

**Nationhood Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: A
Comparative Analysis of Post-communist Bulgaria,
Montenegro and North Macedonia**

by

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**Nationhood Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: A
Comparative Analysis of Post-communist Bulgaria,
Montenegro, and North Macedonia**

KOÇ UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

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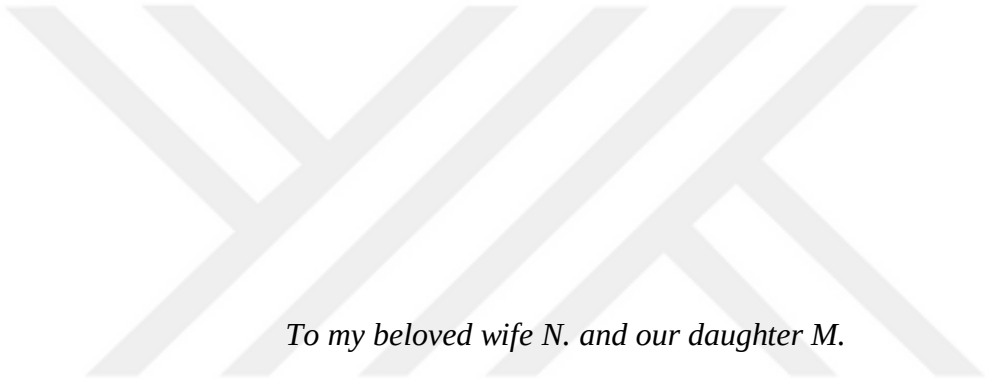
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To my beloved wife N. and our daughter M.

ABSTRACT

Nationhood Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of Post-communist Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia

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Why do societal conflicts in some multiethnic countries escalate into collective violence while in other cases, the tensions exist but societal disputes are contained by formal or informal institutional mechanisms? Most theories focus on the nation-state model's exclusionary logic and different forms of institutional design. I argue that the peaceful or violent patterns of interethnic relations are contingent on the presence/absence of a nationhood cleavage within the majority ethnic group. Majority nationhood cleavage generates authoritarian imposition of ethnic policies in which other elites with a different vision of nationhood are either sidelined or silenced, and as such increases the likelihood of interethnic violence. Majority nationhood cohesion, on the other hand, facilitates cooperation among majority elites when designing ethnic institutions and hence paves the way for interethnic peace. I further argue that nationhood visions are forged politically by past state policies and their persistence in the present is endogenous to partisan competition and competitive politics. I develop these theoretical arguments building on outcome variation in three otherwise similar southeast European countries. Post-communist Bulgaria and Montenegro built enduringly peaceful interethnic relations despite dark shadows of an assimilationist past in the former and a militant federation partner and neighborhood in the latter. Post-communist North Macedonia, by contrast, has frequently experienced violent conflict despite a multiethnic past and a series of consociational arrangements tried until present.

ÖZETÇE

Milliyet Ayrışmaları ve Etnik Çatışma: Komünizm Sonrası Bulgaristan, Karadağ, ve Kuzey Makedonya'nın Karşılaştırmalı Analizi

İdlir Lika

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Neden farklı etnik grupları barındıran ülkelerin bazılarında toplumsal çatışmalar toplu şiddete dönüşürken, bazılarında gerilim söz konusu olsa da toplumsal ihtilaflar formel ve informel kurumsal mekanizmalar tarafından sınırlandırılmaktadır? Birçok teori, ulus-devlet modelinin dışlayıcı mantığına ve muhtelif kurumsal tasarı formlarına odaklanmaktadır. Bense, etnik gruplar arası ilişkilerin barışçıl ya da şiddetli örüntülerinin, çoğunluğu teşkil eden etnik grubun içindeki milliyet ayrışmalarının varlığı ya da yokluğuna bağlı olduğunu ileri sürüyorum. Çoğunluğun içindeki milliyet ayrışması, farklı bir milliyet görüşüne sahip elitlerin kenara itildiği ya da sessizleştirildiği etnik politikaların otoriter dayatmasına sebep olmakta ve etnik gruplar arasındaki şiddet ihtimalini artırmaktadır. Öte yandan, çoğunluk içindeki milliyet uyuşması ise, çoğunluğu teşkil eden elitler arasında, etnik kurumların tasarlanmasındaki işbirliğini kolaylaştırarak, etnik gruplar arasındaki barışın önünü açmaktadır. Bu teorik savları, aksi takdirde benzer olan üç Güneydoğu Avrupa ülkesindeki sonuç çeşitliliği üzerine inşa ediyorum. Komünizm sonrası Bulgaristan ve Karadağ, sırasıyla asimile edici bir geçmişin karanlık gölgesi ve askeri bir federasyon ortağı ile komşuluğa rağmen, etnik gruplar arası barışçıl ilişkileri devamlı bir şekilde inşa etmişlerdir. Buna karşın, Komünizm sonrası Kuzey Makedonya ise, çok etnikli toplum geçmişine ve günümüze kadar denenen bir dizi oydaşmacı düzenlemelere rağmen, sıklıkla şiddetli çatışma yaşamıştır.

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I conducted the research for this dissertation in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Montenegro during the seven months from November 2018 until May 2019. I thank Koç University's Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities for funding the fieldwork. The SETA-funded "Türkiye'nin Bulgaristan'daki Soydaş Politikası" research project (March-August 2019) allowed me to conduct additional research and interviews in Kardzhali, Plovdiv, and Sofia in Bulgaria. I am very grateful to Hüseyin Alptekin from Istanbul Şehir University who invited me to work as a research assistant in this project.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKSH	Albanian National Army
ASH	Alliance for Albanians in Macedonia
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BDI	Democratic Union for Integration
BESA	BESA Movement in Macedonia
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party
DCG	Democratic Montenegro
DEMOS	Democratic Alliance of Montenegro
DF	Democratic Front of Montenegro
DOST	Democrats for Responsibility, Solidarity, and Tolerance
DPS	Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro
DS	Bulgarian State Security
EC/EU	European Community/European Union
FORCA	New Democratic Force of Montenegro
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
GERB	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria
ICG	International Crisis Group
KZNI	Committee for the Defense of National Interests
LCM	League of Communists of Macedonia
LDMZ	Democratic Alliance of Albanians in Montenegro
LSCG	Liberal Alliance of Montenegro
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDSV	National Movement Simeon II
NFSB	National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria
NLA	National Liberation Army
NOVA	New Serbian Democracy
NPP	Nationalist-Populist Parties
NPSD	People's Party for Freedom and Dignity
NSCG	People's Party of Montenegro
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement

PDSH	Democratic Party of Albanians in Macedonia
PF	Patriotic Front of Bulgaria
PPD	Party for Democratic Prosperity
PZP	Movement for Changes
RTCG	Radio Television Montenegro
RTT	Round Table Talks
SDA	Party for Democratic Action of Bosniaks in Montenegro
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Montenegro
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SKCG	League of Communists of Montenegro
SKJ	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
SNP	Socialist People's Party of Montenegro
SNS	Serbian People's Party of Montenegro
SRP	Serbian Radical Party
SRS	Alliance of Reformist Forces of Montenegro
TDP	Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia
THP	Turkish Movement Party in Macedonia
TMBH	Turkish National Unity Party in Macedonia
TMKH	Turkish National Liberation Movement in communist Bulgaria
UDB	Yugoslav State Security Administration
UDF	Union of Democratic Forces
UDSH	Democratic Union of Albanians in Montenegro
UN	United Nations
UP	United Patriots of Bulgaria
URA	United Reformist Action in Montenegro
VMRO-	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-
DPMNE	Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
VP	Rebirth Process
WP	(Ohrid) Working Paper
YNA	Yugoslav People's Army

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Puzzle of Violent Ethnic Conflict

Why do societal conflicts in some multiethnic countries escalate into collective violence while in other cases, the tensions exist but societal disputes are contained by formal or informal institutional mechanisms? Why have ethnic relations between the Albanian minority and Macedonian majority in the postcommunist period been marked by persistent violence while the relations between the ethnic Turkish minority and Bulgarian majority have been enduringly peaceful? Why have ethnic Albanians in postcommunist North Macedonia frequently rebelled whereas their co-ethnics in postcommunist Montenegro have been remarkably quiescent?

The variation in the pattern of interethnic relations across three postcommunist Southeast European countries is particularly puzzling if one considers the developments in the late communist period. Starting from mid-1980s, Bulgaria's Turkish minority was subjected to a violent name-changing campaign that has been described as "one of the most extensive and certainly the most rapid assimilation campaign in European history" (Dimitrov 2000: 1). This led many observers in the immediate postcommunist period to warn against the potential for interethnic violence. Likewise, given the fact that Montenegro was in a union with Serbia until 2006 and given the war in Kosovo, scholars such as Brendan Simms had remarkably noted that "The present author would have staked his reputation ... on the outbreak of a diversionary war in Montenegro in the autumn of 2000" (2001:342). Neither of the aforementioned scenarios materialized. By contrast, Macedonia was the only Yugoslav republic that seceded peacefully and thus appeared to many outside observers and scholars as a "beacon of hope" in a region ravaged by war and killings (ICG 1998: i). Developments thereafter belied this prognosis. Postcommunist Macedonia has so far experienced two insurrections (2001 and 2015) and several dozen

deadly ethnic riots that claimed the lives of roughly two hundred and displaced up to 140,000 civilians, disquieting figures for a country of barely two million people.

This dissertation seeks to address this puzzle by making two main arguments. First, it challenges the dominant view in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship that assumes the fundamental logic underlying the modern nation-state is that of a unified majority¹ ethnic group seeking to impose homogeneity into an otherwise heterogeneous social space by either assimilating or excluding minority ethnic groups. As such, the modern nation-state is said to inexorably generate horizontal inequality and polarized identities in an ethnically diverse social space, thereby often leading to violence (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Hechter 2000; Wimmer 2002; 2013; Cederman et al. 2013). I argue instead that there often exist salient cleavages among elites of majority groups in terms of how they vision the ethno-linguistic expression of minority groups, what I call here a nationhood cleavage, and this in turn determines the domestic alliance patterns among majority and minority elites. Violent ethnic conflict is often the outcome of majoritarian or authoritarian *imposition* of ethnic policies by allied majority and minority elites in which other elites with a different vision of nationhood are either sidelined or silenced. The imposition of ethnic policies generates majority and minority counterelites who are dissatisfied with the status of minority rights and/or resource distribution and leads them in turn to ally with each other. In such settings, the allied majority and minority counterelites will seek to ethnicize political space to ethnically outbid their allied majority and minority counterparts. Adopting a definition based on power struggle, outbidding is defined here as trying to unseat the incumbent party. Accordingly, I identify *double ethnic outbidding* as the main causal mechanism that leads to violent conflict in societies with majority nationhood cleavage, as the example of postcommunist North Macedonia shows.

On the other hand, where elites of the majority ethnic group are united on the nationhood question, they are more likely to *cooperate* when instituting ethnic policies. Unlike the pattern of imposition, majority elite cooperation renders majority and minority counterelite emergence less likely and effectively de-ethnicizes political space. This

¹ In this dissertation, I use the words “majority” and “minority” in the mere demographic sense of which ethnic group predominates numerically. As such, I assume, although this is not always the case, that the majority ethnic group will also be the one that predominates in the state administration. Often scholars have preferred not to use these words and opted instead for alternative typologies, such as distinguishing between “core” and “non-core groups” (Mylonas 2013) and “dominant” and “nondominant groups” (Bulutgil 2016).

causal mechanism prevents ethnic disputes from escalating into violence and paves the way for peaceful cohabitation, as the examples of postcommunist Bulgaria and Montenegro illustrate.

Analyzing ethnic conflict through the lenses of the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage addresses another key question: what institutions best contain interethnic disputes from escalating into violence? Most studies argue that the “right” institutions are those that have a built-in democratic/liberal logic, including those based upon a consociational logic of power-sharing (Lijphart 1977), devolution of central power (Horowitz 1985), “in-group policing” (Fearon and Laitin 1996), introducing some form of indirect rule (Hechter 2000), and minority access to central executive power (Cederman *et al.* 2010). I argue instead that any institutional formula proposed without taking into account the interaction patterns among the elites of the majority group who design them will not tell us much about the prospects such institutions have for containing violence. Instead, institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of cooperation, even though they might sometimes be illiberal/undemocratic in themselves, are most likely to contain interethnic tensions from escalating into violence. On the other hand, institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of imposition, even though they often might be democratic in themselves, are less likely to contain violence.

The rest of the introductory chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, I introduce the dependent variable of this study, its operationalization, and measurement. In the second section, I outline the research design. In the third section, I go through the alternative explanations on the causes of violent ethnic conflict, highlighting their contributions to the literature, their theoretical shortcomings and showing how the outcomes in my cases contradict the empirical implications of the alternative explanations. Finally, I summarize my argument and its observable implications.

1.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable this study focuses on is violent ethnic conflict. The empirical cases analyzed here are three postcommunist countries that during early 1990s embarked upon the journey towards democratization. Thus, all cases in various degrees are characterized by ethnic conflict since democratization in itself entails the free expression of ethnic diversity and conflicting demands. When these conflicting demands are

channeled and resolved via institutional ways, this is what I call ethnic peace. On the other hand, violent ethnic conflict denotes a situation where existing institutions are either inadequate to effectively channel ethnic conflict and/or ethnic elites for various reasons are unwilling to resolve the conflict via institutional ways. For the present research purposes, I operationalize violent ethnic conflict as any group mobilization along ethnic lines that leads to death(s). Thus, I count *only* fatalities. Any kind of injury, beating, property destruction surely matter, but for practical purposes I will not include them in my operationalization.²

Minorities at Risk project by Ted Gurr (1993a; 1993b; Gurr and Harff 1994) has pioneered the collection of country-level aggregate statistics on incidents of violence involving 284 minority groups facing economic and/or political discrimination throughout the world from 1945 to the present.³ The data has been of immense use to scholars for interstate comparisons. Yet for Macedonia, the dataset was of limited use given its limited time coverage (2006-2017 is completely uncovered) and because, as I found out during my own data collection, several incidents of violence during the period 1991-2006 were not covered. To compensate for these problems, I created my own original dataset. For the time period 1990-2017, I collected statistics on every reported instance of group mobilizations along ethnic lines that led to death(s). I compiled the dataset from the following sources:

- News reports by the Western media (BBC News; New York Times; The Daily Telegraph; Reuters; The Economist)
- 1991-2016 U.S. State Department Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices
- Various secondary sources

All recorded instances of violent ethnic conflict are presented in the Appendix A. The outcome variation is striking. Postcommunist Bulgaria and Montenegro contain no instance of group mobilization along ethnic lines that led to death. In Macedonia, by contrast, I recorded two armed rebellions (the six-month long insurgency in 2001 and the two-day long armed clashes in Kumanovo in May 2015) and several ethnic riots amounting to a total of 200 deaths.

² This matches the mainstream operationalization of violence in the literature. In his pioneering work on the subject, Stathis Kalyvas (2006: 20) notes “Although homicide does not exhaust the range of violence, it is an unambiguous form that can be measured more reliably than other forms, which is why it is used as the primary indicator of violence in quantitative studies.”

³ The last update was completed in February 2009 for the years 2004-2006.

1.3 Research Design

The core of the dissertation is a controlled, qualitative comparison between violent and nonviolent cases (Slater and Ziblatt 2013). This research combines deductive and inductive process tracing (Bennett and Checkel 2015) with a “most similar systems” (MSS) design (George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007) trying to account for the variation in outcome (dependent variable) among otherwise similar cases: Bulgaria, Macedonia and Montenegro.

The focus on negative cases is essential. I selected negative cases from those that had ex-ante similar probabilities of experiencing violent ethnic conflict, given existing theory (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Following Mahoney and Goertz’s (2004) “possibility principle”, the negative cases I selected had the following conditions present: the country was experiencing an incomplete double (political and economic) transition with weak institutions; one of the cases experienced also state breakdown; the incumbent communist successor party faced mass mobilization led by the anti-communist opposition; the minority ethnic group represented a social identity group different from the majority one with overlapping cleavages; the minority is demographically sizeable and spatially concentrated; availability of neighboring kin-state support; past legacy of violent minority mobilization; presence of historical antagonisms among the ethnic groups and Kosovo war as an external shock. The negative cases are not identical on each of these dimensions but they overall embody the empirical conditions that existing theory tells us should have led to violent ethnic conflict. Moreover, to increase “unit homogeneity” among cases in comparisons of ethnic conflict (Sambanis 2004), I selected cases from the same time period and same geographical region. In the end, I selected two negative cases from postcommunist Balkan countries, Bulgaria and Montenegro, and one positive case, North Macedonia. Table 1.1 below presents the cases, typological space and makes the case for an MSS design.

Table 1.1: Most Similar Systems (MSS) Analysis.

Similar Background Conditions	BULGARIA (1990-present)	MONTENEGRO (1990-present)	NORTH MACEDONIA (1990-present)
<i>IV1: Minority Size</i>	588,318/ 8.8 %	30,439/ 4.9 %	509,083/ 25.17 %
<i>IV2: Majority Religion</i>	Orthodoxy	Orthodoxy	Orthodoxy

<i>IV3: Minority Religion</i>	Sunni Muslim	75% Sunni Muslim; 25 % Catholic	Sunni Muslim
<i>IV4: Linguistic majority</i>	Slavic (cyrillic)	Slavic (cyrillic & latin)	Slavic (cyrillic)
<i>IV5: Linguistic minority</i>	non-Slavic	non-Slavic	non-Slavic
<i>IV6: Geographic region</i>	Southeast Europe	Southeast Europe	Southeast Europe
<i>IV7: Former Ottoman land?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>IV8: Former Communist Polity?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>IV9: Time of first statehood</i>	1878	1878	1944
<i>IV10: Minority bordering kin-state?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>IV11: NATO& EU membership?</i>	Both NATO & EU member	NATO member & EU candidate	NATO member & EU candidate
<i>IV12: GDP per capita (PPP) (CIA 2017 est.)</i>	\$21,800 (87. in the world)	\$17,800 (99. in the world)	\$14,900 (113. in the world)
<i>IV13: State Breakdown</i>	No	Yes	Yes
<i>IV14: Double Transition with weak institutions?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>IV15: Past legacy of ethnic violence?</i>	Yes	No	No
<i>IV16: Minority access to executive power?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>IV17: Ethnic Incorporation mode</i>	Civic assimilationism	consociationalism	consociationalism
<i>IV18: Communist exit after first multiparty election?</i>	No	No	Yes
<i>IV19: Kosovo war as external shock?</i>	Not applicable	Yes	Yes
<i>IV20: Nationhood Cleavage?</i>	NO	NO	YES
<i>DV: Pattern of Interethnic Relations</i>	Peaceful (0 dead)	Peaceful (0 dead)	Violent (200 dead)

Among all background conditions outlined above, the minority size (IV1) arguably stands out, since by relative size Albanians in North Macedonia far outnumber both Bulgarian Turks and Montenegrin Albanians. This could give some credence to the argument that Macedonian Albanians have a much greater potential to cause trouble because of their higher numbers. As a counter-argument, however, I claim that we should not be looking

only at the sheer size of a minority. Rather, we should also be focused on the political weight a minority has in the political system. Hence, a closer look at the Bulgarian and Montenegrin cases reveals that both the Turkish and Albanian minority, respectively, have a large political clout and have a potential to politically destabilize their respective countries. In this respect, despite their different relative sizes, both Bulgarian Turks and Montenegrin Albanians are similar to Macedonian Albanians. As a second counter-argument, there is well-established empirical evidence from other countries that small-size minorities are not less likely to launch an ethnic insurgency. Indeed, in an insightful recent work on genocide and political violence in post-colonial Africa, Scott Straus shows that the ethnic insurgency of Christian Joolas, who are about 5.5 per cent of Muslim-majority Senegal's population, constitutes the longest insurgency in sub-Saharan Africa (Straus 2015: 205-213). The size of Christian Joolas is almost the same as that of Montenegrin Albanians. Thus, to conclude, one should be cautious on not attributing too much causal weight to demographic variables like the relative size of a minority, without analyzing deeper the political context into which the minority is embedded.

To research the three empirical cases, I conducted field research in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Montenegro over a seven-month period from November 2018 until May 2019. My field research centered on semi-structured elite interviews with then-current or former prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, party leaders and deputy leaders, presidential advisors – as well as academics, journalists, and diplomats. I conducted a total of 33 interviews – 12 in Bulgaria (Sofia and Razgrad), 11 in North Macedonia (Skopje and Gostivar), 10 in Montenegro (Podgorica and Ulcinj). In addition, I sought to obtain original data from parliamentary and party archives.

1.4 Alternative Explanations: What We Know about the Causes of Violent Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict analysis is a well-established field of study. Methodologically, violent ethnic conflict represents a specific outcome that exhibits patterns across several cases that we as social scientists can examine and explain. After the end of the Cold War, the proliferation of cases of violent ethnic conflict in the Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East and sub-saharan Africa has led scholars establish many such empirical patterns. No consensus reigns, as is the case with any field of study, but here I would identify six main clusters of theory: primordialism, security dilemma and instrumentalism, institutionalism, legacy

of previous episodes of violence, diffusion/spillover effects, and finally, geopolitical competition.

1.4.1 Primordialism/Essentialism

Primordialist/essentialist theories mostly put the locus of agency in the masses and trace the root cause of ethnic violence in “old animosities” and “the realm of feelings” that are activated by inherent, immutable identity differences among people from different ethnic categories (Shils 1957; Geertz 1963; Kaplan 1993; Connor 1994). To me, despite being heavily criticized for largely being out of touch with reality⁴, these theories still continue to enlighten our understanding of the causes of violent conflict in two major ways: by singling out the role of emotions in driving human action and second by accounting for how emotion-based mechanisms activated by structural shocks (Petersen 2002) can often lead violence to take brutal and unimaginable dimensions.⁵ Beyond these contributions, essentialist theories have two shortcomings. First, they grossly overpredict the occurrence of violent ethnic conflict and second, they can not come easily to terms with more limited forms of violence such as short-term civil wars and riots which by far constitute “the more common form of ethnic violence” (Varshney 2002: 14; Horowitz 2001). In this respect, my cases should be “most likely” to experience violent conflict since the identity cleavages among the three minority and majority groups analyzed here *reinforce* rather than cut across one another. Albanians and Turks are Sunni Muslims who speak non-Slavic languages written in Latin script. By contrast, Bulgarians, Macedonians and Montenegrins are Orthodox Christians who speak Slavic languages written in Cyrillic script. Yet, the outcome variation in my cases does not bear out primordialist claims. Nor does a more modern version of essentialism cast in terms of “modern hatred” and

⁴ For a scathing critique of primordialist arguments applied to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s see Gagnon (2004: 1-8). Similarly, Rogers Brubaker refers to primordialism as “a long-dead horse that writers on ethnicity and nationalism continue to flog” (1996: 15). Murat Somer, in a more moderate critique, argues that primordialist theories applied to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s “serve more to satisfy the Western onlooker’s own self-image by distinguishing between ‘them’ (who are capable of great evil) and ‘us’ (who are immune to conflict caused by ancient hatred) than to explain the real causes of the country’s tragedy” (Somer 2001: 135).

⁵ In this respect, it is my conviction that a primordialist argument fares much better than an instrumentalist one (for instance Gagnon 2004) in explaining why violence in Bosnia (1992-95) took a genocidal turn. For instance, in a largely overlooked but important book, Michael Sells (1996) convincingly shows how the invented religious ideology of *christoslavism* (which holds that Slavs by origin are Orthodox Christians and Bosniak Muslims by converting to Islam had betrayed their “real” faith, hence deemed to be Christ-killers) emotionally driven Bosnian Serbs to commit the worst atrocities and establish the infamous rape camps in Foca, Visegrad, and Zenica.

“historical enmities” (Kaufman 2001; Grigorian and Kaufman 2007) account for the outcome variation. All three majority groups often treat their respective minorities as remnants of past “Ottoman repression” and Albanians moreover share the traumatic experience of 1912 when almost half of ethnic Albanians were left out of the borders of present-day Albania.

1.4.2 *Security dilemma and Instrumentalism*

Another cluster of theories focuses on structural characteristics such as state breakdown and postcommunist transition as critical junctures. Applying insights from neorealist IR theory on an ethnic conflict setting, scholars such as Barry Posen and James Fearon argue that state breakdown generates an anarchic domestic environment where “security dilemma” and “commitment problems” reign among ethnic groups (Posen 1993; Fearon 1998). In such a setting, such theories predict that ethnic minorities as relatively weaker are more likely to strike preemptively. While Bulgaria did not experience state breakdown, Yugoslavia did and it remains unclear why Albanians in Macedonia and Montenegro reacted differently to the anarchic environment created by the federal state collapse. Moreover, although such theories rightly point out the lack of institutions that can potentially provide credible commitments to ethnic groups, the theories are mostly applicable to the immediate transition period and lose explanatory power in later periods. In this respect, why should Macedonia experience violence in 2015, assuming that the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA)⁶ and strong international supervision significantly reduced potential insecurity and commitment problems between Albanians and Macedonians?

On the other hand, other scholars using statistical methods (Mousseau 2001; Mansfield and Snyder 2005) and case-study research (Snyder 2000) argue that countries which undergo incomplete democratization processes with weak domestic institutions create conditions for elites to resort to ethnonationalist themes to gain and/or preserve political power. These arguments have the special merit of pointing out the *intragroup* domestic mechanisms that are implicated in ethnic conflict and the ways interethnic violent conflict is often endogenous to intraethnic processes and power struggles (Brass 1991; Gagnon 1994/95; 2004). These arguments are certainly plausible, yet they display

⁶ Signed in August 2001, OFA ended the six-months long ethnic Albanian insurgency in Macedonia. It was designed as the “constitution of peace” among Albanians and Macedonians.

three shortcomings: one methodological, one theoretical, and the other empirical. Methodologically, they do not address a crucial question: Why do some elites give in to the temptation of resorting to ethnonationalist themes in some countries but not in others? Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Montenegro all underwent transition and during the 1990s especially, had weak institutions but only Macedonia experienced violent ethnic conflict. In Bulgaria especially, the then-incumbent Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) faced two times during 1990 and 1997 massive popular mobilization led by the anticommunist opposition. For instrumentalists, this would constitute an ideal environment for threatened incumbent elites to resort to ethnonationalism to preserve power.⁷ Yet, contrary to an instrumentalist logic, in both cases BSP elites stepped down and called for early elections which they subsequently lost. This methodological lacunae is a problem for instrumentalist theories in general, and it largely stems from the fact that they do not consider “negative cases” (Mahoney and Goertz 2004) in their research, that is cases in which the outcome of interest is absent.⁸ An instrumentalist theory that argues that elites provoke violent ethnic conflict for preserving political power should also be able to account for structurally similar cases where elites do *not* pursue a strategy of violent conflict. To make up for this methodological lacunae, I consider two “negative cases” in my research, Bulgaria and Montenegro.

Second, although instrumentalist theories argue that interethnic violence is endogenous to intraethnic processes and power struggles, the specific interaction patterns among majority and minority elites that lead to violence are largely underspecified. For instance, Brass emphasizes “intragroup struggles for control and of the right to speak on behalf of the group” (1991: 278) as “the critical precipitants in ethnic group conflict and political mobilization” (1991: 293) while in a much-cited study, Fearon and Laitin (1996) model ethnic violence as the breakdown of the “in-group policing” equilibrium that is otherwise responsible for sustaining interethnic cooperation. Yet, one needs to specify the interaction patterns among majority and minority ethnic groups that precipitate violence and/or break the “in-group policing” equilibrium in some cases but sustain

⁷ Indeed, as one leading instrumentalist scholar observed, “Such a strategy is quite commonly used by elites who are faced with a serious threat to their interests and values, particularly in moments of high political mobilization, economic and political liberalization, and democratization” (Gagnon 2004: 7).

⁸ For instance, all cases Mansfield and Snyder (2005) analyze in their case-based sections of the book are violence cases. Likewise, Gagnon (2004) analyzes only two “positive” cases, Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s, while Brass (1991) focuses only on “positive” cases in the Indian subcontinent.

cooperation in others. I argue that such interaction patterns will vary with the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage since the cleavage in itself will generate variation among both majority and minority elites in terms of whom they chose to ally with. For this purpose, in the next chapter, I develop a typology of interaction patterns generated under the presence and absence of a majority nationhood cleavage. I then make the argument that violent ethnic conflict and peaceful cohabitation are endogenous to the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage and the various interaction patterns it generates.

In a very recent study on social cleavages and ethnic cleansing, Zeynep Bulutgil (2016) argues that containing ethnic cleansing is endogenous to the presence of salient nonethnic cleavages (mainly class and religious-secular divide) among members of the dominant group and that the ethnic cleavage trumps other social cleavages mostly in times of territorial conflict between states.⁹ Although this study provides a refreshing look at the domestic obstacles that constrain ethnic cleansing, it assumes that in the absence of nonethnic cleavages and in case of territorial conflict among states, the dominant ethnic group will act as coherent and unified towards the nondominant groups and therefore make ethnic cleansing more likely to occur. Such an assumption, though, largely does not apply to a postcommunist context where decades of communist rule had levelled class distinctions, radically secularized the societies and regardless of the presence/absence of territorial conflict between states had already institutionalized ethnicity as the only salient cleavage.¹⁰ Moreover, as I show below, even in the absence of salient nonethnic cleavages, majority elites in postcommunist countries still differed in terms of how they visioned the status and ethno-linguistic expression of minorities. Majority groups, thus, in many cases were anything but unified in their stance towards minority groups. What led to violence in postcommunist countries, I argue, is one part of the majority group *imposing* its vision of nationhood on the other rather than *cooperating* with them. This

⁹ I am making reference here to Bulutgil's (2016) work not because hers is an instrumentalist approach. Indeed, it is not. Nor is the dependent variable of her study (i.e. ethnic cleansing that is defined as "any event in which an organization that has the capability to use coercion in a given territory permanently deports and/or kills a substantial part of an ethnic group that lives within their territory" (Bulutgil 2016: 6)) similar to the one of this study or to the other ones analyzed in the alternative explanations herein. Instead, I make reference to her work since, like instrumentalists, she endogenizes an *interethnic* outcome to *intraethnic* dynamics.

¹⁰ For an excellent collection of works on the communist legacy in Eastern Europe see the edited volume by Barany and Volgyes (1995).

interaction pattern of imposition always has the potential to polarize ethnic identities and ultimately lead to violence regardless of the presence/absence of territorial conflict between states. Thus, contrary to Bulutgil's argument that "the relative importance of ethnicity compared to other cleavages is largely endogenous to territorial conflict between states" (2016: 190), I argue that the salience of ethnicity is endogenous to intraethnic dynamics and power struggles.¹¹ This thesis draws in part on Somer (2016: 155-157) who, by focusing on a within-case comparative analysis of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey, argues that interethnic conflict can arise as a "by-product" of intraethnic power struggle between ethnic majority elites that have different conceptions of the nation.

