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The Macedonian Quandary in the post-Yugoslav Era: Identity Disputes of North Macedonia with Greece and Bulgaria

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Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

Doctor Luís Nuno Rodrigues, Full Professor

ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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To all the Balkan peoples who continue their struggle and live together after various sufferings and wars.

Peace and love,
Paz e amor,
Paqe dhe dashuri,
Mir i ljubav,
Мир и любов,
Мир и љубов,
Pace și dragoste,
Мир и љубав,
Mir in ljubezen,
Barış ve sevgi,
Ειρήνη και αγάπη.

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Abstract

In 1991, diplomatic talks took place between Greece and the newly independent Republic of Macedonia, covering issues such as naming dispute, minority rights, and historical symbols. Greece expressed deep concern about the newly founded state's claim to Macedonia's name and historical heritage, viewing this as a profound threat to its national identity. To address this issue, the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a new name in 2019 to ease tensions and gain international recognition.

However, challenges persisted. Later, Bulgaria intervened and demanded the renaming of the Macedonian language. Bulgaria stressed that North Macedonia's EU membership depends not only on resolving historical and linguistic issues with Greece but also with other neighboring countries. This intervention reignited tensions and raised doubts about the legitimacy of the Macedonian identity on the world stage, adding complexity to North Macedonia's EU membership aspirations.

Shifting focus, this dissertation explores the complex layers of Macedonian identity, examining its mix of Slavic and ancient Macedonian elements and its impact on the broader national identity. The study also critically analyzes the ongoing identity dispute between Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria, using constructivist and ontological security perspectives to comprehensively understand the complex and persistent issues in this protracted dispute..

Keywords: North Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria, Naming Dispute, EU, NATO

Resumo

Em 1991, ocorreram negociações diplomáticas entre a Grécia e a recém-independente República da Macedônia, abordando questões como disputa de nomenclatura, direitos das minorias e símbolos históricos. A Grécia expressou profunda preocupação com a reivindicação do recém-formado estado ao nome e patrimônio histórico da Macedônia, considerando isso uma ameaça profunda à sua identidade nacional. Para abordar essa questão, a República da Macedônia do Norte adotou um novo nome em 2019 para aliviar tensões e obter reconhecimento internacional.

No entanto, desafios persistiram. Mais tarde, a Bulgária interveio e exigiu a mudança do nome da língua macedônia. A Bulgária enfatizou que a adesão da Macedônia do Norte à União Europeia depende não apenas da resolução de questões históricas e linguísticas com a Grécia, mas também com outros países vizinhos. Essa intervenção reacendeu tensões e levantou dúvidas sobre a legitimidade da identidade macedônia no palco mundial, acrescentando complexidade às aspirações de adesão da Macedônia do Norte à UE.

Mudando o foco, esta dissertação explora as camadas complexas da identidade macedônia, examinando sua mistura de elementos eslavos e antigos elementos macedônios e seu impacto na identidade nacional mais ampla. O estudo também analisa criticamente o contínuo conflito de identidade entre Macedônia, Grécia e Bulgária, utilizando perspectivas construtivistas e de segurança ontológica para compreender abrangentemente as questões complexas e persistentes neste conflito prolongado.

Palavras-chave: Macedônia do Norte, Grécia, Bulgária, Disputa de Nomenclatura, UE, OTAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Resumo.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Glossary of Acronyms.....	vi
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	6
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework.....	11
2.1. Constructivism.....	11
2.2. Ontological Security Theory.....	15
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	19
Chapter 4. The Construction of Macedonian National Identity.....	22
4.1. The Macedonian Identity in the post-World War II	22
4.2. The New Macedonian Question.....	25
4.3. The Antiquization of the Identity and the Project “Skopje 2014”	28
Chapter 5. Analysis of the North Macedonian - Greek Name Dispute.....	31
5.1. A Conflict over Macedonian Identity.....	31
5.2. A New State Called “North Macedonia”.....	37
Chapter 6. Analysis of the North Macedonian – Bulgarian Dispute.....	43
6.1. North Macedonia’s EU Path is Blocked Again.....	44
6.2. North Macedonia’s Identity Conflict with Bulgaria.....	48
Chapter 7. Conclusion.....	53
Bibliography.....	57

Glossary of Acronyms

EU	European Union
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GERB	Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria
IR	International Relations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLA	National Liberation Army
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OST	Ontological Security Theory
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
SYRIZA	Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
VMRO-DPMNE for	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party Macedonian National Unity

1. Introduction

In 1991, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia emerged as a newly established European nation. Since then, a persistent series of disagreements has plagued the country, encompassing a wide range of topics from the past, present, and future. These discussions have encompassed various subjects including politics, history, culture, and religion. The status of Macedonia as an autonomous nation has been subject to scrutiny, with concerns arising regarding its territorial boundaries and constitutional rights. The historical and territorial disputes that surround Macedonia have given rise to what is now commonly known as the New Macedonia Question, which is currently a topic of contention. This issue delves into the amalgamation of Slavic and ancient Macedonian identities, as well as the historical development, linguistic identity, and distinct statehood of the Macedonian nation. It is important to acknowledge that this is distinct from the Macedonian Question of the early 1900s, which primarily focused on territorial disputes and military conflict.

After the republic's secession from Yugoslavia, the situation surrounding Macedonia has become an intricate political predicament. This matter encompasses numerous internal and external factors, encompassing the relationship between the Macedonian and Albanian communities and the state's connections with neighboring countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Albanian movements within Macedonia opposed granting the new state a Macedonian national character. They advocated for the decentralization of Macedonia and the recognition of the Albanians as a nation-building group alongside the Macedonians. The Macedonian Orthodox Church was denied autocephaly by the Serbian Patriarchate, closely linked to the Belgrade government. Athens rejected the appropriation of the ancient legacy by the Slavs of the Balkans as unacceptable. Moreover, Bulgaria consistently questioned the existence of a distinct Macedonian people and a separate Macedonian language. The internal political crisis in Macedonia, though not of significant magnitude, has garnered attention from the United States, the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This attention is primarily due to the Balkans' significance in terms of European and global security, as well as the ongoing foreign policy debates surrounding the crisis.

This dissertation investigates the conflict surrounding the identity of Macedonia and the disagreements it faces with Bulgaria and Greece in the context of the new Macedonian problem. On one hand, a novel model of governance was established with the involvement of external actors subsequent to the endorsement of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001, which brought together ethnic Albanians and Macedonians within Macedonia. Termed as

consociationalism, this democratic system entails power-sharing among different groups. Consequently, the parties involved have reached a consensus through a process of compromise, leading to the establishment of a stable state that operates on the principle of 'state-sharing through power-sharing.' This has resulted in constitutional amendments, official adoption of consociational processes, and the granting of more rights to the Albanian community (Piacentini, 2021). On the other hand, the ascendancy of VMRO-DPMNE in post-2001 Macedonia marked a critical period defined by complex dynamics and heightened Macedonian nationalism. Following the 2001 crisis, where the ethnic Albanian militant National Liberation Army (NLA) sought greater rights for ethnic Albanians, VMRO-DPMNE rose to prominence, championing a robust stance against perceived threats, particularly the notion of a "Greater Albania." This nationalist fervor, vehemently opposed to territorial changes and external influences, fueled VMRO-DPMNE's narrative. The party strategically distanced itself from the Ohrid Framework Agreement, emphasizing a commitment to Macedonian sovereignty (Grillot et al., 2004, p. 8-9). The delicate balance between ethnic Macedonian nationalism and the aspirations of the Albanian minority shaped the political landscape, with VMRO-DPMNE playing a central role in promoting a vision of Macedonia that resisted external pressures and safeguarded its territorial integrity.

Beside all this, despite encountering economic challenges, Skopje has experienced a remarkable architectural transformation through the implementation of the "Skopje 2014" initiative. In this scholarly thesis, one aspect under scrutiny is the New Macedonian Question, which is intricately connected to the issues of international acceptance and the crisis of legitimacy. Additionally, the dissertation delves into the examination of the Macedonian identity arguments within the context of North Macedonia. This examination is crucial as North Macedonia requires assistance in establishing its official identity both internally and externally during the nation-stateization and nation-building process. The deconstruction of this identity is achieved through the application of ideological analysis. Consequently, the primary objective of this dissertation is to address the following research questions:

Q.1: Was the state of North Macedonia successful in creating such an identity by combining the Slavic and the ancient Macedonian identities?

Q.2: Does Greece see the Macedonian identity as a historical or security threat?

Q.3: Is Bulgaria's ultimatum to North Macedonia in 2019 due to its policy of ethnolinguistic nationalism and its rejection of Macedonian identity?

The notion of identity holds significant importance for a state, as it serves as the defining element that distinguishes it from others, eliminates any ambiguity surrounding its

recognition, and establishes its status in the international community. Furthermore, it is pivotal in understanding a state's essence and significance. Hopf's analysis suggests that identities are integral to international politics, providing structure and predictability. In the absence of clear identities, chaos and uncertainty may arise. Identities have a significant role to play in society by defining individual and collective traits. They enable individuals to understand their own identity, as well as the identities of others. A state's perception of other entities is based on the identity it attributes to them and reflects its own identity correspondingly (Hopf, 1998, p. 174). In addition, identity is a crucial creative factor in constructivism, and identity plays an essential role in world politics. Identities are produced by interactions, institutions, norms and cultures, and identities are critical to the state's construction (Wendt, 1992, pp. 411-413). An essential component of the constructivist research program entails understanding the development of identities, the norms and practices that accompany their perpetuation, and how they interact. Constructivism functions on the premise that identities have the potential to be crucial to the constitutive rules of the state, thereby influencing its actions both domestically and internationally. According to Hopf (*ibid.*, p. 174), the conduct of each state towards other states varies depending on their respective identities.

Constructing and upholding the identity of a state is of utmost importance in both its internal and external dimensions within the realm of international politics. The distinctive attributes and qualities inherent in a state's identity offer valuable perspectives into its position, concerns, and actions. Throughout history, the Macedonian state has played a significant role in the Balkans, and its identity has undergone considerable transformations over time. The occurrences that unfolded during the course of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's history exerted a profound influence on the shaping of Macedonia's identity. Furthermore, the matter of Macedonia's national identity is a topic that is frequently discussed and debated. The origins of this identity can be traced back to the extensive historical, cultural, and traditional heritage of the Slavs and Ancient Greeks, which have endured for thousands of years. The self-identification of the Macedonian people is intrinsically intertwined with their national identity, encompassing language, customs, and culture. However, it is worth noting that this identity is only sporadically acknowledged by the Greeks and Bulgarians.

There exists a long-standing scholarly discussion regarding the origins of the Macedonian people, with two prevailing hypotheses currently circulating. The initial hypothesis suggests that the Macedonians are of Slavic descent, a concept that gained

prominence during the era of Yugoslavia. The second hypothesis contends that their lineage can be traced back to ancient Macedonia, with Alexander the Great serving as their progenitor as part of the "antiquization process."¹ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Macedonian Constitution does not explicitly make reference to the nation's ancestry from earlier times. Both the society and culture of North Macedonia have undergone significant transformations across all aspects of daily life. These shifts have given rise to new paradigms of identity and struggles, as observed by Piotr Majewski (2013, p.14). This societal transformation represents a transition from one social structure to another, surpassing the socialist order and progressing towards a society of late modernity that operates under the principles of the neoliberal system.

The Macedonian government has devised a narrational framework aimed at fostering a robust sense of national identity among its citizenry. This narrative accentuates the historical trials and triumphs of the Macedonian populace, with particular emphasis on their audacious endeavors to secure their autonomy and self-governance. Such a narrational construct endeavors to unify the population under a shared historical heritage and motivate them to embrace their cultural legacy. The governmental initiatives to ensure historical continuity by establishing values, principles, symbols, and personas as a form of collective memory hold tremendous significance, especially considering Macedonia's relatively brief history. The country's religious landscape was shaped by external forces, necessitating an ethnocentric approach to historiography for the nascent independent state. Safeguarding a nation's cultural heritage and historical artifacts is of paramount importance, as it contributes to the accumulation of knowledge and the preservation of traditions, while also serving as a testament to a people's distinct identity and heritage for future generations. As Hobsbawm and Ranger (2008, p. 10) assert, the shared adherence to beliefs, values, and traditional practices can foster a sense of belonging within a community.

The dissertation consists of several chapters, each fulfilling a distinct purpose. The introductory chapter serves to provide a concise overview of the research questions. The subsequent chapters, namely the second and third, delve into the theoretical framework and methodological approach. In the fourth chapter, the literature review is presented, which explores the national identity of the Macedonian nation, particularly after the disintegration

¹ The term "antiquization" pertains to the identity policies implemented by Macedonia's nationalist VMRO-DPMNE-led governments from 2006 to 2017. These policies were intended to connect modern ethnic Macedonians and their ancient Macedonian predecessors within the country's discourse. As a result, post-Yugoslav politics not only seeks to revive the cultural heritage of the Ancient Macedonians, including Philip II and Alexander the Great, but also aims to illustrate a clear continuity of history and ancestry from the ancient Kingdom of Macedon to the modern Republic of North Macedonia. This is done to demonstrate that contemporary Macedonians have an unbroken existence. (Vangeli, 2011, pp. 13-15).

of Yugoslavia. This chapter also examines how the "Skopje 2014" project incorporated elements of ancient Macedonian and Slavic Macedonian culture. Moving forward, the fifth chapter concentrates on the long-standing name dispute between Greece and North Macedonia. It analyzes the recognition process undertaken by Greece subsequent to Macedonia's independence. The turning point in this dispute is considered to be the Prespa Agreement, and as such, the developments in 2018 are thoroughly examined in this chapter. Ultimately, the dissertation comprehensively scrutinizes the intricate issues surrounding the Macedonian national identity and the ongoing dispute over the country's name. In doing so, it offers valuable insights and contributes to the broader academic discourse.

