN ACTIVISTS IN BULGARIA.**

Following the decision of the Supreme Cassation Prosecution Office to return his complaint for review on 26.11.2025, Stoyan Gerasimov received a telephone invitation to appear in Sofia regarding the decision. His request to receive a written invitation was rejected. He went to the prosecution office in Sofia under the impression that he had been invited by the Supreme Cassation Prosecution Office. After several checks, it was established that he had in fact been summoned by the State Agency for National Security.

After being taken there, he was questioned from 13:30 to 16:00 hours by two agents, a man and a woman, who did not introduce themselves to him, did not show him a warrant, nor gave him any documents whatsoever. They subjected him to two and a half hours of interrogation. The woman asked him five times: "But you are Bulgarian right?" and he corrected her five times: "No, I am Macedonian, how many times do I have to tell you, I am a Bulgarian citizen, but Macedonian by nationality."

At their request, he wrote three pages about what had happened to him in the past, about the repressions. The woman tried to intervene to change some things, but the man said let him write whatever he wants. He told them that the whole tragedy stems from the fact that they have not recognised us as Macedonians, from Todor Zhivkov to now. He showed them the 2021 declaration from the municipal council of Blagoevgrad attacking Macedonian ethnicity, as well as old Bulgarian newspapers in which the Macedonian ethnicity is recognised. They asked him who was to blame for the Revival Process; he said

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<sup>116</sup> BHC letter to the Committee of ministers, 23 January 2026 § 6

<sup>117</sup> The list omits the judges of three rulings, one each from the Blagoevgrad Administrative Court, the Blagoevgrad District Court, and the Plovdiv District Court.

Zhivkov, but not only him. The repressions continue in another forms, covertly, making a person afraid to say they are Macedonian.

## **THE AUTHORITIES REFUSE DIALOGUE**

Dialogue between representatives of the Macedonian minority and the authorities is a regular recommendation in monitoring reports for Bulgaria. This year as well, the authorities did not undertake a single initiative to implement the recommendations in the reports of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to initiate a dialogue with the minority. Conversely, they did not even reply to numerous written requests from Macedonian organisations for meetings and talks with Bulgarian institutions. In cases where, instead of a meeting request, the authorities received alerts and complaints, they either did not reply, rejected them, gave evasive answers, or started interrogating people sending them letters. All institutions directly or indirectly refuse to initiate a dialogue on the issues of discrimination and the rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria.

In October 2024, OMO Ilinden sent meeting requests to various Bulgarian institutions. They remained unanswered both at the end of 2024 and throughout 2025. On 10 April, OMO Ilinden PIRIN and OMO Ilinden sent a joint letter to the Minister of Education and Science, Krasimir Valchev, but never received a reply. On 26 November, OMO Ilinden addressed the Prime Minister, the Chairperson of the National Assembly, the Prosecutor General, and the Ombudsman. While no reply was received from any institution, an answer eventually came in the form of a police interrogation of the chairperson of OMO Ilinden, Kiril Tilev, regarding these letters (about which we will write in the 2026 report).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The violation of the right to association and peaceful assembly, the hate speech and the discrimination to which Macedonians in Bulgaria are subjected, are based on the nationalistic ideology dominating from the time of communism, in which the denial of the existence of a Macedonian minority and nation, and the treatment of the very idea as hostile to Bulgaria, play a key role.

Under the current situation, it does not seem likely that the position of Macedonians in Bulgaria can improve without serious external intervention, and particularly from the European institutions. The problem is very old and serious and requires urgent measures.<sup>118</sup> The denial and discrimination of the Macedonian minority constitutes the last totalitarian policy in the European Union.

In order to start resolving the existing problems with the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, the following changes must be made in Bulgaria:

1. To withdraw the decision of the Constitutional Court of 29 February 2000 and the declaration of the Bulgarian parliament of 6 March 1990, as well as the position of the government and the declaration of the parliament of 9 November 2019, which officially postulate that there is no distinct Macedonian ethnicity in Bulgaria. These serve as the ideological and legal basis for discrimination. The government should officially declare that the Macedonian minority will no longer be denied or discriminated against, and that its rights will be protected.

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<sup>118</sup> For the same recommendation see: <https://www.civicsolidarity.org/article/1639/respect> and recognition Macedonian minority Bulgaria strong condemnation announcements, accessed on 16 March 2020.