The third shortcoming of instrumentalist theories is that they can not come easily to terms with cases of large-scale violence like ethnic cleansing and genocide. If we accept, like instrumentalists do, that ethnic identities are short-term, fluid, and amenable to manipulation for political purposes (Posner 2005), why do ethnic entrepreneurs need to foment large-scale violence when pogroms, riots, or more short-term, limited forms of war would certainly do the trick and thus polarize ethnic identities in a multiethnic society? Episodes of large-scale violence such as ethnic cleansing and genocide need to be supplemented by theories focusing on the role of ideology driving human emotions. Indeed, in a recent successful attempt to do so, Scott Straus (2015: 56) argues that "genocide requires some leap of imagination" and finds that genocide in modern Africa has occurred in those countries "where there exists a pre-crisis *founding narrative* that constructs an implicit hierarchy between a primary citizen class, defined as a social identity group, whom the state serves and a secondary citizen class whom the state should

¹¹ Indeed, since Bulutgil largely overlooks the fierce intraethnic power struggle in Serbia and Croatia between elites with different visions of nationhood, she causally attributes, erroneously I believe, the war and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia to the overwhelming success of the nationalist parties in the first democratic elections (given the absence of alternative nonethnic cleavages) and to the external territorial conflict in broader Yugoslavia (mainly the independence of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina itself) (Bulutgil 2016: 122-49). For instance, she argues that "The territorial changes within Yugoslavia were bound to increase the importance of ethnic cleavages in Bosnia even if such cleavages had not been dominant" (Bulutgil 2016: 145) and that "The predominance of the ethnic parties, especially of the SDS within the Serb community, is also crucial in understanding why the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Muslims in Bosnia started at the very beginning of the war and in the absence of significant Serb losses due to fighting or occupation (146). To me, the war and genocide in Bosnia is best explained by a combination of instrumentalist and primordialist theories. Milosevic and Tadjman's *imposition* of exclusionary policies towards minorities accounts only for the onset of the war in Bosnia. As previously stated (see footnote 6), the invented religious ideology of *christoslavism* accounts for why the war took a genocidal turn.

not serve” (Straus 2015: 58). Hence, cases with limited scale of violent ethnic conflict, like the Macedonian case herein, are more amenable to an instrumentalist approach.

1.4.3 Institutionalism

A third cluster of arguments explain ethnic peace/violence as a direct outcome of successful/unsuccessful institutional engineering. Given the wide-range of arguments proposed and the differences in their goals, it is suitable to summarize institutional approaches separately. In his pioneering work, Lijphart (1977) makes a strong case for a “consociational” solution, consisting of a grand coalition, mutual veto, proportional representation, and strengthening “segmental autonomy”.¹² Subsequent works critical of Lijphart emphasized the need to create electoral incentives that would promote interethnic elite moderation and cooperation (Horowitz 1985; 1991).¹³ In an important work, Michael Hechter (2000) argues that only some form of indirect rule is most likely to contain nationalism. He claims that containing potential violence coming from mobilized national minorities “can only be done by institutions providing decentralized decision-making within multinational states” (Hechter 2000: 33).¹⁴ Focusing on elections and ethnic violence in India, Wilkinson finds that elites from the dominant ethnic group will have strong incentives to prevent violence when *either* “minorities are an important part of their party’s current support base” *or* “when the overall electoral system is so competitive ... that there is therefore a high probability that the governing party will have to negotiate or form coalitions with minority supported parties in the future, despite its own preferences” (Wilkinson 2004: 6). Finally, in more recent quantitative studies, Cederman *et al.* (2010; 2013) argue that the likelihood that a minority group will resort to violence is contingent upon its access to central executive power.¹⁵

¹² As Lijphart (1977: 223) remarked long ago, “If political leaders of plural societies wish to establish or strengthen democratic institutions in their countries, they must become consociational engineers.” Lijphart (1977) also considered federation as a form of consociationalism.

¹³ A strong proponent of this approach, Donald Horowitz (1985: 640) considers the “alternative vote” system “to be conducive to a politics of bargaining and moderation.” Applying this framework later to a democratizing South Africa, Horowitz (1991) made the case that alternative vote provides incentives for “vote pooling” and interethnic vote transferability that compels politicians to moderate their rhetoric and claims. For a critique of Horowitz’s (1991) arguments on South Africa see Reynolds (1999).

¹⁴ This follows from the central argument of his book that since nationalism is “collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit” (Hechter 2000: 7), the rise of direct rule/centralization in multiethnic states will make those boundaries incongruent. Hence, “nationalism is most likely to emerge following the breakdown of indirect rule” (Hechter 2000: 28).

¹⁵ Again, this finding comes from Cederman *et al.* (2010: 95) conceptualization of “ethnic politics as the struggle over control of the state between various ethnically defined organizations and their constituencies”,

These arguments have two important advantages. First, they show that state policies and institutions can decisively affect the course of interethnic relations in a multiethnic society. Second, they make clear that there is no single best institutional design that can function properly in various multiethnic settings. Despite these advantages, there are two main weaknesses in institutionalist theories, one theoretical and the other empirical. First, such arguments suggest that those institutions that have a built-in democratic/liberal logic are most likely to prevent ethnic violence.¹⁶ I argue instead that any institutional formula proposed without taking into account the interaction patterns among the majority elites who design them will not tell us much about the prospects such institutions have for containing violence. Instead, I propose that institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of cooperation, even though they might sometimes be illiberal/undemocratic in themselves, are most likely to contain interethnic tensions from escalating into violence. As I am going to argue below, the constitutional clause prohibiting ethnic parties in postcommunist Bulgaria in itself was quite illiberal and undemocratic. Yet, the fact that it was designed out of close cooperation and consensus among the communist successor party and the anti-communist one effectively de-ethnicized political space in Bulgaria and eventually paved the way for peaceful interethnic relations.

On the other hand, institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of imposition, even though they often might be democratic in themselves, are less likely to contain violence. The persistent “grand coalitions” in postcommunist Macedonia and the OFA-mandated multiethnic reforms enacted after the 2001 armed conflict did little to prevent interethnic tension from erupting into violence again, given that the two main parties representing ethnic Macedonians, holding different visions of nationhood, have almost never cooperated with each other.

Empirically, institutionalist theories can not account for the outcome variation in my cases. While they might be able to account for the absence of violent conflict in Bulgaria, where ethnic Turks have been junior partners in two ruling coalitions (in 2001 and

out of which they hypothesize that “The probability of ethnonationalist conflict increases the more representatives of an ethnic group are excluded from central executive power” (Cederman *et al.* 2010: 95).

¹⁶ This criticism applies also to a very recent contribution to institutionalist scholarship which argues that the precise effect of particular institutions depends on “whether a specific policy is employed for inclusion or exclusion at the group and individual levels in the broader context of ethnic incorporation” (Alptekin 2017: 2675).

2005)¹⁷, and Montenegro, where ethnic Albanians have joined seven out of eleven postcommunist ruling coalitions, they almost certainly can not account for the Macedonian case. Macedonia embodies almost all empirical conditions that existing institutionalist theory tells us should have led to interethnic cooperation: it is a quintessential example of power-sharing in a multiethnic setting¹⁸, it has enacted significant decentralization reforms and it is almost certain that Macedonian majority parties will have to negotiate and form coalitions with minority-based parties to form a majority government. The interethnic outcome, though, contradicts the empirical implications of institutionalist theories.¹⁹

Last, a recent detailed comparative study of conflict dynamics in Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Macedonia deserves closer inspection. Taking the end of communism as a critical juncture, Koinova (2013: 13) argues that Macedonia experienced more violence than Bulgaria because ethnic Albanians' constitutional status was decreased (i.e. from nationality during communism to minority) and this change in status was reinforced by co-opting ethnic minority elites which eventually led to the minority developing a two-pronged strategy towards the state: accepting state institutions at some point and developing clandestine activities at another. By contrast, ethnic Turks' constitutional status was increased in Bulgaria (i.e. forceful assimilation was banned) and this change was reinforced again by co-opting ethnic minority elites which eventually led to the minority fully accepting state institutions (Koinova 2013: 13). Applying path-dependence (Pierson 2004) on ethnic conflict analysis, she then argues that "informally institutionalized conflict dynamics" at critical junctures self-perpetuate and become

¹⁷ Indeed, Wilkinson (2004) claims that his theoretical framework can explain why interethnic relations in postcommunist Bulgaria were peaceful. He argues that "The reason why Bulgaria escaped violence lies in the unexpected results of the 1991 transitional elections, that placed DPS (i.e. the party representing ethnic Turks) in a key position to determine the majority government. Ahmet Dogan's DPS over the next few years switched his support first to the UDF (i.e. the anti-communist party) and then to BSP (i.e. the communist successor party)" (Wilkinson 2004: 225-6). Wilkinson, though, does not discuss or even mention the Macedonian case. If he had, he would have certainly realized that the ethnic Albanian party in Macedonia, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD), when it held a monopoly of ethnic Albanian representation (1991-94), had much more political clout than DPS in Bulgaria in determining the majority government, yet the course of interethnic relations gradually took a violent turn in Macedonia.

¹⁸ Indeed, ethnic Albanian parties have been junior partners in *all* postcommunist ruling coalitions. This should make it a "most likely" case to remain ethnically peaceful, yet the complete opposite has been the case.

¹⁹ Indeed, Cederman *et al.* (2010) explicitly acknowledge that their theoretical framework can not explain the 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia. They admit that the violent conflict "among groups in power" in Macedonia "illustrate a general limitation of our research design" (Cederman *et al.* 2010: 108-9).

difficult to change at later periods (Koinova 2013: chap. 7). This work represents a successful application of historical institutionalism on ethnic conflict studies and certainly illuminates several aspects of conflict dynamics in Bulgaria and Macedonia, yet its empirical implications fail to account for the episodes of violence in the post-Ohrid period. Stated differently, given that for Koinova constitutional status change of minorities is what starts the causal chain, how can we explain the 2015 large-scale violent clashes in Macedonia?²⁰ By any standard, 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement represents another critical juncture since it radically redefined interethnic relations: constitutional status of Albanians significantly improved as they became a *constituent* element of the state, Macedonia constitutionally became a bilingual state, the principle of double majority in ethnic issues (legally the Badinter principle) was instituted and significant decentralization reforms took hold. Major episodes of violence should be less likely in such a setting, yet this was not the case.

1.4.4 Legacy of Previous Episodes of Violence

A fourth cluster highlights the importance of past experiences of violent ethnic conflict. (Laitin 1995; Rydgren 2007). As Cederman *et al.* (2010: 97) point out, if relations among ethnic groups in the past have been marked by violence, this means that “violence is no longer unthinkable but constitutes part of the accepted repertoire of action and ... even create a culture of violence.” While there is no denying that history certainly matters, one empirical implication of such a theory is that postcommunist Bulgaria should have been more violence-prone than Macedonia. Even though Albanian-Macedonian relations during communism did experience episodes of violence, like the 1981 violent riots in Tetovo (Poulton 1991), they generally were quite peaceful. Interethnic violence thus constituted the exception rather than the norm during communism. Communist Bulgaria, by contrast, since early 1960s, gradually institutionalized a brutal assimilation policy towards ethnic Turks, violently trying to eradicate their ethnic and religious identity. The so-called “rebirth-campaign” reached its peak in March 1985 when communist dictator Todor Zhivkov publicly declared that “there are no more Turks in Bulgaria” (Eminov 1997: 127). This led ethnic Turks to form underground resistance organizations and wage a low-intensity violent struggle for three years (1986-89). In a very recent study, Alptekin (2017: 2685) points out that from 1986 to 1989, a total of 42 separate Turkish resistance

²⁰ The 2015 violent clashes are obviously not addressed in her book since the book was published in 2013.

organizations were formed in Bulgaria. To be sure, this traumatic experience definitely had an impact on postcommunist interethnic relations, yet paradoxically, it set them on a relatively peaceful path. As I am going to elaborate on further below, ethnic Bulgarian elites from both the communist successor party and democratic opposition, because of the salience of ethnic identity generated by the “rebirth-campaign”, agreed upon de-ethnicizing political space and officially forging a civic conception of Bulgarian nationhood.

1.4.5 Diffusion/Spillover Effects

A fifth cluster of arguments emphasizes that the 2001 insurgency in Macedonia was a result of diffusion/spillover effects from the 1998/99 war in Kosovo (Hislope 2003; Phillips 2004; Engström 2009; Koinova 2013). This approach plausibly underscores how diffusion mechanisms in general increase the likelihood of violent ethnic conflict²¹, yet its empirical implications fail to elucidate the situation in Macedonia for three main reasons. First, diffusion arguments imply that violence is most likely to spillover to regions inhabited by the insurgents’ ethnic kin. Then, why did spillover effects from Kosovo war *not* cause any ethnic Albanian insurgency in neighboring Montenegro, where Albanians constitute 6,6 % of the population?²² Second, the “spillover” argument implies that the main mechanism that increases the likelihood of violent conflict is weapon availability. Again, Montenegro is not different from Macedonia in this respect either. More strikingly, I argue that in both countries weapons were not in short supply even before the Kosovo war. Students of Balkan history should be familiar with the fact that Montenegrin Albanians, Kosovars and Macedonian Albanians are overwhelmingly *Ghegs*²³, a highlander community among whom there has been and still exists a persistently strong “gun and honour culture”, where every male is expected to keep weapons in his residence (Hislope 2004). Moreover, after the collapse of the pyramid investment schemes in Albania in 1997, the Albania-Montenegro porous border, like Albania’s border with Macedonia and Kosovo, became an epicentre of weapon

²¹ For a more detailed treatment of how diffusion mechanisms increase the likelihood of violent ethnic conflict see Lake and Rothchild 1998.

²² MONSTAT; Statistical Office of Montenegro; Available online at <http://www.monstat.org/eng/>. The figure is from the 1991 population census.

²³ One of the two major subgroups that inhabits the north of Albania, the other being the *Tosks* who live south of Shkumbini river. For more on the history of the two subgroups in Albania see Vickers 2006.

smuggling. In brief, it is clear that weapons have never been in short supply among Montenegrin Albanians either, yet the interethnic relations have been very peaceful.

This “gun and honour culture” combined with several local criminal activities constitute a common *grassroots/local* dynamic for both Macedonian and Montenegrin Albanian communities, however the pattern of interethnic relations at the *national* level is very different among the two cases. Hence, this challenges the micro-level explanations of ethnic violence in the literature which maintain that conflicts and violence “often seem more related to local issues rather than the ‘master cleavage’ that drives the civil war at the national level” (Kalyvas 2006: 364). Montenegro and North Macedonia at least, show that the presence/absence of a majority nationhood (master) cleavage at the national level matters more than the local dynamics for the pattern of interethnic relations.

Third, the “spillover” argument can not account for the most recent wave of violence between Albanians and Macedonians in May 2015. There was no war in Kosovo going on in 2015, Kosovo’s status had been resolved mostly in favor of Albanians²⁴ and yet violent conflict persists in Macedonia.

1.4.6 Geopolitical Competition

Finally, in a recent contribution, Harris Mylonas (2013) argues that the majority group’s policies towards minorities²⁵ and by extension, the outcome of interethnic relations, is contingent upon the foreign policy goals of the host state and its external relations with the state supporting the minority group.²⁶ Hence, a host state is more likely to exclude a minority group, potentially with violent means, when it has revisionist foreign policy goals *and* the minority is externally supported by an enemy of the host state. In a more recent co-authored article with Keith Darden, Mylonas further develops this logic and argues that “interstate competition and, more specifically, the presence of external threats to a state’s territorial integrity create incentives” for homogenous nation-building policies (Darden and Mylonas 2016: 1447). This argument is among the exceptional studies in the

²⁴ Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence on February 17, 2008.

²⁵ Actually, Mylonas (2013) introduces a new typology differentiating between “core” and “non-core groups” that closely matches the distinction between majority and minority groups in multiethnic polities. Furthermore, the dependent variable of Mylonas’ study, nation-building policies, is not the same with mine, although, what he refers to as a policy of “accommodation” overlaps with my interethnic outcome of “ethnic peace” whereas what Mylonas (2013) refers to as a policy of “exclusion” partially overlaps with my interethnic outcome of “violent ethnic conflict”.

²⁶ Indeed, juxtaposing his theory directly to that of Anderson and Gellner, Mylonas argues that “Nationalism is more a contingent outcome of a strategic response by statesmen to modern conditions of geopolitical competition than the product of industrialization or print capitalism per se” (Mylonas 2013: xxi).

scholarship on ethnicity and nationalism that seeks to *explain* why nation-states pursue homogenizing policies towards minority groups instead of merely assuming the existence of such policies. Yet, on the other hand, by assuming that elites of majority groups respond only to geostrategic concerns, Mylonas (2013) completely overlooks the domestic political imperatives and treats majority elites as coherent and unified when instituting the nation-building policies. Once we relax such assumption, we are confronted with a different picture. Indeed, the interethnic violence in North Macedonia contradicts the empirical implications of Mylonas' (2013) theory. Postcommunist Macedonia is clearly a status-quo state and ethnic Albanians as a "non-core group" are supported, among others, by externally friendly (the U.S. and EU) and at least not hostile (Albania) states. While Mylonas (2013) would predict an accommodationist policy towards Albanians, this often has not been the case.

In a more recent work on the subject, Belgin San-Akca (2016) provides a more convincing argument by integrating also domestic political imperatives with the international dynamics. Her argument that international rivalry between external/sponsor governments and target states impacts both how sponsors select rebel groups and how rebels select their foreign patrons might have some explanatory power as far as the 2001 insurgency in North Macedonia is concerned. Indeed, among the three cases analyzed here, North Macedonia has arguably the most anti-NATO/anti-West mainstream party (VMRO), and it has also to be noted that the two major instances of violent ethnic conflict in Macedonia (2001 and 2015) happened under VMRO incumbency and in one of them (2001) NATO implicitly supported the Albanian rebels of NLA. However, here I develop the argument that Macedonia is so susceptible to external influences primarily because of its internal divisions. In other words, my argument indicates that it is nationhood cleavage that might put the country into rivalry with other international actors, it makes the country more vulnerable to international influences, and it gives leverage to restive minority counter-elites (like the insurgent NLA in 2001).

1.5 The Argument in Brief

My argument is premised on two observations. First, ethnic groups themselves do not rule. Instead their representatives rule and they are often divided among themselves over *how* to rule over the ethno-linguistic heterogeneity of their social domain. Stated differently, elites of the majority group are often divided by a salient nationhood cleavage.

Second, the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage generates different interaction patterns among representatives of majority and minority groups.

First, drawing on a recent study that reconceptualizes state policies towards ethnic diversity (Aktürk 2012) and slightly revising it for present purposes, I argue that majority elites often differ significantly in terms of how they vision the ethno-linguistic expression of minority groups in the political system. I distinguish between a *multiethnic* vision of nationhood that supports the expression of ethnic diversity of minority groups and as such actively promotes ethno-linguistic rights for them; and a *non-multiethnic* vision of nationhood that is against the expression of ethnic diversity of minority groups and as such actively opposes ethno-linguistic rights for them. Moreover, politics in multiethnic societies with a majority nationhood cleavage revolves around both minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights *and* resource distribution. Both are closely interrelated and often minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights becomes a smokescreen for concealing what essentially is a concern with resource distribution. Likewise, Somer (2016) in his analysis of the dynamics of the Kurdish conflict in early republican Turkey finds out that the Turkish-Kurdish conflict emerged partly as a "by-product" of conflicts Turkish majority elites had over issues unrelated to ethnicity and nationhood. These elites were instead divided over modernization visions, nature of secularism, power sharing, authority and over the question of leadership. As Somer (2016: 156) argues, "The Kurdish question was of secondary importance compared to the secularism question (secular versus Islamic modernization)."

From a theoretical perspective, nationhood cleavages are important because they generate different interaction patterns among representatives of majority and minority groups. Assuming that the majority group is represented by two main political parties, when these parties are divided by a salient nationhood cleavage, I argue that it is more likely that one party will try to *impose* its vision of nationhood on the other. On its part, the minority group, assuming that it is initially represented by a single party, intuitively will try to *collude* and ally itself with the majority party that has a multiethnic vision of nationhood to advance its own ethno-linguistic rights and *protect* itself from the non-multiethnic party that seeks to *dominate* it. Regardless of which majority party is incumbent, the pattern of imposition in itself always has the potential to generate majority and minority counterelites that are dissatisfied with the status of minority rights and/or

resource distribution and often end up allying with each other. In such settings, the consistent empirical pattern is allied majority and minority counterelites seeking to ethnicize political space and ethnically outbid their allied majority and minority counterparts. Hence, *double ethnic outbidding* is the main causal mechanism that leads to violence.

On the other hand, assuming again that the majority group is represented by two main parties, when both these parties hold the same vision of nationhood, be it multiethnic as in the case of Montenegro or non-multiethnic as in the case of Bulgaria, they will be more likely to *cooperate* with each other when instituting ethnic policies. The cooperation on ethnic policies does not necessarily preclude the emergence of counterelites dissatisfied with resource distribution, yet, I argue that it does effectively preclude the emergence of counterelites dissatisfied with the status of ethno-linguistic rights of minorities. Stated differently, when majority parties hold the same vision of nationhood, I do *not* expect majority and minority counterelites who would push for change in the status of ethno-linguistic rights of minorities. Hence, I expect an effective *de-ethnicization* of political space under this scenario. On its part, the minority group, assuming again that it is initially represented by only one political party, will try to *collude* with either one of majority parties. It will not prioritize any majority party since neither will push for changing its status of ethno-linguistic rights. Essentially, I expect the minority party to ally itself with the highest bidder; whichever majority party will offer the best deal in terms of resource distribution, that is the party the minority will collude with.

Finally, as stated above, even when both majority parties hold the same vision of nationhood, under conditions of electoral competition this does not necessarily preclude the emergence of counterelites dissatisfied with resource distribution. Yet, even when such counterelites do emerge and choose to mobilize the masses to push for change, in a relatively de-ethnicized political environment, I do not expect the incumbent majority party to resort to ethnonationalist themes and violence to deflect popular anger onto a convenient ethnic target.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and specifies its observable implications. It provides theoretical and empirical justification for the argument that the presence of a majority nationhood cleavage can often lead to violent ethnic conflict in a multiethnic polity whereas the absence of such a cleavage can prevent interethnic tensions from escalating into violence. As such, my argument stands on two pillars. The first is the idea that majority elites in multiethnic countries often differ significantly in terms of how they vision the ethno-linguistic expression of minority groups in the political system. This idea goes against the dominant view in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship that breaks ethnic conflict into only two constituent actor-types: a unified majority group that seeks to dominate minority groups. Hence, by arguing that majority groups are often divided among themselves by salient nationhood cleavages, I try to problematize and explain rather than assume that the fundamental logic underlying the modern nation-state is that of a unified majority ethnic group seeking to impose homogeneity into an otherwise heterogenous social space.

The second pillar of the argument is that the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage has important implications for the patterns of interactions among representatives of majority and minority groups. Specifying these interaction patterns is crucial for uncovering the causal mechanisms through which the presence of a nationhood cleavage can lead to violent ethnic conflict while its absence can foster interethnic cooperation.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, I offer a conceptual and operational definition for nationhood cleavage. In the second section, I go through some major works in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship that assume that the modern nation-state has a built-in homogenizing logic, thus, inexorably generating horizontal inequality and polarized identities in an ethnically diverse social space and ultimately often leading to violence. In the third section, I show how relaxing the assumption of a unified dominant group theoretically and empirically challenges the assumed homogenizing logic of the nation-state. In this section, I also graphically illustrate the interaction patterns generated among representatives of majority and minority groups under the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage and show how these

patterns might lead to interethnic violence and peace. Finally, I conclude by discussing the observable implications of my argument.

2.1 Conceptually and Operationally Defining Nationhood Cleavage

I develop the concept of nationhood cleavage by drawing on a recent reconceptualization of state policies towards ethnic diversity. Şener Aktürk (2012) argues that state policies towards ethnic diversity, for which he coins the term “regimes of ethnicity”, can be categorized along a membership and expression dimension. Accordingly, states that restrict membership to the nation to a specific ethnic group are said to have a “monoethnic regime”. On the other hand, when the state grants multiple ethnic groups membership to the nation, either it does not allow expression of ethnic diversity, thus constituting an “antiethnic regime”, or it allows and institutionalizes the expression of ethnic diversity, hence constituting a “multiethnic regime”. Drawing on this new typology and slightly revising it for present purposes, in this dissertation, when talking about a nationhood cleavage among elites of the majority group I distinguish between:

1. a *multiethnic* vision of nationhood that supports the expression of ethnic diversity of minority groups and as such actively promotes ethno-linguistic rights for them.
2. a *non-multiethnic* vision of nationhood that is against the expression of ethnic diversity of minority groups and as such actively opposes ethno-linguistic rights for them.

I thus compress the property space and combine Aktürk’s (2012) “monoethnic” and “antiethnic” types into a *non-multiethnic* regime type. Admittedly, such a move comes at the expense of foregoing some of the descriptive richness of the original typology, yet it also has two important advantages. First, as I am going to elaborate on further below, it allows for a much more parsimonious analysis of the interaction patterns between and within majority and minority groups. Hence, if we assume the majority group is represented by two main parties, with two visions of nationhood, there are only three empirically possible dyads: both majority parties share a multiethnic vision of nationhood¹; both majority parties share a non-multiethnic vision of nationhood²; one majority party has a multiethnic vision while the other a non-multiethnic vision of

¹ The case of Montenegro herein exemplifies this dyad. Another similar case I am going to refer to is Spain after the transition to democracy in mid-1970s.

² The case of Bulgaria herein exemplifies this dyad. Another similar case I am going to refer to is Greece after the transition to democracy in mid-1970s.

nationhood³. Second, it avoids much of the controversy often accompanying scholarly efforts to empirically differentiate between monoethnic and antiethnic regime types, with some scholars often claiming that “antiethnic” is merely a cover for what is essentially a “monoethnic” understanding of nationhood.⁴

What is also significant for my purposes here is that Aktürk (2011) convincingly shows that members of majority groups often have different discourses linking ethnicity to nationhood. Indeed, according to the theoretical framework he develops, the existence of *elites* from majority groups who have a different *discourse* on nationhood from the status-quo one constitute two necessary elements for changing state’s regime of ethnicity⁵, and the very fact that state policies towards ethnic diversity can change challenges the hegemonic view in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship which holds the opposite.⁶

To be sure, my focus here is not on states’ ethnicity regimes but rather on the peaceful and violent patterns of interethnic relations in multiethnic polities. Yet, I argue that the existence of a salient nationhood cleavage among elites of the majority group has causal effect also on the patterns of interethnic relations. Moreover, a further implication of the aforementioned hegemonic view which Aktürk (2011) persuasively challenges is

³ The case of Macedonia herein exemplifies this dyad. Another similar case I am going to refer to is the Republic of Turkey (1923-present).

⁴ To give a prominent example of such an empirical controversy, there is still an ongoing debate among Turkish political scientists on whether Turkish definition of nationhood before the 2009 minority language broadcasting reforms constituted an antiethnic or monoethnic regime, or actually a mix of the two. On one side of the debate, Şener Aktürk (2009) argues that Turkey’s founding republican elites essentially adopted the French antiethnic model of nation-building and the migration patterns (mostly Balkan Muslims migrating to Turkey after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire) in themselves contradict the notion that Turkey’s model of nation-building was monoethnic. On the other side of the debate, Murat Somer (2016) argues that Turkey’s definition of nationhood was “a mix of ethnic and civic models.” Moreover, he also adds that “the presence of civic elements did not prevent the exclusion of (ethnic) Kurdish identity and Kurds being seen as a threat.” See his *Milada Dönüş* (Somer 2016: 87). Acknowledging the contributions of both sides to the debate, I argue that much of this empirical controversy could have been avoided if we defined pre-2009 Turkish model of nationhood as simply *non-multiethnic*. A similar controversy exists also in the Bulgarian case over whether Todor Zhivkov’s assimilationist policies towards ethnic Turks make the Bulgarian model a monoethnic or antiethnic. Yet, certainly no one would dispute the claim that the communist Bulgarian model, contrary to the Marxist-Leninist legacy on the national question, was non-multiethnic.

⁵ Aktürk refers to such elites as *counterelites* and defines them as “the political elite that is linked with, and representative of, constituents with ethnically specific grievances against the continuation of the ethnicity regime” (Aktürk 2011: 133). As a side issue, the third necessary element that combined with the other two becomes jointly sufficient for changing a state’s ethnicity regime is electoral hegemony of counterelites over the opposition (Aktürk 2011: 134).

⁶ As Aktürk (2011: 156) puts it, “although very difficult and rare, these institutions *can* change. This is an important corrective to the belief, implied or explicitly stated by many scholars of ethnicity and nationalism, that *the* nation-state has certain policies on ethnicity and that these policies are an immutable part of its existence.” (*italics* in original)

that, as state policies towards ethnicity are assumed to be unchangeable, minority groups have either to assimilate into the dominant culture or be excluded, with such processes (i.e. assimilation and exclusion) often taking violent forms. Indeed, such a dominant view still persists (most recently articulated by Cederman *et al.* 2013 and Wimmer 2013) and the nation-state model is still assumed to generate horizontal inequality, assimilation, and exclusion.

I argue instead that homogenizing policies are not (and should not be) an end in itself for the nation-state, instead they are only means to an end: cementing the loyalty of the masses to the state (see also Somer 2016: 71-78). Although arguably such an end can be more easily achieved with a homogenous body, it does not necessarily have to be so. Indeed, as Somer (2016: 73) points out, not only Japan and Sweden that are ethnically homogeneous relatively, but also highly heterogeneous countries like America and India have eventually succeeded in building a common overarching national identity. Hence, the nation-state does not necessarily generate assimilation and exclusion of minority groups. It can also accept them as members of the nation providing a range of ethno-linguistic rights from equal to those of the majority group⁷ to minimal ones. Yet, all these scenarios need to be *explained*, not merely assumed. Stated differently, we need to problematize the dominant view in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship that assumes the fundamental logic underlying the modern nation-state is that of a unified majority ethnic group seeking to impose homogeneity into an otherwise heterogeneous social space by either assimilating or excluding minority ethnic groups. In this dissertation I argue that the peaceful or violent patterns of interethnic relations in a multiethnic society are often more a function of domestic dynamics within majority groups; they are often contingent on the presence/absence of a majority nationhood cleavage. Accordingly, my two central arguments are as follows:

1. When the nation-state does generate violent interethnic relations, often through policies of assimilation and/or exclusion, it is the outcome of majoritarian or authoritarian imposition of ethnic policies by elites of the majority group, in which other elites with a different vision of nationhood are either sidelined or silenced.