Furthermore, an examination of Bulgaria's ultimatum to North Macedonia in 2019 is presented in the sixth chapter. Within this chapter, the term "ultimatum" was not ostensibly employed in its heading. Nonetheless, Sofia established the fulfillment of this de facto ultimatum by Skopje as a precondition for commencing European Union negotiations with North Macedonia. This chapter concentrates on Bulgaria's perspective towards Northern Macedonia, a distinctive ethnic community, and its rejection of acknowledging the Macedonian language. Bulgaria perceives the Macedonian language as a variation of Bulgarian and asserts that ethnic Macedonians constitute a subgroup of the Bulgarian populace. Such a stance reignites the issue of identity. Ultimately, the seventh chapter encompasses the section in which I juxtapose the analyses from the fourth and fifth chapters and deliberate upon the findings of my research.

Before concluding the introduction, it is imperative to clarify that the terms Republic of Macedonia or Macedonia were employed in this thesis until the 2018 Prespa Agreement, as it denoted the official name of the country. However, subsequent to the official name alteration, the terms Republic of North Macedonia or North Macedonia have been utilized ever since.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter endeavors to establish an all-encompassing theoretical framework that elucidates the intricate correlation between the identity of an individual and the subsequent behavior that ensues. My research relies on the theories of Constructivist International Relations (IR) and Ontological Security Theory (OST) to construct a sturdy foundation for comprehending the ways in which an individual's identity molds and impacts their actions.

2.1. Constructivism

Throughout the 1980s, the field of international relations was shaped by two significant debates: neoliberalism versus neorealism. These theoretical frameworks both seek to integrate economic principles into the study of international relations but diverge in their approaches to international cooperation. There is a continued discourse between critical theorists and rationalists within international relations. Critical theorists challenge the epistemological, methodological, ontological, and normative assumptions of rationalists - neorealists and neoliberals. Conversely, rationalists raise concerns regarding the practical feasibility of critical theory and its capacity to provide concrete solutions for the discipline of international relations (Reus-Smit, 2018, p. 285). In the aftermath of the Cold War, a considerable dispute emerged between the positivist and post-positivist schools of thought. This discourse has come to be known as the "Third Great Debate," as coined by Yosef Lapid. Certain theorists have raised questions regarding established concepts embraced by rationalist theorists within international relations. As a result, positivists have referred to these individuals as "reflectivists." Various new theoretical perspectives have emerged through these discussions, including neorealism and neoliberalism. One such view, constructivism, has arisen as a means of reinterpreting the nature of international relations.

Constructivism has emerged as a credible alternative to rationalist theories within international relations since the 1990s (Karakoc, 2013, pp. 132-135). This approach emphasizes identity politics, intersubjectivity, the construction of social reality, and the ontological determination of rules, language, and culture, with the purpose of explaining the constantly evolving world. Some adhere to the constructivist approach and place significant emphasis on identity politics. In contrast, orthodox paradigms tend to assume that social actors are predetermined and do not necessitate any examination of the origins or formation of their identity. In the constructivist perspective, identities are regarded as active agents, and the focus is placed on identity construction. The theory posits that individuals shape their identities through social connections and interactions. Within this context, an individual's

identity is not predetermined and remains subject to change. The development and evolution of one's identity play a significant role in shaping social agents' primary concerns and choices. Constructivists consider intangible and complex factors, such as culture, norms, customs, beliefs, and mentality, when reviewing a state's identity. These factors are considered significant data points in their analysis (Aleksandrov, 2003, pp. 33-34). The theory of Constructivism posits that the construction of reality is primarily shaped through discourse at the "perception level" rather than through the structure of the "concrete/material world". This theory is renowned for its normative aspect, a prominent feature of its framework.

Within international relations, the constructivist perspective regards states as social actors, indicating that their national interests are not static and may fluctuate over time (Ozturk, 2014, pp. 2-4). Such fluctuations are often attributed to a state's sense of identity and the resultant impact on its objectives. The perception of a nation's identity is not a fixed construct but a dynamic interplay of various global and local factors that can shape its development over time. The evolution of national identity is a critical factor that influences the development of national interests, resulting in significant changes over time. To understand a nation's foreign policies, analyzing its self-interests alone is insufficient, and national identities must also be considered. According to the constructivist perspective, how communication and interaction states engage plays a pivotal role in shaping their identities and interests. It is worth noting that such identities are not predetermined but are subject to development and transformation through ongoing communication. Our identities are molded and influenced by a combination of our interactions with individuals in our immediate surroundings and the inherent characteristics that we possess. The development of personal identities is a complex process that involves both internal and external discursive practices. These practices combine to attribute meaning and value to individuals, policies, states, and events.

From the constructivist perspective, identities play an important role in international politics by providing a framework for order and predictability. The absence of distinct identities would lead to disorder and ambiguity in the global arena. The concept of identity holds significant importance in society as it determines how others recognize and perceive individuals. Individuals' identities considerably impact how they are perceived by the state, ultimately shaping the state's identity. Hopf (*ibid.*, p. 174) discusses this notion in detail.

Based on the constructivist theory, an individual's identity is primarily influenced by their interactions with society and the environment. However, when it comes to the

development of Macedonian identity, it is strongly impacted by a range of cultural, social, and political elements that have played a significant role in shaping the understanding of what it means to be Macedonian. These elements have influenced the way Macedonians perceive themselves and their culture and have contributed to the longstanding debate over the definition and boundaries of the Macedonian identity.

According to the constructivist perspective, identity is not a static or predetermined characteristic. Instead, it is a fluid and continuously changing aspect influenced by various societal and historical factors. In analyzing Macedonian identity, the constructivism approach provides valuable insights into how diverse social and political factors have contributed to forming a distinct Macedonian national identity. When it comes to the formation of Macedonian identity, it was a gradual process that was shaped by a combination of political and cultural developments within the region. These factors included the influence of neighbouring nations, their cultures, and various historical events and movements that impacted the area. As a result, creating a unique national identity in Macedonia was a complex process that took place over time, with various factors contributing to its development and evolution.

As per the constructivist perspective, Macedonian identity heavily relies on language and culture, as they are the main factors contributing to forming an individual's historical background, beliefs, and customs. The Yugoslav government's initiatives to promote and preserve the Macedonian language and culture have significantly contributed to creating a shared identity among the Macedonian people.

Constructing a Macedonian identity heavily relies on historical narratives, as these narratives play a vital role in shaping the Macedonian community's collective memory, cultural values, and beliefs (Roudometof, 2002, pp. 1-10). By understanding and interpreting their past, Macedonians can establish a sense of continuity and connection with their ancestors, contributing to their overall sense of identity. Therefore, historical narratives are essential in constructing and maintaining a Macedonian identity. According to experts in the field of constructivist theory, how historical narratives are constructed can profoundly impact the formation and strengthening of collective identities. In particular, such narratives can promote a shared understanding of a community's past and foster a sense of solidarity and purpose among its members. In the case of Macedonian identity, for example, the popularization that Macedonians constitute a distinct ethnic group with a unique cultural legacy has been instrumental in bolstering a sense of collective identity and common purpose among the Macedonian people.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the considerable impact of political factors on forming Macedonian identity. According to constructivist theories, it is necessary to recognize that identity is not a fixed or predetermined construct but rather continuously evolving and malleable in response to historical and social contexts (Calic, 2019, p. 167). The development of a distinctive Macedonian identity was closely intertwined with the political atmosphere of Yugoslavia during that particular period. The objective was to promote the notion of a socialist federation comprising republics that held equal status.

Macedonian identity is a multifaceted process influenced by various historical, cultural, and political factors. When viewed through a constructivist approach, it becomes clear that the promotion of the Macedonian language and culture, the crafting of historical narratives, and the politics of Yugoslavia all played crucial roles in shaping the collective identity of Macedonians. The significance of these factors cannot be overstated, as they have had a lasting impact on how Macedonians perceive themselves and their place in the world. By examining the complex interplay between these various elements, one can better understand the Macedonian identity and the forces that have shaped it over time.

The identity dispute between North Macedonia and its neighbouring countries, Greece and Bulgaria, is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in historical and national identity factors. Taking a constructivist approach, we can delve deeper into the complex dynamics of national identity formation and its effects on these ongoing conflicts.

The utilization of the appellation "Macedonia" by North Macedonia has raised concerns for Greece, given that it may suggest a potential desire to assert territorial claims over the region of Macedonia, which is deemed an inseparable part of Greece. This issue has been a contentious disagreement between the two nations and has been the subject of ongoing political and diplomatic discussions. The dispute's origins can be traced back to the ancient era when the Macedonian Empire, a powerful kingdom, ruled over the northern territories of Greece. This historical period saw the emergence of various political and cultural tensions that have continued to shape the region's socio-economic landscape. Constructivists would argue that the dispute is not just about historical facts but also about constructing national identity. When analyzing the dispute surrounding the term "Macedonia" usage through a constructivist lens, it becomes evident that the issue extends beyond mere concern for historical accuracy. At its core, the debate centers around the development of national identity, with Greece viewing its identity as deeply intertwined with that of the ancient Macedonians. Consequently, North Macedonia's decision to adopt this name presents a significant challenge to Greece's ongoing efforts to construct and solidify its sense of identity.

The implications of this disagreement are far-reaching and complex, touching upon a range of cultural, political, and social factors that continue to shape the region today.

Similarly, there has been a prolonged and essential discussion regarding the identity of North Macedonia with Bulgaria. Specifically, Bulgaria has raised concerns that its language and culture may not be entirely distinct from Bulgarian and may be more closely related to a regional variation. As per the constructivist perspective, the current dispute is centered on differences in language and the establishment of a collective national identity. Bulgaria places great importance on its language and cultural heritage, which are integral to its national identity. As such, the adoption of the Macedonian language and culture by the neighbouring state of North Macedonia is perceived as a potential threat to Bulgaria's national identity, given the close relationship between language and culture.

The constructivist perspective sheds light on how identity-based conflicts are not exclusively influenced by objective evidence but also by national identity's social and cultural constructs. From a constructivist standpoint, effectively addressing these disputes requires recognizing the diverse and conflicting identity constructions and developing strategies to accommodate these varying assertions.

2.2. Ontological Security Theory

Security measures have always been of the utmost importance throughout history. In particular, during the Cold War era, the primary focus was to ensure the survival and well-being of the state. This was achieved by implementing various policies and strategies to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity. These measures were designed to protect the country from external threats, such as foreign invasions and espionage, and internal threats, such as political dissent and terrorism. Overall, the overarching goal of security policies was to ensure the state's and its citizens' safety and security. Throughout the Cold War era, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a highly competitive military race, which contributed to the widespread belief that the military capabilities of other nations posed a significant threat to a state's overall survival. This assumption has led to the study of security through military threats. Since the early 1990s, many research studies have posited that an exclusive focus on state and military security is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of security.

In recent years, the cultivation of an ontological security theory has emerged as a pivotal facet of security studies. In international politics, it is common to witness states emphasizing factors beyond physical security, and safeguarding their identity security holds

significant importance in their decision-making process. According to the ontological security theory, a state's identity security plays a significant role in shaping its foreign policy actions. Therefore, understanding a state's identity security is critical in comprehending its overall policy.

The concept of ontological security, initially rooted in psychoanalysis and sociology, has been adopted by the field of international relations. Psychiatrist R.D. Laing first introduced the concept. According to Laing (1960: 39), an individual with ontological security exudes confidence in their existence, feels a sense of wholeness, and can uphold their identity over time. Individuals who possess a robust sense of self, commonly called ontological security, are better equipped to navigate the uncertainties and hazards inherent in life—conversely, those who grapple with existential anxiety and are frequently plagued by self-doubt experience ontological insecurity. Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991), a sociologist following Laing, analyzed the impact of modernization and globalization on individuals using the concept of ontological security. Ontological security refers to an individual's trust in the continuity of their self-identity, as per Giddens. Laing and Giddens emphasize that people possess a stable and continuous identity.

Giddens' conceptualization influenced the theorists who popularized the concept of ontological security in IR. By analyzing Jennifer Mitzen's (2006) theoretical framework, we can better understand how this notion can be implemented within the context of IR literature. Mitzen's analysis provides a comprehensive definition of ontological security at the individual level. The author then proceeds to conduct extensive research and evaluates this concept from a state perspective. According to Mitzen, ontological security pertains to the security of identity rather than physical safety. The sustained coherence of an individual's understanding of their fundamental nature is crucial in ensuring their ontological security. In uncertain situations surrounding one's identity, individuals may experience difficulty determining appropriate actions, resulting in a sense of ontological insecurity. The notion of ontological security can be understood as mitigating uncertainty by establishing a cognitive framework within one's environment (*ibid.*, pp. 346-347).