2. The state should officially recognise the existence of national minorities in Bulgaria and the term “national minorities” should be placed in the Constitution. The necessary legal changes should be made so that the principle of the unity of the nation cannot be used to deny the very existence of national minorities and their rights. In best scenario, minorities should be listed by name to avoid any possibility of a perverse interpretation of the Constitution and denial of the minority.
3. Measures should be taken so that the constitutional ban on the registration of organisations on an ethnic basis cannot be interpreted and used against the right of minorities to establish organisations.
4. The Law on the registration of non-governmental organisations should be amended by introducing clauses that make it impossible to interpret the self-determination of minorities and the protection of their rights as unconstitutional, anti-state, threatening territorial integrity, or as a ground for refusing registration.
5. Bulgaria should implement the judgments of the ECHR, and UN, and Macedonian organisations should be registered; the implementation of these judgments is of fundamental importance for ensuring the rule of law.<sup>119</sup> The existing blockade on the registration of Macedonian organisations should be lifted.<sup>120</sup>
6. An active dialogue should begin between the state and representatives of the Macedonian minority to resolve existing problems, and a Macedonian representative should join the Commission for Minorities.<sup>121</sup> The dialogue must begin immediately, without waiting for the recognition of the minority, because “recognition of the minority by the state is not a mandatory condition for being qualified for protection under the Framework Convention”, and it should focus on the application of the Framework Convention to Macedonians under specific articles of the Convention.<sup>122</sup>
7. In future censuses, a separate column for “Macedonian” should be introduced, and during its conduct, it should be publicly and officially announced that everyone who feels Macedonian can freely self-determine as such,<sup>123</sup> and the same should be included in the instructions for census takers.
8. Measures should be taken to promote tolerance towards the Macedonian minority and protect it from hate speech and institutional discrimination.
9. The study of the Macedonian literary language, culture, and history should be included in the educational programmes for children from the Macedonian minority, as well as in state universities. At the same time, the main educational programmes must be modified so that they do not exclude the Macedonian nation, minority, and their history, culture, and language (something which is not new and was done in Bulgaria in the past, but was subsequently abandoned). The history of Bulgaria curriculum in schools should include all minorities and mention the Macedonian minority and nation, and it should be taught in the way that do not create or support stereotypes questioning or denying Macedonian identity and ethnicity.

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<sup>119</sup> Compare: European Implementation Network (EIN) & Democracy Reporting International (DRI), Justice Delayed and Justice Denied: Non Implementation of European Courts’ Judgments and the Rule of Law, April 2022, pp. 7 8, <https://democracyreporting.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/images/626ab7f1ad94b.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe following her visit to Bulgaria on 25 29 November 2019, 31/03/2020, & 6, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/report-of-the-commissioner-for-human-rights-of-the-council-of-europe-following-her-visit-to-bulgaria-on-25-29-november-2019-49>.

<sup>121</sup> Commissioner, & 49.

<sup>122</sup> Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of National minorities, Fourth Opinion on Bulgaria adopted on 26 May 2020, ACFC/OP/IV(2020)001Final, <https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-Bulgaria-en/16809eb483>, & 25 27.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Advisory, & 31 36.

10. The government of Bulgaria should formally apologise and give financial reparations to the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria for its crimes during communist rule and recognise the Macedonians as amongst one of the repressed groups subjected to revival processes in that period.

11. The government of Bulgaria should immediately stop its ongoing genocide<sup>124</sup> of the Macedonian minority and people through various domestic and international acts of aggression, including the transnational repression of the Macedonian minority in Albania, subjected to hostile ethnic targeting and harassment.

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<sup>124</sup> We use the term genocide in its foundational academic sense, which was used to formulate the Genocide Convention, and by using this approach we counter the hegemonic understanding that has emerged and misconstrues and conflates the crime as synonymous with mass killing. Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term, defined genocide holistically without necessitating mass killing. He explained it as a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. While domestic and international politics heavily influenced the drafting of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948 (Genocide Convention), resulting in the exclusion of political and cultural genocide, unlike popular belief, mass killing still legally remains not a requisite for the crime of genocide. Under Article II(b), (d), and (e), genocide includes inflicting serious bodily or mental harm, preventing births, and transferring children. The following acts inflicted on the Macedonian minority by the Republic of Bulgaria, which are by no means exhaustive, such as the systematic actions targeting the Macedonian minority, evidenced by a census reduction from 187,000 to 1,000 over 65 years, killing, arresting, imprisoning, torturing, mass surveilling and policing of activists and conscious Macedonians, exiling, displacing Macedonian families, propaganda, hate speech and ethnic denial, the denial of their fundamental rights, the suppression of their ability to organise and defend those rights, external diplomatic pressure to prevent another state from protecting them, and frequent public expressions anticipating their ultimate demographic extinction, alongside the total denial of Macedonian culture and their forced mischaracterisation as Bulgarian demonstrate and amounts to a clear intent to destroy the minority group in whole or part. Consequently, these systematic actions satisfy both Lemkin's definition and the legal criteria for the specific intent to destroy an ethnic group, thereby justifying the application of the term and amounting to the crime of genocide. (See Jeffrey Bachman, 'Cases Studied in Genocide Studies and Prevention and Journal of Genocide Research and Implications for the Field of Genocide Studies' (2020) 14(1) Genocide Studies and Prevention.)