⁷ In which case there is not going to be any more a dominant group in society but rather a consociation of (theoretically) equal ethnic groups together constituting the nation. Both the Soviet Union, as the pioneer of such a model, and later other multiethnic communist countries, were founded on such a premise. For an excellent discussion of the national question in Marxist-Leninist theory and practice see Connor (1984).

2. On the other hand, when the nation-state does generate peaceful interethnic relations, it is often the outcome of cooperation among majority elites sharing the same vision of nationhood.

If nationhood visions are indeed causally important, this begs the question of where they originate from and why they often are so persistent and difficult to change. In trying to answer these questions in the context of postcommunist countries, I develop a constructivist argument: nationhood visions were forged politically by pre-communist and communist state policies and their persistence in the postcommunist period is endogenous to partisan competition and competitive politics. By theorizing about why nationhood visions do *not* change, my argument contributes to constructivist theories of ethnic identity that largely focus on explaining why ethnic identities *do* change. In other words, in addition to change, I suggest that the persistence in the salience of nationhood visions should be equally puzzling for constructivist theories to consider. Moreover, in constructivist scholarship, partisan competition and competitive politics has been largely used to explain why ethnic identities are so fluid and frequently change (Brass 1991; Chandra 2004; Wilkinson 2004; Posner 2005). In this dissertation, by contrast, I use partisan competition to explain why nationhood visions persist.

Before elaborating on these points further, I briefly go through some major works in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship that assume the modern nation-state has a built-in homogenizing logic, hence generating horizontal inequality, exclusion, and polarized identities.

2.2 The Dominant View

An excursus into the origins and spread of nationalism and the nation-state would show that most scholars agree not only that the nation-state is a product of modernity and originated roughly in late eighteenth century in Western Europe, but also that the nation-state has a built-in homogenizing logic.⁸ Regardless of whether the quest for homogeneity was initially driven by the structural imperatives of industrialization (Gellner 1983) or print capitalism (Anderson 1983), it has two interrelated implications. First, it assumes that the nation-state establishes the dominance of a unified and coherent ethnic group and

⁸ I refer mostly to modernist scholarship since it is the dominant view on the origin and spread of nationalism and nation-states. Yet, when it comes to the homogenizing logic the nation is assumed to be built on, the modernist view is not much different from the primordialist one. For instance, Walker Connor, a leading primordialist, defines a nation as a “self-differentiating ethnic group” and claims that a nation can only be monoethnic (Connor 1994: 42).

of the language closely associated with that group. Second, it assumes that nondominant (i.e. minority) ethnic groups will either have to assimilate into the dominant culture or they will eventually be excluded. As such, the nation-state model is assumed to generate horizontal inequality among ethnic groups and polarized identities, thereby often leading to violence.⁹

Ernest Gellner is perhaps the first among nationalism scholars to exemplify the modernist obsession with ethno-linguistic homogeneity.¹⁰ In his famous definition of nationalism, he argues that it is “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1983: 1), and *the* principal indicator of achieving such congruence is the language domination of the ethnic group the nation is associated with. Likewise, Anderson’s (1983) famous “imagined communities” by definition denotes a linguistically homogenous community.¹¹ Eric Hobsbawm (1992) insightfully describes how during the first phase of nationalism, “the bourgeois liberal phase” (1830-70), the nation-state represented “unquestionably a phase in human evolution or progress from the small group to the larger” (Hobsbawm 1992: 38), and as such relied exclusively on an assimilationist logic; whereas during the second and third phase (1870-1945), “nationalism mutated from a concept associated with liberalism and the left, into a chauvinist, imperialist and xenophobic movement of the right” (Hobsbawm 1992: 121), relying mostly on “the mass expulsion or extermination of minorities” (133).¹² Combining a Gellnerian style of analysis with rational choice perspective, Hechter (2000: 7) also influentially defined nationalism as “the collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit” and avered that “violence is a too-frequent by-product of nationalist conflict” (Hechter 2000:

⁹ Henceforth, when using the terms “polarized ethnic identities” and “polarization”, I adopt Somer’s (2001: 128) definition: “ethnic polarization is defined as a cascade process of individual reactions, whereby a particular image of ethnic identities, what I call the divisive image, is enhanced among the members of a multiethnic society. The divisive image implies a definition of ethnic identities as mutually exclusive and incompatible with belonging to the same nation.”

¹⁰ Actually, writing before both Anderson and Gellner, Arend Lijphart (1977), not an ethnicity and nationalism scholar in the strict sense of the term, has also argued that the nation-states “replace segmental loyalties by a common national allegiance”, thereby stimulating “intersegmental violence” (Lijphart 1977: 24). Instead, Lijphart (1977) proposes that in order to prevent violence and promote democracy, segmental loyalties in society should be strengthened, constituting one of the four characteristics of his consociational model.

¹¹ Given these facts, it is ironic that both Anderson and Gellner considered language domination an instrument of inclusion. As Anderson (1983: 191-2) himself noted “language is not an instrument of exclusion.” Clearly, for both scholars linguistic assimilation was an instrument of inclusion, ignoring its exclusionary side.

¹² This is why Hobsbawm refers to the “ethnically and linguistically homogenous entities which came to be seen as the standard form of ‘nation-state’ in the West” (Hobsbawm 1992: 169).

33), spurred by the tendency of modern age to centralize rule and erode forms of indirect rule.¹³

More recently, this dominant view is carried on by other influential thinkers. Andreas Wimmer (2002) argues that while premodern polities were premised on a logic of “hierarchical inclusion”, the hallmark of the nation-state model is “horizontal exclusion”, distributing the benefits of modernity unequally along ethnic lines. Given that “Political modernisation ... leads *everywhere* to similar forms of exclusion” (Wimmer 2002: 14; *italics my emphasis*), it is assumed that “ethnic conflicts and xenophobia/racism are integral parts of the modern order of nation-states” (Wimmer 2002: 5).¹⁴ In his later award-winning *Waves of War*, he reinforces the idea that the principle of ethnic self-rule brought about by the modern nation-state leads to “exclusionary ethno-political configurations of power”, especially in resource-poor polities with weak civil societies, and “breeds violent conflict” (Wimmer 2013: 8). Mann (2005) likewise argues that modernity in incompletely democratized multiethnic societies generates “organic” conceptions of democracy that fuses *demos* with *ethnos* and makes “suppression of deviant minorities” more likely (Mann 2005: 4; 55). Moreover, even the stably institutionalized democracies of Northwestern Europe in their past

committed sufficient ethnic cleansing to produce an essentially *mono-ethnic* citizen body in the present. In their past, cleansing and democratization proceeded hand in hand. Liberal democracies were built on top of ethnic cleansing (Mann 2005: 4; *italics my emphasis*)¹⁵

¹³ This also sheds light on the central puzzle of Hechter’s book as to why nationalism is a modern phenomenon. Given that all forms of *premodern* polities relied on some sort of indirect rule, the boundaries of the nation and the governance unit were largely congruent, so “indirect rule thwarts nationalism” (Hechter 2000: 27-8). The hallmark of the modern nation-state instead became centralization, thereby breaking the local ethno-linguistic homogeneity that indirect rule afforded (Hechter 2000: 56).

¹⁴ What is also very significant for my purposes here is that Wimmer causally attributes the spread of violent ethnic conflict in the post-Cold War period precisely to the shift of post-Soviet and Yugoslav states to the nation-state model in this period (Wimmer 2002: 91-101). At this specific point, he probably followed the lead of Brubaker (1996) who argued that Soviet and Yugoslav successor states were bent on becoming “nationalizing states” in order to complete the homogenous nation-state project. In a similar move, Petersen (2002) considers both interwar and post-Cold War periods as constituting a “similar case” comparison where “a *stable* nation-state developed policies establishing the dominance of the titular group” (Petersen 2002: 166-7; *italics my emphasis*). As I aim to show, the titular group, especially in Yugoslav successor states, often was not that stable as assumed by the above-cited works, and this crucially affected the pattern of interethnic relations in those countries.

¹⁵ In a recent contribution reminiscent of Mann’s (2005) *The Dark Side of Democracy*, Philipp Ther (2014) in *The Dark Side of Nation-States* goes through a *begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) of ethnic cleansing and reaches the conclusion that as a concept it is intrinsically linked with the emergence of the modern nation-state.

In addition to Mann, two renowned democratization scholars also find the logic of nation-state not to be conducive to democratic consolidation. According to Linz and Stepan (1996: 417),

The logic of the nation-state produces a political language and a set of descriptive terms whose discursive effect is to create polar identities and to work against the multiple complementary identities that make possible democratic life in a de facto multinational state.¹⁶

Finally, the most recent expression of the dominant view comes from Cederman, Buhaug, and Gleditsch (2013) who think of nationalism “as a generator of ‘categorical inequality’ since nationalist politics hinges on who is in and who is out” (Cederman *et al.* 2013: 34). Hence, *ethno*-nationalism that denotes the capture of state power by a dominant ethnic group generates ethnically motivated grievances, thereby making violent conflict more likely.

2.3 Relaxing the Dominant Assumption of a Unified Majority Ethnic Group: Toward an Alternative Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework starts with a simple observation. Even if we accept the dominant assumption that the nation-state is associated with ethnic self-rule, this still begs the question: rule by whom among the dominant group? Ethnic groups themselves do not rule. Instead their representatives rule and often they are divided among themselves over *how* to rule. Given that ethno-linguistic heterogeneity is more the norm rather than the exception of social reality, this means that representatives of the ethnic group that is assumed to have established the nation often differ in terms of how they vision the ethno-linguistic expression of minority ethnic groups. In the previous sections, I distinguished between a multiethnic and non-multiethnic vision of nationhood. Assuming that the majority group is represented by two main political parties, there are only three empirically possible dyads:

- 1) One of the majority parties has a multiethnic vision of nationhood whereas the other has a non-multiethnic vision
- 2) Both majority parties share a multiethnic vision of nationhood

¹⁶ Given that Linz and Stepan (1996) find the logic of the nation-state often incompatible with that of a pluralist democracy, they came up and later fully developed the concept of “state-nation” (Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011). Somer (2016) applies this new paradigm to the Kurdish question in Turkey, coming up with concrete recommendations on how to solve the question within the framework of a pluralist/liberal democracy.

3) Both majority parties share a non-multiethnic vision of nationhood

Let's first analyze the scenario of a multiethnic society with a nationhood cleavage among the majority group.

2.3.1 Multiethnic Society with a Majority Nationhood Cleavage

Initially, let's also assume that a given minority group is represented by only one political party. When there exists a nationhood cleavage among parties of the majority group, then we have a total of three actor-types that we can represent with the following notation¹⁷:

A – majority party with a multiethnic vision
B - majority party with a non-multiethnic vision
C- minority party

With only three actor-types, there are six possible permutations of interactions among them:

<i>A-B</i>	<i>B-A</i>	<i>C-A</i>
<i>A-C</i>	<i>B-C</i>	<i>C-B</i>

To describe the pattern of interaction among each of the six dyads, I develop a typology of four interaction patterns. Interaction dyads and the four different interaction patterns I identify may be shown graphically on a 3 x 3 table.

Table 2.1 Interaction dyads and patterns in a multiethnic society with majority nationhood cleavage and a single minority party (3 actor-types; 6 interaction dyads; 4 patterns of interaction).

with Interaction of	A	B	C
A		imposition	collusion
B	imposition		domination
C	collusion	protection	

The interaction patterns represent the hypothesized objectives of each actor-type, given a certain interaction. First, I hypothesize that when the majority parties are divided by a salient nationhood cleavage, it is more likely that one party will try to *impose* its

¹⁷ In developing the following framework, I have been influenced by the game-theoretical notation introduced by Ian Bremmer (1993).

vision of nationhood on the other (represented by the dyads A-B and B-A). Second, the majority party with a non-multiethnic vision poses the most direct threat to the minority party since it opposes any ethno-linguistic rights for it and thus will be more likely to seek to *dominate* it (dyad B-C). Third, I hypothesize that the minority party will be more likely to *collude* with the majority party that holds a multiethnic vision (dyad C-A) in order to *protect* itself and its ethno-linguistic rights and head off the threat coming from the majority party with a non-multiethnic vision (dyad C-B). Finally, I hypothesize that the majority party with a multiethnic vision will be more likely to *collude* with the minority party (dyad A-C), offering ethno-linguistic rights in return for the minority party's support in electoral competition against B.

Of course, normally actors will possess a repertoire of means to accomplish such hypothesized objectives from establishing formal electoral alliances and/or informal backdoor deals to using force. Let's illustrate some of these interaction patterns with concrete examples from the cases of this study and from some other ones. The electoral alliance established between the communist successor party in Macedonia (SDSM) and the ethnic Albanian party (PPD) between 1992-98 to head off the threat coming from the staunchly nationalist and anti-communist party (VMRO-DPMNE) is a good illustration of the interaction pattern of *collusion* between a multiethnic majority party and a minority party. The first postcommunist Macedonian constitution that gave substantial ethno-linguistic rights to national minorities was *imposed* by SDSM on VMRO, which actively opposed those rights. If we turn to two Southern European countries, the violent repression and silencing of Islamists and "evolutionary secularists" by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in early republican Turkey (Somer 2016: 170-79) exemplifies an interaction pattern of *imposition* among majority elites. It is indeed this pattern of imposition that led to the strongly assimilationist policies (i.e. non-multiethnic vision) towards ethnic Kurds. Likewise, Franco used force and violently repressed the socialists in post-civil war Spain to impose his vision of a religious and Castilian-only nation (Conversi 1997).

Coming back to the theoretical framework, it is important to note that politics in multiethnic societies with a majority nationhood cleavage revolves around both minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights *and* resource distribution.¹⁸ Indeed, both are

¹⁸ As I am going to elaborate on further below, this is different from politics in multiethnic societies *without* a nationhood cleavage among the majority group. In the latter scenario, politics is most likely to revolve around *only* issues of resource distribution. Concern with resource distribution is common to both types of societies. After all, as the famous saying goes, politics is about "who gets what, when and how".

closely interrelated and often minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights becomes a cover for concealing what essentially is a concern with resource distribution. As such, regardless of which majority party is incumbent, the interaction pattern of imposition always has the potential to generate counterelites from the majority group. *Majority counterelites* here refer to the majority party with a different vision of nationhood from the incumbent majority party that is dissatisfied with minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights and often with the status-quo resource distribution also.¹⁹ On the other hand, if we still stick to our assumption that the minority is initially represented by only one party, theoretically there are two scenarios for the emergence of *minority counterelites*. First, if the non-multiethnic majority party (B) is incumbent, the then-only minority party (C) will become minority counterelite, and in accordance with my theoretical expectations, will be more likely to collude with A in opposition to the incumbency of B. Second, in case A is incumbent (most likely allied with C), theoretically a minority counterelite can still emerge (D). This is the case since the mere availability of allies from the majority parties who can further minority's ethno-linguistic rights does not prevent the emergence of minority counterelites who are dissatisfied with resource distribution and who can resort to ethno-nationalist themes to conceal this dissatisfaction. D's emergence theoretically can take various forms: it can emerge as a splinter faction within C, as an independently-formed party or even as an extra-parliamentary actor that actually uses or threatens to use violence. Given that the emergence of D is a scenario that often occurs, let's focus more closely on its theoretical and empirical implications.

2.3.2 Multiethnic Society with a Majority Nationhood Cleavage and Two Minority Representatives

When the majority group is divided by a nationhood cleavage and there are two representatives of the minority group, then we have a total of four actor-types that we can represent with the following notation:

A – majority party with a multiethnic vision
B- majority party with a non-multiethnic vision
C- minority representative₁
D- minority representative₂

¹⁹ Accordingly, depending on which party is incumbent, A or B can potentially become majority counterelite.

With four actor-types, there are twelve possible permutations of interactions among them:

<i>A-B</i>	<i>B-A</i>	<i>C-A</i>	<i>D-A</i>
<i>A-C</i>	<i>B-C</i>	<i>C-B</i>	<i>D-B</i>
<i>A-D</i>	<i>B-D</i>	<i>C-D</i>	<i>D-C</i>

The twelve interaction dyads and the four interaction patterns among them may be shown graphically in a 4 x 4 table.

Table 2.2 Interaction dyads and patterns in a multiethnic society with majority nationhood cleavage and two minority representatives (*4 actor-types; 12 interaction dyads; 4 patterns of interaction*).

with Interaction of	A	B	C	D
A		imposition	collusion	domination
B	imposition		domination	collusion
C	collusion	protection		imposition
D	protection	collusion	imposition	

As Table 2.2 shows, first I expect that the interaction patterns between A, B, and C will not change with the emergence of D. Second, I hypothesize that initially the non-multiethnic party (B) and D will both seek a formal/informal alliance with each other to counter the alliance between A and C. The fact that D seeks an alliance with a non-multiethnic party theoretically makes sense since as hypothesized, D is motivated more with changing the status-quo resource distribution than with minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights which is already good. For instance, the formal electoral alliance between VMRO and the ethnic Albanian splinter party PDSH (1998-2001) and their informal backdoor deal (known as the two-thirds/one-third deal) to split among them all

governmental posts and state revenues is a good illustration of the interaction pattern of *collusion* between B and D, and how D sought to *dominate* over its fellow ethnic Albanian party C. It is important to note that majority nationhood cleavage may also lead to a symmetrical nationhood division among the minority, since the minority counter-elite typically will try to find some point of convergence on which to justify its alliance with the majority counter-elite. For instance, PDSH leader Arben Xhaferi's vision that unitary multiethnic states can *not* survive closely matched VMRO leader Ljupco Georgievski's vision "Macedonia for ethnic Macedonians". Both counter-elites actually envisioned some kind of mono-ethnic enclaves within Macedonia. Hence, when the majority nationhood cleavage symmetrically spills over to the minority then it becomes a cross-cutting cleavage.

Through which causal mechanism do the identified interaction patterns lead to violent ethnic conflict? A major observable implication of the present theoretical framework is that interethnic relations are more likely to turn violent *after* a minority counter-elite emerges. Minority counterelite emergence is crucial for two main reasons. First, it generates minority intraethnic competition and second it provides the majority counterelite with a potential partner with whom to ally to ethnically outbid their majority and minority counterparts. As such, the main causal mechanism that leads to violent ethnic conflict is *double ethnic outbidding*.

In addition to affecting the interaction patterns between majority and minority elites, nationhood cleavage may also lock the majority parties in a "societal security dilemma" (Roe 2005) where the nationhood vision produced by one party to pursue ontological security generates ontological insecurity for the other party which clings to a different nationhood vision. As far as the North Macedonian case is concerned, efforts by the mainstream left to pursue and maintain a "Slavic-origin" narrative may render the "antique-oriented" mainstream right ontologically insecure, and vice versa. Ontological insecurity in turn, as Rumelili and Çelik (2017) convincingly argue, generates distrust and perceptions of threat from the outside world, enabling ethnic majority elites to manipulate this threat in ways that serve their political interests. This alternative causal mechanism would actually complement and further enrich my thesis that it is the quest for power that lies behind the two pairs of allied majority and minority elites in divided countries. In other words, the support provided by divided majority elites to minority counter-elites might take place in an environment marked by ambiguous national identity

and cleavage-driven ontological insecurity. As I am going to discuss in detail in the North Macedonian chapter (Chapter 3), the Macedonian political right (i.e. VMRO) has frequently justified the need to support alternative Albanian parties (i.e. Albanian counter-elites) on the ground that NATO/the West together with the Macedonian left (SDSM) and their domestic Albanian allies constitute a threat to Macedonian national identity and to the future of the Macedonian state.

2.3.3 Multiethnic Society with majority nationhood cohesion

When there is not a nationhood cleavage among the majority group, there are only two empirically possible dyads: either both majority parties share a multiethnic vision of nationhood or both of them share a non-multiethnic vision. Since the theoretical implications of each of them for the pattern of interethnic relations are similar, let's analyze them together. Accordingly, assuming again that the minority is initially represented by a single political party, then we have a total of three actor-types that we can represent with the following notation:

- A- majority party with a multiethnic / non-multiethnic vision*
- B- majority party with a multiethnic / non-multiethnic vision*
- C- minority party*

With only three actor-types, there are six possible permutations of interactions among them:

<i>A-B</i>	<i>B-A</i>	<i>C-A</i>
<i>A-C</i>	<i>B-C</i>	<i>C-B</i>

Unlike the case of a multiethnic society with a majority nationhood cleavage, here I identify only two patterns to define the six possible interaction dyads. Interaction dyads and the two interaction patterns I identify may be shown graphically on a 3 x 3 table.

Table 2.3 Interaction dyads and patterns in a multiethnic society with majority nationhood cohesion and a single minority party (3 actor-types; 6 interaction dyads; 2 patterns of interaction).

with Interaction of	A	B	C
A		cooperation	collusion

B	cooperation		collusion
C	collusion	collusion	

The interaction patterns represent the hypothesized objectives of each actor-type, given a certain interaction. First, I hypothesize that when both these parties hold the same vision of nationhood, be it multiethnic as in the case of Montenegro or non-multiethnic as in the case of Bulgaria, they will be more likely to *cooperate* with each other when instituting ethnic policies (dyads A-B and B-A). For instance, during the Round Table Talks in Bulgaria (January-May 1990), both the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the anti-communist Union of Democratic Forces agreed upon banning ethnic political parties and making the minority-based Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) the only political representative of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996).²⁰ Bulgarian elites deliberately projected an image of a civic, liberal interethnic model to dampen earlier tensions engendered by Zhivkov's assimilationist "rebirth campaign". In reality, what is referred to in the literature as the "Bulgarian ethnic model" (Rechel 2007) is a myth purposefully projected to conceal an essentially monoethnic vision of nationhood. Deal-making among majority parties can also be observed in Montenegro, where the communist successor Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) led by Milo Dukanovic made a formal agreement in September 1997 with Montenegrin opposition parties to enlist minorities' support in forming and later cementing an anti-Serb coalition (Darmanovic 2003: 148-9).

The effect sharing the same vision of nationhood has on inducing cooperation between majority parties when instituting ethnic policies can be seen most clearly in those countries that had experienced civil war in their past. For example, in both post-transition Greece and Spain, majority parties that roughly represented the descendants of the warring sides of the civil war came to share the same vision of nationhood, non-multiethnic in the case of Greece and multiethnic in the case of Spain. In the latter case, the 1979 Statutes of Autonomy for Basque and Catalan regions were a product of public negotiations and close cooperation between the center-right Union de Centro Democratico, the center-left Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) (Linz and Stepan 1996: 100). In the former case, despite an otherwise deep

²⁰ Likewise, both parties in early transition period concurred on the issue of not recognizing a separate Macedonian nation on the ground that Macedonians are essentially ethnic Bulgarians and their language is merely a dialect of Bulgarian (Poulton 1995).

mutual distrust, both the center-right Nea Dimokratia and the center-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in post-transition Greece concurred on the issue of not officially recognizing the existence of a Slavic minority in Northern Greece (Danforth 1995).

All in all, cooperation among majority parties on ethnic policies, notwithstanding their potential disagreements on other questions, is contingent upon a shared vision of nationhood. This thesis is also implied in a comparative historical analysis of post-abolition racial orders in Brazil, South Africa, and United States. Anthony Marx (1998) insightfully shows how British and Dutch Afrikaner white elites in South Africa and Northern and Southern white elites in the United States, otherwise deeply divided by economic interests and a civil war legacy but both sharing a *white supremacist* vision of nationhood, chose to institute apartheid and Jim Crow and institutionally exclude the blacks. “The ‘deal’ of racial domination” was made possible by both the need to reconcile the divided white interests and a shared white supremacist vision (Marx 1998: 136), although the latter factor is rather overlooked in the analysis. In a later work, Marx (2005) further develops the thesis that exclusionary nation-building is endogenous to the need to build domestic cohesion amidst internal conflict, yet he again overlooks the crucial role sharing the same nationhood vision plays in this process. I argue instead that unless majority elites share the same vision of nationhood, exclusion of any social category is unlikely to build cohesion and ‘heal the wounds’ among them. Instead each group of majority elites will politicize its vision of nationhood and use it as a tool to outbid each other in the struggle for power. The case of postcommunist Macedonia is a good illustration of such patterns.

Second, I hypothesize that the minority party will try to *collude* with either one of the majority parties (dyads C-A and C-B) and the latter will do the same in return to enlist minority’s support in electoral competition (dyads A-C and B-C). In the case of non-multiethnic parties, the minority will not prioritize any majority party since neither will push for changing its status of ethno-linguistic rights. The same scenario is likely to apply in the case of multiethnic majority parties also since both would further ethno-linguistic rights of minorities. Hence, I expect the minority party to ally itself with the highest bidder; whichever majority party will offer the best deal in terms of resource distribution, that is the party the minority will collude with. For instance, the minority MRF in Bulgaria shifted its support twice between BSP and UDF in the early transition period. This

markedly contrasts with the attitude of the then-only ethnic Albanian party in early transition Macedonia. Even though VMRO won the first democratic elections, the ethnic Albanian PPD refused to form a government with it given its clear non-multiethnic agenda and opted instead for a coalition with the multiethnic SDSM.

This point sheds light also on an important facet of politics in multiethnic countries with majority nationhood cohesion. Politics in such countries is more likely to revolve around issues of resource distribution. I do not expect minority's ethno-linguistic rights to play an equally important role. Stated differently, I expect a relative *de-ethnization* of political space. Yet, the cooperation on ethnic policies among majority parties does not necessarily preclude the emergence of majority counterelites dissatisfied with resource distribution but I argue that it does effectively preclude the emergence of counterelites dissatisfied with the status of minority's ethno-linguistic rights. Accordingly, even when majority counterelites dissatisfied with resource distribution do emerge and choose to mobilize the masses to push for change, in a relatively de-ethnized political environment, I do not expect the incumbent party from the majority group to resort to ethnonationalist themes and violence. The fact that the Bulgarian Socialist Party faced two times during 1990 and 1997 such a scenario but did not resort to violence and stepped down instead is a good illustration of such patterns.

Furthermore, the absence of a majority nationhood cleavage is also likely to limit the ability of minority counterelites (if they do emerge) to use minority's status of ethno-linguistic rights as a cover to conceal a deeper dissatisfaction with resource distribution. Such minority counterelites (D-type actors) will merely compete with the incumbent minority representative over which gets a better deal on resource distribution from the majority parties. The interaction dyads and the likely interaction patterns in a multiethnic society *without* a majority nationhood cleavage and two minority representatives can be shown graphically on a 4 x 4 table.

Table 2.4 Interaction dyads and patterns in a multiethnic society with majority nationhood cohesion and two minority representatives (*4 actor-types; 12 interaction dyads; 2 patterns of interaction*).

with Interaction of	A	B	C	D

A		cooperation	collusion	collusion
B	cooperation		collusion	collusion
C	collusion	collusion		competition
D	collusion	collusion	competition	

Figure 2.1 presents a causal graph outlining the building blocks of my causal narrative.

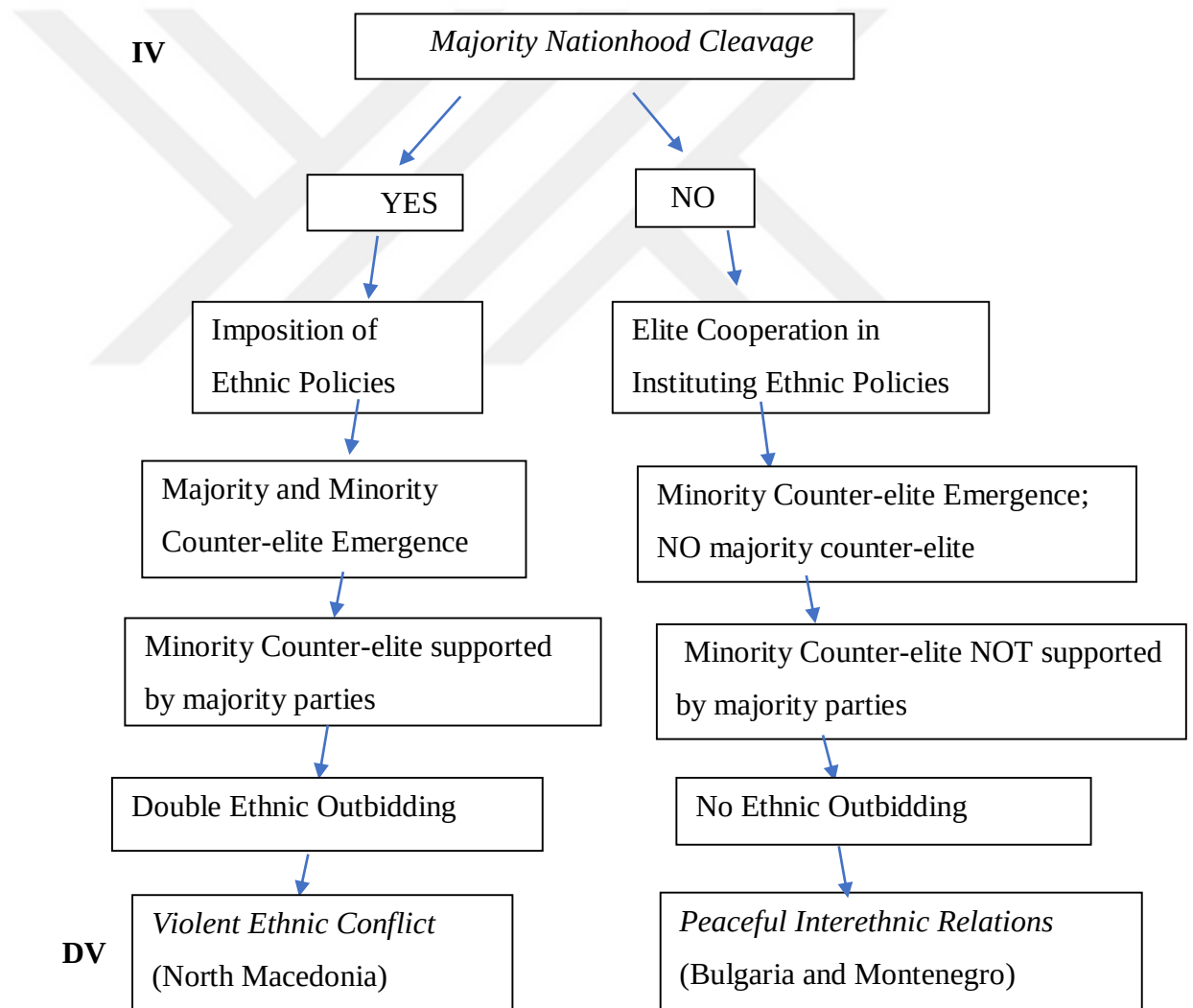


Figure 2.1: Causal Graph.