Ontological security is a vital concept that emphasizes the significance of subjectivity and physicality while addressing the need for biographical continuity. This continuity plays a crucial role in providing meaning to an individual's actions and helps them safeguard their existence against potential existential threats and anxieties that may compromise their integrity. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize establishing ontological security to ensure individuals' overall well-being and a sense of purpose (Kinvall & Mitzen, 2017, pp. 4-5).

Mitzen and Giddens assert that a consistent identity is crucial for acting and making decisions.

The theoretical framework of Ontological Security Theory seeks to analyze the complex interplay between a state's identity and security. The theory posits that states prioritize ensuring both their physical safety and ontological security, which is rooted in their self-understanding and perception of their place in the international community. This normative foundation serves as a motivating factor for states in their decision-making and behavior (Mitzen & Larson, 2017, pp. 2-3).

The theory of ontological security posits that an individual's identity is not a fixed or innate aspect of their consciousness but is subject to change and influenced by societal roles and positions (Jenkins, 2014, pp. 17-19). Identity formation is a complex process involving rituals, practices, and relationships with other individuals, and these factors are essential in developing and maintaining a sense of self. However, attaining a stable self-identity is hindered by the precarious nature of human existence, characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability.

The application of ontological security theory has the potential to yield valuable insights into the ongoing identity disputes between North Macedonia and Greece, as well as between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Such an analysis can offer a nuanced understanding of the underlying psychological and cultural factors driving these disputes, which may help develop strategies to address them. This theory posits that states prioritize the preservation of their identity and continuity of existence, which may contribute to the tensions in these situations. By examining these disputes through the lens of ontological security theory, we can better understand the underlying factors and potential pathways towards resolution.

The ontological security theory offers a theoretical framework that can be utilized to comprehend identity disputes. It posits that individuals and groups seek to establish a consistent and stable identity; any threat can result in insecurity and anxiety (Buzan, 1991). The issue surrounding the use of the name "Macedonia" by North Macedonia has become a source of contention for Greece and Bulgaria. This is because the name challenges their historical and cultural identity, creating a sense of threat to their ontological security. As a result, the matter has become a sensitive and complex issue that requires careful consideration and diplomacy to find a mutually agreeable solution.

The ongoing dispute between Greece and North Macedonia is complex, involving various factors such as territorial and geopolitical concerns and historical and cultural considerations. Specifically, Greece has expressed concerns regarding North Macedonia's use

of the name "Macedonia," as it could be interpreted as a claim to the region of Macedonia, which has historical ties to the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon. This issue remains a point of contention between the two countries. The dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia is rooted in historical and cultural ties to the region and concerns over the treatment of the Bulgarian minority within North Macedonia. This issue is vital to Bulgaria and requires close attention and consideration to achieve a fair and equitable resolution.

Ongoing efforts to resolve the identity conflict between North Macedonia and Greece have been underway for several years. The two nations engaged in negotiations culminating in the 2018 Prespa Agreement, leading to a decision by North Macedonia to alter its name. However, opposition from nationalist groups in both countries has underscored the deeply entrenched nature of this disagreement. Despite these challenges, the parties continue to seek a peaceful and mutually beneficial resolution to this complex issue. To sum up, one may turn to ontological security theory in analyzing the complex matter of identity disputes. The name "Macedonia" by North Macedonia is viewed as a potential threat to Greece and Bulgaria's historical and cultural identity, thus jeopardizing their sense of ontological security. This multifaceted disagreement encompasses various factors, including territorial, geopolitical, historical, and cultural considerations, which renders it a formidable challenge to resolve.

3. Methodology

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the organization and structure employed in this dissertation. It aims to give the reader a sound understanding of the methodical approach to presenting the research findings.

My current study area involves exploring a method that will be helpful in my dissertation. I aim to determine this method's applicability and potential generalizations it may offer. To achieve this, I will use an empirical approach that involves gathering essential data to establish a theory or draw scientific conclusions. Specifically, I plan to collect empirical observations or data that will help me address specific research questions. The primary focus of my research is to test and refine these theories. Specifically, I aim to examine how Greece and Bulgaria perceive Macedonia's identity. To achieve this, I will utilize constructivist and ontological security theories to verify their validity in addressing my research questions.

I thoroughly explored pertinent literature to explore the topic and analyze the primary theory. According to the research of Manheim, established empirical research methods are the most effective means of obtaining accurate answers to research questions. A crucial step in this process is transforming a general research question into one or more specific inquiries by developing plausible explanations for the observed phenomena. Moving from abstract questions to concrete observations is one of the initial challenges in research, as highlighted by Manheim. Creating possible explanations for events is known as theory building and is the first stage of the research process. Therefore, understanding the relationship between theory and research is essential, as emphasized by Manheim (2002: pp. 14-15, 50-52).

The theories of constructivism and ontological security theory will be questioned in this dissertation, as they are used to explain certain developments in the Macedonian state and identity. The focus will be on forming Macedonian identity and its potential influences, specifically whether it is a blend of Ancient Greek and Slavic identity. In addition, this study explores the perspectives and objections of both Greek and Bulgaria regarding the Macedonian identity.

My dissertation's methodology examines and analyses the identity disputes between North Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria in the post-Yugoslav era. My theories' foundation is based on visual concepts or possessing the potential for observation. While not all concepts may pertain to directly observable phenomena, the most useful ones have theoretical significance that is essential in explaining observed events.

The central concept of my work is the Macedonian Quandary and the identity disputes between North Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria. The purpose of my concept is to underscore the significance of the issue of identity disputes, analyze its construction, and provide my perspective on the topic. To achieve these objectives, I will conduct research based on materials of significant value and interest. I will use these materials to create specific concepts and theories and analyze relevant sections of the material. In summary, my research methodology, which relies on concepts, will comprehensively analyze the identity disputes between North Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria.

In the methodology section of my dissertation, theory testing plays a fundamental role in the research process. As per Manheim's (*ibid.*, p. 25) perspective, theories are typically developed by assimilating knowledge regarding actual relationships. Consequently, theory testing involves utilizing the theory to establish expectations about other relationships that have yet to be observed and verifying whether the solid relationships we have observed are consistent with these expectations. In essence, the theory should enable us to anticipate the connections it was designed to elucidate.

To achieve this, I will use my research material to analyze my research question's distinctive features and try categorizing and framing a theory that describes all the phenomena. I will observe all the essential material in my research question and conclude with the parts of my work that are most interesting and significant. However, I will also consider those parts of my work that can be used for theory elaboration and compare theories to describe the phenomenon of the Macedonian Quandary and the identity disputes of North Macedonia with Greece and Bulgaria in the post-Yugoslav era.

Theories are never finally proved or disproved as sets of concepts, assumptions, and propositions. Therefore, theory elaboration is mainly based on comparing hypothesized conditions with reality and modifying our theory so that hypotheses derived from it are consistent with what we observe. In my work, I will choose the most significant considerations that reflect my research question and are essential for theory elaboration. By comparing theories to describe the phenomenon of the Macedonian Quandary, I can test and refine my theories.

It is essential to choose the appropriate research methodology that suits the research question and the current state of knowledge in the area under study to ensure the success of my research project. My dissertation focuses on comprehending how the theory operates and how it can be used to explain phenomena. I will implement the empirical research method to collect and analyze materials from various sources, including books and the Internet.

Although interviews could have been a potential method for gathering data, I have decided not to go down this route as previous scholars have already scrutinized the generalizations made during interviews. Instead, I will present their perspectives based on their research. I have cherry-picked the most significant observations and viewpoints to describe the phenomenon of Macedonian identity from a particularly compelling angle.

Furthermore, in conducting my research, I adopt an interpretive approach to fully comprehend the subject matter by examining it holistically. This approach challenges the constraints of positivism, which tends to concentrate on specific aspects and may limit our understanding. Interpretivism, conversely, posits that scrutinizing the entire phenomenon is imperative in gaining a thorough comprehension, considering that different realities can influence our perception of the matter at hand. By employing this approach, I aspire to acquire a more profound insight into the complex identity disputes between North Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria during the post-Yugoslav era.

4. The Construction of Macedonian National Identity

Exploring national identity in the post-Yugoslav era is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that is influenced by a multitude of factors. These factors include cultural norms, historical events, and political structures. This chapter utilizes two critical theories, namely constructivism and ontological security theory, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the intricate process of Macedonian national identity formation. Constructivism, which places emphasis on social norms and cultural practices, reveals how individuals and communities shape their identities through their interactions with the environment. It takes into account the profound impact of cultural traditions, historical legacies, and political dynamics. On the other hand, ontological security theory highlights the significance of individuals feeling secure in their identity. This theory sheds light on the emotional and psychological aspects of the process of identity formation. Applying these theories to the case of Macedonian identity during the post-Yugoslav era offers a nuanced understanding of the interplay between historical legacies, cultural influences, and the quest for a secure and stable national identity. This exploration aims to unravel the complexities involved in the formation of Macedonian national identity, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of identity within this unique historical and cultural context.

4.1. The Macedonian Identity in the post-World War II

The concept of Macedonian identity, a subject characterized by its complexity and intricacy, remains a topic that elicits a wide range of opinions and perspectives. Following its secession from Yugoslavia in the year 1991, the Republic of North Macedonia has undergone a transformation into a diverse melting pot, serving as a home to a varied population composed of Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, and other communities. Current discussions revolve around the multifaceted meanings and ramifications associated with the identification as Macedonian.

Examining the historical and cultural origins of the Macedonian people proves to be a complicated undertaking, as explicated by the principles of constructivism and ontological security theory. In accordance with constructivism, both individuals and societies construct their sense of self through their interactions with their surrounding environment, which encompasses elements such as culture, history, and politics. As a result, certain Macedonians perceive themselves as direct descendants of the ancient Macedonian kingdom, while others align themselves with Slavic and Balkan traditions, thereby proudly showcasing a unique Macedonian language and cultural heritage. Ontological security theory posits that

individuals strive for stability by affiliating themselves with specific groups or cultures. Various political and historical events, such as residing in different nations with differing policies towards them, have further molded the Macedonian identity, leading to disparities in how Macedonians perceive both themselves and the world at large.

The creation of the Macedonian identity in the years following World War II was significantly influenced by political, cultural, and historical factors, as highlighted by Ristovska-Josifovska (2018, pp. 5-9). After the war, Yugoslavia emerged as a socialist federation consisting of six republics, one of which was the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Within this political context, the development of the Macedonian identity aimed to establish a distinct national identity separate from Bulgaria and Serbia. In order to affirm the idea that Macedonians constituted a unique ethnic group with a special heritage, the Yugoslav government made substantial investments in the advancement of the Macedonian language, culture, and history. These endeavors encompassed the establishment of institutions like the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which fostered an environment conducive to the preservation and study of Macedonian literature, language, and culture.

The manifestation of politics' impact on the progress of Macedonian identity becomes evident within the era following the war. The Yugoslavian governance, with the aim of establishing a socialist Yugoslavia, endeavored to cultivate a sense of "brotherhood and unity" amidst its diverse nations. The historian Ivan Katardziev (as cited in Katardziev, Marinov & Vezenkov, 2014, p. 545) characterized the time period spanning from 1944 to 1964 as the "homogenization of Macedonian national identity," characterized by the utilization of repressive measures. Throughout this duration, measures were implemented to stimulate the advancement of the Macedonian Slavic national identity, thereby resulting in the dissolution of Bulgarian factions within the boundaries of the republic, consequently eradicating Bulgarian influences.

In the mid-20th century, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia experienced a distinctive approach to the process of constructing a nation, as emphasized by Uzgel (1992, pp. 224-225). Families with surnames that ended in "-ovic" were obligated to modify them to "-ovski" as part of the efforts to Macedonianize, mirroring the rules on surnames implemented during the campaigns of Serbianization and Bulgarianization after the Balkan Wars. Simultaneously, efforts were made to establish a separate Orthodox church and scholarly investigations into the Macedonian language were undertaken. A narrative emerged during this period, which aimed to establish the historical continuity of Macedonians from the time of Tsar Samuel to the present. Interestingly, despite the promotion of a unified Yugoslav

identity in the 1950s, each republic, including Macedonia, adhered to distinct strategies for national identification. In Macedonia, the development of Macedonianism had to occur in opposition to the broader nation-building efforts of Yugoslavia. Additionally, scholarly inquiries were initiated during this era with the intention of validating the existence of a distinct Macedonian language separate from Serbian and Bulgarian. It is noteworthy to mention the exceptional dedication of the Macedonians during the Yugoslav era to the establishment of their national church, a commitment that exceeded that of other Balkan countries.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the emergence of Macedonian state nationalism signaled the initiation of endeavors to establish a distinct Macedonian Slavic identity. The communist Macedonian party organs exerted influence, resulting in the homogenization of the region's population, while the establishment of the autocephalous Macedonian church and the widespread adoption of the Macedonian language played pivotal roles. At the same time, the construction of historical narratives aimed at nurturing a sense of continuity with medieval monarchs became an integral aspect of national historiography. Despite the controversies surrounding the development of Macedonian identity, as highlighted by Dambrauskas and Baradziej (2021, pp. 157-159), who draw attention to Bulgarian perspectives that perceive Macedonian identity as a political fabrication in support of a separate state within Yugoslavia, the exclusion of perceived threats to the dominant Macedonian identity, particularly from Albanians and Turks, remained a recurring theme. Political, cultural, and historical factors played significant roles in the formation of Macedonian identity during the post-World War II period. The political landscape of Yugoslavia was closely linked to the endeavor of establishing a distinct national identity for Macedonia, driven by the overarching aim of promoting a socialist federation comprising of equal states. However, the construction of Macedonian identity was not devoid of intricacies, resulting in controversies and the exclusion of certain ethnic groups. Under the guidance of Kiro Gligorov, Macedonia conducted a referendum for independence following the turbulent civil wars in Yugoslavia and the initiation of the federation's dissolution. This represented the initiation of Macedonia's progression towards attaining status as an autonomous nation-state, accompanied by endeavors for both internal and international recognition.

In the ongoing struggle for the recognition of Macedonia in 1992, significant diplomatic achievements were made. After the withdrawal of the federal army from Macedonian territory in March, the nation took crucial measures to establish diplomatic relations with Croatia and Slovenia, both of which had recently seceded from Yugoslavia. It

is noteworthy that the acknowledgment of Macedonia by important nations played a vital role in its international status. Russia and Turkey, in August and January 1992 respectively, officially recognized Macedonia by its constitutional name (Ulger, 2019, pp. 51-52). However, due to Greece's objection to the name, the United Nations admitted Macedonia on April 8, 1993, under the designation "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-FYROM" instead of "The Republic of Macedonia." This intricate diplomatic process, as meticulously documented by Babuna (2000, p. 80), reached a turning point on April 15, marked by the acknowledgment and endorsement of Macedonia by member countries of the European Union.

Within the field of historiography, as Troebst (2001) has shown, Macedonian national historical narratives experienced a significant change in direction beginning in the 1950s. Deliberate temporal relocation was used in this transformation to highlight significant historical periods, including the reign of Tsar Samuil in the tenth century and the Slavic migrations in the sixth and seventh centuries (p. 63). These historical narratives became instrumental in molding Macedonian nationalism in the post-communist era that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Bulgaria refused to recognize the Macedonian nation as a result of opposition to this carefully crafted historical narrative from historians and politicians who saw it as a part of Bulgarian history. Simultaneously, post-Yugoslav Macedonian state nationalism was thrust further into antiquity by amateur historiography that emerged in the 1990s, citing the reigns of Philip II and Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. This historiographical movement, according to Troebst's analysis, sought to distinguish the Macedonian nation from the Bulgarian narrative and highlight the special qualities of the Republic of Macedonia in reaction to Bulgaria's political position and rejection of Macedonian nationalism.

4.2. The New Macedonian Question

The breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991 led to the creation of the Republic of Macedonia, a new state on the European map. In the years that followed, there were many disagreements about politics, history, culture, and religion regarding the country's past, present, and future. These disagreements fueled tensions and conflict in the area as each group struggled to maintain its unique identity.

The "New Macedonian Question" encapsulates a series of intricate conflicts that surfaced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries concerning the newly independent former Yugoslav Republic. Unlike the original Macedonian question, which centered around the

contested region of Macedonia during the Ottoman Empire's collapse, the contemporary issue primarily revolves around national identity, linguistic heritage, and the establishment of a separate Macedonian state. These multifaceted conflicts necessitate meticulous consideration and analysis.

The New Macedonian Question, introduced by British scholar J. Pettifer (2001, pp. 16-19), encompasses several diplomatic tensions between Macedonia and neighboring countries, including Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania. Despite the passage of time, some of Pettifer's provisions are still relevant today. Elizabeth Barker (2001, pp. 4-8), a notable British historian, conducted a comprehensive comparative analysis of the Macedonian question at the turn of the previous two centuries and its current manifestation after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Her research demonstrated the crucial geopolitical importance of Macedonia in the post-Cold War period. In addition, the controversy surrounding the name of the Macedonian state due to its identity attracted great attention among scholars.

The increasing tensions in bilateral relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria following Bulgaria's recognition of the newly established Macedonian state have brought nuanced complexities to the fore. Although Bulgaria officially recognized Macedonia, this recognition was not without reservations. At the official level, recognition of a separate Macedonian nation and language was conspicuously missing. Instead, Bulgaria categorizes the Macedonian language as one of its dialects, underscoring the complexities woven into the region's historical and political fabric.

Bulgaria's stance on the Macedonian question is deeply rooted in its Bulgaria's complex political landscape. The reluctance to explicitly recognize a specific Macedonian nation and language is due to concern within Bulgaria that such recognition could accelerate the emergence of a new Macedonian national minority within its borders. This fear reflects the complex interplay between historical narratives, geopolitical considerations and the delicate balance of ethnic identities in the Balkans. The complexity of this recognition underscores the complex web of historical disputes and political intricacies that continue to shape the region's dynamics.

The historic dispute between Macedonia and Bulgaria has been dragged on due to the Macedonian leadership's efforts to establish its own identity. This dispute is also influenced by inter-ethnic relations within Macedonia and the name dispute with Greece. Recent events such as Bulgaria's celebration of the thousandth anniversary of the Battle of Belasitsa in 2014 and Macedonia's unveiling of a monument to Tsar Samuil in Skopje have sparked debates among Bulgarian historians, journalists and politicians. The Macedonian Scientific Institute

in Bulgaria was actively involved in the historical dispute, and Bulgarian historians have published studies that refute Macedonian historians' ideas about the anti-Bulgarian uprising of 963. Despite these challenges, the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation agreement signed in 2017 has helped improve diplomatic relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria.

The New Macedonian Question expands its scope to include the long-standing historical and political discord between Macedonia and Greece, primarily revolving around the use of the name "Macedonia." Greece's opposition to this name has its roots in territorial claims and concerns about historical heritage. This ongoing disagreement has been a crucible of controversy, fueled by a complex interplay of cultural, historical and political factors that have left an indelible mark on the relationship between these two nations.

The complexity of this dispute reflects the convergence of different perspectives on identity, history and territorial integrity. Cultural narratives, intertwined with historical legacies, have played a crucial role in shaping the entrenched positions of Macedonia and Greece. Furthermore, political considerations have further complicated the matter, making it a protracted challenge that goes beyond mere nomenclature. The ongoing tension surrounding the use of the name "Macedonia" has become emblematic of the complex geopolitical dynamics in the Balkans, where historical narratives intersect with contemporary politics and shape the fate of nations. However, after several years of negotiations, in 2018, Macedonia and Greece signed the Prespa Agreement, which resolved the decades-long debate over using the name "Macedonia." The agreement required Macedonia to change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia. Greece agreed to lift its veto on the country's accession to NATO and the EU. The Prespa Agreement has received mixed reactions in both countries, but it marked the end of a long-standing dispute and paved the way for better relations between the two nations.

Although progress has been made in addressing the New Macedonian Question, it is essential to acknowledge that systemic issues persist. While the Prespa Agreement successfully resolved the naming dispute, it also created a situation where Greek interference in North Macedonia's affairs is now a concern. Additionally, the Treaty with Bulgaria needed to fully address the problem of non-recognition of the Macedonian people and language. Interethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians continue to be challenging, and there are concerns regarding the reduction of Macedonian sovereignty. The root of this complex issue lies in the late formation of the Macedonian nation and statehood.

4.3. The Antiquization of the Identity and the Project “Skopje 2014”

The concept of identity is a central part of human existence as it plays a key role in shaping individual and collective behavior. Scholars from various disciplines have long been fascinated by the development and evolution of national identities. In the Republic of North Macedonia, a remarkable change was observed in this regard with the launch of the “Skopje 2014” project, which aimed to revitalize the city's identity. Graan (2013, p. 162) argues that the fundamental aim of the project was to improve the city's image through the construction of new buildings and monuments that reflect the country's rich cultural heritage. As a direct result of the implementation of the project, the city experienced a significant transformation, resulting in a complete overhaul of its cultural and social landscape.

The “Skopje 2014” project had a specific goal: to modernize the city and transform it into a pioneering European metropolis. However, the project's designers also emphasized the city's ancient past, which they wanted to celebrate through various architectural and artistic means. The resulting cityscape features numerous monumental buildings, museums and statues, all aimed at evoking a sense of national pride and identity by highlighting the country's rich and storied history. This approach, often referred to as “antiquating identity,” is becoming increasingly popular as governments seek to draw on their past to create a sense of cultural continuity and unity.

The New Macedonian Question, analyzed by Barker (2001, pp. 4-8), expands its scope to include the long-standing historical and political discord between Macedonia and Greece, mainly revolving around the use of the name “Macedonia”. Greece’s opposition to this name is rooted in territorial claims and concerns about historical heritage. This ongoing disagreement has been a crucible of controversy, fueled by a complex interplay of cultural, historical and political factors that have left an indelible mark on the relationship between these two nations.

The “Skopje 2014” project represents a Europeanized version of Macedonia that not only adopts a post-socialist-era European model, but also reflects a carefully planned vision that counters the resistance of Albanian and Greek ethnic groups to the constitutionalism of the Macedonian state. The project's selection of neoclassical buildings and sculptures, such as the Alexander Monument, convey a narrative that highlights the country's ethnic history and distinguishes its national identity from the heritage of ancient Macedonia. This interpretation has been supported by scholars such as Brown (2003, pp. 244–249), Vangeli (*ibid.*, pp. 22–25) and Graan (*ibid.*, pp. 167–169).

Former Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski is widely seen as the driving force behind the Skopje 2014 project. He has repeatedly emphasized that promoting a national identity through public works is the top priority of his political agenda. The use of historical symbols and antiquity in this project questions the Greek claim to a monopoly on the ancient past. However, it is notable that the monumental historical figures of Muslims and Albanians are not represented in the Skopje 2014 buildings, raising questions about the project's commitment to creating a truly inclusive city. As scholars Janev (2011, pp. 4–9) and Graan (2013, pp. 167–170) have pointed out, the project does not appear to aim for a multi-ethnic urban center, but instead proposes a mono-ethnic national vision that excludes Muslims and Albanians from the European metropolis.

Andrew Graan (pp. 164-165) has argued that the 2014 Skopje Project's reliance on neoclassicism is based on two significant events in Macedonia's recent history that have threatened Macedonian nationalism. The first event relates to the Greek objection to the name “Macedonia”, as they believe that the use of this name implies a territorial claim by the Macedonians to the Macedonian region of Greece.

As I mentioned earlier, the controversy over the use of the name “Macedonia” is at the heart of the ongoing dispute between Greece and Macedonia. Greece argues that Macedonia's claim to the Macedonian past, particularly to Alexander the Great, its ancestors, is based on a Hellenic heritage. Conversely, Macedonians vehemently deny this claim, claiming that their ancestors never spoke Greek and that their ethnicity is rooted in the Slavic race. Although Macedonia has been recognized by over 120 countries, including Turkey, the United States and Russia, its application for membership in international organizations under the name “Republic of Macedonia” was blocked by Greece. Greece's veto power has thwarted its efforts to have Macedonia join NATO and the EU. The second reason for the Macedonian government's emphasis on national identity in the Skopje 2014 project, as outlined by Mojanchevska and Van Dijk (2012, p. 6), can be traced to the ethnic conflict in 2001 between Albanian insurgents and the Macedonian government repatriate state security forces. The Macedonian government viewed this as an attempt to create a "Greater Albania" that included the western part of the country, including Skopje. At the same time, paramilitary organizations of ethnic Albanians emerged that demanded more rights for ethnic minorities in the country. In 2002, after the ethnic conflict, a 77-meter-high cross was built on Mount Vodno (above Skopje), visible from every side of the city. In response, a few years later, the monument of Skanderbeg, an Albanian historical figure, was placed in the Old

Bazaar on the left bank of the Vardar River (inhabited mainly by Albanians, Turks and Roma) overlooking the cross on Vodno.

Constructivism is a crucial theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon of “antiquization of identity.” Constructivist theorists assume that national identity is not an inherent or static concept but is shaped by social and cultural processes. These processes involve the construction and negotiation of symbols, narratives and traditions that define a nation and its position in the global community. In the case of North Macedonia, the Skopje 2014 initiative can be seen as an attempt to construct a new national identity narrative that highlights the nation's ancient heritage and cultural continuity. Ontological security theory is another essential perspective for understanding the phenomenon of “antiquization of identity”. This theory argues that individuals and societies need a stable and coherent sense of self and identity. When this sense of identity is threatened or destabilized, individuals and organizations can use defensive or therapeutic strategies to restore their sense of security. The Skopje 2014 project in North Macedonia can be seen as a response to the country's perceived identity crisis caused by historical disputes with Greece and Bulgaria, as well as tensions between Macedonian Slavs and Albanians.