Before turning to the in-depth study of the three three empirical cases, a final and important concern is addressed. Which forces and variables are more significant as causal

factors of domestic political outcomes in postcommunist countries, external or domestic ones?

2.4 Assessing the Relative Weight of External and Domestic Variables as Causal Factors of Domestic Political Outcomes in Postcommunist Countries

Up to now, my research has singled out domestic variables as the primary causal factor of interethnic peace and violence in postcommunist countries. I have argued that it is the majority nationhood cleavage and cohesion which generates certain causal mechanisms (double ethnic outbidding and deethnicized political space) that ultimately lead to interethnic peace or violence. However, a legitimate counterargument could be made that my causal account neglects the influence of external variables and hence overestimates the causal impact of the domestic ones. In other words, it could be argued that overlooking the wider political conjuncture and regional influences of powerful international actors on ethnic politics can potentially bias the quest for causality. All the more so when my three empirical cases are postcommunist Balkan countries that are said to constitute Europe's "backyard".

Indeed, scholars have long noted the overwhelming influence the network of Western democracies and their intergovernmental organizations have had on postcommunist ethnic politics, in terms of protecting/furthering minority rights and containing ethnic conflict. For instance, Andrew Janos (2000) has argued that the postcommunist order represents a transition from Soviet to Western hegemony, yet this "has not implied change from hierarchy to equality, but from one form of hierarchy to another"; a hierarchy built on imposing the principle of "liberal universalism" and "interventions on behalf of ethnic minorities" (Janos 2000: 364-6). Hence, Janos concludes that in postcommunist East Central Europe "external forces have far outweighed domestic ones as causal factors of institutional change" (2000: 410-1). Likewise, Roger Petersen (2005) has argued that the development of norms of ethnic tolerance and the containment of violent conflict in many postcommunist Eastern European countries should be attributed to the "powerful Western influence" in getting these countries "not only to adapt to Western sanctions and incentives, but also to be adopting certain Western norms" (Petersen 2005: 220). In brief, as Anastasakis and Bechev (2003: 4) succinctly put it, the West in general and the European Union (EU) in particular has become "the only game in town" for postcommunist Eastern European countries.

The implication of all this is that in cases of interethnic peace (as the Bulgarian and Montenegrin cases here), focusing on domestic factors at the expense of external ones may lead to an overestimation of the causal impact of the former when the relative success of Western/European integration may be just as important for explaining the outcome. Conversely, in cases of violent ethnic conflict (as the North Macedonian case here), one may incorrectly attribute the outcome to domestic factors when the incomplete or failed process of Western/European integration provides an equally good or perhaps a better causal account.

While in principle I do not dispute the enormous Western influence on the development of ethnic politics in postcommunist Eastern Europe, I still believe domestic factors remain critical to determine the effectiveness of such influence. This thesis is in line with more recent findings from scholarship on different forms of political violence. For instance, Ackermann (2000) points out that prevention of violent conflict in small states is a “two-way process” and external influences in this direction are more likely to be effective if supported by domestic actors. Patrice McMahon, while acknowledging that external influences “can provide the *message*, the *motivation*, and the *means* to push tense majority-minority relations away from violence and toward ethnic cooperation”, also concedes that the “‘international community’ however defined has never been able to solve the problems associated with majority-minority relations, and it will likely never will” (McMahon 2007: 24 *italics in original*). Last, Scott Straus similarly contends that while international actors can certainly play a supportive role in preventing conflicts from escalating into violence, “it is very difficult, if not impossible, for international actors to impose new political narratives or to impose peace on ruling elites who do not want to compromise” (Straus 2015: 326).

These studies however fall short of pointing out the domestic factors that make international influence more or less likely to pay off. After all, the powerful Western influence on Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War is more or less a constant variable while its effectiveness varies across countries. The challenge thus becomes to identify those domestic conditions under which international influence can be more or less effective. This would allow us to generalize about the ways EU/Western influence has changed, or failed to change, ethnic politics in postcommunist Eastern Europe. The theory of majority nationhood cleavage/cohesion I develop in this dissertation can be

helpful in the quest for generalization. Accordingly, I put forward two theoretically-driven hypotheses that can be empirically tested.

H1: Western influence on containing violent conflict in multiethnic societies is more likely to be effective when the majority representatives are united on the nationhood question because nationhood cohesion (be it multiethnic or non-multiethnic) facilitates the process of Western integration.

However, concerning the question of advancing minority rights, Western influence is more likely to be effective under conditions of multiethnic nationhood cohesion, whereas its influence is likely to be limited when the majority representatives share a non-multiethnic nationhood vision.

H2: Western influence on containing violent conflict in multiethnic societies is less likely to be effective when the majority representatives are divided on the nationhood question because nationhood cleavage hinders the process of Western integration. Moreover, majority nationhood cleavage can further dilute Western influence by exposing such countries to the influence of other international actors with political agendas opposed to the West.

I now proceed to the in-depth study of each of my three empirical cases and in so doing, I also test the above two hypotheses.

Chapter 3

MAJORITY NATIONHOOD CLEAVAGE, ELITE NON-COOPERATION, AND INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE IN POSTCOMMUNIST NORTH MACEDONIA

The two main ethnic Macedonian parties that oversaw the process of political and economic transition in what was formerly the Socialist Republic of Macedonia are deeply divided by a nationhood cleavage. The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), the legal successor of the League of Communists of Macedonia, strongly clings to the pro-Yugoslav view that ethnic Macedonians are a distinct south Slavic people that have inhabited the geographic area known as Vardar Macedonia (roughly constituting the boundaries of present day Macedonia) since the sixth century. Kiro Gligorov, the first Social Democratic president of postcommunist Macedonia, aptly captures SDSM's vision when he declared in June 1992 that "We do not have any relation to Alexander the Great. We are a Slavic people who arrived here in the sixth century" (cited in Danforth 1995: 46). SDSM credits postwar Yugoslavia and Tito for building the modern Macedonian nation since Macedonia achieved statehood for the *first* time in 1944 when it became one of the six constituent units of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; the communist regime was the first to standardize the modern Macedonian language; and it created in 1967 an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church separate from the Serbian Church (Danforth 1995: 51-52; Poulton 1995: 97-110). When it comes to national minorities, SDSM holds a centralized multiethnic vision that promotes the expression of ethnic diversity and seeks to provide institutional protection from the center for minority rights. As Emilija Simoska, prominent social democratic intellectual and former minister of education, points out, SDSM's leading motto has always been creating a "grazdanski drzava", literally a citizen state (Simoska 2019). Last, SDSM holds a status-quo foreign policy vision that explicitly renounces any territorial claims against Greece on the geographic region known as Aegean/Greek Macedonia (Danforth 1995: 47).

Founded on 17 June 1990, the center-right Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity VMRO-DPMNE (henceforth VMRO) holds a staunch anti-Yugoslav vision of nationhood. Diametrically

opposed to SDSM's view of Yugoslavia as the founder of the Macedonian nation, VMRO refers to Yugoslavia as "Serboslavia," and "the prison of the Macedonian people" (Danforth 1995: 53). As such, while for the former Tito constitutes a hero, for the latter he is a traitor. VMRO from its founding until present has endorsed two main discourses on nationhood, both strictly monoethnic (i.e. non-multiethnic). During the leadership of its founder Ljupco Georgievski (1990-2003), VMRO adopted the discourses of the early twentieth century paramilitary group from which it took its name too: Macedonia for the *ethnic* Macedonians (Ackermann 2000: 57) and "clean (chist) Macedonia" (Schwartz 1996: 90). At the core of this indigenization policy there was no place for minorities and their ethno-linguistic expression. Second, during the leadership of Nikola Gruevski (2003-2016), whose family had migrated from Greek (Aegean) Macedonia after the end of the Greek Civil war (1946-49), until present VMRO spearheaded the so-called antiquization policy that holds that contemporary Macedonians are the direct descendants of ancient Macedonians (Vangeli 2011). According to this new nationhood discourse, "'Slavism' is a destructive doctrine that 'aims to eradicate Macedonism completely.' If Macedonians are Slavs, then they 'have no legal right to anything Macedonian'" (Danforth 1995: 45-6). It should be clear that VMRO's antiquization discourse is exclusionary not only towards national minorities but also towards those ethnic Macedonians that define themselves as Slavs. Last, VMRO holds a revisionist foreign policy view that seeks to revise the 1913 Bucharest Peace Treaty that had divided historical Macedonia in the aftermath of the Balkan wars between Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia), Greece (Aegean Macedonia), and Serbia (Vardar Macedonia) (Shea 1997: 246).

In the most recent manifestation of this deep nationhood cleavage, VMRO opposed, and still opposes, the June 2018 *Prespa Agreement* that the SDSM government signed with Greece, and the new constitutional name of the country, North Macedonia, that became official in January 2019. VMRO's former vice-president, Trajko Slaveski, aptly describes the stance of his party on the Prespa Agreement:

Prespa Agreement, it is unilateral. It is almost like capitulation ... You know we oppose that, we strongly oppose ... the price that you pay is extremely high. Not only change of the name, change of the identity, change of history, of culture ... *They (SDSM) erased the history of these people. They claimed that history until 1945 belongs only to the Greeks.* This is all to complete, or to close the so-called Macedonian question (Slaveski 2019; emphasis in mine)

National minority representatives in Macedonia also acknowledge the deep cleavage dividing the mainstream Macedonian parties. Erdoğan Saraç, former leader of the Turkish Democratic Party (TDP) and current leader of the Turkish National Unity Party (TMBH), argues that: “In the Balkans, many times state policies have constituted nations ... Unfortunately, even now in 2018 you see that with European, NATO, and U.S. pressure, a north Macedonian nation came into being. Because if you look into the (Prespa) agreement, they (the social democrats) essentially have erased all the history before (1944)” (Saraç 2019).

3.1 Historical Roots of the Nationhood Cleavage

What are the historical roots of this deep nationhood cleavage between SDSM and VMRO? Unlike Bulgaria and Montenegro which attained independent statehood relatively early, in the aftermath of the 1878 Congress of Berlin, Macedonia would not be able to have a state of its own until very late (1944). The first organization that sought some form of Macedonian autonomy from the Ottoman Empire was the paramilitary group VMRO that was founded in Thessaloniki in 1893 by a small group of intellectuals educated in Sofia, Belgrade, and St. Petersburg (Danforth 1995: 56). However, as historians point out, since the very beginning VMRO was fatally divided between a right wing that had Bulgarian national consciousness and wanted to annex Macedonia to Bulgaria, and a left wing that favoured Macedonian autonomy within a wider Balkan federation or independence (Poulton 1995: 53-54; Shea 1997: 169). What is nowadays celebrated as Macedonia’s national holiday, the 2 August 1903 Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman Empire, was actually a strategy of VMRO’s right wing to gain upper hand and ultimately destroy the left wing. As John Shea points out, “the right wing initiated the Ilinden Uprising to provoke reprisals by the Turks in order to facilitate eventual Bulgarian intervention. After the failed Ilinden Uprising, the right faction gained almost complete control of VMRO” (Shea 1997: 169). Hugh Poulton also confirms that VMRO’s right wing “explicitly served as Bulgarian proxies and served post-San Stefano Bulgarian policy of fomenting local uprisings which were designed to attract Ottoman reprisals and consequently Great Power intervention” (Poulton 1995: 53).¹ The left/autonomist wing left the organization as the result of the bloody internal strife in VMRO and would eventually join Tito’s partisan forces during World War II in fighting against both Nazi

¹ Indeed, Poulton also notes that when VMRO insurgents captured the Macedonian town of Krusevo for a week and declared a (short-lived) republic there, they “flew Bulgarian flags everywhere” (Poulton 1995: 57).

and Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia. Whereas since the failed 1903 Ilinden Uprising, VMRO under the complete control of its right wing “became more overtly Bulgarian-nationalistic”, served once more as Bulgarian proxy during the interwar years and eventually allied with the Nazis during the Second World War (Poulton 1995: 58-84).

All the aforementioned developments show, as Loring Danforth makes clear, that “At the end of World War I, the notion of a distinct Macedonian nation did not exist” (Danforth 1995: 65). During the interwar years also, “perhaps the majority” of the Slavic-speaking people inhabiting the geographic region of Vardar Macedonia “still harboured Bulgarian consciousness” (Poulton 1995: 93-4). Thus, it was the communist Yugoslav regime that institutionalized for the first time the vision that Macedonians are a distinct south Slavic nation, and VMRO’s former leftist/autonomist wing fully adopted this view since they had fought together with the partisans during World War II. While those Macedonians harbouring Bulgarian consciousness, VMRO’s right wing, strongly opposed this new imposed ethnogenesis. As Poulton points out “Post-war Yugoslav communists rewrote the history of VMRO, laying emphasis on the thought and activity of the so-called ‘left’ autonomist wing, despite its being actually a *small minority* within VMRO” (Poulton 1995: 117; my emphasis).

Hence, the roots of the nationhood cleavage in postcommunist Macedonia can be traced back to the nation-building process during Yugoslavia (1944-89). Arguably, both VMRO wings were already fatally split since the very beginning in late 19th century, however this division became fully institutionalized only after World War II, since the communist regime was the first to articulate the ethnogenesis of a distinct Macedonian south Slavic nation. As a result, those Macedonians who denied this imposed ethnogenesis were imprisoned, persecuted, and even killed. “The Law for the protection of Macedonian national honour” and Article 136 of the Yugoslav Criminal Code criminalized denying the existence of a distinct Macedonian south Slavic nation (Poulton 1995: 118-21). The Macedonian Communist Party under the leadership of the “ruthless former partisan leader” Lazar Kolisevski liquidated in bloody purges and silenced all those Macedonians harbouring Bulgarian or pro-independence visions – only in 1945-46 “about 4,700 persons disappeared without trace” (Palairt 2015: 295). As John Shea emphasizes:

Obeying directives from Belgrade, they (Communist Party of Macedonia) declared all living (and deceased) independence-seekers to be pro-Bulgarian enemies of the federation. They

imprisoned people expressing ideas of Macedonian independence. This attitude lasted as long as the former Yugoslavia (Shea 1997: 178)

It is precisely the persecuted under these laws and the emigre intellectuals (that had left Macedonia during Yugoslavia as the result of the oppression) that formed VMRO in 1990. VMRO was founded from the proposals and strong financial backing of the radical Macedonian diaspora circles in Australia, Canada, and the U.S. (Saraç 2019). Most prominent among them were Dragan Bogdanovski and the brothers Mane and Goran Jakovlevski (Ristovski 2019). In one of the first nationalist rallies VMRO held in the town of Ohrid, it publicly called for the former partisan leader Lazar Kolisevski to be hanged (Palairret 2015: 311). Throughout the 1990s, however, the main pillar of the nationhood vision VMRO promoted was creating an independent Macedonian state that would include all three historical parts of Macedonia – Vardar/present-day Macedonia, Aegean, and Pirin Macedonia.² They didn't proclaim publicly their pro-Bulgarian tendencies. The antique nationhood vision slowly gained ground throughout the 1990s and became dominant in VMRO only with the leadership of Nikola Gruevski (2003-present). It should be emphasized that this antique vision is predominant among those Macedonians who have been refugees from and trace their descent in Aegean/Greek Macedonia. Consequently, this vision became dominant in VMRO only when they took over the party – it began with Vasil Tupurkovski in 1996 and reached the peak with Nikola Gruevski from 2006 onwards (Simoska 2019).

All in all, an article published in the Macedonian weekly *Delo* in 23 June 1995 nicely summarizes the nationhood cleavage in postcommunist Macedonia and relates it to the developments in the communist period:

One element in the new political atmosphere was an echo of the independence movement in Macedonia. The newspaper lamented the *violent divisions within Macedonian politics over the last one hundred years*. Delo pointed out that it was the desire for independence that led Macedonians to join the communist party resistance to the invaders in the Second World War. It noted also that once in power, for fifty years the communist rulers of Macedonia attacked Macedonians who expressed the very same ambition for Macedonian independence, declaring all living (and deceased) independence-seekers to be pro-Bulgarian enemies of the federation. Splits in foreign interests again brought about *splits among the Macedonians themselves, giving birth to antagonism and hatred whose influence can still be felt today ...* Daily political interests have again divided the Macedonian nation into pro-Bulgarian and pro-Serbian oriented groups. Faced with the possibility of losing power, the current ruling party (SDSM) played the old card of ... declaring an entire party (VMRO) to be pro-Bulgarian. Arguing that it was high time to stop labeling people in this way, Delo asked for

² Indeed, in June 1991, delegates at the VMRO party conference held in Ohrid proclaimed that the next congress of the party will be held in Thessaloniki (Palairret 2015: 312; Saraç 2019).

a national reconciliation platform to unite all significant groups in the country (cited in Shea 1997: 256; my emphasis in italics).

Lastly, high-level Macedonian Albanian representatives also put much emphasis on the deep nationhood cleavage among SDSM and VMRO. For instance, Xhevdet Hajredini, prominent Albanian social democratic intellectual and former Minister of Finance in the first SDSM government (1992-1994), told the author:

What helps us (Albanians in Macedonia) is the fact that the conflict between VMRO and SDSM is *not only ideological. They have different conceptions about the nation, about identity. VMRO claims that we are descendants of Alexander the Great. For SDSM Macedonians are a nation formed in the 19th century, with Slavic origin and Slavic language. They clash with one another on identity. Thus, they can not compromise, cohesion is lacking among them. Macedonia is a small nation but deeply divided over identity ... Ultimately it was SDSM which signed the agreement with Greece (Prespa Agreement) and accepted that (ethnic) Macedonians belong only to north Macedonia. Whereas VMRO never gave up the argument that present-day Macedonians are only 1/3 of ancient Macedonians. SDSM has never accepted and still does not accept this stupidity ... There is no agreement between these two Macedonian blocs, they are roughly equal in strength. (However) more than half of ethnic Macedonians follow VMRO's identitarian policies. Hence, among the ethnic Macedonian trunk, the majority nowadays claims that they are ancient (Hajredini 2019; my emphasis in italics)*

3.2 Ethnic Structure

According to the most recent November 2002 census, North Macedonia has a population of 2,022,547. The ethnic composition of the population is presented below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Ethnic Composition of North Macedonia.

Ethnic Group	Total number	% population
<i>Macedonian</i>	1,297,981	64.17
<i>Albanian</i>	509,083	25.17
<i>Turk</i>	77,959	3.85
<i>Roma</i>	53,879	2.66
<i>Serbian</i>	35,939	1.77
<i>Bosniak</i>	17,018	0.8
<i>Vlach</i>	9,695	0.47

Source: (Macedonia Census 2002: 34).

As Table 3.1 shows, ethnic Macedonians constitute a majority in North Macedonia while ethnic Albanians make up a large minority of 25 per cent. Albanians make up more than 20 per cent of the population in 26 of the 85 (30 per cent) municipalities in

Macedonia, while they constitute a majority in only 16 of them³ (Macedonia Census 2002: 34-35). While Macedonian censuses do not collect religiously specific information, it is a well-known fact that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia are almost all sunni Muslims. Thus, they differentiate from their ethnic kin in Albania and in Montenegro who are majority Muslim but have also a large Christian (Orthodox and Catholic) minority. Figure 3.1 locates in a map the North Macedonian municipalities where ethnic Albanians constitute a majority of the population.

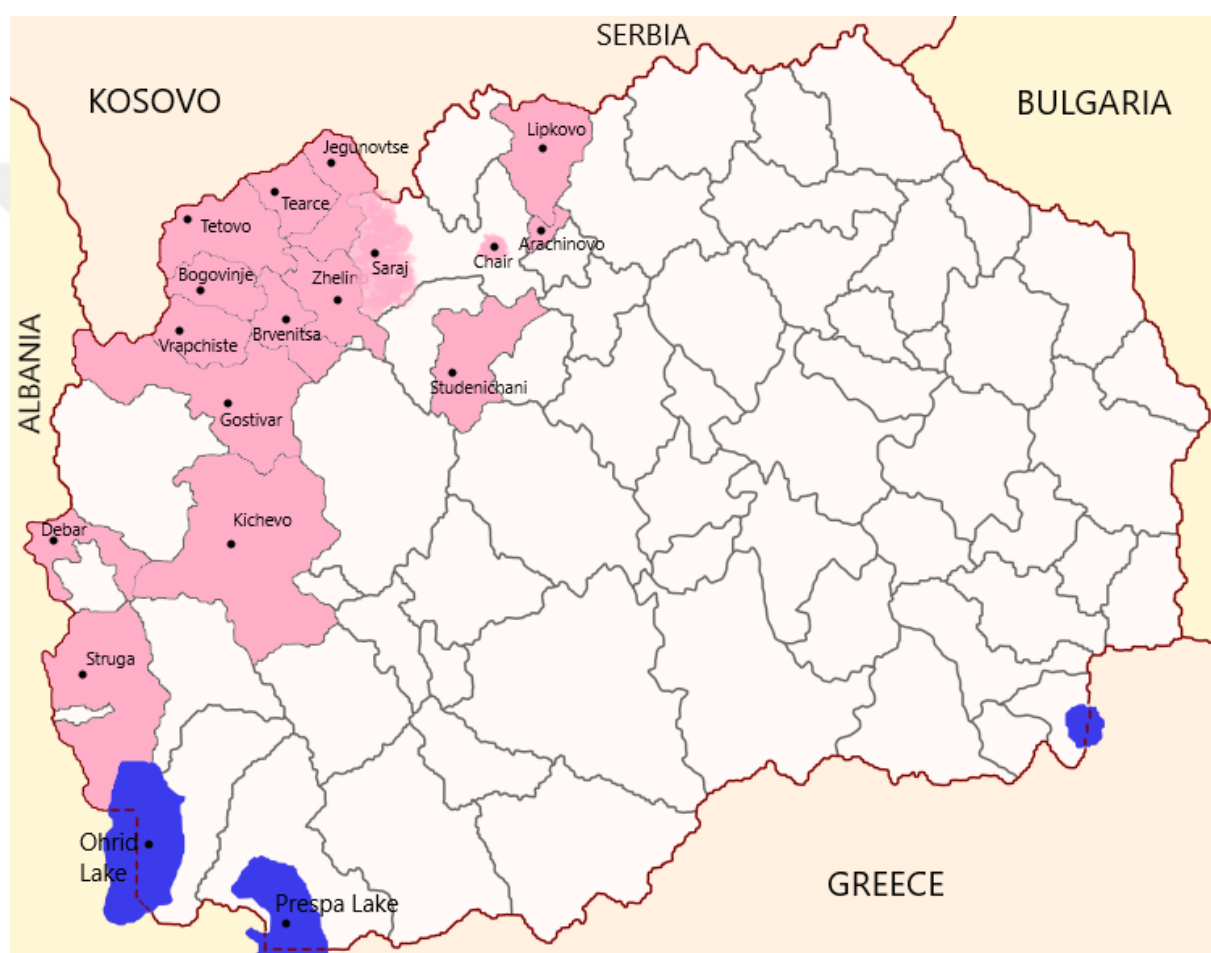


Figure 3.1: Albanian-majority municipalities in North Macedonia (16/85).

Note: The capital city of Skopje constitutes a special administrative district that contains within 10 smaller municipalities. Two of these municipalities (Saraj and Chair) are Albanian majority.

³ These 16 municipalities are: Saraj, Chair (both administratively part of the capital city Skopje), Aracinovo, Bogovinje, Brvenitsa, Vrapchiste, Gostivar, Debar, Zhelino, Kichevo, Lipkovo, Jegunovtse, Struga, Studenichani, Teartse, and Tetovo (Macedonia Census 2002: 34-35).

Two observations are in order. First, ethnic Albanian areas of settlement are concentrated in the north-western and western part of Macedonia and border both Albania and Kosovo. As we are going to see in Chapter 5, this pattern of settlement contrasts with that of the ethnic Albanians in Montenegro that predominantly border only Albania (see Figure 5.2. in Chapter 5). Second, if we include also the municipalities where Albanians make up more than 20 per cent of the population, we would notice from Figure 3.1 that, taken together, ethnic Albanian settlements in Macedonia form a compact, territorially homogenous unit that covers most of north-western and western Macedonia, starting from the town of Lipkovo bordering Kosovo and Serbia in the north until the western town of Struga in the shores of Lake Ohrid. Again, this contrasts with the ethnic Albanian settlements in Montenegro that lack the territorial compactness present in Macedonia (refer again to Figure 5.2 in Chapter 5). These two demographic factors, coupled also with the much greater absolute and relative number of Albanians in Macedonia, reasonably have led many Albanian intellectuals and former MPs in Macedonia argue that Macedonian Albanians have a much greater potential for destabilizing their host country than their ethnic kin in Montenegro (Iseni 2019; Pollozhani 2019). Seen only from the demographic perspective, this argument is fair enough. However, if we take into account also the *political* weight Albanians have in each country, we are going to see that Montenegrin Albanians have an equal potential to politically destabilize their host country, since Montenegrin parties can not secure electoral majorities against the Serbian parties without Albanian support. Thus, Albanians' destabilizing potential can not account for the divergent pattern of interethnic relations observed in Macedonia and Montenegro. Instead, as I am going to argue, we need to focus on the opportunity structure afforded by the division or cohesion among the majority parties.

3.3 Political Context and Background

In 1989, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, like all other Yugoslav republics, was mired in the federal debates over how to remodel socialist Yugoslavia amid an economic and legitimacy crisis and rising nationalist tendencies. The main clash at the federal level was between the Slovenian proposal for a loose confederal arrangement and the Serbian proposal for a recentralized federation (Siljanovska-Davkova 2013: 111). For the Macedonian political leadership, the goals had always been set clear: they wanted to preserve Yugoslavia in any feasible form, both because they were in dire need of federal

funds as one of the economically underdeveloped republics and because Macedonia needed federal protection against neighbors (Bulgaria and Greece) that had historically coveted its territories. For this reason, it was of paramount importance for the Macedonian leadership to try to reconcile the Slovenian and Serbian proposals and bring them once more together (Rossos 2008: 261). The League of Communists of Macedonia (LCM) under the leadership of the conservative, pro-Belgrade Jakov Lazarovski, in its Central Committee meeting held on 28 September 1989, initially sided with Milosevic's vision for Yugoslavia instead of the Slovenian one (Siljanovska-Davkova 2013: 112). This initial decision unleashed a wave of domestic nationalist demonstrations from those independence-seeker ethnic Macedonians and from those Macedonians asking LCM to stand against the human rights violations of their ethnic kin in Bulgaria and Greece. In other words, those pro-independence and great Macedonian stances that had been violently repressed for almost five decades started to reawaken by the end of 1989.

The student union in the main state university in Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, played a leading role in organizing these pro-independence and nationalist demonstrations. As Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, prominent Macedonian constitutional lawyer and intellectual, points out: "The pretransition period in the Republic of Macedonia (i.e. the phase of liberalization of the monistic system) was too short, and was reduced to (among others): the activities of the League of Socialist Youth" (Siljanovska-Davkova 2013: 111). The student union organized its largest demonstration in Skopje Central Square in the night of 23 November 1989, just one day before the tenth Congress of the League of Communists of Macedonia that was scheduled to elect the party's new leader (Ristovski 2019). Ljupco Ristovski, the leader of the student union who was and still is a great Macedonian nationalist, told the author about his speech that night in front of a crowd of about 70,000 people:

Hear us the Macedonian students, hear the voice of the united youth of Macedonia. That is a voice that everyone has to engrave upon their minds. *The besmearing and eschewing of history must be stopped.* The current attitude of our political and state leadership must be stopped, for it is in the least demeaning, if not inferior. And end must be put to the "hide-and-seek" game being played between the standard of our highly exalted "socialist" working man, and the incapability, powerlessness for giving clear direction and vision, thus opening new prosperity horizons. An end must be put to the current atmosphere, which has been in the making under the maneuver of the quote on quote "democracy" of socialist design, a "democracy" interlaced with threats, intimidation, *tete-a-tete meeting, arrests, the physical use of strength*, and countless other types of harrasments typical only of non-democratic societies. This has not been our aspiration, nor will it ever be. And when all of this is put to an end, what will become manifest and perceptible, more than ever before, is the strength and power of Macedonian intelligence, of the Macedonian universities, and of the entire student population. That is the only way in which we can follow a developed Europe, a

Europe without boundaries, without borders nor disputes, a Europe which instead will be a field for only cultural competition. And on this day, November 23, 1989, let the voice of the Macedonian students be heard loudly and resonate afar. It is directed to everyone and everywhere – it is the voice of the consciousness of Macedonia today. Let everyone give a careful thought prior to contemplating to oppose it, because the strength of it is our consciousness. *And let once again be known to everyone, that from the East & West, North & South, the Macedonian name will not perish* (Ristovski 2019; my emphasis in italics)

This speech clearly shows that what LCM was facing at the time were not only demands for political change but also demands to revive the hitherto suppressed history of ethnic Macedonians living in neighboring Bulgaria and Greece. Indeed, flags featuring the ancient symbol, the 16-ray sun of Vergina, were waved during the demonstration. In other words, LCM's official view that the history of the Macedonian nation starts from 1944 was now being challenged. It is crucial to point out that this is exactly the same way VMRO challenged the most recent Prespa Agreement the communist successor party (SDSM) signed with Greece (Slaveski 2019). Seeds of the nationhood division were already there since the very beginning of the Macedonian transition.

The fact that Ristovski was not arrested for this nationalistic speech is indicative of the degree of liberalization of the Yugoslav socialist regime in the end of the 1980s. Moreover, one day after this demonstration, on 24 November 1989, LCM's 10th Congress elected by secret ballot the reformist Petar Gosev instead of his conservative contender Mihail Danev as the new leader of the League of Communists of Macedonia (Ristovski 2019). It was a move intended to temporarily appease the domestic nationalist voices and preserve somehow the legitimacy of the party in the eyes of the public. Thereafter, at the 14th extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in January 1990 (which was going to be its last), after the Slovenian and Croatian proposals for a loose confederal model were rejected and after their delegates walked out of the Congress in protest, the reformist Macedonian leadership (together with Bosnia) followed suit (Phillips 2004: 50). Hence, in line with the Slovenian liberal vision, LCM also started to prepare the ground domestically for the first multiparty elections. In February 1990, LCM president, the reformist Petar Gosev, proposed and established a 30-member *Societal Reform Commission*. One of the members of this Commission, the Turkish-descent Güner Ismail who was director of the Nationalities Theater at the time, told the author that this Commission was composed of prominent LCM party members and social democratic intellectuals who were to play leading roles during the 1990s in Macedonia: Kiro Gligorov – first Macedonian president, Nikola

Kljusev – first non-partisan Macedonian prime minister, Denko Maleski- first Macedonian foreign minister, Ljubomir Frckovski and Lazar Kitanovski – writers of the first Macedonian constitution (Ismail 2019). In its two most important decisions, LCM decided to leave the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (together with Slovenia and Croatia) in 7 April 1990 and amended the 1974 republican Constitution in order to legally allow for political pluralism (Siljanovska-Davkova 2013: 112).