In conclusion, the Skopje 2014 project and the antiquization of identity in North Macedonia reflect the complex and contested nature of nation-building in a post-conflict society. The aim of the project was to strengthen North Macedonia's cultural identity and increase the country's international reputation. It also highlighted the challenges of building a unified national identity in a country with diverse ethnic and linguistic communities. In addition, the project was met with criticism from neighboring countries such as Greece, which saw it as an attempt to appropriate their shared cultural heritage. Ultimately, the Skopje 2014 project and the antiquization of identity underscore the importance of understanding the complex interactions between history, politics, culture and identity in the construction of national identities.

5. Analysis of the North Macedonian - Greek Name Dispute

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the diversity of the ethnic population poses challenges for nation building. The fusion of linguistic and religious differences makes this endeavor even more complex. Furthermore, Greece rejected the use of the term “Macedonia” due to supposed territorial claims to the Greek region of the same name. As a result, North Macedonia faced external pressure to change its name and national symbols. The nation eventually relented and changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia, signifying a significant identity change and fostering improved relations with Greece and neighboring countries.

The ongoing dispute between North Macedonia and Greece over its name had lasted since 1991 and was due to different nationalist interpretations. On June 17, 2018, the dispute was resolved through the mediation of Western states, which was a crucial moment for regional stability. This development is consistent with the constructivist perspective, which states that “modern national identities are constructed within current-historical cultural dynamics.” North Macedonia's geographical location, demographic structure and identity development make it a crucial case study in this framework.

The ongoing controversy over Macedonia has its roots in its complicated and ancient history and contributes to a long-standing disagreement with Greece over the use of the name “Macedonia.” The historical origins go back to ancient times when in the First Age B.C. the Macedonian state came into being in northern Greece. In the 4th century B.C. it extended its influence throughout Greek territory, and through the conquests of Alexander the Great, Hellenic culture spread over a vast area reaching as far as India. Today, Greece considers ancient Macedonia an integral part of its national history. Although it remains difficult to establish the exact borders of historical Macedonia, it is believed that it covered a larger geographical area than the present borders of the Republic of North Macedonia.

5.1. A Conflict Over Macedonian Identity

The identity dispute and the associated normative elements with Greece represent Macedonia's greatest challenge. The name and symbol problem with Greece remained limited to the two neighboring countries, but as a global problem had a detrimental effect on Macedonia. Greece claims that this issue is not only a dispute over historical facts and symbols, but also an issue that concerns other United Nations (UN) member states, particularly in the context of issues such as sovereignty, neighborly relations and territorial integrity. Greece claims the situation violates basic principles of international law.

Furthermore, Greece has accused Macedonia of pursuing an irredentist agenda by imitating Greece's national, historical and cultural heritage, as Kotzias (2017) claims.

During the Cold War, the Macedonian question between Yugoslavia and Greece was handled cautiously by both states. Despite Greece's objections to the creation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in the 1940s, it overlooked this entity, which remained under Yugoslavia's jurisdiction for a time. The problematic perception of Greece began with Macedonia's efforts to assert itself in the global community as the Republic of Macedonia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Greece accused Macedonia of using names and symbols that Greece claims are part of its identity. Greece claimed that the name "Macedonia", a Greek word, was an inalienable part of the historical and cultural heritage of Greece, belonging to the ancient Kingdom of Macedonia. In addition, Greece argued that the name Macedonia geographically refers to a Balkan region that includes some other countries, with Greece occupying most of it. Nevertheless, Greece stressed that Macedonia is the name of the region within the current borders of Greece, where 2.5 million Greeks live, and that this community has referred to itself as "Macedonian" for centuries. In other words, Greece feared that this new state, using the name Macedonia, would claim ownership of the land in northern Greece in the future. As a result, numerous efforts have been made to prevent international recognition of this state since its founding, and these attempts have been relatively effective.

It has been argued that certain Greek nationalists have rejected the notion of a distinct Macedonian identity as well as the existence of the Macedonian language. Furthermore, according to Poulakidas (1995, pp. 425-426), it was claimed that the Macedonian nation was an artificial construct created later. According to Kofos' research (1999, pp. 226-227), Greece was concerned about the possibility of an armed conflict between East and West, potentially endangering the northern provinces of Thrace and Macedonia. This concern led successive Greek governments to seek the security of Western security arrangements. In the 1970s, the territorial aspects of the dispute faded into the background and a new type of Macedonian question emerged. Yugoslavia Macedonia's dominant nationalist ideology aimed at converting its population into ethnic "Macedonci" and a major campaign was launched to gain international recognition and credibility for this new ethnicity. Slavic-Macedonian nationalists adopted an aggressive mentality and referred to all Slavic speakers or descendants of Slavic speakers in the wider Macedonian region as "Makedonci". Such maximalist claims caused considerable resentment among Greeks and Bulgarians. In the 1980s, Tito's successors in Belgrade restrained Skopje's anti-Bulgarian rhetoric and instead

focused the nationalist fervor of Slavic Macedonian nationalists on Greece. Ramet (1992, pp. 21-24) claims that from the mid-1980s Skopje became the vanguard of a significant escalation of propaganda against Greece, supported by Slavic-Macedonian nationalists living outside their homeland. To understand the current situation, it is important to consider the process of building the Macedonian nation during the Yugoslav era. The Communist Party's goal was to eliminate ethnic ties and create a single nation-state using the South Slavs definition. To strengthen its dominance in Vardar Macedonia, the Communist Party accepted the existence of the Macedonian nation while eliminating Bulgarian identity in the region. This was achieved by introducing the Macedonian language instead of the Bulgarian language and establishing the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The reinterpretation of history by the Macedonian National History Institute and the University of Skopje aimed to prove the existence of the Macedonian nation through Marxist theories under Serbian directives. Despite these developments, Greece and Bulgaria have never accepted the existence of the Macedonian nation, as this excludes the possibility of unifying the region with Bulgaria by removing the group of Bulgarian origin living in the region.

During Yugoslavia's membership of Yugoslavia, the question of the name "Macedonia" had no significant significance, despite ongoing Greek protests. However, when the country gained independence in 1991 and adopted the name Macedonia, the Greek perspective emerged, asserting its own Greek culture and the historical region of Macedonia. The prevailing opinion of most Greeks is that the name Macedonia is reserved exclusively for the northern region of Greece and Thessaloniki is, as throughout history, the historical capital. Therefore, they consider it unacceptable for their neighboring country to have the same name, as they see this as an appropriation of Greek history and a disguised claim to Greek territory. From a Greek perspective, Slavic Macedonians lack a real connection to ancient Macedonia due to their Slavic ethnic background, similar to other ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, their South Slavic dialect language bears striking similarities to Bulgarian and stands in stark contrast to the ancient Macedonian language, which closely resembles Greek. Conversely, Slavic Macedonians firmly assert their claim to the name Macedonia, having taken it for granted since their declaration of independence in 1991 and their previous status as a constituent republic within Yugoslavia, as reported by BBC (2019) reports.

Due to Greek objections, the Republic of Macedonia initially faced challenges in gaining international recognition. A significant development occurred at the Lisbon Summit Declaration in 1992, during which the EU expressed its willingness to acknowledge the

newly formed nation, provided its name did not contain the term 'Macedonia.' This led to a temporary disruption in relations between the EU and the Republic of Macedonia until the matter was addressed at the subsequent summit in Edinburgh, where the United Nations raised the issue. In 1993, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted admission to the UN General Assembly under the provisional name “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, which would remain in place until the naming dispute was resolved, as discussed by Chryssogelos and Stavrevska (2019, pp. 431-436).

In addition, the country's admission to the UN was dependent on compliance with Greek requirements. Accession to the UN was permitted with the name “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and the abbreviation FYROM. The United Nations Security Council recommended the country's membership to the United Nations General Assembly and stipulated that the state should adopt a temporary name for all UN purposes until the naming disagreement was resolved. In April 1993, the General Assembly approved the recommendation and the Republic of Macedonia became the 181st member of the United Nations. The compromise reached was carefully worded and emphasized that the term FYROM served as a quick reference rather than an official name until the naming conflict was resolved (UN, 1993).

In February 1994, Greece imposed an economic embargo against the FYROM, restricting trade between the two countries. According to Loizides (2020, p. 9), this strict strategy, which lasted seven months, had significant financial consequences for the FYROM after the last government imposed an oil embargo in 1992. The economic embargo sparked international efforts to resolve the name issue and led to the signing of the Interim Accord in 1995. Although the agreement did not resolve the name dispute, it laid the foundation for improving bilateral relations and initiated UN-mediated negotiations.

Under the agreement, the FYROM changed its flag and made constitutional adjustments to address Greece's concerns. In response, Greece lifted the economic embargo and agreed not to object to the FYROM's applications for membership in international organizations of which Greece was a member, as reported by Chryssogelos and Stavrevska (ibid., pp. 431–436). However, this was dependent on the FYROM using the long name intended for its UN membership. The Interim Accord, signed on September 13, 1995, also stipulated that both nations would continue negotiations on the name issue under the auspices of the United Nations. Greece's agreement not to raise objections to the FYROM's applications as long as the temporary provisional name was used facilitated the FYROM's

membership in various international organizations, including the Council of Europe, The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Partnership for Peace.

After the signing of the Interim Accord, Greece's attention to the name issue decreased, although it remained concerned about FYROM's use of the name 'Macedonia.' In the early 2000s, Greece sought to align with prevailing European politics and advocated for Europeanization, EU foreign policy, and enlargement. This required a formal resolution of the name issue to examine FYROM's possible candidacy for EU membership. FYROM was convinced that its integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions could be achieved without changing its name, citing the provisions of the Interim Accord. President Branko Crvenkovski expressed optimism about Greece's support for NATO and EU integration, as evidenced by Greece's backing of FYROM's agreement with the EU in April 2001, as noted by Chrysogelos and Stavrevska (*ibid.*, p. 433).

Violent conflicts in FYROM during the summer of 2001 attracted international attention and led the EU to support the Ohrid Framework Agreement, highlight enlargement prospects in the 2003 'Thessaloniki Agenda,' and address the naming issue in line with the EU's normative agenda to resolve and counter rising nationalist populism and the influence of external forces in the Balkans. For the Greek political elite, Europeanization enabled Greece to pursue its interests within the EU framework and act as a gatekeeper for FYROM's EU and NATO membership. This moderation accommodated nationalist sentiments and contributed to regional stability. FYROM gained candidate status in 2005 and sought broader international recognition, as reported by Chrysogelos and Stavrevska (*ibid.*, pp. 431-436), both in Skopje and Athens.

The name issue between Greece and Macedonia goes hand in hand with disputes over the flags, constitutions and symbols of the two states. A key point of contention is the six-pointed Vergina sun, which has been controversial although only problematic in 1977 when both countries recognized it as a national heritage site. After the discovery of Philip's tomb, the Greek Prime Minister declared Alexander the Great the unifier of Greece and used the Sun of Vergina as a symbol of the connection and continuity between the ancient and modern Hellenes. In 1992, Macedonia also adopted the Vergina Sun as a national symbol and incorporated it into its flags, leading Greece to perceive this as an intrusion into its national culture. This problem has become known as "Vergina Syndrome" and has led to ongoing tensions between the two countries.

The significance of the grave remains found in the Vergina region has been interpreted as evidence that the Macedonian Kingdom existed within the borders of Greece.

Greece viewed the acceptance of the Vergina Sun as a national symbol and its inclusion in the flag of Macedonia as a threat to its territorial integrity. As a result, Greece prevented the use of the Macedonian flag in various situations, such as at the Olympic Games, at the United Nations, and at diplomatic missions in other countries. Even after Macedonia was admitted to the UN as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, its current flag was not flown. Finally, in 1993, Macedonia adopted the sixteen-rayed Vergina Sun as a national symbol in its parliament. In 1995, a compromise was reached between Macedonia and Greece, resulting in Macedonia agreeing to change its flag, as outlined by Graan (2021, p. 175).

Macedonia's desire to associate its origins with Alexander the Great while preserving its Slavic identity suggests an attempt to establish a distinctive national identity. This emerges from the 'Skopje 2014' project launched by the Macedonian government with an estimated budget of 500 million euros. The project aims to remove the city's communist image and rebuild it with ancient architecture. As part of the initiative, old buildings in the city were renovated with ancient architecture, and several giant statues were installed throughout the city, the largest of which depicts Alexander the Great. Although this project aims to give the city a fresh look, it has been criticized by the Albanian and Turkish minorities for not reflecting the entire ethnic and historical structure of the country, as stated by Kubiena (2012, pp. 87-88).

In addition, the constitutional issue represents a notable area of disagreement between Macedonia and Greece. Following Macedonia's declaration of independence, Greece expressed discontent with specific provisions outlined in the constitution formulated by the Macedonian parliament. Of particular concern to Greece are two essential articles, articles 3 and 49, which have drawn significant attention and prompted Greece's reaction. Floudas (2002, pp. 94-98) discusses how Article 3 of the Macedonian constitution states that the country shall take necessary measures to protect the rights and interests of Macedonian people living outside its borders. Greece views this provision as problematic, as it perceives it as an assertion of territorial claims over the region of Macedonia in Greece. The Greek government argues that this article implies a territorial expansionist agenda and challenges its sovereignty and the historical and cultural heritage associated with the region. Furthermore, Article 49 of the Macedonian constitution grants the country the authority to promote and protect the rights and interests of ethnic Macedonians living abroad. This provision has been a source of contention for Greece, as it considers it interfering in other countries' internal affairs, particularly concerning the Macedonian minority in Greece. Greece contends that including such a provision in the Macedonian constitution implies irredentist aspirations and

undermines national unity and stability. These constitutional provisions have contributed to the ongoing dispute between Greece and North Macedonia. Greece has consistently raised concerns over these articles, emphasizing the need for their revision or removal to address its objections and improve bilateral relations. On the other hand, North Macedonia has defended these provisions, asserting that they aim to protect the rights and interests of Macedonian people worldwide and do not imply any territorial claims.

After the December 2016 elections, Zoran Zaev, leader of the Social Democratic Party, assumed the position of Prime Minister and formed a new government. In a significant gesture, the government, as noted by Tagaris (2018), decided to change the airport's name, currently known as Skopje International Airport, and renamed the motorway as the "Friendship Railway" instead of its designation as the "Alexander the Great Highway." These name changes symbolized the government's intentions and indicated to Athens that North Macedonia had adopted a fundamentally different approach.

The 1995 interim accord persisted for over two decades until a new UN-led negotiation occurred from 2017 to 2018. Despite facing challenges such as limited political capital and low popularity, Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance's (SYRIZA) anti-nationalist stance and commitment to Balkan reconciliation, as discussed by Loizides (ibid., pp. 10-13), increased the prospects of success. The agreement, known as the Prespa agreement, was reached in June 2018, proposing the name "Republic of North Macedonia." It secured cultural heritage rights for Greece and allowed North Macedonians to retain their identity and language. Additionally, the agreement facilitated North Macedonia's EU and NATO membership aspirations and garnered support from the Albanian minority, fostering stability.

5.2. A New State Called “North Macedonia”

The Prespa Agreement, signed on June 17, 2018, marked a crucial turning point in resolving the name dispute between North Macedonia and Greece. This historic agreement required Macedonia to change its name to the 'Republic of North Macedonia' (Republika Severna Makedonija). It also entailed a referendum for approval, with most Macedonian voters supporting the agreement (BBC, 2018). Although the voter turnout fell short of the required threshold, Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev advocated for the agreement's implementation through parliamentary voting (Damyanov, 2010).

The international community, including the US administration and the EU, expressed their endorsement of the referendum results and demonstrated support for Macedonia (BBC,

2018). Greek nationalists objected to mentioning 'Macedonia' and advocated for alternative names such as the Skopje or Vardar Republic. Despite protests outside the Greek Parliament, the Prespa Agreement was ratified through a majority vote, facilitating Macedonia's trajectory towards EU and NATO integration (Sputnik, 2019).

As stated in Article 1, the Prespa Agreement mandates the change of the country's name to North Macedonia, effectively addressing Greece's concerns about territorial impacts and historical heritage (Prespa Agreement, 2018). This diplomatic compromise ended the long-standing stalemate and opened new avenues for cooperation and regional stability. Furthermore, the impact of the Prespa Agreement goes beyond bilateral relations and significantly influences regional stability in the Balkans. Resolving the name dispute removed a major obstacle to North Macedonia's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. In particular, the agreement was crucial in facilitating the country's accession to NATO, officially achieved in March 2020 (NATO, 2020).

Achieving NATO membership has significant implications for North Macedonia and the broader Southeast European region in terms of regional stability. By joining NATO, North Macedonia will gain access to security guarantees and strengthen the entire security architecture in Southeast Europe. This enhances the country's defense capabilities and promotes stability and peace in the region. The Prespa Agreement, therefore, promotes regional cooperation and improves security. In addition, the Prespa Agreement also extends North Macedonia's path to EU integration. By successfully resolving the long-standing dispute, North Macedonia demonstrated its commitment to good neighborly relations and adherence to European values—essential prerequisites for EU accession. As a result, the EU granted candidate status to North Macedonia in 2020, marking a significant step forward in the country's European integration process (European Commission, 2020). The Prespa Agreement, therefore, not only paved the way for North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration but also positioned it positively on the path to EU membership.

Numerous explicit provisions in the Prespa Agreement address and regulate issues related to language and identity. In particular, Chapter 7 confirms and establishes the right of the people of North Macedonia to continue calling themselves 'Macedonians' and referring to their native language as 'Macedonian.' Although identity formation within the country remains an ongoing endeavor, the Prespa Agreement has laid the foundation for North Macedonia to redefine its identity and promote more harmonious coexistence with neighboring states. Due to the importance of this particular issue to the Macedonians, and

traditionally, due to a lack of agreement, it has been a significant obstacle to resolving the name dispute in the past.

Constructivism permeates the entire situation surrounding the name dispute, and this conflict exists only because of conceptual and identity problems. Due to their identification as Macedonians, both parties feel entitled to use the term 'Macedonia' as their own. The lack of agreement about who has a legitimate claim to identify as Macedonian is to blame for the prolonged matter of the name issue and the resulting delay in resolution.

Constructivism can analyze the controversy surrounding North Macedonia's flag, particularly regarding identity and concepts. Greek Macedonians reject the Vergina Sun, a representation of medieval Macedonia, as it inaccurately reflects the Slavic population of the former Yugoslav Republic and should not be featured on the flag. A nation's flag signifies and expresses the shared identity of an ethnic group. A constructivist perspective interprets the criticism from Greek Macedonians as stemming from their belief that the flag does not accurately represent the North Macedonian population and identity, but rather symbolizes historical Macedonia and its associated ideals and identity.

Constructivism can also be applied to examine the linguistic issue, particularly the debate over whether it should be called Macedonian. The people of Greek Macedonia believe that Macedonian is a language associated with historical Macedonia and has no connection to the Slavic language used in North Macedonia. They consider it essential that North Macedonia does not use the term 'Macedonian,' as, in their opinion, it should be associated with something else. Despite no longer being spoken, the ancient Macedonian language holds great significance for the identity of Greek Macedonia. Therefore, the recognition of the Slavic language in North Macedonia as Macedonian through the Prespa Agreement could pose problems for the Greek population regarding their sense of identity.

Constructivism contributes to the international community's difficulty in recognizing the importance of the name issue. It asserts that outside observers find it challenging to fully comprehend the identities and beliefs shared by different populations. Conflicts like these are more intricate to understand than conflicts involving concrete values such as territorial claims or border disputes. It is challenging for outsiders to grasp the sensitivity associated with a flag bearing a sun symbol or a statue of a historical figure, along with their significance in terms of ideals and identity for the Balkan populations involved. From a constructivist perspective, the sensitivity of questions related to identity and ideas is a crucial factor in the lengthy negotiation process. In these circumstances, constructivism is evident, as cooperation between nations has been hindered, even though it would seem economically, logically, and

strategically beneficial to both sides. The Prespa Agreement has made substantial strides in tackling the complex challenges of identity and ideas. However, despite these efforts, the complete success of the agreement is hindered by various factors, one of which is the potential for complications among Greek Macedonians who also identify themselves as Macedonians. The existing shape of the agreement raises concerns about this. The practical and geopolitical benefits offered by the Prespa agreement have taken priority over considerations of identity and ideals. Consequently, the contract cannot be adequately explained through a constructivist approach when viewed from this standpoint.

The agreement regulates ownership of the historical heritage of ancient Macedonia. To align with the Slavic historical narrative, North Macedonia has committed not to make any claims about the historical narratives related to Alexander the Great and ancient Macedonian history. These aspects are integral to their Greek national identity, and they attach great importance to this issue. This connection can be partially attributed to constructivism's principles, emphasizing the role of identity. Residents of North Macedonia and Greek Macedonians identify with historic Macedonia, including figures like Alexander the Great and symbols like the Vergina Sun. From a constructivist perspective, specific incentives can contribute to future conflicts. Additionally, ontological security theory posits that individuals and nations seek stability and self-continuity through their identities and cultural symbols. In the case of Greece and North Macedonia, both countries deeply anchor themselves in historical narratives and cultural heritage to bolster their ontological security. Greece, due to its strong ties to ancient Macedonia and figures like Alexander the Great, perceives any use of the name "Macedonia" by its neighbor as a direct threat to its identity and security.

From a constructivist approach, one could argue that the Prespa Agreement faces significant obstacles to its success. Strong opposition in both countries, driven by concerns about identity and ideology, is undermining the prospects of the agreement. The secondary treatment of these issues in favor of pragmatic or strategic considerations further diminishes its chances of success. Success would require gradual convergence of populations' identities over time, but this goal appears unattainable in the foreseeable future. As a result, the Prespa Agreement is likely to encounter significant difficulties in achieving its intended results. The ongoing conflict has deepened the divide between the residents of Greece and North Macedonia and highlighted the importance of a shared identity and shared ideals as prerequisites for the longevity and stability of partnerships.

Ontological security theory posits that individuals and nations strive for continuity and stability in their identities to achieve psychological well-being. It underscores the significance of a shared understanding of identity and recognition in fostering a sense of security and belonging. Applying this theory to the Macedonia-Greece name dispute allows us to examine how the Prespa Agreement addressed identity issues and provided a framework for reconciliation. Moreover, the Prespa Agreement stands as a milestone in resolving this dispute. By renaming Macedonia to the 'Republic of North Macedonia,' the agreement aimed to alleviate Greek concerns about territorial claims and safeguard their national identity. Through this compromise, both nations endeavored to reconcile their competing historical narratives and establish a mutual understanding of their identities. The Prespa Agreement effectively addressed the ontological security needs of both parties, providing a foundation for mutual recognition and stability.

Attachment to historical symbols and narratives has led to a deep emotional investment in maintaining ontological security, resulting in the naming dispute persisting as an enduring issue. Nevertheless, the Prespa Agreement aimed to address these concerns by renaming North Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia. This compromise aimed to allay Greece's fears regarding territorial claims and the appropriation of historical heritage, thereby laying the foundation for the reconciliation of the two nations' identities. However, challenges to ontological security remain as certain individuals and groups in Greece and North Macedonia are reluctant to fully accept the terms of the Prespa Agreement. Hardliners on both sides argue that the agreement endangers their national identities and undermines ontological security, highlighting the deep emotional ties and complexities associated with identity-based conflicts.

To maintain ontological security and promote lasting reconciliation, it is essential to encourage communication, teaching, and cultural interaction between Greece and North Macedonia. By participating in activities that emphasize mutual respect and understanding, gaps in historical accounts can gradually be filled. Collaborative projects, joint cultural events, and shared research efforts have the potential to promote a broader sense of identity and history between both nations. By actively engaging in activities that emphasize respect and understanding, both countries can gradually close the gaps in their historical accounts. However, achieving a comprehensive and nuanced view of identity requires educational reforms that promote plurality, empathy, and critical thinking.

In conclusion, the Greece-Macedonia name dispute has presented substantial obstacles for both nations, stemming from profound historical identity and ontological security

concerns. The ratification of the Prespa Agreement signified a significant step towards addressing these issues, yet there are persisting challenges in its execution. Through the adoption of open dialogue, educational initiatives, and cultural exchange, Greece and North Macedonia can lay the groundwork for a harmonious coexistence and a future built upon shared identities and collective aspirations. Sustaining ontological security necessitates continuous endeavors to foster mutual understanding and respect, empowering both nations to transcend their historical differences and forge a path towards enduring reconciliation.

6. Analysis of the North Macedonian – Bulgarian Dispute

The North Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute is a long-standing and complex conflict that encompasses historical, cultural, and political dimensions. In this analysis, I delve into the intricacies of this dispute through the lenses of constructivism and ontological security theory, emphasizing the underlying factors shaping the dynamics between the two nations. By employing these theoretical frameworks, my objective is to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, identities, and beliefs fueling the dispute between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, ultimately exploring potential paths to resolution and reconciliation.

From a theoretical perspective, constructivism emphasizes the role of ideas, norms, and social interactions in shaping international relations. According to constructivist theory, the behavior of states is not solely determined by material interests or power dynamics but is also influenced by shared beliefs, values, and identities. In the context of the North Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute, constructivism enables an examination of how historical narratives, cultural perceptions, and national identities contribute to the ongoing tensions between the two nations. On the other hand, ontological security theory provides insights into the individual and collective need for stability, continuity, and self-confidence. This theory assumes that individuals and states strive to maintain a coherent and stable sense of identity to cope with the complexity of the world. In the North Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute context, ontological security theory helps us understand how contested historical narratives, territorial claims, and linguistic issues threaten the perceived identity and security of both nations. Examining the impact of ontological security concerns on behavior and attitudes in North Macedonia and Bulgaria provides valuable insights into the underlying factors driving the ongoing conflict. Understanding how these ontological security concerns shape the actions and perspectives of both nations contributes to a more comprehensive analysis of the dispute.

In this analysis, I delve into the historical background of the North Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute, exploring key events that have influenced the relationship between the two countries. Additionally, I assess the role of constructivism and ontological security theory in elucidating the motivations, perceptions, and behaviors of the involved parties. By scrutinizing their engagement with historical narratives, cultural identities, and territorial claims, I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the North Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute. This approach aims to foster a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics and identify potential paths to resolution and reconciliation.