Accordingly, in 15 April 1990, the first Albanian party in Macedonia, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD), was founded in Poroj of Tetovo by a group of Albanian intellectuals under the leadership of Nevzat Halili (Iseni 2019). It was received with great enthusiasm by the Albanian population since Albanians in former Yugoslavia since 1912 had never had the right of political organization (Hajredini 2019; Pollozhani 2019). PPD was part of the *Coordinating Council of Albanian Political Parties in Yugoslavia* that was led by the Kosovar Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and his party Democratic Alliance of Kosovo (LDK). Ideologically, PPD was an ethnic, right-wing, conservative party given that Albanians in Macedonia identify the Albanian nation with Islam (Pollozhani 2019). In its official program, however, PPD was defined as:

‘party of all citizens of Macedonia, of all social strata, of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.’ It stands for freeing all peoples, and for the realization of all economic, political, national, and civil freedoms. The PDP condemns the use of force for the fulfillment of political goals, and opposes the instigation of anger, mistrust, and intolerance among peoples; it also opposes revanchism. It reaffirms the benefits of European civilization, and rejects nationalist and hegemonic principles ... For it, the territorial unity of Macedonia is indisputable. It sees Macedonia as a ‘state of equal citizens of all collectivities.’ (cited in Siljanovska-Davkova 2013: 128).

In 17 June 1990, the main anti-communist opposition party VMRO-DPMNE held its founding congress in the capital Skopje (Rossos 2008: 262). Its founders were those “prosecuted for their ideas about Macedonian independence from Yugoslavia” and “members of the Macedonian diaspora and Macedonian intellectuals with very strong national orientations.” (Siljanovska-Davkova 2013: 121). It was founded on a fierce anti-communist/anti-Yugoslav and anti-Albanian platform (Hajredini 2019). As such, it pledged to work for the creation of a “clean Macedonia” by opposing minority rights (Schwartz 1996: 90) and for the “spiritual, economic, and ethnic union of the divided Macedonian people and the creation of a Macedonian state in a future united Balkans and united Europe” (cited in Daskalovski 2006: 48). Reasonably then, Erdoğan Saraç, Turkish leader in Macedonia, called VMRO’s first leader Ljupco Georgievski “a very idealist

man” (Saraç 2019). Indeed, Saraç recalls a discussion he had with VMRO leadership in those days about their (lunatic) ideas for the creation of a Balkan confederation:

VMRO requested a meeting with us (Turkish Democratic Party in Macedonia). Of course, we could clearly see the presence of a Bulgarian wing within them. They said to us, if we form a confederation with Bulgaria, what would you Turks say to that? We answered that we do not approve of such plans. (We said that) The Republic of Macedonia is our motherland, our state, our common motherland, of Macedonians, Albanians and of Turks. In this dough named Macedonia there is also our blood. We don’t accept (Saraç 2019).

Equally concerning was also VMRO’s proclamation in those early days that they would hold the party’s next congress in Thessaloniki (Saraç 2019) and their public calls for hanging the former leader of the Macedonian Communist Party Lazar Kolisevski – a close associate of Tito (Palairat 2015: 311). Taken together, Xhevdet Hajredini, PPD high-level official and former minister of finance (1992-1994), argues that the name DPMNE that VMRO adopted is totally misleading:

DPMNE stands for Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity. What unity are they talking about? They (VMRO) are the party that has caused the greatest divisions in the Macedonian nation ... Even nowadays they would prefer a Macedonia united with Bulgaria rather than one in which Albanians have influence and share power with Macedonians. VMRO leadership has frequently warned and still is warning that in the long-term, with the current political and demographic trends, they are going to lose Macedonia. They don’t want such a Macedonia (influenced by Albanians), that’s their ideal (Hajredini 2019).

I argue that it is exactly this deep nationhood cleavage that has prevented SDSM-VMRO cooperation on ethnic policies in almost every instance since 1990 until present. Instead the consistent pattern has been one majority party allied with a minority counterpart seeking to impose its vision of nationhood and ethnically outbid the other. As such, I argue that *double ethnic outbidding* is the main causal mechanism that has led to violent conflict in postcommunist North Macedonia. Let’s focus more closely on the alliance patterns across time.

3.4 Patterns of Majority and Minority Elite Interaction and Factors of Escalation

3.4.1 First multiparty election and constitution (November 1990 – September 1992)

The first instance showing the lack of cooperation between SDSM and VMRO is that, unlike Bulgaria and Montenegro, there were no interparty negotiations and public debate on designing the new democratic institutions before the first multiparty election in Macedonia. Everything from the timing of elections, electoral law, form of government and prerogatives of the president were unilaterally decided by the SDSM. The double

ballot majority system instituted by SDSM is in itself significant for two main reasons. First, given its superior organizational capacity and resources, a majoritarian system was expected to afford SDSM a greater payoff over the newly-founded VMRO. Second, while a majoritarian system normally tends to under-represent minorities, this effect is diluted if the minority is spatially concentrated. Hence, SDSM's electoral law choice also intended to offer to the large and spatially concentrated Albanian minority proportional representation and enlist its help in the electoral competition against VMRO.

The electoral platforms of the two mainstream Macedonian parties were diametrically opposed. SDSM revived the time-tested Titoist slogan of *brotherhood and unity* in the first election (Ismail 2019). Its leader, Petar Gosev, emphasized that as former communists they were coming with "clean hands" and that they were going to build a society with rights and freedoms for everyone – a society without hatred (Saraç 2019). Whereas VMRO since the very beginning resorted to openly fascist rhetoric calling for "gas chambers" for the Albanians and pledging a state only for ethnic Macedonians (Iseni 2019; Fazliu 2019; Saraç 2019). Güner Ismail, one of SDSM founders, claims that it was paradoxical how VMRO accused SDSM of being a pro-Serb party while VMRO's rhetoric toward Albanians showed the complete opposite:

VMRO claimed that Albanians are going to devour us (ethnic Macedonians). Actually, you see that VMRO is a right-wing, conservative party, a party that links its history to legends, anti-Turkish, *komitadji*, anti-Yugoslav party. But you also see that it is a party that is essentially built on a Serbian platform because it is anti-Albanian (Ismail 2019).

The first multiparty elections were held in two rounds in November 11-25, 1990. Out of 120 seats in the *Sobranje*, VMRO won 38, SDSM won 31 seats and the Albanian PPD won 23 seats. Emilija Simoska, former SDSM Minister of Education (1994-1996), reveals that VMRO's national vote share was much smaller after the first round, yet during the two rounds of election, Alija Izetbegovic's nationalist party SDA won in Bosnian elections and this greatly affected the titular ethnic Macedonian electorate who significantly shifted to VMRO in the second round of Macedonian parliamentary elections (Simoska 2019). This important detail aside, the election results offered a strategic opportunity to Albanians who could theoretically swing the executive into whichever camp they choose. In other words, practically Albanians became a swing group bartering parliamentary support for ethno-linguistic favors. Yet, according to the framework developed in this dissertation, I would expect PPD to ally with the majority

party that holds a multiethnic vision (i.e. SDSM). And this is indeed what actually happened.

VMRO, as the winner of the largest share of seats, refused even to propose to PPD to form a coalition government. VMRO simply did not want to see Albanians in government (Ismail 2019). As Fati Iseni also confirms, “at the beginning VMRO’s political concept was that the government can be formed without Albanians” (Iseni 2019). Hence, with both VMRO and PPD unwilling to ally with each other, the Macedonian Assembly decided first to elect Kiro Gligorov, a former senior communist official in Belgrade, as Macedonian president (in 27 January 1991) as a step toward solving the political impasse. As the Macedonian-Canadian historian Andrew Rossos (2008: 264) aptly points out:

The election of the almost-74-year-old Gligorov was fortunate for Macedonia. It is difficult to think of a contemporary who possessed his expertise in and understanding of Macedonian, Yugoslav, and Balkan politics and major international trends ... Gligorov spent virtually the entire Communist era in Belgrade. He held various federal offices, including secretary of finance, deputy chair of the federal executive council, and president of the federal assembly, and built a reputation as a liberal economic reformer.

It was the liberal politicians and intellectuals within SDSM who proposed to Gligorov the office of the president and brought him from Belgrade to Skopje (Ackermann 2000: 58). As shall be remembered, reformist SDSM leader Petar Gosev had already included Gligorov in the 30-member *Societal Reform Commission* formed in February 1990 (Ismail 2019). SDSM in early 1990 was very much concerned that:

VMRO’s confrontational stance toward an independent Macedonia was feared to be too aggressive a policy for this southern republic (Macedonia), which had also been strongly dependent on the central government in Belgrade, and which now feared Serbian intervention ... Intent on averting the spread of (VMRO’s) extreme nationalism, a war with Serbia, and an ethnic war at home, this group (SDSM liberals) worked tirelessly to ensure that ethnic tensions in Macedonia did not escalate into violence, as they had in Slovenia and Croatia (Ackermann 2000: 58).

On the other side, VMRO was deeply suspicious of Gligorov and his strong Yugoslav background. As VMRO’s former vice-president, Trajko Slaveski, told the author:

At the very beginning, they (Gligorov and the Social Democrats) did not have a clue. They wanted to preserve Yugoslavia. Until the last day, they did not believe that Macedonia can be an independent state. So, they were not ready. *Gligorov spent all his life in Belgrade. He has no family here* (in Macedonia), you know that. Crvenkovski (first Macedonian prime minister-to-be) is a son of a (Yugoslav) army colonel. He was born in Bosnia- Herzegovina, in Sarajevo. So, *they did not have any national feeling., they were Yugoslavs so to speak* (Slaveski 2019; my emphasis in italics).

It was Gligorov actually who decided the rules of the game, opposed VMRO and repeated many times that no Macedonian government will be formed without the participation of Albanians (Ismail 2019). Gligorov then proposed the formation of a “government of experts” to temporarily solve the political impasse while he, together with Alija Izetbegovic, would try to mediate between Serbia and Slovenia/Croatia at the federal level and prevent Yugoslavia from disintegrating (Daskalovski 2006: 50; Rossos 2008: 265). A “government of experts” led by Nikola Kljusev was eventually formed in March 1991, composed mostly of former nomenklatura officials, included three ethnic Albanian ministers, and ruled until July 1992 under the supervision of Gligorov (Ackermann 2000: 58). Reasonably then, argues Andrew Rossos (2008: 265), “His opponents liked to accuse him (Gligorov) of being authoritarian, and there was an element of personal rule during his presidency.”

Slovenia and Croatia’s unilateral declaration of independence in 25 June 1991 followed by the Yugoslav Army’s intervention first in Slovenia and then in Croatia put an end to Gligorov’s and Izetbegovic’s common mediation efforts to preserve Yugoslavia. Clearly unwilling to remain part of a rump Yugoslavia dominated by Milosevic’s Serbia, Kiro Gligorov pushed forward with a referendum on independence on 8 September 1991 where 68 per cent of Macedonian citizens voted in favor (Bugajski 1994: 124). The next crucial step for founding a new independent state was enacting a constitution, and here too, Gligorov assumed the leading role by forming an expert group to draft the new constitution. The enacting of the first postcommunist constitution in 17 November 1991 denotes the first instance in which ethnic policies were imposed by one majority party over the other (represented by the interaction dyad A-B in Table 2.1). To start with, the expert group formed by Gligorov consisted entirely of SDSM members who at the time were professors in the Law Faculty at the Cyril and Methodius State University in Skopje (Vankovska 2013: 91). The most prominent among them were Ljubomir Frckovski, Vlado Popovski, Savo Klimovski, and Lazar Kitanovski (Saraç 2019; Simoska 2019; Ismail 2019; Fazliu 2019). Second, as Macedonian professor Biljana Vankovska (2013: 91) points out, “The period for crafting as well as for deliberation was too short.”

The preamble of the November 1991 constitution defined Macedonia as the:

national state of the Macedonian people (*nacionalna država na makedonskiot narod*), in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is

provided for Albanians (*albancite*), Turks, Vlachs, Romanies and other nationalities (*nacionalnosti*) living in the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia Constitution 1991)

Although the preamble uses the Slavic word with ethnic connotation *narod*, what is frequently overlooked in scholarly studies is that it also contains explicit reference to “full equality as citizens” and the actual text of the constitution is quite liberal and democratic, giving Albanians substantial ethno-linguistic rights such as:

- a. **Article 7:** In the units of local self-government where the majority of the inhabitants belong to a nationality, in addition to the Macedonian language and Cyrillic alphabet, their language and alphabet are also in official use.
- b. **Article 48:** Members of nationalities have a right freely to express, foster and develop their identity and national attributes. The Republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of the nationalities ... Members of the nationalities have the right to instruction in their language in primary and secondary education, as determined by law (Macedonia Constitution 1991)

VMRO fiercely opposed such rights in parliamentary sessions when the constitution was being drafted. It opposed the constitutional recognition by name of Albanians in the preamble, wanting a reference to them as simply ‘citizens’ and it opposed the official status of Albanian language in units of local self-government (Danforth 1995: 144; Fazliu 2019). Such rights clearly would contradict VMRO’s nationhood discourse “Macedonia for the Macedonians”. As Emilija Simoska, former SDSM Minister of Education, argues: “(VMRO) opposed any rights for the minorities. They wanted to define Macedonia only as the national state of the Macedonian people” (Simoska 2019). Yet, VMRO’s leader Ljubco Georgievski was effectively silenced by president Gligorov. Furthermore, Macedonian social democratic intellectuals convincingly argue that the phrase “national state of the Macedonian people” contained in the preamble did not signify monoethnic statehood, as many critics wrongly assume. Rather, as Simoska puts it, it “simply meant that Macedonia is the only country of the Macedonian people, but it is also the country of all minorities listed by name” (Simoska 2019). Similarly, Vankovska argues that critics of the preamble disregard a very important fact: “the (ethnic) Macedonians not only had weak statehood traditions but this was the *first* opportunity in their history to form an independent state” (Vankovska 2013: 91; my emphasis in italics). From a legal perspective, Erdoğan Saraç, Turkish leader in Macedonia, argues that one should not read too much into the preamble of the constitution because legally, “laws can not be derived from the preamble. Laws can be derived only from constitutional articles. The preamble is merely nominal” (Saraç 2019). All these

claims were somehow confirmed two months after the enactment of this constitution (January 1992) when the EC-mandated Badinter Commission judged that of all the former Yugoslav republics, only Slovenia and Macedonia met the requirements for minority rights protection and were thus worthy of EC/international recognition⁴ (Vankovska 2013: 92).

It is very important to point out that representatives of the Albanian party PPD also accept this line of reasoning concerning the first Macedonian constitution. To exemplify the point, Xhevdet Hajredini claims that the phrase “national state of the Macedonian people” was not meant to be discriminatory toward Albanians but only to show that apart from the Republic of Macedonia ethnic Macedonians do not have any other national state – unlike Macedonian Albanians who have their own national state in Albania (Hajredini 2019). Although ethnic Albanians were not satisfied with their constitutional minority status and were also demanding higher education in their mother tongue, they had to accept the constitution for the sake of regional and domestic stability. As Hajredini explains:

In principle, we (PPD) accepted the constitution. We had no other choice, we had to be part of the government. We couldn't stay out. War was raging in the region, Milosevic had his eyes on Macedonia. International/Western actors persistently pleaded with us to keep quiet until the Kosovo problem was solved ... Keep quiet otherwise Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbs will devour Macedonia. Indeed, it was like that in reality (Hajredini 2019).

The fact that both SDSM and PPD were keen on preserving domestic and regional stability was best shown by their readiness to discuss potential amendments to the constitution as early as June 1992. For this reason, they agreed to hold trilateral talks with the mediating of the EC's *Minorities Working Group* led by the German career diplomat Geert Ahrens. In his memoirs, Ahrens singles out the adoption and signing of a Working Paper (WP) between SDSM and PPD representatives in 17 June 1992. This WP adopted in Ohrid contained four main agreed-upon principles upon which any future amendment of the constitution should be based: changing the preamble of the November 1991 constitution so as to reflect more closely the model of a citizens' state; enactment of a 10 per cent threshold for making minority languages official in the local level; providing university education in minority languages; and some form of consensual decision-making for matters relating to ethnic questions (Ahrens 2007: 409-411). Ahrens argues

⁴ Macedonia had already proclaimed its independence from Yugoslavia in 21 November 1991.

that for the time this WP remained only a “guideline”, since the SDSM hesitated to implement the agreed-upon changes after the EC refused to recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name due to the Greek objection (Ahrens 2007: 403-404). He further clarifies that “Looking at this backlash with the wisdom of hindsight, there was nothing astonishing in the (Macedonian) government reaction ... The unfortunate recognition issue had made the EC and, as a consequence, the EC Conference very unpopular with Macedonians, whom the Badinter Commission had found worthy of recognition under their real name.” (Ahrens 2007: 404). Other interesting details emerge out of my interviews with SDSM elites who participated in the *Working Group* meetings with Ahrens. For instance, Emilija Simoska, former SDSM Minister of Education, argues:

The Social Democrats estimated that if they go too fast with those changes (outlined in the WP), maybe some turmoil will appear. *They were always afraid of a civil war, always ...* There was big frustration among Macedonians over lack of international recognition. That’s why they (might) perceive the increase in minority rights as they (Albanians) are getting everything and we (Macedonians) are not getting anything. So, it’s a psychological phenomenon ... *SDSM wanted to go gradually over everything.* The problem of the Social Democrats has always been not causing too much turmoil, because they wanted to avoid something worse that can happen. *They were always pro-minority*, but I am telling you, the dynamic is the problem, how you do it (radically or gradually)? (Simoska 2019; my emphasis in italics)

Erdoğan Saraç also agrees that SDSM feared a civil war if they conceded everything to the Albanians at the very beginning:

SDSM could not concede to what PPD demanded because they feared VMRO. They feared that they could lose power because *losing power meant death in those days*, in terms of eruption of a civil war. For instance, VMRO’s calls that we will put Albanians in gas chambers and especially their calls that we will cut off the wings of the eagle (Albanian national symbol) could directly have led to a civil war. The Social Democrats said that we must rein in VMRO (increasing the rights of Albanians would only provoke more the extremism of VMRO) (Saraç 2019)

In terms of the views of Xhevdet Hajredini quoted above, it becomes clear that the Albanian PPD also accepted in principle SDSM’s reasoning for the sake of preserving domestic and regional stability. All in all, SDSM needed Albanians, both in terms of PPD’s swing role in forming a government and in terms of PPD’s support in preventing government crises due to potential VMRO political attacks. On its part, although dissatisfied with certain constitutional principles, PPD elites well understood that only SDSM could afford them protection from VMRO (dyad C-B in Table 2.1), could later advance their ethno-linguistic rights and provide for domestic and regional stability. In brief, SDSM and PPD needed each other to advance their respective political agendas and

finally colluded (dyads A-C and C-A in Table 2.1). After Nikola Kljusev's "government of experts" was dissolved, on 5 September 1992, the SDSM-PPD coalition government, including also the Liberal Party and Socialist Party of Macedonia, took over under the leadership of Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski (controlling 71 out of 120 seats). During the two years of the coalition government (1992-94), SDSM took concrete steps to deliver on some of its promises to PPD and advance Albanians' ethno-linguistic rights, yet VMRO consistently blocked the passing of legislation. To exemplify the point, SDSM drafted legislation on bilingual identity cards but VMRO blocked its passage (Danforth 1995: 146).

3.4.2 Minority Counterelite and the Start of Double Ethnic Outbidding (February 1994-July 1997)

In accordance with its ideology and vision of nationhood, SDSM sought to build a centralized multiethnic polity. It provided institutional protection from the center for minority rights and as such was strongly opposed to any form of decentralized institutions fostering indirect rule. It should be clear that by 1994 SDSM's multiethnic vision had already generated a majority counterelite in opposition (i.e. VMRO) that was dissatisfied with what it called SDSM's concessions towards Albanians. Yet, SDSM centralizing tendencies gradually caused dissatisfaction also among several PPD elites who had little or insufficient access to the center and felt excluded from the spoils of governing. Intraparty tensions came to a head during PPD's second congress held in Tetovo on 12 February 1994 when the faction led by Arben Xhaferi split and subsequently formed the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH). Very recent evidence, however, shows that PDSH was actually a creation of UDB, former Yugoslav state security service, and its formation had the blessing and support of the then Albanian president Sali Berisha, himself also a former politburo member. This was confirmed to the author by Xhevdet Hajredini, former PPD high-level official and minister, and Muhamed Zeqiri, current SDSM deputy leader and parliamentarian. For instance, Hajredini explicitly argues that:

The goal of UDB has been to divide the Macedonian Albanians, for them not to stay in one single party. Of course, Albanians could have had more than one party, but not in the way it occurred – somebody from outside intervenes and then some Albanians are declared enemies/traitors while some are declared patriots (Hajredini 2019)

Regardless of how PDSH was actually formed, it represents the emergence of a D-type actor claiming insufficient minority rights as a cover to conceal what was actually a dissatisfaction with status-quo resource distribution. This becomes clear when one

analyzes PDSH's political platform. Its founder and leader, Arben Xhaferi, has consistently called for a decentralized form of governing for Albanian-inhabited regions of Macedonia. To provide social scientific support to his views, Xhaferi even consistently cited the work of Arend Lijphart and his consociational model (Brown 2005). In brief, for Xhaferi, strengthening "segmental autonomy" and thus creating monoethnic enclaves was the only way a multiethnic democracy could function in Macedonia. He reasoned that multiethnic states can not survive, only monoethnic ones can – "practically some kind of Albanian autonomous province has to be founded, a kind of state within state" (Iseni 2019). For PDSH, SDSM's centralized and *grazdanski drzava* (i.e. citizen state) model was a cloak for ethnic Macedonian oppression. Former PDSH parliamentarian Bekim Fazliu (2008-2014) confirmed to the author these views:

You cannot find in Europe a state with ethnic composition similar to Macedonia's (i.e. 65-25) that functions as a unitary state. All those states that are similar to Macedonia function either as federations, or confederations. This is what Mr. Xhaferi meant. In our region you have the example of Bosnia. In Western Europe you have the examples of Belgium and Switzerland. Only Macedonia is unitary. And that is the reason this state does not function properly and still faces problems and crises (Fazliu 2019).

PDSH's emergence is crucial for two main reasons. First, it signifies the emergence of a *minority counterelite* and minority intraethnic competition. Second, PDSH provided VMRO with a potential partner with whom to ally to ethnically outbid the incumbent SDSM-PPD coalition government. Bearing these two points in mind, it is important to emphasize for the present causal narrative the fact that instances of violent ethnic conflict started in Macedonia *after* PDSH emerged. Stated differently, in the first four postcommunist years (1990-94), interethnic relations in Macedonia were peaceful. They took a violent turn only *after* a minority counterelite emerged and then subsequently allied with the majority counterelite (i.e. VMRO).

The two main and hotly contested cases of violent conflict before the 2001 insurgency in Macedonia are the February 1995 ethnic riot in Tetovo and the July 1997 riot in Gostivar. In the former case, Macedonian police clashed with Albanian students and local residents gathered for the second day of classes in the then-unrecognized University of Tetovo, resulting in 15 injuries to demonstrators and police and the shooting death of one ethnic Albanian, Abduselam Emini. In the latter case, after PDSH Gostivar Mayor, Rufe Osmani, was arrested for ordering the Albanian flag to be flown from municipality building, Macedonian police clashed with several hundred ethnic Albanian

demonstrators, shooting and killing three of them (author's data; see Appendix). To better understand the political context under which these developments occurred, one needs also to mention that the second parliamentary election, held in October-November 1994, again produced a SDSM-PPD coalition government. VMRO, claiming massive voter fraud after the first round, boycotted the second round and refused any mandates in the *Sobranje*, a development that showed once again how deep the animus between SDSM and VMRO was. SDSM with 64 seats allied with the Socialist Party (8 seats) and PPD (14 seats) and took over with an overwhelming majority (86/120 seats) in the *Sobranje*. The newly-founded PDSH on its part secured only 5 seats but showed its growing strength by capturing the major Albanian urban centers (Tetovo and Gostivar) in the November-December 1996 local elections.

I claim that both ethnic riots were the result of PDSH and VMRO's efforts to ethnicize political space and ethnically outbid the incumbent SDSM-PPD coalition government. This claim can be substantiated by the fact that the government, having a majority in the *Sobranje* after October-November 1994 parliamentary election, had already taken concrete institutional steps to address the questions of higher education in minority language and display of minority national symbols.

Tetovo Deadly Ethnic Riot, February 1995

First, after the SDSM-PPD coalition government took over its second mandate in 20 December 1994, one of its main priorities was to try to solve the issue of higher education in minority language which the Albanians had long been demanding. However, they realized that the real problem was not the lack of a university in Albanian language, but the low education level of Albanian students and the shortage of qualified high school teachers in all disciplines in Albanian (Ismail). Güner Ismail, who was SDSM government spokesperson during its second mandate (1994-1996), explains that in the high school entrance examinations, Albanian students had a very low success rate compared to their ethnic Macedonian counterparts – while 75 per cent of Macedonian students would succeed in those examinations, the corresponding figure for Albanian students was only 25 per cent. Hence, argues Ismail, “Education level was low, why? Because there were no sufficient teachers, and they were not enough qualified. The solution was opening a Pedagogical faculty to train teachers (in Albanian)” (Ismail 2019). And the two coalition partners (SDSM-PPD) in principle agreed that, instead of opening

a university, they needed first to train high school teachers in Albanian. Then, where did the idea of opening a university in Tetovo come from? Xhevdet Hajredini (2019) explicitly states that Tetovo University was “the private initiative” of Fadil Sulejmani, an ethnic Albanian originally from Tetovo but who had worked all his life as professor of philology at Pristina University in Kosovo. After the Pristina University was violently closed down by Milosevic in early 1990, Sulejmani sought to make up for it by opening a new Albanian university in his native Tetovo. However, the suddenness of opening a university in Tetovo came as a shock and surprise not only to the SDSM but also to its Albanian coalition partner PPD – a professor coming from outside Macedonia and trying to establish illegally a university in Macedonia (Hajredini 2019). It was precisely this suddenness that was instrumentalized for political purposes by both PDSH and VMRO in opposition, and eventually lead to the deadly ethnic riots when Tetovo University was opened. As Güner Ismail (2019) recalls,

Unfortunately, there was a *rush* concerning the opening of this so-called illegal university. Unfortunately, *that was a strange project*. Some people interfered in this issue. From political formations, *there was (Menduh) Thaçi and (Arben) Xhaferi's PDSH*. We saw that different people were hanging around. You know, when something bad happens over here, you can find the fingerprints of everyone in it. (my emphasis in italics)

Perhaps the most explicit evidence to substantiate my claim that the deadly ethnic riot in Tetovo was an instance of double ethnic outbidding comes from Emilija Simoska who was SDSM Minister of Education when the Tetovo clashes happened. It would be useful to quote her testimony in full:

I was cooperating closely with Max Van Der Stoel (then-OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities) before I became minister of education, meaning 1992, 1993, that early. I was in favor of a trilingual university, although university education in minority language is not mentioned in the constitution. The main problem was that the government wanted to do it a little bit slower than my opinion. I was a bit more radical than politicians in the solutions I proposed, but I am not a politician (laughs). *The approach of the government was first to slowly introduce lectures in Albanians in those faculties where they need to train teachers*. The Skopje University wanted to stop the lectures in Albanian in the Pedagogical Faculty, and *I, as minister, had the biggest clashes with the university where I used to work*. We, as government, won at the end. It was not a problem ... But the people who caused the violent clashes, it was a little bit Albanian blame as well because *they wanted overnight to establish that university and promote their political ideas*. Look at what we did, we did this and that. So, they also used it for political propaganda. And that is why it happened. *When you have parties competing over which is greater Albanian and greater Macedonian, it is always like that. Ethnic outbidding is the worst thing that can happen* (Simoska 2019; my emphasis in italics)

It is very interesting to note that it was the opposition VMRO that pushed Skopje University at that time to institutionally clash with the SDSM government over the

opening of the Pedagogical Faculty in Albanian language. As Güner Ismail recalls, “VMRO had 400 university professors sign their declaration for not opening the Pedagogical Faculty in Albanian. Among them was the current VMRO presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska. But they did not succeed in that” (Ismail 2019). Fati Iseni (2019) mentions that several high-level VMRO officials like Antonio Milosovski and Filip Petrovski even went on a hunger strike to protest the opening of the Pedagogical Faculty.⁵ Eventually, on 17 February 1997 the Macedonian Assembly adopted the law that created an Albanian-language track in all disciplines taught at Skopje State University (Ackermann 2000: 92). To conclude, as I have evidenced, the political will on the part of SDSM-PPD coalition government to solve the problem of higher education in Albanian has been there since the very beginning. The suddenness of the opening of Tetovo University, the deadly riot that followed, and VMRO protests and hunger strikes, were clearly nothing more than VMRO-PDSH attempts to ethnicize the political space and outbid the incumbent SDSM-PPD.