6.1. North Macedonia's EU Path is Blocked Again

The signing of the Prespa Agreement on June 17, 2018, marked a pivotal moment in North Macedonia's journey towards EU membership. This historic agreement resolved the longstanding name dispute with Greece, leading to the country's name change from FYROM to the Republic of North Macedonia. The Prespa Agreement not only improved bilateral relations between the two nations but also played a crucial role in North Macedonia's pursuit of EU integration.

The Western Balkan region, including North Macedonia, is viewed as a promising candidate for EU membership, aligning with the EU's commitment to enlargement in this area. The Prespa Agreement successfully addressed a significant obstacle in the country's accession negotiations, garnering global support for its role in promoting regional cooperation and stability. However, despite the agreement's successful implementation, North Macedonia faced a new challenge on its path to EU membership—Bulgaria's imposition of a veto. This veto introduced fresh obstacles and complexities to North Macedonia's EU accession journey. Bulgaria, as an EU member state, raised significant concerns related to linguistic and historical complexities, resulting in a deadlock in North Macedonia's accession negotiations. This Bulgarian veto, contrary to the generally pro-European stance of Boyko Borissov's cabinet, disrupted the positive momentum generated by the Prespa Agreement's implementation. It introduced additional hurdles to North Macedonia's EU membership aspirations. Notably, the veto was driven by domestic political considerations rather than a broad pro-European perspective. Influential nationalists within the cabinet, pivotal in securing the necessary parliamentary majority, strategically employed the veto to bolster their popularity and safeguard their political standing.

Simultaneously, escalating public controversies over sensitive historical and cultural issues have heightened tensions among closely connected populations in neighboring countries. In this volatile environment, feelings of kinship have unintentionally led to negative consequences, further deepening divisions and conflicts. Various public opinion polls have substantiated this observation, capturing the escalating polarization and opposition within these communities. For instance, a recent survey conducted by the Center for European Strategies "Eurotink" in Skopje revealed that citizens of North Macedonia view Bulgaria as their primary adversary, while expressing greater sympathy for Serbia. According to reports, this finding illuminates prevailing sentiments among the population and provides insights into the dynamics of regional relations in North Macedonia (Faktor, 2023).

Furthermore, Bulgarian citizens show their support for North Macedonia, endorsing its aspirations for EU membership and reaffirming the enduring ties that arise from a common historical background. However, Bulgarian citizens strongly emphasize that before considering EU membership for their southwestern neighbor, it is essential to address and resolve outstanding issues within bilateral relations with Skopje. Skopje's timely and full implementation of the agreed commitments, as set out in the bilateral agreement between the two countries, serves as a prerequisite for further progress (Georgievski, 2020). Additionally, according to a poll by The Sofia Globe, 60.9% of Bulgarians believe that North Macedonia should join the EU. However, it is worth noting that 32.2% of respondents opposed North Macedonia's European integration, while 6.9% remained undecided on the matter (Sofia Globe, 2022). These statistics highlight the different views within the Bulgarian population on North Macedonia's EU aspirations and underline the complexity of the dynamics surrounding the issue. These circumstances have led the ruling institutions on both sides of the border to exercise greater caution. Additionally, temporary and fragile coalition governments were in power in Sofia and Skopje, emphasizing the need for a cautious approach. The possible consequences of impulsive actions could lead to the downfall of these governments, highlighting the need for careful deliberation.

After the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) suffered a significant defeat in the local elections on October 17 and 31, 2021, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev was compelled to resign. His successor, Dimitar Kovachevski, faced challenges in maintaining power and had to make concessions to his Albanian party allies, intending to strengthen his position. However, these concessions ultimately diminished his authority in the eyes of the Macedonian population. In December 2021, the newly formed coalition government under Kiril Petkov in Sofia decided to postpone the normalization of relations with the neighboring country. Within the cabinet, the prime minister faced resistance from two of the four coalition partners, namely the "There is Such a People" movement and the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Additionally, President Rumen Radev, in pursuit of his political agenda, expressed disapproval of what he perceived as hasty and unjustified actions toward North Macedonia. During his visit to Berlin on May 16, 2022, he articulated his stance on this issue in a way that was extremely harsh and untenable for the opposing party, stating: "We must prevent the legitimization of Macedonianism, the ideology of the former Yugoslavia and the Comintern within the EU" (News.bg, 2022).

It is not surprising that K. Petkov's term was relatively short. The exit of the "There Are Such a People" movement initially marked the first blow to his coalition. Subsequently, a

vote of no confidence initiated by his main political opponent, the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party led by former Prime Minister B. Borisov, received majority support in the People's Assembly. Although the main reason for the resignation was not excessive softness on the Macedonian question but rather the internal political calculations of those with ill intentions toward K. Petkov, it still contributed to the decision. Remarkably, on June 24, Parliament held an extensive five-hour discussion and overwhelmingly approved the lifting of the Bulgarian veto on the start of negotiations (170 in favor, 37 against, and 21 abstentions) (Euronews, 2022). Notably, this resolution came with an ultimatum, demanding the inclusion of the Bulgarian position in EU documents. The decision stipulates that the Bulgarian government agrees to the proposed framework for North Macedonia's EU accession negotiations on the condition that it guarantees the fulfillment of the following requirements:

1. the inclusion of the Bulgarians in the Macedonian constitution as a nation-building people;
2. nothing in the negotiation process will be interpreted as recognition of the Macedonian language by Bulgaria;
3. good neighborliness remains a benchmark in the accession process and Brussels will keep EU countries informed of progress;
4. the negotiation framework will include the observance of the agreement with Bulgaria and its protocols (Kandilarov, 2022, p. 3).

Sofia gave Skopje, and therefore Brussels, an ultimatum to replace the veto with a new system of sustained pressure on North Macedonia throughout the negotiation process. This strategy aimed to create a process supported by the EU and explicitly enshrined in its official documents.

Initially, both North Macedonian Prime Minister D. Kovachevski and President Stevo Pendarovski (affiliated with the SDSM) deemed the French proposal in the Bulgarian version unacceptable. This declaration was made on June 23 during the Brussels Summit. To persuade the Macedonian side to seize the extraordinary 'historic opportunity' in Skopje, O. Scholz, S. Michel, and U. von der Leyen intervened promptly. However, the Bulgarian demands were met, while the Macedonian demands were only minimally addressed. One EU document succinctly acknowledged: 'With regard to the translations of the *acquis* into Macedonian, the EU noted the respective unilateral declarations of Bulgaria and North Macedonia on the Macedonian language' (IGC Ministerial Meeting, 2022). Ultimately, on July 16th, the North Macedonian Assembly adopted the French proposal after three days of

debate, with VMRO-DPMNE and the 'Lefts' abstaining from voting. Following the second intergovernmental commission meeting on July 17, the two countries formally finalized their agreement by signing a protocol. This step facilitated the start of the negotiating process in Brussels.

After a prolonged political crisis, Bulgaria experienced further upheaval with the resignation of the K. Petkov government. Despite the president's efforts to form a coalition government with various political factions, these attempts proved unsuccessful. The 'There is Such a People' movement, led by Slavi Trifonov, was reluctant to restore a coalition with former partners, adding complexity to the situation. Consequently, the head of state dissolved the National Assembly, appointed an interim government, and called for new elections. Under these circumstances, it appeared unlikely that Sofia's position on the Macedonian issue would change significantly.

The situation in Skopje remained challenging. Despite the ruling coalition having 73 mandates, the SDSM collaborated with Albanian parties to secure the passage of the controversial French plan with 68 out of 120 votes in parliament. However, some representatives of smaller Macedonian parties within the coalition disagreed with this decision. To meet Bulgarian demands and enact the necessary constitutional changes, the assembly needed a two-thirds majority (80), which the cabinet did not have. This reality is acknowledged by both Sofia and Brussels. The opposition called for early parliamentary elections amid sustained and violent protests denouncing the "national betrayal" and "Bulgarization" of the country. The outcome of these efforts remained uncertain. Sofia's attempts to foster friendly neighborly relations, brotherhood, and the "neutralization of Macedonianism" only fueled anti-Bulgarian sentiments, given the inherent nature of ethnic conflict. A survey by the Institute for Political Research in Skopje found that 72.8% of ethnic Macedonians reacted negatively to the start of negotiations with the EU without North Macedonia accepting France's proposal. Approximately 56% of respondents, regardless of nationality, expressed disagreement (MKD.mk, 2022).

Since June 2022, following the removal of the veto by the Sofia administration regarding the commencement of negotiations between Skopje and the EU, there has been a notable enhancement in the bilateral relationship between the two parties. Throughout the period from June 2022 to January 2023, this favorable progression remained steadfast, resulting in a moderate improvement in relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Regrettably, the recently observed resurgence of conflicts has cast a shadow over the previously improved dynamics between the two nations.

On January 26, 2023, a meeting occurred between Rumen Radev, the President of Bulgaria, and Oliver Varhelyi, the Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement of the European Commission. During the meeting, Radev suggested that the EU take decisive measures to protect and safeguard the rights of Bulgarians living in North Macedonia. Additionally, he claimed that the attack on Hristiyan Pendikov, an employee of a Bulgarian cultural association who identifies as Bulgarian in North Macedonia, was triggered by deep-rooted hostility towards Bulgarians and Bulgarian culture. Radev attributed this act of aggression to long-standing policies that fueled hatred against Bulgarians in North Macedonia (BNR, 2023). Based on Radev's remarks, it becomes apparent that Bulgaria is once again leveraging the EU as a significant factor in its relations with North Macedonia. Consequently, the Sofia government is using Brussels to exert pressure on the Skopje government, similar to its previous approach.

In addition, historical heritage is another issue that has recently strained relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. With celebrations planned for February 4, 2023, in honor of the 151st birthday of Goce Delchev, considered a hero by both Macedonians and Bulgarians, the Skopje government has implemented additional security measures in the country. This is due to the competing claims to Delchev (Brussels Morning, 2023). Therefore, the historical issues between Bulgaria and North Macedonia continue to influence their interaction.

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasize that despite the lifting of Bulgaria's veto over North Macedonia, which partially improves bilateral relations, several fundamental issues remain unresolved. The Sofia government is urging Skopje to ensure the presence of cultural associations in the country aimed at the Bulgarian community. Therefore, Bulgaria expresses its dissatisfaction with North Macedonia's approach to addressing the concerns and rights of the Bulgarian minority. If North Macedonia fails to address the concerns raised by the Bulgarian authorities regarding the issue under discussion, it could face challenges in its prospective EU membership. Consequently, Sofia retains the potential to use its veto power to impede Skopje's progress.

6.2. North Macedonia's Identity Conflict with Bulgaria

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria proactively extended official recognition to the Republic of Macedonia as a sovereign state. Surprisingly, Bulgaria was one of the first countries to recognize the Republic of Macedonia, and it explicitly stated that official recognition of the state does not automatically imply recognition of the Macedonian

language and Macedonian identity. It is pertinent to underscore that this recognition should not be construed as an endorsement of the Macedonian language or the Macedonian identity. The recognition from Bulgaria was partial and accompanied by several reservations. Hence, the bilateral relations between the two countries remained restricted.

In the 1994 meeting held in Sofia between Macedonian President Gligorov and Bulgarian President Zhelev, the issue surrounding the Macedonian language surfaced, marking its initial manifestation. This occurred as Gligorov persisted in utilizing an interpreter, disregarding Zhelev's repeated appeals to abstain from such assistance according to Danforth (1995, pp. 153-154). On April 14, 1994, during the visit of Bulgarian Education Minister Marko Todorov to Macedonia, the Republic of Macedonia declined to endorse the signing of official documents that referred to the languages as the "official languages of the two countries." Subsequently, during Gligorov's visit to Sofia a few days later, he declined to sign official documents and insisted on a formulation that included the phrase "Bulgarian and Macedonian" instead of the proposed expression, as reported by Kocheva et al. (2020, p. 53). Due to the contentious debates among Macedonian and Bulgarian politicians, scholars, and media, by the late 1990s, over twenty bilateral agreements were left unsigned according to Marinov (2013, pp. 421-422).

Two additional components of the New Macedonian Question—the interethnic relations between Macedonian Slavs and Albanians and the name issue between Greece and Macedonia—also had a significant impact on the evolution of the historical dispute between Macedonia and Bulgaria. The Macedonian authorities needed to underline how the new state was connected to ancient and medieval history within these two challenges. To promote societal cohesiveness in the face of the threat of Albanian separatism, Greek attacks on the nation's ancient legacy, and the historical disagreement with Bulgaria, they had to show that the territories of Macedonia had had a substantial impact on the history of the Balkan Peninsula. The strategic objectives outlined in Bulgaria's strategy since 2008, along with their current implementation in North Macedonia through the application of political influence, have played a decisive role in shaping the prevailing political landscape. In addition, Bulgaria has gained increased political leverage within the framework of the EU and NATO, leading to a reconfiguration of the political dynamics. The prevailing framework of relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia prominently emphasizes historical elements, specifically Bulgaria's historical heritage in the 7th century AD. Within this context, Bulgaria's interest in North Macedonia predominantly revolves around the historical connections between the two regions during that period. The emergence of the new political

reality further emphasizes the interplay between historical factors and the collective memory and identity of the North Macedonians, as these historical issues continue to shape the contemporary dynamics of the relationship between the two nations.

The disputes over the historical legacies of the medieval Kingdom of Samuel had strained diplomatic relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria for several years before the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation in 2017 (Koloskov, 2018, pp. 11-19). It is crucial to examine the content of this dispute in more detail. The Kingdom of Samuel ruled in the western regions of the First Bulgarian Empire from 976 to 1018. During this period, the Byzantine Empire conquered the eastern parts of the empire, and the state eventually fell after King Samuel's forces were defeated at the Battle of Belasica in 1014.

According to Macedonian historiography, the western kingdom of Samuel is said to have developed into Ohrid as the capital changed, and after the conquest of the eastern territories, it became a separate and independent entity, different from the First Bulgarian Empire. Some Macedonian sources claim that an uprising occurred in Macedonia in 963, supposedly led by the leader Nikola and his sons David, Aron, Moisey, and Samuel. These sources claim that this uprising led to the overthrow of Bulgarian rule in the Macedonian lands (Antoljak, 1986, pp. 25-26). King Samuel is revered as a national hero in modern Macedonia, and his defeat at the Battle of Belasitsa is considered a significant and tragic episode in Macedonian history. In 2011, a remarkable ceremony to unveil a monument honoring King Samuel took place in the heart of Skopje (Reef, 2018, p. 466), attracting the attention of Bulgarian historians, journalists, and politicians.

In 2014, Bulgaria organized a dignified observance of the thousandth anniversary of the Battle of Belasitsa in direct response to the veneration of King Samuel in Macedonia. Substantial historical controversies emerged surrounding the classification of King Samuel as either a Bulgarian or Macedonian historical figure. Bulgaria meticulously orchestrated a range of public endeavors to demonstrate the historical continuity between the modern Bulgarian state and the Kingdom of Samuel, thereby bolstering its position in the ongoing historical controversy. The event commemorating King Samuel held at the recently refurbished "Samuel's Fortress" Park-Museum in Bulgaria was graced by the presence of the president, prime minister, and the patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, in 2015, a monument paying tribute to King Samuel was erected in the central district of Sofia, inscribed with the words, "Samuel, King of Bulgaria" (ibid., pp. 466-467).

In 2014 and 2015, a significant number of historical research publications surrounding the reign of King Samuel appeared in Bulgaria. Particularly noteworthy is the committed participation of the Macedonian Scientific Institute based in Bulgaria in the ongoing historical discourse with scientists from the Republic of Macedonia. In 2015, the Institute prepared the publication of two significant works: the book entitled "Samuel - Warrior King" written by P. Petrov and the compilation entitled "A Thousand Years of the Battle of Belasitsa and the Death of King Samuel (1014-2014)." Petrov's monograph paid particular attention to the composition of King Samuel's army, which was predominantly Bulgarian. Furthermore, the monograph emphasized the implementation of traditional Bulgarian military strategies in decisive battles. In the compilation, an article written by Bulgarian medievalist Georgi N. Nikolov presented a compelling counterargument to the notion of an anti-Bulgarian uprising in 963. Through an examination of state traditions, Nikolov (2015, pp. 35-60) effectively showcased the unbroken historical line between the First Bulgarian Empire and the Kingdom of Samuel.

According to the Macedonian view of history, the emergence of Macedonian statehood in the 10th and 11th centuries is attributed to the division of the cultural and historical heritage of the medieval Bulgarian Empire. Macedonian historians refer to two revolts, believed to have targeted both Bulgaria and Byzantium, as mentioned by Anatoljak (1986, pp. 25-30) and Nikolov (2015, pp. 35-60). These uprisings are seen as acts of resistance by local authorities against the central government in Bulgaria. Despite the transfer of the capital from Preslav to Ohrid, Bulgarian scholars argued that the rebels and their leaders did not see themselves as the founders of the Macedonian state but rather as the successors to the Bulgarian state.

Given the persistent historical and linguistic disagreements between the two nations, Sofia is exerting pressure on North Macedonia, urging it to reconsider its stance on recognizing the existence of a Bulgarian ethnic minority within its borders. Conversely, Skopje's application specifically relates to Bulgaria's recognition of the Macedonian language and, consequently, the acknowledgment of Macedonia as a unique ethnically based entity. As a condition, Sofia stipulated that Skopje recognizes Macedonian as a Bulgarian dialect before the commencement of EU accession negotiations for Macedonia at the end of 2020. Furthermore, Sofia is seeking acknowledgment from Skopje that North Macedonia and Bulgaria share a common national history predating the division of the region by Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. This division occurred on the eve of the First World War, following the conclusion of the two Balkan wars.

Furthermore, Bulgaria employs the concept of 'ius sanguinis.' Sofia categorizes Slavophiles residing in Macedonia and other post-communist regions of Europe as ethnic Bulgarians, granting them the opportunity to apply for Bulgarian citizenship while retaining their current citizenship. A significant motivating factor for individuals to claim Bulgarian ancestry is the immediate acquisition of EU citizenship and the associated economic and political benefits that come with Bulgarian citizenship. North Macedonia's population, estimated at under two million, is primarily composed of two-thirds Slavic individuals (Judah, 2020). In recent years, the region has witnessed significant migration driven by economic motives. Sofia's offer of passports has been accepted by at least 60,000 Macedonians (Kamusella, 2021, p. 173). Sofia encourages integration into Bulgarian national society by leveraging its EU membership.

According to constructivism, identities are socially constructed through interactions and the sharing of common meanings. Owing to historical and linguistic disparities, North Macedonia and Bulgaria hold different national narratives and self-identifications. Bulgaria regards the Macedonian language as a dialect of Bulgarian and asserts that ethnic Macedonians are part of the Bulgarian nation. Conversely, North Macedonia asserts its own distinct Macedonian identity and language. Both countries believe that their national identities and histories are in jeopardy due to this narrative conflict, leading to an ongoing identity crisis.

Bulgaria's refusal to recognize the Macedonian language and ethnicity can be viewed as an effort to support its historical narrative and national identity. In order to preserve its sense of ontological security and defend its self-identity, Bulgaria denies the existence of the Macedonian nation as a separate entity. Threats to a state's self-confidence can induce unease and potentially lead to conflict. From Bulgaria's perspective, the recognition of the Macedonian language and ethnicity could be perceived as a potential threat to its own national identity, possibly destabilizing its self-confidence. By withholding recognition of the Macedonian identity and language, Bulgaria aims to maintain its ontological security, protect its self-identity, and ensure stability.

7. Conclusion

This dissertation primarily focused on the identity conflict between North Macedonia and its neighbors, Greece and Bulgaria, and highlighted the historical processes that influenced this conflict. The dissertation applied the theoretical insights discussed in the second chapter logically to the historical insights presented in the fifth and sixth chapters.

This study addresses three main questions. The first question focuses on North Macedonia's efforts to create an identity that unites Slavic and ancient Macedonian identities. To shed light on this, the fourth chapter discusses the formation of Macedonian identity after the end of the Second World War, along with an examination of the 'New Macedonian Question,' which refers to the debates surrounding the Macedonian nation and identity. Additionally, the antiquization process and the 'Skopje 2014' project, implemented by the VMRO-DPMNE government to strengthen Macedonian national pride and identity, serve as significant turning points in the development of Macedonian identity.

Furthermore, in creating its national identity, North Macedonia has made significant efforts to combine Slavic and ancient Macedonian identities. The period after the Second World War saw the formation and promotion of a distinct Macedonian identity. Subsequent events, such as the 'Skopje 2014' project, further emphasized the connection to ancient Macedonian heritage. One could say that North Macedonia has succeeded to a certain extent in forging a mixed identity, although the process has been fraught with several difficulties and disputes. However, the ongoing nature of identity formation requires continuous initiatives to promote inclusivity, protect cultural diversity, and maintain the delicate balance between historical stories and modern reality.

In addition, the fifth chapter of the study examines the 'Macedonian' identity dispute between North Macedonia and Greece. The focus of this section was on the second question, which sought to determine whether Greece sees its neighbor's identity as a historical or security threat. The aim of the study was to examine this issue in order to shed light on the complicated process underlying the dispute and to provide a thoughtful answer to this crucial question.

The Greek perception of Macedonian identity as both a historical and security policy concern becomes clear through the analysis of the North Macedonian-Greek name dispute. Greece believes that the use of the word 'Macedonia' represents a direct challenge to its own historical heritage and geographical integrity, which lies at the heart of the controversy surrounding Macedonia's identity. The Prespa Agreement, negotiated and subsequently signed in 2018, which led to the name change from Macedonia to North Macedonia,

represented an important step towards resolving the conflict. However, the fact that underlying tensions and concerns remain is significant, as it shows that Greece still views Macedonian identity from the perspective of historical and security issues.

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Another critical aspect of the study delves into the identity conflict between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. The analysis of the North Macedonian-Bulgarian conflict reveals that North Macedonia's response to Bulgaria's ultimatum in 2019 can be attributed to the country's strategy of ethnolinguistic nationalism and its rejection of Macedonian identity. Central to the disagreement were differing historical narratives, languages, and cultures. Bulgaria contested the uniqueness of the Macedonian language and cast doubt on the authenticity of the Macedonian identity. The Bulgarian ultimatum, which impeded North Macedonia's progress toward EU membership, underscored the depth of the identity crisis and the prevalence of nationalism in Bulgarian politics.

Bulgaria's approach to the conflict exemplifies ethnolinguistic nationalism, reflecting the country's prioritization of its neighbors and the imposition of a specific understanding of their language and cultural history. This nationalist ideology, geared towards preserving and promoting a homogenized Bulgarian national identity, is evident in Bulgaria's rejection of the Macedonian identity. Bulgaria effectively challenged the legitimacy of North Macedonia's identity by insisting on specific linguistic and historical standards, further straining bilateral relations. The 2019 Bulgarian ultimatum not only blocked North Macedonia's EU accession but also highlighted the delicate and complex nature of the identity struggle. It underscored

the significant hurdles North Macedonia must overcome to gain greater acceptance in the region and move closer to its EU aspirations. Resolving this disagreement necessitates delicately balancing the protection of cultural uniqueness with the promotion of understanding. To address underlying issues and forge a path toward a stronger relationship based on respect, inclusiveness, and shared interests, ongoing communication, diplomacy, and compromise are essential for both nations.

It is important to recognize that the 2019 Bulgarian ultimatum and the underlying conflict between North Macedonia and Bulgaria remain active, underscoring the persistent difficulties in resolving this issue. Bulgaria's rejection of Macedonian identity and the ongoing conflict over ethnolinguistic nationalism continue to impede the development of bilateral relations and hinder North Macedonia's progress in the EU accession process. The unresolved nature of the dispute emphasizes the necessity for sustained diplomatic efforts, engagement, and a shared commitment from both parties to constructive discussions that prioritize mutual respect and understanding. Overcoming this impasse is essential to promote regional peace and advance North Macedonia's aspirations for European integration. Finding a mutually acceptable solution to the identity conflict will be crucial in achieving these goals.

This dissertation employed constructivism and ontological security theory to analyze North Macedonia's identity dispute with Bulgaria and Greece. These theoretical frameworks were consistently applied across each chapter, facilitating a comprehensive examination of the conflict's various dimensions and shedding light on the intricate dynamics of identity construction, protection, and security concerns. The conceptual foundation, historical context, and theoretical framework chapters collectively served as crucial pillars in this analysis. The objective of this dissertation was to present a descriptive account that provides a nuanced understanding of the diverse nature and implications of the identity dispute involving North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece. This was achieved through the continuous incorporation of various theoretical perspectives.

In conclusion, constructivism and ontological security theory offer insightful analyzes of the dynamics and motivations underlying the identity struggle between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. North Macedonia's efforts to create a unique identity can be interpreted as a response to historical and political causes that highlight its distinct Slavic ancestry and historical ties to ancient Macedonia. Greece's resistance to Macedonian identity stems from concerns over territorial disputes and cultural appropriation, as it endangers Greece's ontological security by posing a threat to its historical heritage. Similarly, Bulgaria's rejection of the Macedonian identity, given its historical and linguistic ties to the region, can be

understood as a means of preserving its own national narrative and ontological security. These theoretical frameworks shed light on how common historical narratives, norms, and the need for identity coherence impact the construction, contestation, and protection of identities. This analysis contributes to the broader discussion of identity politics in this area by using constructivism and ontological security theory to provide a deeper understanding of the intricacies and reasons underlying identity struggle.

This dissertation examined the identity issues of North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria, using the theoretical frameworks of constructivism and ontological security theory. It has illuminated the reasons and dynamics that influence the development, contestation and securing of identities in the region by examining the complex interplay of historical, cultural and political elements. Ontological security theory has highlighted the importance of identity in maintaining a sense of stability and security, while the application of constructivism has highlighted the relevance of shared norms, historical narratives and social interactions in identity formation. This dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricacies and implications of identity disputes by summarizing the conceptual background, historical context and theoretical framework, and by providing insights into the motivations and actions of the affected parties. The findings complement the broader academic discussion identity politics by shedding light on the complexities of identity formation and regional security dynamics.

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