Gostivar Deadly Ethnic Riot, July 1997

In 9 July 1997 in Gostivar, Albanian-majority town in western Macedonia, after the then-newly elected mayor, Rufi Osmani (*from PDSH*), was arrested for ordering the Albanian flag to be flown from municipality building, Macedonian police clashed with several hundred ethnic Albanian demonstrators, shooting and killing three of them. Like the previous Tetovo events, the violent clashes in Gostivar also should come as surprising given that the SDSM-PPD government had already undertaken specific institutional steps to address the issue of the use of national symbols *before* the Gostivar events. Indeed, just a day before the deadly ethnic riot in Gostivar (8 July 1997), the *Sobranje* passed the law that authorized the use of national minority flags in front of local public institutions *only* during national holidays (which in the case of Albanians is 28-29 October of each year) (Brown 2000: 131; Iseni 2013: 111). The fact that the Albanian flag was flown outside the authorized time frame during the incumbency of a PDSH municipality mayor is in itself revealing on the causes of the deadly ethnic riot in Gostivar. The clearest evidence to substantiate this claim comes from Fati Iseni who at the time was student union leader at (then-still unrecognized) Tetovo University. Iseni draws an interesting analogy

⁵ Unfortunately, after VMRO came to power in 2006, many of the same people who had gone to a hunger strike in 1995-1996 became ministers and high-level state functionaries. For instance, Antonio Milosovski served as VMRO Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2006 until 2011 (Iseni 2019).

between Gostivar and Tetovo who at the time of the clashes (9 July 1997) were both PDSH-controlled municipalities, in both of them Albanian flags were forcefully removed by the police, but only in Gostivar and *not* in Tetovo the PDSH mayor was arrested and violent clashes ensued (Iseni 2019). As he aptly describes:

In 8 July 1997, Arben Xhaferi and Menduh Thaçi (PDSH leader and deputy leader respectively), as leaders of the party who had won the municipalities of Tetovo and Gostivar in the 1996 local elections, enter the government building and meet with prime minister Crvenkovski. The meeting was around afternoon. At 2 p.m. after midnight (9 July 1997), both municipalities were attacked by the police. In Gostivar, apart from removing the flag, the police also arrested the mayor, but not in Tetovo. Now look at the paradox. *The mayor of a municipality which is in periphery like Gostivar is arrested in the most brutal form, many people were killed in the same day, and another 400 were arrested, whereas in Tetovo (the Albanian stronghold in western Macedonia) there was no violence at all.* I was witness to the events in Tetovo and I can testify together with my friends – the late Harun Aliu, Ismail Vlashi, Ekrem Abdul, and many other friends were there in Tetovo. *Despite all our provocations, the Macedonian police in Tetovo did not react at all.* Meaning, *there was no order to cause trouble in Tetovo*, which is quite revealing (Iseni 2019; my emphasis in italics)

3.4.3 VMRO-PDSH Incumbency and the 2001 Insurgency (December 1997-August 2001)

Despite the uproar caused by the Tetovo and Gostivar riots, what ethnicized political space the most before the October-November 1998 parliamentary elections was the emergence of an Albanian paramilitary group called National Liberation Army (NLA). It carried out its first bomb attack in 17 December 1997 against the local courthouse in Gostivar and claimed responsibility for four other bomb attacks against police stations in Kumanovo, Prilep, Tetovo, and Bit Pazar in the period from January to July 1998 (Iseni 2013: 122-7). Although the attacks caused only material damages and no casualties, the emergence of an extra-parliamentary actor carried the day and the then-Interior Minister Tomislav Cokrevski openly admitted in parliament in August 1998 that NLA paramilitary structures were operating in Macedonia (Iseni 2013: 128). NLA since the outset presented itself as an extra-parliamentary alternative to the Albanian political parties PPD and PDSH, yet its bomb attacks in the period preceding the October-November 1998 parliamentary elections actually helped both PDSH and VMRO ethnically outbid the incumbent SDSM-PPD coalition in the elections. Indeed, after 4 years of absence in the *Sobranje*, VMRO won 49 seats whereas SDSM suffered a major defeat and saw its seats more than halved from 64 in the previous election to 27. The highest vote getter from the Albanian camp was PPD with 14 seats, yet the party VMRO asked to join the ruling

coalition was PDSH with 11 seats.⁶ This alliance pattern conforms to the expectations of the theoretical framework developed in this dissertation. The majority party that holds a non-multiethnic vision of nationhood will be more likely to collude with minority counterelites that emerge as a result of dissatisfaction with resource distribution (dyad B-D in Table 2.2) and vice versa (dyad D-B).

As stated in the above sections, the passing of the 1991 constitution which conferred substantial ethno-linguistic rights to national minorities and the subsequent SDSM-led legal reforms (in coalition with PPD) to further these rights for Albanians in the areas of higher education in minority language and display of national symbols represent instances of a majority party imposing its multiethnic vision on its non-multiethnic counterpart. Once the non-multiethnic VMRO took over (allied with the minority counterelite PDSH) in 1998, it returned the favor. The (in)formal deal that governed VMRO-PDSH relations was based on two points. First, it was the so-called “two-thirds/one-third pact ... which gave the Democratic Party one-third of the government jobs, ambassadorships, and directorships of public enterprises, and one-third of the revenues from government business” (Hislope 2004: 22). Second, VMRO and PDSH informally “transform(ed) Macedonia into a two-part federation of Slav Macedonians and Albanians” with VMRO assuming the governance of eastern Macedonia and PDSH governing the Albanian-inhabited western Macedonia (Barany 2005: 92). As part of the second pact, VMRO leadership withdrew Macedonian police and security forces from Albanian-inhabited regions, especially from areas bordering Albania and Kosovo, leaving PDSH complete control over the organized criminal networks in the “golden Balkan triangle”⁷ (Ismanovski 2008; see also Hislope 2002). Although the VMRO-PDSH coalition government has frequently been described as the coalition between two unlikely partners given the radical nationalist rhetoric of both of them, I argue that their deal and policies essentially reflect their respective visions of nationhood. Stated differently, by creating two monoethnic enclaves within one state, VMRO actually delivered on its promise to create a “Macedonia for (ethnic) Macedonians” in the east and PDSH likewise delivered on its promise to strengthen segmental autonomy and create a monoethnic Albanian ‘fiefdom’ in western Macedonia. As aptly put by the former PDSH parliamentarian himself: “The government during that

⁶ Election results accessed from the official website of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia. Available at <http://www.sobranie.mk/elections-results-135bbd48-80ba-4f7e-9a31-32ca86058785.nsp>

⁷ Denoting the area comprising the border regions between Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia).

time functioned like this: I as Albanian party am responsible for Albanians, you are responsible for Macedonians” (Fazliu 2019). Fazliu defends the position of his party by arguing that *informally* dividing Macedonia was the only way the country could function properly – a unitary state was a recipe for ethnic Macedonian oppression according to him (Fazliu 2019). In terms of the present theoretical framework, both parties imposed these policies on their majority and minority counterparts (dyads B-A and D-C in Table 2.2).

Arguably, this informal division of the spheres of influence between the two coalition partners could well be considered an example of ethnic power-sharing that somehow increased the rights of Albanians in Macedonia. And there is evidence to substantiate this point. PPD parliamentarian at the time Azis Pollozhani (1998-2002) explains:

When PDSH came to power with VMRO, the Albanian question actually advanced in some aspects – with informal political agreements, *not* constitutionally. Albanians started to get employed more by saying to them ‘do whatever you want in the western part of the country’. So, they separated the country. By not changing anything from the constitutional aspect, they (VMRO and PDSH) made changes through a political agreement. For instance, until that time, the police chief in Tetovo was an ethnic Macedonian, now he will be an Albanian. The hospital director in Gostivar was a Macedonian, now he will be an Albanian. So, when VMRO came to power, some things were actually done better than the left and PPD had previously done. I was myself in PPD during that period. We were in opposition and we did not have many arguments against PDSH. Despite the fact that they (PDSH) began also corruption during that period, what they did with VMRO was a new informal approach to politics. Why? Because VMRO gave a lot of space to PDSH (Pollozhani 2019).

Needless to say, for both VMRO and PDSH representatives, the period of their coalition government represents the “golden period” of interethnic relations in postcommunist Macedonia (Fazliu 2019; Slaveski 2019). “Institutional doors were opened for the first time for Albanians. Albanians started to enter and lead state institutions. They started to get employed in the state administration. Thus, they became economically stronger” avers Bekim Fazliu (2019). However, such a perspective conceals more than it reveals.

First and foremost, it is true that in terms of public employment, ethnic Albanians started to get employed more, but the truth is that those who got employed was a narrow group of Albanians loyal to the PDSH leadership, whereas for most Albanians the situation did not change much. As a matter of fact, PDSH *never* got majority Albanian support in parliamentary elections. Indeed, after the 1998 election, it joined the VMRO-led government as the loser in the Albanian bloc since PPD had got the majority of

Albanian votes. As Hajredini puts it, “PDSH in 1998 created the dangerous precedent that Macedonian parties can come to power by forming a coalition with the Albanian party that did not enjoy the support of the majority of Albanians (Hajredini 2019). Second, and most importantly, VMRO-PDSH policies were imposed on the Macedonian and Albanian opposition parties and, as such, were bound to create huge dissatisfaction. As Azis Pollozhani (2019) summarizes:

Albanian people experienced that slight improvement of rights during VMRO-PDSH rule more as a party concession, as fulfillment of the desires of the incumbent party, as personal privileges. *Albanian people did not experience it as an advancement of the collective rights of Albanians ... Thus, it was a rule that resembled more a kind of monism.* It was an autocratic form of governing where party was everything. This pleased those within the party (PDSH), *but displeased a great part of Albanians, who did not dare to speak out. As if we were in communism ...* Local elections took place in 2000, what happened? PDSH won all Albanian municipalities, but killed Albanians for votes. *The killing of Albanians for votes has occurred in the time of PDSH.* Here in Kondovo it occurred, in 2000.

Muhamed Zeqiri, current SDSM deputy leader, also condemns the “fratricide” that occurred among ethnic Albanians during VMRO-PDSH rule. *De facto* dividing the country was “the biggest mistake” according to Zeqiri (2019). “It has always suited VMRO – you (as Albanian party) deal with Albanians, do whatever you want, we (as Macedonians) mind our business” adds Zeqiri (2019).

Accordingly, I argue that the extreme nationhood policies (i.e. *de facto* dividing Macedonia) and the corrupt practices during VMRO-PDSH rule is the main cause of the outbreak of the 2001 insurgency. First, these policies triggered the *double ethnic outbidding* mechanism whereby the opposition majority and minority parties disaffected with the status-quo nationhood discourse and resource distribution sought to (re)ethnicize political space. Yet, this time an extra-parliamentary actor, NLA, was added to the list of the seriously disaffected. Second, as previously stated, VMRO-PDSH policies left the Albania-Macedonia and Kosovo-Macedonia borders virtually unpatrolled and these porous borders provided NLA with the indispensable elements of staging an insurgency – free flow of arms from both Albania and Kosovo, transborder logistical support and cooperation of the unpressured local population.

This should make clear the fact that spillover from Kosovo war in itself did *not* cause the 2001 insurgency in Macedonia. Instead, I argue that it is VMRO-PDSH extreme nationhood policies and corrupt practices that caused the 2001 armed insurgency. The temporal dimension of causality is again important. NLA attacks had already turned deadly more than one year *before* the actual insurgency started in mid-February 2001. As

previously stated, since its official appearance in December 1997, NLA attacks on courthouses and police stations caused only material damage and no casualties. Yet, NLA's first deadly attack came only *after* PDSH took over in coalition with VMRO, when in 11 January 2000 it slayed three Macedonian police officers in a checkpoint in Arachinovo near Skopje (Appendix A). Its second deadly attack came one year later in 25 January 2001 when NLA attacked the Tearce police station in Tetovo and killed one Macedonian police officer and wounded three others (Appendix A).

While VMRO's designation of NLA as a terrorist organization is unsurprising, its coalition partner's identical attitude is in itself revealing. An examination of the Albanian sources on the subject in question shows that both before and during the 2001 insurgency, PDSH's highest ranking officials univocally interpreted the 2001 insurgency as one meant to unseat them from power. In the first of such instances, in the aftermath of the Arachinovo and Tearce slayings, PDSH deputy leader, Menduh Thaçi, in an interview for the Albanian daily *Flaka* in Skopje (8 February 2001) publicly called NLA a terrorist organization and added that (henceforth, translation from Albanian to English is mine):

But we are fortunate since that small group of people (i.e. NLA militants) does not enjoy any support among Albanians in Macedonia, Kosovo or Albania, nor do they have any political hope to do so. For this reason, I don't think they represent a serious security threat ... Macedonia's and Albanians' enemies dislike PDSH's successful institutional initiatives. The enemies of Macedonia are also the enemies of the Albanian people and vice versa. But, I am optimistic that, through the institutions of the system, we will put an end to these troubles that are being exploited for political ends (cited in Iseni 2013: 157)

Similarly, after the insurgency started in mid-February, Menduh Thaçi in another interview given to the Macedonian daily *Nova Makedonija* (16 March 2001) declared that:

Our stance is clear – we condemn those armed Albanians who incite violence and will not accept any dialogue with them ... Once the context is analyzed, we will come to the conclusion that their main aim is to ruin PDSH and its governmental cooperation with VMRO-DPMNE (cited in Iseni 2013: 174)

Equally significantly, PDSH founder and leader, Arben Xhaferi, stated explicitly in another interview to *Nova Makedonija* that the insurgency was *not* a spillover from Kosovo but was instead domestically engineered (Iseni 2013: 177-8). Unsurprisingly, both VMRO and PDSH representatives the author interviewed diagnosed the source of the insurgency in an almost identical manner. Bekim Fazliu (2019) from PDSH explained:

Let's clear out the dilemma of 2001 so that we do not have any misunderstanding. The Albanian people who went out to fight were pure idealists. I am speaking about the rank and file of the NLA. *For the leadership, it was only a struggle for power.* This becomes clear now since the results (in terms of advancing the rights of Albanians) are lacking ... The leadership played with the feelings of Albanian people, they greatly played ... Indeed, *it is very puzzling that at the moment when the rights of Albanians had reached the peak, during VMRO-PDSH rule, the 2001 conflict erupted.* It is very strange that when we (PDSH) are in power, Albanians overreact. For me, they overreact because we (PDSH) raise up their dignity. *Definitely, the goal of the NLA leadership has not been ethnic, but merely to unseat us (PDSH) from power.* But please, point out the difference, by citing me, that the fighters and the people were in a pure idealism – fighting for better rights and freedoms.

Whereas Trajko Slaveski, former VMRO vice-president, outlines his party's version of events, which, unsurprisingly, closely matches that of PDSH:

There is a confusion about what happened in Macedonia at that time. There is huge, huge confusion. Because, you know, I followed very closely what was going on. In 1999, it's very interesting. *International Crisis Group*, you know that, they were quite active in the region. They published a report which they withdrew later on when the conflict in Macedonia started. And there is a paragraph saying, I am paraphrasing: 'If you ask average Albanian in Macedonia whether they are satisfied with the situation in the country, they would give a positive answer. If you ask average Macedonian if they are satisfied, they would give a negative answer. So, we (VMRO) never understood why this conflict in 2001 erupted in Macedonia. It's a puzzle. *International Crisis Group* withdrew its report. Probably (because) they were also puzzled because, you know, they portrayed the situation in Macedonia as favorable for Albanians. I participated in the government in 2000, and I know the atmosphere. It was very friendly. Georgievski (VMRO leader) was very open, you know, very friend with Albanians. (Arben) Xhaferi, the late, his ministers like Bedredin Ibrahimi and others. There was, you know, very frank cooperation, friendship ... And all of a sudden, this time, winter in 2001, it all started. The first five communiques of this NLA, or UÇK, the first five communiques were very anti-Macedonian. They were referring to as occupier Macedonian Slavs etc. So, I know this first hand from my conversations with my students, Albanian students. Sometimes they are frank. Two-three months, people were very reserved, they did not know. Some of my students who are now functionaries in DUI (the Albanian party that emerged out of NLA), they were puzzled who these people in the mountains were. What do they want? What are their goals etc? And NLA in Macedonia attracted the fighters promising them that they fight for great Albania. Nobody can hide that. They (NLA) issued five communiques and after that, they changed the tune. And it seemed that this is controlled conflict ... That is why many people believe, and Ljupco Georgievski will always, until now, tell you that at that time Macedonia was fighting not its own Albanians from here, but it was attacked from NATO and from Kosovo. Many people believe this. Yes, because you know Kosovo Liberation Army is a brainchild of NATO. Who can hide that? ... It is very clear that Americans ... have found in Albanians a strategic partner. How will this end in the medium term, in the long term for Albanians nobody knows. Because Albanians have paid a very high price twice, once with Stalin, second time with Mao, now with Americans ... I want to say that what happened in 2001, for us is a puzzle. There was no real reason for the conflict, no real reason (Slaveski 2019).

What further substantiates my emphasis on ethnic outbidding as the cause of the 2001 insurgency is the fact that the ethnic Macedonian opposition party SDSM also agreed with the logic of VMRO and PDSH that the 2001 conflict *was not ethnically motivated*. As Emilija Simoska, former SDSM Minister of Education, explicitly told the author:

The 2001 conflict was *not* built on anger that culminated, although the problems existed ... 2001 insurgency absolutely was *not* ethnically motivated. It was economically motivated. It was a group of people that simply wanted to push Arben Xhaferi, and the PPD and say, 'until now you controlled the borders, the businesses and everything. From now on, we are going to do it ... Absolutely, Ali Ahmeti (NLA leader) struck *not* for the rights of the minorities, but to get rid of Arben Xhaferi and to have his place, and Ahmeti succeeded in that. It is very simple, it is nothing more than that (Simoska 2019).

Lastly, Xhevdet Hajredini of PPD claims that the 2001 insurgency was a struggle for power and the NLA had NATO support behind. "Five communiques of NLA were calling for great Albania. In the sixth they changed tune ... When NATO commanded them to stop, they stopped" adds Hajredini (2019). Very recent ethnographic research of the 2001 insurgency also supports this interpretation. For instance, Greek-American anthropologist Vasiliki Neofotistos (2012: 3-6) argues that "The 2001 armed conflict was neither the first nor the last crisis in Macedonia ... the 2001 crisis is diagnostic of intense political struggles, couched in ethnonational terms, over the allocation of power in the newly founded state." "Middle-and-working-class Macedonians and Albanians in Skopje" she concludes, "almost unanimously interpreted the 2001 insurgency as *politika*, overturning the essentialist premises of nationalist media discourse" (Neofotistos 2012: 66). All in all, with the exception of NLA leadership and those who later became members of the political party that emerged from NLA, there exists *unanimity* among other parties in Macedonia that the 2001 insurgency was not ethnically motivated but was instead staged to unseat VMRO and PDSH from power. Stated differently, there is well-established evidence to prove the causal mechanism of double ethnic outbidding.

3.5 Ohrid Framework Agreement: Radical Break or Continuation of Politics-as-Usual?

After 6 months of low intensity warfare that left about 150 dead and displaced up to 140,000 people (Phillips 2004: 161), EU and U.S.' mix of carrot (on 10 April 2001 Macedonia was offered to sign the EU Stabilization and Association Agreement) and sticks, coupled with the moderate demands of the rebels, produced the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) that officially ceased the hostilities (13 August 2001). OFA was and still is hailed as a milestone that crucially redefined the interethnic relations in the country. First, the preamble of the 1991 constitution was changed. With Amendment IV, the Republic of Macedonia is (re)defined as:

The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia (*graѓanite na Republika Makedonija*), the Macedonian people (*makedonskiot narod*), as well as citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people (*albanskiot narod*), the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the

Serbian people, the Romany people, the Bosniak people and others taking responsibility for the present and future of their fatherland (Macedonia Constitution 1991).

Accordingly, compared to the preamble of the 1991 constitution, the phrase *nacionalna država na makedonskiot narod* (national state of the Macedonian people) is removed and the new preamble starts with the phrase *graѓanite na Republika Makedonija* (the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia). Moreover, the constitutional status of Albanians (and all other listed minorities) is upgraded from *albanci nacionalnosti* (Albanian nationality) to *albanskiot narod* (Albanian people), thus becoming a constituent nation of the Republic of Macedonia. Second, with Amendment V (replacing Article 7 of the 1991 constitution) the Republic of Macedonia became constitutionally a bilingual state:

The Macedonian language, written using its Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language throughout the Republic of Macedonia and in the international relations of the Republic of Macedonia. Any other language spoken by at least 20 percent of the population is also an official language, written using its alphabet, as specified below (Macedonia Constitution)

Third, OFA mandated the double majority principle (a.k.a. the Badinter principle) when deciding issues affecting the interests of non-majority ethnic groups. The Badinter rule mandates majority support (62 out of 123 seats) in the *Sobranje* and a concurrent majority of votes among MPs who represent non-majority ethnic groups. Amendment X introduced these changes:

For laws that directly affect culture, use of language, education, personal documentation, and use of symbols, the Assembly makes decisions by a majority vote of the Representatives attending, within which there must be a majority of the votes of the Representatives attending who belong to communities not in the majority in the population of Macedonia. In the event of a dispute within the Assembly regarding the application of this provision, the Committee on Inter-Community Relations shall resolve the dispute (Macedonia Constitution 1991)

Last, OFA mandated the central government to devolve authority for a wide array of functions to the municipal level and thus obligated a revision of the municipal boundaries. All these reforms were meant to institutionally cement a multiethnic Macedonian state and pave the way for peaceful interethnic relations. Indeed, for scholars who argue that the preamble of the 1991 constitution was the real generator of violent ethnic conflict in the pre-Ohrid period (Koinova 2013), interethnic violence should have been less likely in the post-Ohrid period. As I am going to show, this has not been the case and the main reason for this is the nature of OFA itself and its failure to diagnose the real source of interethnic tensions in Macedonia.

Indeed, not all parties were willing OFA signatories. SDSM leader Branko Crvenkovski and PPD's Imer Imeri willingly signed OFA since its provisions clearly conformed to their nationhood visions of creating a citizen state (*grazhdanski drzava*) that would further minorities' ethno-linguistic rights. Yet, VMRO leader Ljupco Georgievski and its former coalition partner PDSH's Arben Xhaferi were reluctant signatories. As I am going to show below, in the immediate post-Ohrid period, both leaders openly disowned OFA, averring that it was dead and publicly calling for the partitioning of Macedonia. The reason for this is not hard to discern. OFA-mandated institutional values of civicness, inclusiveness, and multiculturalism represent the antithesis of the monoethnic enclave/fiefdom nationhood vision that both VMRO and PDSH advocate and actually put to life during their coalition government (1998-2001). In this respect, I also argue that VMRO's later shift to the discourse and policy of antiquization under the leadership of Nikola Gruevski represents *the* attempt to undo the multiethnic regime forged at Ohrid and re-assert the ethnic Macedonian identity of the state.

Based on the points raised above, I claim that OFA failed to diagnose and propose a remedy for the real source of interethnic tensions in Macedonia. More precisely, OFA failed to instill the value of *intraethnic elite cooperation* among both majority and minority elites. It is certainly true that OFA represents a milestone in terms of substantially advancing minorities' ethno-linguistic rights. Yet, these rights were once more imposed on reluctant domestic actors instead of being willingly embraced by them. Recent evidence suggests that "The framework document was 'ready-made' by foreign actors whose names are still not known. The negotiation was carried out away from the public eye and even today the list of experts and consultants is not known" (Vankovska 2013: 96). Hence, as in the pre-Ohrid period, imposition of ethnic policies again triggered the double ethnic outbidding mechanism and again led to interethnic violence. Hence, in terms of patterns of interethnic relations, I argue that OFA does not represent a break with the past. Instead OFA can be best described as continuation of politics- as-usual in the Republic of North Macedonia.

3.5.1 First Post-Ohrid Parliamentary Election: Silence after the Storm?

The 15 September 2002 parliamentary elections represented the first critical test in the post-Ohrid period. Two important political changes had occurred. First, the NLA rebel group, after the signing of OFA, the successful NATO-led disarming process and the amnesty law for its fighters promulgated in *Sobranje*, transformed into a political party,

Democratic Union for Integration (BDI), led by the former NLA rebel leader Ali Ahmeti. It self-identified as a center-left, social democratic party (Pollozhani 2019; Simoska 2019). Second, the *Sobranje* dropped the double ballot majority electoral law and instituted instead a closed list proportional system with no threshold at all. SDSM formed a pre-election alliance with all national minorities other than Albanians (i.e. Turks, Roma, Vlachs, Serbs, and Bosniaks), the *Za Makedonija Zaedno* (Together for Macedonia), running on a platform promising to reverse the political and socio-economic instability of the past four years. According to Enes Ibrahim, leader of Turkish Movement Party (THP) in Macedonia, SDSM's "all-embracing policy" in the first post-Ohrid election was crucial for normalizing the country in the aftermath of the war (Ibrahim 2019). VMRO instead again clinged to a campaign of ethnic chauvinism stressing the "fight that VMRO-DPMNE led along with the Macedonian people" and claiming that "the enemy we fought against will not renounce its idea for Greater Albania" (Election Watch Report 2002: 3). The Macedonian and Albanian electorate perceived VMRO and PDSH respectively, quite fairly according to my causal argument, as responsible for leading the country to the brink of full-scale civil war. Indeed, as expected, both VMRO and PDSH paid the price for their past policies at the polls. SDSM swept the elections in the Macedonian camp by doubling its seats from 27 in the last elections to 60 in 2002. VMRO instead saw its seats almost halved from 49 to 33. Former rebel-group-turned-political party BDI swept the elections in the Albanian camp capturing 16 seats while PDSH captured 7 seats.⁸ It seems that the biggest loser in the Albanian camp was PPD who elected only 2 MPs, yet many of its former members had actually shifted to BDI in the post-Ohrid period.⁹ In brief, there was a new constellation of political forces in the Albanian camp. In the post-Ohrid period, minority intraethnic competition would revolve around two main actors: Ali Ahmeti's BDI and Arben Xhaferi's PDSH. BDI would replace PPD as PDSH's main political rival.

In terms of the theoretical framework developed here, BDI would represent a C-type actor, both because it replaced the former C-type actor (i.e. PPD) and because it shared its vision of primarily a civic state advancing minorities' ethno-linguistic rights. Moreover, unlike PDSH, both BDI and PPD fully embraced OFA and its complete implementation. For BDI this seems to be quite natural since it was its moderate demands,

⁸ Official results of the 15 September 2002 parliamentary election. Accessed from *Sobranje's* official website <http://www.sobranie.mk/elections-results-5e745a79-1d11-47eb-bafc-eff5545f399c.nsp>

⁹ As a case in point, former PPD vice president, Aziz Pollozhani, was elected MP from BDI in the September 2002 parliamentary election (Pollozhani 2019).

advancing the right of Albanians short of secession or federalization, that won it the support of the international community and eventually paved the way for OFA. When BDI was formed, one of its high-level officials Musa Xhaferi, even put forward the idea that one day BDI merge with SDSM and form one big leftist multiethnic party (Simoska 2019). Hence, for the September 2002 parliamentary elections, I would have expected SDSM and BDI to come together for the ruling coalition (dyad A-C in table 2.2). This is what happened indeed. The old alliance pattern did not change and in 1 November 2002, SDSM-BDI coalition government, dubbed as the coalition of “guns and roses”, took over under Social Democrat Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski.

Barely a month had passed since the SDSM-BDI government took over when in 25 December 2002, a powerful bomb exploded in a high school in Kumanovo killing one Macedonian civilian (Author’s data). This was the first of a wave of kidnappings, terrorist bombings, and attacks on police stations and courthouses that rocked Macedonia between December 2002 and August 2003. A new Albanian paramilitary group, *Armata Kombetare Shqiptare* (AKSH, Albanian National Army), claimed responsibility for most of these attacks. This new paramilitary group that emerged in the immediate aftermath of Ohrid, rejected OFA by calling it as “harmful and treacherous” and vowed to fight for the secession of western Macedonia to join the Greater Albania (Bajrami 2002). In all likelihood, AKSH consisted of the henchmen of PDSH’s strongman and deputy leader Menduh Thaçi. Xhevdet Hajredini (2019) told the author that PDSH henchmen two times had attacked and tried to kill BDI leader Ali Ahmeti.

What is equally important for my causal narrative here is that in the midst of this wave of violence, OFA was dealt its heaviest blow by two of the four parliamentary actors that had signed and ratified it. Concretely, on 18 and 19 April 2003, VMRO leader Ljubco Georgievski and PDSH leader Arben Xhaferi and deputy leader Menduh Thaçi issued public statements disowning OFA, claiming that “the Framework Agreement is dead” and calling for the partitioning of Macedonia (ICG 2003: 29). In his article in the Macedonian daily *Dnevnik* in 18 April 2003, Georgievski flatly stated that partition was the best solution. Yet, should Albanians reject partition, he proposed that “Macedonians build a wall like the one going up between Israelis and Palestinians” (ICG 2003: 21). Georgievski’s former coalition partner Arben Xhaferi likewise averred that “the only solution to fill the geo-strategic emptiness of the Balkans after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian one is [mono] ethnic states” (ICG 2003: 29).

After these public statements, there was an upsurge in AKSH's terrorist bombings and attacks until August 2003.

These events provide the strongest support for my argument that the *imposed* nature of OFA triggered once more the double ethnic outbidding mechanism among the majority and minority parties in opposition and led once more to interethnic violence. Undoubtedly, both Georgievski and Xhaferi were the political losers once the dust of the 2001 insurgency settled (Simoska 2019). They then lost the first post-Ohrid parliamentary elections. Hence, the upsurge in interethnic violence in the aftermath of Ohrid is an outcome of both leaders' attempts to ethnicize political space in order to ethnically outbid their incumbent majority and minority counterparts. During this time, perhaps quite significantly, the rhetoric of both Georgievski and Xhaferi was very similar to that of the paramilitary group (AKSH) committing the acts of violence. All three actors rejected OFA and advocated the partitioning of Macedonia. As Fati Iseni (2019) points out:

It is very interesting to draw an analogy. After losing the 2002 election, PDSH returned to the position it was during 1995-1996, when they used to promote the ideas that multiethnic states can *not* survive. Then, when they joined government in 2006, this concept was again forgotten. Whenever he was in opposition, Xhaferi would again promote these ideas. PDSH would pay a high price for this lack of seriousness because the Albanian electorate would gradually punish it.

This clearly shows once more that it is the double ethnic outbidding mechanism and *not* the quest for more minority rights that is the main cause of interethnic tensions and violence in postcommunist North Macedonia.

3.5.2 The 2004 Redistricting Law and VMRO's Failed Referendum Bid

The next hot button political issue that clearly showed the persistence of the pattern of imposition of ethnic policies in Macedonia was the passing of the OFA-mandated redistricting law that revised the 1996 municipal boundaries. The new territorial law would decrease the number of municipalities, increase their competences and most importantly, ensure more balanced ethnic representation. As such, it was explicitly meant to promote power-sharing with the Albanian minority community and increase its number in certain municipalities so that the Albanians could meet the 20 per cent OFA-specific threshold and its accompanying ethno-linguistic rights (Pollozhani 2019). Second, the Law was meant to redraw the boundaries in such a way as to create *urban* Albanian municipalities, since according to the 1996 Law, most Albanian municipalities were rural.

As then-BDI parliamentarian Azis Pollozhani (2019) mentions “The second aim of the 2004 Law was to bring back Albanian political weight to urban centers.”

The law in itself and its goals were quite democratic and SDSM once more showed its multiethnic credentials and its readiness to further the ethno-linguistic rights of Albanians. Yet, the mean through which this law was drafted and passed was authoritarian imposition, as has been the case with the passing of almost every ethnic policy in postcommunist Macedonia. Without any effective parliamentary debate, the redistricting law was largely an outcome of “closed-door negotiations” between the ruling coalition partners, SDSM and BDI, during which “The public, and even fellow party members, were largely kept in the dark” (ICG 2005: 2). Fulfilling OFA-mandated double majority principle, SDSM-BDI ruling coalition passed the redistricting law on 11 August 2004. It decreased the number of municipalities from 123 to 83, with the capital Skopje organized as a separate district composed of ten municipalities. Most importantly, the redistricting law resulted in several ethno-linguistic rights for Albanians. With the new law, Albanians surpassed ethnic Macedonians and became a majority in the city of Struga. Second, Albanians came to constitute more than 20 per cent of the population of the capital Skopje, thus meeting the OFA threshold and making Albanian the second official language in the capital. Third, Albanians became an outright majority in two of Skopje’s ten municipalities, Cair and Saraj (ICG 2005: 2).

The imposition of the law by the SDSM-BDI ruling coalition triggered the usual double ethnic outbidding mechanism. VMRO, allied with a ultranationalist NGO (World Macedonia Congress), accused SDSM of “national treason” and started a signature campaign to collect the required 150,000 signatures to trigger a national referendum to repeal the redistricting law. Collecting 180,454 petition signatures, *Sobranje* scheduled the referendum for 7 November 2004 (ICG 2005: 3). VMRO’s traditional ally in the Albanian camp, PDSH, was also against the law. “There was no reason for PDSH to oppose the law” avers BDI’s deputy Pollozhani (2019). However, unsurprisingly according to the theory developed here, PDSH parliamentarian Bekim Fazliu (2019) told the author that:

The territorial Law harmed the Albanians. If you look at the Albanian municipalities, they do not have any financial capability. Our demand for the capital Skopje has been for two Albanian municipalities to exist within: the municipality of the Castle and of the Clock Tower. Not like the present Chair. The municipality is 3 km², it has the largest population density in all Europe, and you don’t have any space left for economic development. Half of *çaršija* (old bazaar) belongs to the municipality of Chair, and the other half does not. The

Skopje Castle does not belong to Chair ... Only the rural municipality of Saraj became part of Skopje to reach the 20 per cent threshold. However, Skopje is surrounded with Albanian settlements. There are the municipalities of Studenichani and Arachinovo, which are not part of Skopje, but are 99 per cent Albanian. We (PDSH) wanted these municipalities to be part of Skopje so that our (Albanians') number rises to 30-40 per cent of Skopje's population.

Two weeks before the scheduled referendum, armed militias began to circulate in Kondovo, an ethnic Albanian village in the hills northwest of Skopje. Later identified to be PDSH henchmen, they threatened to use violence if the redistricting law was not repealed (Zekiri and Georgievski 2004). This clearly shows once more that it is the double ethnic outbidding mechanism and *not* the quest for more minority rights that is the main cause of interethnic tensions and violence in postcommunist Macedonia. After strong international pressure for restraint, Crvenkovski government did not intervene and clash with the militia. In the absence of such pressure, armed clashes setting off a chain of violence would have been the likely scenario.

As this case clearly shows, it is important to stress the point that international pressure from EU and the U.S. is an important variable that has often prevented interethnic tensions from escalating into violence in Macedonia. Indeed, EU and U.S. initiatives were also key in defeating the referendum call. First, sensing the danger of the developments, then European Commission President Romano Prodi visited Macedonia in 1 October 2004 and in his speech before the *Sobranje* declared that the new redistricting law was “a method of founding stable and deep roots of local democracy. Europe is here, at the reach of your hands ... However, the decision depends on you ... to say whether you want Europe” (cited in ICG 2005: 4). Second, on 4 November 2004, just three days before the scheduled referendum, the U.S., with Greek silent approval, recognized Macedonia by its constitutional name, The Republic of Macedonia instead of FYROM. This provided an immense reassurance both to the SDSM-BDI ruling coalition and the population at large. Indeed, the referendum turnout was an embarrassingly 26 per cent low, with ethnic Albanians not showing up at the polls at all (ICG 2005: 5). This represented a resounding defeat for the opposition VMRO and PDSH and a major victory for the civic-oriented and multiethnic SDSM-BDI ruling coalition.

However, the 2004 referendum also points to the limits of international/Western pressure in nationally divided polities like Macedonia. In other words, despite strong Western opposition, VMRO never backed out of the referendum. Likewise, despite the anticipated international condemnation, VMRO leader Georgievski one year earlier in 2003 claimed that OFA was a dead agreement and called for partitioning Macedonia. Two

observations are in order. First, if even in a relatively new, small and weak state like Macedonia we observe mainstream parties that consistently oppose international actors in accordance with their nationhood visions, this means that in explaining domestic outcomes we need to consider seriously the primacy of domestic dynamics over the external ones. Second, the aftermath of OFA and the 2004 referendum clearly show how VMRO constantly revives and instrumentalizes its monoethnic nationhood vision for achieving political objectives. As Azis Pollozhani (2019) points out “VMRO opposed the 2004 Law because it had reason to oppose – that Law was opposite to their political vision.” This evidences my argument that the salience of nationhood visions is endogenous to partisan competition and electoral politics. Indeed, VMRO will continue to revive its monoethnic vision under its new party leader also, Nikola Gruevski. Yet, Gruevski will blend monoethnicity with antiquization.

3.6 Nikola Gruevski, the “New” VMRO, and the Shift to Antiquization (2008-present)

Ljupco Georgievski's public rejection of OFA and his shocking call for partitioning Macedonia in mid-April 2003 coincided with his resignation from VMRO. He was succeeded by the party's former finance minister (1998-2002) and World Bank economist, Nikola Gruevski, in 25 May 2003. Facing two resounding electoral defeats of VMRO, the September 2002 parliamentary election and the 2004 failed referendum bid, Gruevski was quick to initially distance himself from his predecessor's flat rejection of OFA and radical nationalist rhetoric. The July 2006 parliamentary election became the first and until present, the only one, where VMRO ran a campaign focused primarily on economic rather than nationalist issues (Hislope 2013: 621). Gruevski's strategy, coupled with SDSM's leadership succession problems at the time, paid off handsomely. VMRO captured 45/120 seats while SDSM again saw its seats almost halved to 32. In the Albanian camp, BDI captured 17 seats while its minority rival PDSH captured 11 seats.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the non-nationalist platform on which it was elected, VMRO in the aftermath of elections reverted to politics-as-usual concerning the alliance patterns and its policies towards minorities. In accordance with my theoretical framework, I would expect VMRO to collude again with its traditional ally PDSH and the latter to reciprocate (dyads B-D and D-B respectively). This is indeed what actually happened. Despite the

¹⁰ Official results of the 5 July 2006 parliamentary elections. Accessed from the official website of *Sobranje* <http://www.sobranie.mk/elections-results-0b3af4c4-0837-4a12-9c9b-172d6dd5b805.nspix>

fact that BDI was the highest vote getter in the Albanian camp, Gruevski refused to cooperate with BDI and invited instead PDSH to join the ruling coalition.¹¹ This prompted BDI to boycott *Sobranje* for five months from January to May 2007, intending to deny the ruling coalition the OFA-mandated double majority to pass legislation affecting minority issues (Bieber 2008). As expected, the pattern of imposition of ethnic policies came to the fore again.

First, in 2007, Gruevski had the Constitutional Court repeal the 2005 Law on the Use of National Symbols¹² passed under the SDSM-BDI ruling coalition. (ICG 2012: 7). Second and most importantly, in 2007 VMRO officially initiated the *antiquization* policy. “‘Antiquization’ refers to the identitarian policies based on the assumption that there is a direct link between today’s ethnic Macedonians and Ancient Macedonians” (Vangeli 2011: 13). It represents a major nationhood discourse shift that, unlike Georgievski’s indigenization discourse *Macedonia for the Macedonians*, is exclusionary not only towards minorities but also towards those ethnic Macedonians who identify themselves as Slavs (almost exclusively the SDSM electorate). I argue that such a discourse shift represents, in the short-term, VMRO’s reaction to and its attempts to undo the multiethnic regime forged at Ohrid and make up for the catastrophic 2004 referendum failure. As VMRO saw SDSM as largely responsible for forging the OFA-mandated multiethnic regime and advancing Albanians’ rights through the 2004 redistricting law, it is not surprising that VMRO’s new nationhood discourse is exclusionary also toward SDSM. As such, the imposition of this new nationhood vision was bound to trigger once more the double ethnic outbidding mechanism and ultimately lead to interethnic violence.

Indeed, in the midst of the domestic uproar caused by BDI’s *Sobranje* boycott, VMRO’s repeal of the law on national symbols and the beginning of antiquization policy, in a pattern that by now should be familiar to the readers, news of major armed clashes between Macedonian security forces and a group of radical Albanians rocked the country. More specifically, in 7 November 2007, Macedonian security forces killed six members of what it called an ethnic Albanian extremist group during heavy clashes in the village of Brodec located in the hills above Tetovo, centre of the 2001 guerrilla insurgency

¹¹ It will be recalled, this is exactly what happened also in the aftermath of the 1998 parliamentary elections, where PPD, despite capturing the largest number of seats in the Albanian camp, was not invited by VMRO to form a ruling coalition. Then-VMRO leader Georgievski courted PDSH’s Arben Xhaferi instead.

¹² Advancing Albanians’ ethno-linguistic rights, the law allowed minorities’ flags to be displayed on public institutions, not restricting the legal allowance only during minorities’ national holidays.

(Author's data; see Appendix A). The abrupt nature and flow of the event is almost identical with previous cases where imposition of ethnic policies was followed by an upsurge in interethnic violence.

3.6.1 Antiquization in Full Swing and the Smilkovo Lake Killings (2008-2014)

Antiquization officially started in 2007 with the renaming of Skopje International Airport as Alexander the Great and placing of classical-era statues in front of the main government building. Unsurprisingly, this move prompted the frustration of Greece with whom Macedonia is involved in a bitter name dispute since independence. The Greek official nationalist position on Macedonia is clear-cut:

Because Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians were Greek, and because ancient and modern Greece are linked in an unbroken line of racial and cultural continuity, only Greeks have the right to identify themselves as Macedonians (Danforth 1995: 32) ... Macedonia and everything associated with it are not only Greek; they are exclusively Greek and nothing else ... 'an inalienable and eternal possession of Hellenism, a piece of its soul' (Danforth 1995: 30)

As a result of Gruevski's policies, Greece effectively blocked Macedonia's NATO bid in the April 2008 Bucharest summit and one year later its EU membership process. It is important to note that antiquization is not an outcome of the failure of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration, rather it is largely its cause. Two observations support this claim. First, Greece as a veto player blocked Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic bid only *after* antiquization had officially started in 2007. Prior to that, the Greek presidency of the EU in 2003 had actually encouraged the EU to offer membership to Western Balkan countries (Macedonia included) and in 2005 Greece even supported Macedonia's EU bid (Vangeli 2011: 25). Second, as Emilija Simoska (2019) of SDSM convincingly argues, although antiquization officially began only in 2007, it was being promoted as a political idea since at least a decade before 2007. Arguably, Vasil Tupurkovski, last Macedonian representative of the Yugoslav collective presidency who is of Aegean/Greek Macedonian-descent, is the first who began to politically promote the ideas about Alexander the great in 1996. Thereafter, by forming the *Democratic Alternative (DA)* party, Tupurkovski joined the coalition government with VMRO in 1998 (Simoska 2019). As further pointed out by Simoska (2019):

I visited in 1995 Australia (as Minister of Education), our emigrants there (mostly of Aegean Macedonian-descent). They were all prepared, they were dressed like soldiers of Alexander the great. So, antiquization started earlier. Gruevski's policies were only the final touch. They have nothing to do with the failed NATO membership bid in the 2008 Bucharest summit.

An important finding emerges here. Despite the opposite perception, the lack of Euro-Atlantic integration is not the source of Macedonia's interethnic tensions and violence. Instead it is the imposition of radical and exclusionary nationalist policies in a multiethnic polity and the outbidding mechanisms they generate. More specifically, the lack of Euro-Atlantic integration for Macedonia in itself is largely the result of VMRO's antiquization discourse. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that VMRO under Nikola Gruevski worked closely with Russia and the whole antiquization project had the support of Kremlin. Emilija Simoska (2019) told the author:

Gruevski is a completely different story from Georgievski (VMRO's first leader). The difference is that Gruevski is working closely with Serbian services, with that part of the world, Russia, and he always had an agenda. Not only for his personal power interests, but for other people's interests as well ... VMRO never wanted to have good relations with Greece. Every time relations between the two countries improved a bit, you would find people from this party coming out with maps of great Macedonia. The whole concept of this *Skopje 2014* is also all about provoking Greece, and there is no question about it. So that we never settle the dispute, in order to never get into NATO and EU, in order for Macedonia never to get out of the status-quo position because it suited him very well. For 10 years, Gruevski established a dictatorship, mafia state.

Erdoğan Saraç and Enes Ibrahim, leaders of two Turkish political parties in Macedonia, also emphasize that Gruevski was resolutely opposed to any name change for Macedonia and used the antiquization project first as a bargaining tool not to back out from the name dispute with Greece, and second, used it for domestic consumption (Saraç 2019; Ibrahim 2019). Even VMRO's former vice-president Trajko Slaveski (2019) acknowledges that:

(Antiquization) That was his (Gruevski's) project and some people that influenced him. It was not written in any program of the party. Maybe later he could explain. As you can see, he (Gruevski) gives interviews from Budapest now. What was his strategy? His project was to challenge the attempt of the Greeks to monopolize Macedonian ancient history. The history of ancient Macedonia can not be a monopoly of Greece ... If it were his strategy to provoke the Greeks in order to, let's say, increase the chances of Macedonia to be a winner in this dispute over the name, he failed. He failed dramatically.

The aforementioned evidence about the link between Nikola Gruevski, VMRO's antiquization discourse, and Russia proves my hypothesis that nationally divided countries are more likely to dilute Western influence by exposing such countries to the influence of other international actors with political agendas opposed to the West.

Failing to obtain NATO membership at the April 2008 Bucharest summit, VMRO leader Gruevski called for snap parliamentary elections in 1 June 2008. This time campaigning exclusively on the theme of ancient Macedonian nationhood, VMRO

secured an ironclad majority of 63/120 seats. SDSM suffered a major setback, capturing only 27 seats. In the Albanian camp, PDSH likewise had a near catastrophic result securing only 5 seats while BDI's 18 seats gave it a quasi-monopoly of ethnic Albanian representation.¹³ The elections were incredibly tense in the Albanian camp as deadly armed clashes between BDI and PDSH party members disrupted voting in many polling stations in western Macedonia.¹⁴ The aftermath of the elections saw the VMRO-BDI ruling coalition taking over.

Arguably, the alliance of two erstwhile enemies (actor B and C) can not be easily explained by my theoretical framework. In addition to representing the two warring factions of the 2001 quasi-civil war, VMRO and BDI have clashed on every issue with which they have come into contact in the post-Ohrid period. VMRO's flatly monoethnic vision that has disowned OFA is diametrically opposed to BDI's multiethnic vision that seeks OFA's full implementation. Then, how can we explain their ruling coalition? The key explanatory variable is a mix of international pressure and institutional requirement. First, BDI's sidelining after the 2006 parliamentary elections, despite being the highest vote getter in the Albanian camp, and its subsequent *Sobranje* boycott and armed interethnic clashes, made the international community clearly concerned about BDI's disruptive influence in the system. Second, the steadily declining electoral fortunes of the other two majority and minority contenders, SDSM and PDSH, made alternative electoral combinations less feasible, keeping in mind the requirement to ensure the OFA-mandated double majority principle. Table 3.2 outlines the election results for the four parties in the post-Ohrid parliamentary elections.

Table 3.2: Election results for the two main Macedonian and Albanian parties in the post-Ohrid parliamentary elections in North Macedonia.

<i>Party</i> <i>Election</i>	SDSM	VMRO	BDI	PDSH
September 2002	60 seats	33	16	7
July 2006	32	45	17	11
June 2008	27	63	18	5
June 2011	42	56	15	8

¹³ Official results of the 1 June 2008 parliamentary elections. Accessed from the official website of *Sobranje* <http://www.sobranie.mk/last-structure-703f689a-daa6-4673-9a64-5e23aa939578.nsp>

¹⁴ "Final Report on the Early Parliamentary elections of 1 June 2008", Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

April 2014	34	61	19	7
December 2016	49	51	10	2

Source: Table compiled by the author using data available in the official website of the North Macedonian National Assembly/Sobranje (<https://www.sobranie.mk/members-of-parliament.nspx>)

If we overlook for the moment the most recent December 2016 election, one matter is beyond dispute, and that is VMRO's and BDI's steadily emergence as the dominant party in their respective camps and the concurrent decline of SDSM and PDSH. Accordingly, if international community's main concern is to push the domestic actors toward OFA's full implementation, legally this can not be done if either VMRO or BDI is not part of the ruling coalition, as either party would deny it the Badinter quorum.¹⁵ In brief, VMRO-BDI ruling coalition after the June 2008 parliamentary election is an outcome of a mix of international pressure and OFA-mandated requirements. Hence, to use Donald Horowitz's (1985) terms, VMRO-BDI ruling coalition was not a "coalition of commitment", as was the SDSM-BDI ruling coalition between 2002 and 2006 or the 1998-2001 VMRO-PDSH coalition. Instead, the ruling coalition between two actors with diametrically opposed nationhood visions can be best described as a "coalition of convenience" (Horowitz 1985: 366). To prove the point that VMRO-BDI's "marriage of implacable ethnic opponents" (Horowitz 1985: 395) was one of convenience rather than commitment, it is enough to point out that VMRO's antiquization policies were fully institutionalized and implemented during the 2008-2011 period.

Anastas Vangeli (2011) outlines in detail the post-2008 implementation of antiquization policies:

After renaming the airport, the Skopje stadium was also renamed the "National Arena Philip II," the main highway, part of the pan-European Corridor X, was renamed "Alexander of Macedonia" (p.18) ... Ceremonies for the celebration of the national holiday 2 August (Ilinden) are also being reinvented to suit the new traditions. For example, the horsemen dressed like nineteenth century anti-Ottoman revolutionaries who are part of the celebration of the national holiday at the historic site near Krusevo have been replaced by another cavalry unit in the last few years comprised of horsemen dressed like Ancient Macedonian soldiers (p.19) ... The newest official "History of the Macedonian People" published by the Institute for National History in 2009, argues that during the interaction of the immigrant Slavs and the native Ancient Macedonians, the ancient features prevailed and defined the development of the region (p.20) ... The genetic survey by the Swiss project iGenea whose findings were interpreted to prove that "Macedonians have more ancient Macedonian blood" than Greeks, which, on the other hand, have sub-Saharan origin (p.20) ... Another research project that led to further innovations in the nationalist discourse was an ethnological study in the Hunza

¹⁵ Indeed, this is exactly what happened after BDI boycotted *Sobranje* for four months after the July 2006 parliamentary elections.

Valley of the Himalayas in Pakistan. Researchers discovered that people from the Burusho tribe claimed to be descendants of Alexander's soldiers and shared alleged linguistic similarity to Macedonian. The Burusho tribe people believe that Macedonia is their remote homeland (p.21) ... Metaphysical and esoteric narratives (that allegedly prove) that Macedonians were the founding people of the white race (p.21).

The crowning achievement of antiquization policies was "Skopje 2014", a €250-300 million worth urban renewal scheme, that refashioned the capital Skopje "with a triumphal arch, two new bridges, hundreds of new statues, 15 new buildings reflecting architectural styles drawn from classical antiquity, and gigantic statues of Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great" (Hislope 2013: 622). The impositionary and unconstitutional nature of such policies in general and "Skopje 2014" in particular is evident from the fact that "Skopje 2014" was never presented to *Sobranje* for voting. Under legal procedures, "Skopje 2014" would have to be approved in *Sobranje* and would have required the Badinter double majority since it clearly conforms to the OFA-specified "laws that directly affect culture, use of language, education, personal documentation, and use of symbols" of national minorities. However, VMRO leader Nikola Gruevski bypassed these legal requirements and never presented the project to *Sobranje*. *International Crisis Group* found that for Skopje 2014 "millions of euros were transferred to the (Skopje) municipality unlawfully" and "Gruevski had it approved in the Centar/Skopje municipal assembly under a shortened procedure that excluded wider public debate" (ICG 2011: 3).

Such policies, as expected, brought considerable tension with VMRO's Albanian coalition partner BDI. BDI elites argued that Skopje 2014 had been presented to them as *fait accompli* by VMRO and that it was unacceptable that the capital city of a multiethnic state was monoethnically refashioned and more than 20 per cent of Skopje's ethnic Albanian population had been effectively silenced. Tensions peaked in September 2009. Once the newest official "History of the Macedonian People" published by the Institute for National History described Macedonian Albanians in derogative terms and portrayed them as "newcomers from mountainous northern Albania" (ICG 2011: 15), BDI's leader, Ali Ahmeti, declared that "the truce (of 2001) has been violated" and that unless VMRO repeals the document "there will be war" (cited in Hislope 2013: 631).¹⁶

¹⁶ After strong domestic and international condemnation and opposition, the Macedonian Institute for National History eventually withdrew the document.

VMRO's relations with SDSM as a result of antiquization were equally tense, if not more. Holding a nationhood vision that stressed the distinct south Slavic roots of the Macedonian people, SDSM strongly felt that the newly invented ancient nationhood myth was exclusionary towards them. Ljubomir Frckovski, a leading social democratic public intellectual, former minister of interior and minister of foreign affairs, and a former SDSM presidential candidate, aptly captures the *zeitgeist* in SDSM circles about VMRO's antiquization project. In an interview on 7 October 2014, among others, he stated:

That internal resentment between Macedonians is a little bit boring and hard, I would not touch there, but that project, that absurd project of cultural defacing which VMRO tries to make is supported by a current, which, in relations to Hellenes, has tougher understanding the identity relations. However, they are not against the Hellenes only, they are against the Slavic, Slavic cultural heritage: for the Macedonians, the original cultural heritage ... It brought us to internal shame and frustration that it's a shame to say that you have a Slavic language ... One small group of historiographical and party fraudsters managed to impose throughout the media a hysterical discourse about the identity which brought a great damage to the state. They turned Macedonia in their project, I would say in their absurd mission, into a country for ridicule. And everybody laughs at us now.¹⁷

It was in the midst of the inter-and-intraethnic tensions generated by antiquization that news of a heinous crime rocked Macedonia. In the morning of 12 April 2012, the bodies of five ethnic Macedonians were found dead in the shores of Lake Smilkovo in Skopje. The VMRO government was quick to accuse and arrest six ethnic Albanians, all of them Skopje residents, and in June 2014 sentenced all six to life in prison on charges of deliberate murder and Islamic terrorism. This triggered massive Albanian protests in Skopje during July 2014 where thousands of Albanians clashed with Macedonian riot police (Portalb 16 May 2018). This case, dubbed the "Monster Case", caused huge domestic uproar and international condemnation, however there is widespread belief among both ethnic Macedonian and Albanians that the case was orchestrated by the incumbent VMRO and the Macedonian Secret Service and its agents actually did the killings. It is no coincidence that at the time of the murders, head of the Secret Service was the cousin of Nikola Gruevski, Sasho Mijalkov (Portalb 16 May 2018). As Enes Ibrahim (2019) aptly puts it concerning Gruevski's rule: "Political crises in Macedonia were always artificial. Whenever Gruevski and VMRO faced problems, always an ethnic fight would come out." Likewise, current SDSM deputy leader Muhamed Zeqiri (2019) states that "It is no coincidence that whenever VMRO is in power, huge crises have occurred in Macedonia."

¹⁷ Available with English subtitles at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lgQ2BB8hjk.

Lastly, one of the major effects of antiquization and Smilkovo Lake Killings was bringing the two major ethnic communities in Macedonia close together. SDSM's strong condemnation of antiquization and of the Smilkovo Killings won it a constituency among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, and enabled it for the first time to directly court Albanian vote. This in itself was quite unprecedented in postcommunist Macedonia since, prior to antiquization, SDSM could only indirectly court the Albanians through allying with one of their minority parties and through pushing legislation to advance their ethno-linguistic rights. With antiquization and the Smilkovo Killings, SDSM would now compete directly for the pool of Albanian votes against the minority parties.

3.6.2 May 2015 Kumanovo Armed Clashes: *Deja Vu*?

As a result of what it perceived as VMRO's exclusionary and authoritarian policies, SDSM boycotted *Sobranje* for four months from January to May 2011 and VMRO subsequently called for snap elections in June 2011. Antiquization had paid off and continued to pay off handsomely for Gruevski, as his party won two consecutive snap elections, in June 2011 and April 2014. After each election, two other "coalitions of convenience" with BDI, the dominant party in the Albanian camp, followed (refer to Table 3.2). Apparently, the ancient nationhood myth had outperformed in providing average Macedonians a feel-good myth to make up for their country's economic and political backwardness, interethnic tensions, lack of name recognition, and other hardships of an incomplete postcommunist transition. Yet, this myth of ancient nationhood would exacerbate all aforementioned problems and Macedonia would face its biggest security threat after the 2001 insurgency largely as a result of the imposition of such policies.

The highly polarised environment generated by antiquisation had already led to the Smilkovo Lake Killings in April 2012. However, Macedonia would face a far greater security threat two years later in the aftermath of the April 2014 snap parliamentary elections. Once again, VMRO secured an ironclad parliamentary majority (61/123 seats), whereas SDSM (capturing only 34 seats) declared massive voter fraud and boycotted *Sobranje*.¹⁸ Thereafter, starting from February 2015, SDSM new leader Zoran Zaev began publishing leaked wiretaps, the so-called "Zaev's Bombs", revealing a state apparatus captured by VMRO and massive corruption. An investigative EU expert group concluded

¹⁸ It will be recalled, VMRO did the same in the aftermath of the October-November 1994 parliamentary elections. Declaring massive voter fraud, it boycotted the second round of elections and refused any mandates in the *Sobranje*. Therefore, for four years (1994-98), VMRO was absent in the *Sobranje*.

in June 2015 that over the past ten years of incumbency (2006-2015), VMRO had engaged in “staggering skulduggery” and its range of criminal and corrupt activities included:

direct involvement of senior government and party officials in illegal activities including electoral fraud, corruption, abuse of power and authority, conflict of interest, blackmail, extortion (pressure on public employees to vote for a certain party with the threat to be fired), criminal damage, severe procurement procedure infringements aimed at gaining an illicit profit, nepotism and cronyism; ... unacceptable political interference in the nomination/appointment of judges as well as interference with other supposedly independent institutions for either personal or party advantage¹⁹

The unveiling of recordings in May 2015 that implicated high VMRO officials in specific instances of murder triggered mass popular mobilization and protests in Skopje that were violently repressed by the government. It is exactly in the midst of this *multiethnic mass mobilization* and protests when, on 9 May 2015, news of major armed clashes between Macedonian security forces and more than 40 Albanian fighters in the Macedonian-majority town of Kumanovo rocked the country. Two days of heavy fighting caused the death of eight security forces and fourteen rebels, “the (Balkan) region’s worst loss of life in a decade” (ICG 2015: 1); “The loss of life, the worst in the Balkans since the March 2004 anti-Serb riots in Kosovo” (ICG 2015: 10). This was the largest security threat Macedonia faced since the 2001 insurgency. As of this writing, the evidence still remains inconclusive as to what really happened in Kumanovo. Yet, a recent investigation by the *International Crisis Group* makes the following observations:

Several worrying things about Kumanovo are already clear. The highest levels of the Kosovo and Macedonia governments had known about the group of fighters from multiple sources for months, perhaps as early as September 2014. 40-45 fighters, aged 23 to 48, including at least 28 from Kosovo and nine from Macedonia who arrived days before and were seen moving around openly, were a serious threat. At least five were wartime commanders in the Macedonian NLA or its Kosovo equivalent (ICG 2015: 10) ... Several fighters had been convicted of serious crimes in Macedonia, including murder and robbery, but were able to circulate unimpeded; the group as a whole “treated Macedonia as their back yard”, a diplomat said (ICG 2015: 11) ... The core of the Kumanovo group is said to have rejected Ohrid and sought to reframe Macedonia as a federal state with an Albanian unit. If its goal was to spark an uprising, it miscalculated. Ex-fighters, ethnic Albanian and Macedonian politicians, civil society activists and international officials Crisis Group interviewed agree ethnic Albanians presently have no appetite to re-start the conflict (ICG 2015: 11).

All these observations somehow seem to lend credence to the accusations of both ethnic Albanians and SDSM that “the government staged the incident to deflect anger

¹⁹ “Recommendations of the Senior Experts’ Group on systemic Rule of Law issues relating to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015”, 8 June 2015, pp. 4-6; http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf.

over the wiretaps onto a convenient ethnic target” (ICG 2015: 10). Indeed, the clearest evidence in this regard comes from the testimony of Muhamed Zeqiri, current SDSM deputy leader who was the chief editor of *ALSAT-M* TV Channel at the time of the Kumanovo clashes. It is worth quoting his testimony in full:

VMRO created Kumanovo because of the ‘bombs’ (leaked wiretaps) we as opposition were publishing. VMRO’s greatest interest was for a conflict to erupt so as to defuse the ‘bombs’ ... I was the first journalist who arrived at the scene. I have relatives who live exactly in the neighborhood where the clashes occurred. My uncles live there and I had been informed in advance that (armed) people entered there and knew what was being prepared. Ali (Ahmeti) knew it, BDI knew it, VMRO knew it ... Let me tell you a personal experience. Two days before the fighting started, my mother tells me that she is going to visit my uncles in Kumanovo, but I told her ‘You can not go! I will tell you when to go’. When the fighting actually started two days later, my brother tells me ‘How come you were aware of the whole issue?’ I knew that such a thing could happen, and unfortunately it did ... However, we as journalists did everything to calm down the situation. We were on-air 24 hours and called the population to calm down because this was only a trick of VMRO and had nothing to do with Albanians and Macedonians ... Thus, we calmed things down and prevented them from further escalating. But, this is what happens when the power is in the wrong hands. It is no coincidence that whenever VMRO is in power, huge crises occurred – 2001 and 2015 in Kumanovo. They (VMRO) don’t care about the state. They think that they will always remain in power and that everything here in Macedonia is their private property (Zeqiri 2019).

Likewise, this is what Erdoğan Saraç (2019) had to say about the May 2015 Kumanovo clashes: “Here in Macedonia when the affairs of the government do not go well, it tries to change the agenda.” To sum up, the Kumanovo clashes seem to conform to a consistent empirical pattern established in this dissertation: allied majority and minority parties ethnicizing political space to outbid their allied majority and minority counterparts in opposition. The difference in this case is that VMRO did not have a committed minority ally since its extreme antiquization policies had pushed the dominant Albanian party and its coalition partner (BDI) to support SDSM, while VMRO’s traditional minority ally PDSH was already in decline, internally split and had lost much political influence.

3.7 Recent Developments: December 2016 Parliamentary Election, Prespa Agreement, and NATO Membership

3.7.1 December 2016 parliamentary election and its aftermath

In the aftermath of Kumanovo armed clashes, international involvement intensified. The EU tried to broker a deal between SDSM-VMRO to form a transitional government that would eventually lead Macedonia to the polls. After the tentative date for snap parliamentary elections was postponed two times, they were finally held on 11 December 2016. There were major changes in the Albanian camp for this election. First, in

November 2014, a new Albanian party, BESA Movement, emerged as a conservative, populist, anti-establishment minority party. Second, a splinter faction from PDSH led by the party's former Struga mayor, Ziadin Sela, formed the Alliance for Albanians (ASH). Third, as previously stated, for the first time SDSM was expected to compete directly for the pool of Albanian votes. Its all-embracing political slogan "A Society for All" proved quite appealing to Albanians (and other minorities) at a time when Macedonia had barely escaped civil war during the Kumanovo clashes in May 2015 (Ibrahim 2019; Zeqiri 2019).

Eventually, VMRO and SDSM captured 51 and 49 seats respectively, whereas the Albanian vote, as expected, was dispersed with BDI capturing 10 seats, BESA Movement 5 seats, ASH 3 seats and PDSH with only 2 seats.²⁰ Compared to the previous April 2014 election, we observe a precipitous drop in the vote share of the main Albanian party BDI, that saw its total number of votes halved from 153,000 to 86,000 and its number of parliamentary seats decline from 20 to 10 (Zeqiri 2019). Actually, BDI was heavily punished by the Albanian electorate for the corruption it indulged in during its eight consecutive years of coalition government with VMRO (2008-2016), its dismal failure to stand against VMRO on the case of the Smilkovo Lake Killings, and its perceived involvement in the 2015 Kumanovo clashes (Zeqiri 2019). As a result, a significant number of Albanians who previously used to cast their ballots for BDI shifted to SDSM in the December 2016 election, and SDSM for the first time gathered more than 50,000 Albanian votes and 5 of its total 49 seats were from the Albanian electoral districts (Hajredini 2019; Zeqiri 2019). Unprecedentedly up to that time, SDSM ended up being the second largest party to get Albanian votes after BDI – SDSM surpassed all other Albanian parties BESA, ASH, and PDSH (Zeqiri 2019).

Equally important, the 2016 parliamentary election results proved once more the stable support VMRO had among the ethnic Macedonian electorate. Despite the huge corruption scandal that came out with "Zaev's Bombs", the Smilkovo Lake Killings, and the Kumanovo clashes, the 2016 election clearly showed that ethnic Macedonians still voted more for VMRO than for SDSM. Indeed, even with the huge Albanian support SDSM got, it still could not surpass VMRO's share of votes which, unlike SDSM, consisted entirely of ethnic Macedonian votes (Hajredini 2019). This fact in itself is the

²⁰ Official results of the 11 December parliamentary elections. Accessed from *Sobranje's* official webpage <http://www.sobranie.mk/election-results-2016.nsp>

clearest evidence for the rampant nationalism present among a majority of the ethnic Macedonian electorate. As Xhevdet Hajredini (2019) puts it, “More than half of (ethnic) Macedonians accept VMRO’s identitarian policies, since in the last election VMRO won 51 deputies and all of them were won by ethnic Macedonian votes. Hence, among the ethnic Macedonian trunk, the majority nowadays believe that they have ancient roots.”

With rough power parity between VMRO and SDSM, the 2016 election results offered once more, like the 1990 founding election, a strategic opportunity to Albanians who could theoretically swing the executive into whichever camp they choose. Although this time the Albanian vote, unlike the 1990 founding elections, was severely split, VMRO’s antiquization policies, the wiretapping scandal, and the concomitant electoral rise of SDSM practically ruled out the possibility that the main Albanian parties would collude with VMRO. In accordance with the theoretical framework developed in this dissertation then, I would expect the main Albanian parties to ally with SDSM (i.e. the majority party with a multiethnic vision), despite the fact that VMRO won the December 2016 parliamentary election. Indeed, BDI, as the highest vote getter in the Albanian camp, refused VMRO’s proposal to form a coalition. The stumbling block in the negotiations became BDI’s precondition for joining the government: making Albanian the second official language at the *national* level. Once VMRO categorically rejected, negotiations came to an end. Actually, constitutional Amendment V following OFA stipulated that:

The Macedonian language, written using its Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language throughout the Republic of Macedonia and in the international relations of the Republic of Macedonia. Any other language spoken by at least 20 percent of the population is also an official language, written using its alphabet, as specified below (Macedonia Constitution 1991)

Albanians and VMRO elites attached different interpretations to this constitutional amendment. While for the former, this amendment made Albanian language official at the state level (thus making Macedonia constitutionally a bilingual state), for the latter, it applied only to units of local self-government where Albanians comprised at least 20 per cent of the population. Legally speaking, VMRO’s interpretation can not be substantiated for two main reasons. First, the last part of Amendment V separately contains the legal specifications for units of local self-government:

In the units of local self-government where at least 20 percent of the population speaks a particular language, that language and its alphabet shall be used as an official language in addition to the Macedonian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. With respect to languages spoken by less than 20 percent of the population of a unit of local self-government, the local

authorities shall decide on their use in public bodies (Macedonia Constitution 1991).

Hence, this makes clear that the opening of Amendment V actually refers to the legal specifications at the *state/national* level. Second, Albanian language was already official at the local level in the pre-Ohrid period. The only change OFA brought at the local level was the 20 per cent threshold specification.

After the failure of VMRO-BDI coalition talks, SDSM, conforming to its multiethnic agenda, accepted BDI's precondition for passing the necessary legislation that would make Macedonia officially a bilingual state. SDSM succeeded also in bringing ASH to the ruling coalition and enlisting the parliamentary support of BESA (the latter accepted only to support SDSM in the *Sobranje* and not officially join the coalition). By enlisting the support of three Albanian parties, SDSM succeeded both in capturing a majority in the *Sobranje* (62 seats) and in fulfilling the OFA-mandated double majority necessary to pass the language law.

Although the SDSM-BDI-ASH coalition government was ready to take over by February 2017, Macedonia's VMRO-affiliated President Gjorge Ivanov refused to give the mandate to the SDSM-led government on the ground that the agreement to make Albanian the second official language violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 1 March 2017). In the meantime, SDSM leader Zoran Zaev went ahead with a vote in the *Sobranje* to elect for the first time an ethnic Albanian speaker of parliament in a bid to form the new government. During the voting procedure in the *Sobranje* on 28 April 2017, VMRO-affiliated protesters stormed the Macedonian parliament, violently attacking and injuring more than 70 SDSM (its leader Zaev included) and ethnic Albanian MPs (The Telegraph 28 April 2017). Although this incident does not qualify as an instance of violence according to my operational definition (since there were no deaths), its dynamics clearly conform to the causal narrative presented here. Both Muhamed Zeqiri (2019) and Enes Ibrahim (2019) pointed to the Russian and Serbian secret services' involvement in the storming of the Macedonian parliament. Again, in terms of the theoretical framework developed here, this should not come as surprising as a nationally divided country like Macedonia should offer plenty of opportunities for Russian involvement. As a recent work on the subject also shows, although the Western Balkans are far from being a strategic priority for Russia, Kremlin opportunistically meddles in countries where it can to use it as a

bargaining tool against the West in other theaters where its vital interests are located (Bechev 2017).

After strong Western condemnation and threats of sanctions, President Ivanov handed the mandate to Zoran Zaev for leading the new SDSM-BDI-ASH coalition government on 30 May 2017. SDSM fulfilled its part of the agreement and on 11 January 2018, *Sobranje* passed the law that made Albanian the second official language at the state level, with VMRO boycotting the session (Balkan Insight 11 January 2018). Yet, president Ivanov refused to sign the law, claiming that it violated Macedonia's territorial integrity and thus was unconstitutional. SDSM on its part had *Sobranje* pass the law a second time on 14 March 2018, since constitutionally the president can not refuse to sign a law that is approved twice in the parliament (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 14 March 2018). As of this writing, Ivanov has not signed the law yet, and there is an ongoing constitutional crisis. For Emilija Simoska of SDSM, this is not surprising at all because the president Ivanov together with VMRO leader Gruevski have always been anti-NATO and pro-Russia. As she describes: "They always had an anti-NATO, anti-EU stance. Ivanov always. He never said it openly pro-Russia, but we know. It's obvious. He was trained in Belgrade, he visited Russia often" (Simoska 2019). On the other hand, VMRO opposes the Language Law both from a constitutional perspective and from a classical Gellnerian approach according to which modern societies can function properly and efficiently only under conditions of linguistic homogeneity. As VMRO's former vice-president told the author:

With the law on languages, the situation is not good. I mean, the society has never been divided more. Because you know, we appear that we are constructing a non-functional society, non-functional state with the law on languages ... My wife works in *Stopanske Banka*, the biggest bank in Skopje. She is a regional manager. Yesterday, they went to a big village, Studenichani (Albanian-majority). School with 1000 students, and they went to the school. You know, that's commercial, they would come in order to sell their products. At the very beginning, they were demanded that they need to speak in Albanian, and there was no Albanian (among them). There was some negotiation. (Then, they were told) 'Ok, this is the last time, next time you come, you should speak Albanian.' That's nonsense, that's rubbish ... You are not familiar with what is written on the Law on Languages. Their idea is the following: that Albanians have the right to use their language in any institution in Macedonia, in any hospital, be it public or private. And that is why it (the Law) has created a resentment, additional resentment. For example, in the courts, if a judge is Albanian, they say that the process could be led in Albanian language and everything will be translated, the evidence, the documents etc. Who will judge whether the translation is (correct)? So, there's a problem ... Covered with this right to use your own language, we are on way to construct a non-functional society, non-functional state (Slaveski 2019).

On 30 May 2018, prime minister Zoran Zaev delivered a speech when presenting the government's progress report during SDSM's first year of incumbency. Among other things, he stated:

A society for all, a house for all. There is no more revanchism. There are no more political divisions. There are no more ethnic divisions. We proposed the language law that would broaden the use of language spoken by at least twenty per cent of our citizens, conforming to the constitution and Amendment V ... I am convinced that what is being offered in the Republic of Macedonia is a society for all ... In this way, we are trying to preserve our identity (Portalb 30 May 2018).

What is worth noting in this speech is that the Macedonian prime minister views the preservation of Macedonian identity as intrinsically linked to the advancement of minorities' ethno-linguistic rights - creating "a society for all" will make Macedonians safer. For Enes Ibrahim, such an "all-embracing" approach was very much needed after the deep political crisis Macedonia went through since the publication of "Zaev's bombs" in February 2015. Ibrahim (2019) draws an interesting analogy between SDSM's crucial role in normalizing political life in Macedonia both after the 2001 insurgency and after the 2015 Kumanovo clashes:

Actually, if we look at the historical trajectories, we would realize that whenever SDSM comes to power, it struggles to normalize/stabilize the country. The country normalizes, fills the treasury, then SDSM somehow loses the elections, VMRO comes to power, during its incumbency VMRO transforms the country into a battlefield, empties the treasury, then again Social Democrats come to power and the country again normalizes. We have experienced many times such examples.

On the other side, on 2 June 2018, VMRO's new leader Hristijan Mickoski²¹ organized a protest before the government building in Skopje. Criticising Zaev's aforementioned speech and the language law passed by SDSM, among others he stated that:

Macedonia belongs to Macedonians. We do not fear the traitors. We do not accept that others play with our dignity. We as VMRO will protect the fatherland ... Albanians do not need a bilingual unconstitutional law. Instead they need development and economy (Portalb 2 June 2018).

The fact that for SDSM advancing minority rights helps preserve national identity while for VMRO that constitutes national treason is a clear illustration of the ongoing deep nationhood cleavage in Macedonia. The most recent manifestation of this

²¹ VMRO's former leader Nikola Gruevski stepped down as he is currently facing criminal prosecution on many charges related to the leaked wiretaps scandal. Currently, he resides in Budapest as he was granted political asylum by the ruling *Fidesz* government of Victor Orban.

nationhood cleavage is the *Prespa Agreement* that the incumbent SDSM-led coalition government signed with the SYRIZA government in Greece in 17 June 2018.

3.7.2 *Prespa Agreement and NATO membership*

17 June 2018 marked the signing of a historical agreement between Macedonia and Greece that solved the almost 3-decade-old name dispute between them. The SDSM-led Macedonian government undertook to constitutionally change the name of the country to *Republika Severna Makedonija* (Republic of North Macedonia) while Greece undertook not to block Macedonia's NATO and EU membership under the new agreed-upon name. The particular choice of the Greek village of Psarades, located on the shores of Great Prespa Lake, to sign the agreement is quite revealing since Greek and Macedonian borders meet in the water (AP 18 June 2018). Accordingly, the Prespa Agreement officially decreed that the Republic of North Macedonia geographically and historically consists *only* of the territories north of the Prespa Lake while the territories in the southern part of the lake historically belong only to Greece. It should be clear by now that an agreement based on such a historical version of events could be negotiated and signed only by the SDSM in Macedonia because it conforms to their nationhood vision. On the other hand, VMRO strongly opposes it since for VMRO, Aegean/Greek Macedonia, the southern part of Prespa Lake, historically is a part of the Macedonian nation. This becomes clearer when we consider the fact that many, perhaps most of, former and current VMRO members are of Aegean-descent (most prominently Nikola Gruevski himself). VMRO's strong opposition to the *Prespa Agreement* is aptly described to the author by the party's former vice-president Trajko Slaveski (2019):

Prespa Agreement, it is unilateral. It is almost like capitulation. Unilateral means that Greeks have only benefits. This confers obligations only for the Republic of Macedonia, to change the name, to change the constitution. (However) The price that you pay is extremely high. Not only change of the name, (but also) change of the identity, change of history, of culture. For you to better understand. My in-laws, the parents of my wife, they were born in what is now northern Greece. They were at the age when they were drawn in the partisan movement during the Greek Civil War. You know the outcome of the civil war. They were expelled, they went to Tashkent. They crossed because they lived close to the border with Albania. That's why those people are very grateful to Albania, because Albania opened the border so they can go to the coast and with ships, crossing the Bosphorus, they ended up in the former Soviet Union, most of them. So, my in-laws stayed for 26 years in Tashkent. My wife was born in Tashkent. And they came back in 1975 in Macedonia. There was a policy at that time to attract these people ... So, you know, the social democrats (by signing the Prespa Agreement) erased the history of these people. They claimed that history until 1945 belongs only to the Greeks. This is all to complete, or to close the so-called Macedonian question. I do not know now, I am very curious about the position of Albania proper about *Çameria*, because those people (Muslim Albanian *Çam*) had the same problem with Greece.

Thus, one more time we observe an instance of imposition of ethnic policies that actually divided and polarized the country more than ever. My analysts were concerned violence could erupt because of VMRO's particularly aggressive rhetoric. For instance, in a rally held in the southern city of Bitola (Manastir) at the very same day when the Prespa Agreement was signed, VMRO leader Hristijan Mickoski said: "I, Hristijan Mickoski, speaking from the heart and with a clear mind, never, at any price, even if that would cost (my life), will I support this act of capitulation by Zoran Zaev" (AP 18 June 2018).

A useful analogy can be drawn between the June 2018 *Prespa Agreement* and the September 1995 *Interim Accord* by which Macedonia agreed to remove the 16-pointed sun of Vergina from its flag in exchange for Greece lifting its economic embargo on Macedonia. First, both Agreements with Greece were signed during a SDSM incumbency, and both of them were strongly opposed by VMRO, which was not even consulted to start with. Second, while VMRO denounces *Prespa* as an act of capitulation (Slaveski 2019), it also used to denounce the 1995 *Interim Accord* as "the disgraceful document against Macedonian national dignity" (cited in Shea 1997: 308-309). Third, while *Sobranje* had no problems in ratifying the *Interim Accord* in October 1995 because VMRO during that legislative mandate (1994-1998) had refused to accept any parliamentary seats altogether, it encountered much more difficulties in approving the constitutional changes to rename the country North Macedonia. Even with the support of all minority deputies, SDSM was still short of 8 votes to meet the required 2/3 majority (80/120 votes), and for that SDSM had to coopt/ "buy" 8 VMRO deputies by offering them judicial immunity from the criminal prosecution they were facing (Saraç 2019). Eventually, on 11 January 2019, *Sobranje* approved the constitutional changes to rename the country North Macedonia, with VMRO boycotting the vote and expelling from the party the 8 deputies who had voted in favor of the changes (AP 12 January 2019). Lastly, both agreements were expected to lead to violence. While the SDSM president Kiro Gligorov actually survived an assassination attempt in Skopje on 3 October 1995, 2 days before *Sobranje* was scheduled to ratify the *Interim Accord* with Greece (Shea 1997: 371), up to now no violent incident has occurred in relation to the *Prespa Agreement*, despite VMRO's highly-charged and aggressive rhetoric. Emilija Simoska (2019) from SDSM argues that, "Gligorov was going to solve the problem with Greece. It was going to happen much earlier, everybody knows that." All this begs the question that if Kiro

Gligorov almost got assassinated for trying to solve the problem with Greece, should not Zoran Zaev, who actually solved the problem with Greece, fear similar attempts on his life? Up to now, apart from the calls in front of the parliament building by some extremist groups to “hang Zaev” (Portalb 17 June 2018), nothing more has occurred.

Another useful analogy can be drawn between SDSM’s failed referendum bid on the *Prespa Agreement* in 30 September 2018 and VMRO’s failed referendum bid to repeal the Redistricting Law in 7 November 2004. First, the former referendum was called by the incumbent party (SDSM) and was “consultative” (The Guardian 1 October 2018), while the latter was called by the main opposition party (VMRO) and its outcome was decided to be legally binding. Second, the 2018 referendum asked the citizens whether they are in favor of EU and NATO membership by accepting the *Prespa Agreement* between Macedonia and Greece, whereas the 2004 referendum asked whether citizens wish there to be 123 municipalities, thus repealing the 2004 Redistricting Law that reduced their number to 84 (OSCE/ODIHR 2004: 3). We can clearly observe that the wording of the 2018 referendum question was a bit tricky because it directly tied the *Prespa Agreement* to the EU and NATO membership, while the wording of the 2004 referendum was straightforward. This is why VMRO’s Trajko Slaveski (2019) argues that “the government was very unfair to the Macedonian people because you know, they tried to sell this with NATO membership and start of negotiations.” Third and most importantly, both referendums are clear examples of *double ethnic outbidding* since in both of them the incumbent Macedonian and Albanian parties were opposed by the Macedonian and Albanian parties in opposition. More specifically, in 2018 the incumbent SDSM-BDI coalition campaigned for a “YES” vote while the opposition VMRO and ASH of Ziadin Sela boycotted the vote. While in 2004, it was the then opposition VMRO and PDSH of Arben Xhaferi that campaigned for a “YES” vote, whereas the then incumbent SDSM-BDI coalition boycotted the vote (OSCE/ODIHR 2004: 3). Unsurprisingly then, both referendums failed due to the very low turnout, that fell way short of clearing the 50 per cent threshold required to make the vote valid.²² In 2018, the turnout was 34.7 per cent (The Guardian 1 October 2018) while in 2004 the corresponding figure was 26 per cent (ICG 2005: 5). The 2018 result for VMRO’s Slaveski signifies Macedonian people’s strong opposition to Prespa and proved the illegitimacy of the

²² Although in both referendums an overwhelming majority of those who turned out voted in favor of the respective questions.

agreement in the eyes of the people. “It (Prespa) was enacted from above, imposed to the Macedonian people. Causes a lot of damage to identity of the people, their history” concludes Slaveski (2019). Even for a relatively impartial observer as Turkish leader Erdoğan Saraç, the 2018 referendum result was “unsuccessful. People declared their position. We do not accept the name change, we reject the Prespa Agreement.” (Saraç 2019).

All in all, I argue that the main causal mechanism identified in this dissertation, double ethnic outbidding, makes it very unlikely that any referendum will ever succeed in Macedonia. The most recent one was a “most-likely case” to succeed given the strong Western pressure and given that acceptance of the *Prespa Agreement* was explicitly related to EU and NATO membership, a goal nominally shared by all political parties in Macedonia. If even this referendum failed, this constitutes a very strong evidence for my causal argument that points to the primacy of domestic dynamics in explaining ethnically-related domestic outcomes.

VMRO’s stance toward Prespa and the failure of the 2018 referendum exemplify also the persistence in the salience of nationhood visions in Macedonia and how it is endogenous to partisan competition and electoral politics. In other words, the rampant nationalism in the majority of the ethnic Macedonian electorate pushes VMRO to persistently revive and instrumentalize its monoethnic and ancient nationhood vision. As we saw, this already paid off handsomely for Gruevski who ruled for ten consecutive years despite the huge corruption and criminal cases piling up against him and VMRO. In the latest December 2016 parliamentary election also, VMRO gathered way more votes than SDSM from the ethnic Macedonians. It was only the Albanians who voted in significant numbers for SDSM *and* the support of Albanian parties that carried the Social Democrats to power (Zeqiri 2019). Most recently, in the May 2019 presidential election, SDSM candidate Stevo Pendarovski could win only in the second round and with a small margin against VMRO’s candidate Gordana Siljanovska, despite the fact that Albanian voters and other minorities voted exclusively for Pendarovski.²³ In fact, in most of the

²³ In the second round, Pendarovski gathered 51.65 per cent versus Siljanovska’s 44.75 per cent. In the first round, they had an almost equal vote share: 42.81 per cent for Pendarovski and 42.25 per cent for Siljanovska. Turnout for the first round was 41.67 per cent, while in the second round 46.65 per cent. Data for both rounds are from the official website of the *State Election Commission*. Available online at <https://rezultati-prvkrug.sec.mk/en-US/1/r>.

ethnic Macedonian-majority municipalities, VMRO's candidate won against SDSM's²⁴ and Gordana Siljanovska, a constitutional lawyer by profession, had pledged during her election campaign that if she gets elected, she will undertake concrete steps by international law to invalidate the constitutional name change, which was achieved only by bribing 8 former VMRO deputies (Saraç 2019).

If we take into account the fact that the May 2019 presidential election took place only three months after Macedonia had signed the NATO accession agreement to become its 30th member (6 February 2019), thus fulfilling the country's three-decade-old objective, the unabated nationalism among a majority of ethnic Macedonians becomes even more stunning. Trajko Slaveski (2019) from VMRO offers an explanation for it: "Prespa Agreement it is unilateral, it is almost like capitulation ... That is why people are very unmoved or very indifferent toward what is going on. Yesterday (12 February 2019), the flag of NATO was raised, and you know, people are indifferent. We (ethnic Macedonians) feel we are under occupation and they (Westerners) want us to be happy and to celebrate." This perception of being "occupied" by the West is quite common among VMRO ranks. At this point, I want to argue that even though it is often not explicitly stated, when you actually speak with VMRO representatives, it becomes clear that they are very much anti-American and anti-NATO. The main reason for this is that they consider Americans and NATO responsible for all "evils" that have befallen the Macedonian nation since its independence in 1991. Specifically, the U.S. and NATO are viewed as unconditionally supporting Greece in oppressing the Macedonian minority in northern Greece; they are held responsible for pushing through the 1995 *Interim Accord* with Greece that changed Macedonia's flag; Americans and NATO are perceived as having assisted the Albanians in staging the 2001 insurgency and later in imposing the Ohrid Framework Agreement; they are held responsible for redrawing Macedonia's municipal boundaries in 2004; they are held responsible for elevating Albanian language as official at the state level in 2018; and most recently and importantly, Americans and NATO are held responsible for pushing through the June 2018 *Prespa Agreement* and for changing Macedonia's name. Equally important, VMRO puts the blame on SDSM because Americans and NATO could push through all the aforementioned changes and legislation only through the domestic support of SDSM. Hence, the deep national division

²⁴ See the coloured map in the official website of the *State Election Commission*. Available online at <https://rezultati.sec.mk/en-US/1/r>.

between VMRO and SDSM. Perhaps this is why Siljanovska-Davkova (2013: 109) also describes postcommunist Macedonian politics as one in which “political opponents are considered ‘enemies’” and characterizes the relations between the main parties as “savage”.

High-level VMRO officials openly state that “Americans have found in Albanians a strategic partner” (Slaveski 2019), and they are very concerned that ethnic Albanians, with the domestic support of the social democrats, are taking over the Macedonian state (Hajredini 2019). As VMRO’s former foreign minister, Antonio Milososki, aptly put it during the 2001 insurgency: “NATO is not our enemy, but it is a great friend of our enemies who are attacking the future of this country” (cited in Phillips 2004: 133). In that respect, VMRO should have now another great opportunity to nationally mobilize ethnic Macedonians after the most recent EU summit in Brussels (17 October 2019) declined to open accession talks with Macedonia due to objections from Denmark, France, and the Netherlands. By doing so, the EU dashed the hopes of SDSM and Zoran Zaev who had staked everything on opening the accession talks. “As we told you, the name change was in vain, the EU once more betrayed us” could well be VMRO’s winning card in the snap parliamentary elections scheduled for 12 April 2020.

This chapter concludes by Table 3.3. that summarizes the case analysis of North Macedonia.

Table 3.3: Summary of the Case Analysis of North Macedonia.

Periods of Causal Importance	Developments
23 November 1989	Anti-communist nationalist demonstration organized by the student union of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
24 November 1989 January 1990	LCM’s 10 th Congress; reformist Petar Gosev elected as the new LCM leader LCY’s 14 th extraordinary Congress; Macedonian leadership sides with Slovenia and Croatia against Milosevic
February 1990	Petar Gosev establishes a 30-member <i>Societal Reform Commission</i> to prepare the ground for the emerging democratic regime

7 April 1990	LCM leaves LCY
15 April 1990	The first ethnic Albanian party, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD), founded in Tetovo
17 June 1990	Macedonian nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE founded in Skopje
November 1990	First multiparty election; VMRO captures the largest number of seats but unable to form government
27 January 1991	<i>Sobranje</i> elects Kiro Gligorov as the first Macedonian president
March 1991	SDSM's Petar Gosev fails to form a government; a "government of experts" led by Nikola Kljusev takes over; it included three ethnic Albanian ministers
8 September 1991	Macedonia's referendum on independence; 68 per cent vote in favor; Albanians boycott
17 November 1991	First post-communist constitution enacted; drafted entirely by social democratic elites; outlines a national state model with substantial ethno-linguistic rights for minorities; first instance of imposition of ethnic policies by one majority party over the other
21 November 1991	Macedonia proclaims independence
11 January 1992	EC-mandated Badinter Commission judges that only Macedonia and Slovenia fulfill the requirements for minority rights protection and were thus worthy of EC recognition
February-March 1992	Gligorov negotiates the peaceful withdrawal of Yugoslav National Army (YNA) units from Macedonian territory; Macedonia takes over YNA's military facilities (Ackermann 2000: 82-83)
17 June 1992	Ohrid Working Paper signed between SDSM and PPD with the mediation of the EC's <i>Minorities Working Group</i>
27 June 1992	EC Summit in Lisbon decides not to recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name due to Greek

	objection; SDSM backs out from the Ohrid Working Paper
August 1992	<i>Sobranje</i> votes unanimously for the 16-pointed sun of Vergina to appear on the new Macedonian flag (Brown 1994: 789)
5 September 1992	SDSM-PPD coalition government led by prime minister Branko Crvenkovski takes over
11 December 1992	Upon Gligorov's request, UN Security Council authorizes the first preventive deployment mission in UN history (along Macedonia's border with Kosovo)
12 February 1994	PPD split; PDSH as minority counter-elite emerges
October 1994	Second multiparty election; VMRO boycotts the second round – out of <i>Sobranje</i> for the next four years; second SDSM-PPD coalition government
17 February 1995	Deadly ethnic riot in Tetovo; first instance of double ethnic outbidding
13 September 1995	<i>Interim Accord</i> between Macedonia and Greece signed by the SDSM government; Greece lifts the embargo and Macedonia removes the 16-pointed Sun of Vergina from its flag; VMRO condemns the agreement (Shea 1997: 305-309)
3 October 1995	President Gligorov survives an assassination attempt in Skopje; two days later (5 October 1995) <i>Sobranje</i> ratified the <i>Interim Accord</i> with Greece (Shea 1997: 371)
17 February 1997	SDSM-PPD government passes in parliament the Law that creates an Albanian-language track in all disciplines taught at state universities; protests and hunger strikes by VMRO and the university administration
8 July 1997	SDSM-PPD government passes the Law on Foreign Flags, which decreed they could be flown on private property at any time and on national holidays in front of town halls (Brown 2000: 131)

9 July 1997	Deadly ethnic riot in Gostivar; second instance of double ethnic outbidding
December 1997 – July 1998	NLA carries out bomb attacks against police stations and courthouses in Gostivar, Kumanovo, Prilep, Tetovo, and Bit Pazar
November 1998	Third multiparty election; VMRO-PDSH coalition government; majority and minority counter-elites allied with one another
11 January 2000 – 25 January 2001	Arachinovo and Tearce Killings; First deadly attacks by NLA
16 February 2001	Start of full-scale NLA insurgency
13 August 2001	Ohrid Framework Agreement signed between VMRO, SDSM, PPD, and PDSH; another major instance of (external) imposition of ethnic policies
December 2002 – August 2003	Wave of kidnappings and bomb attacks claimed by AKSH
18-19 April 2003	VMRO and PDSH jointly call OFA a dead agreement and propose a territorial division of Macedonia
11 August 2004	SDSM-BDI government passes the Law on Redrawing the Municipal Boundaries; VMRO and PDSH oppose; another instance of imposition of ethnic policies
7 November 2004	VMRO's failed referendum bid to repeal the Redistricting Law (26 per cent turnout)
July 2006 – May 2007	VMRO invites PDSH to join the coalition government despite it being the loser in the Albanian camp; BDI boycotts <i>Sobranje</i> for 5 months.
7 November 2007	Deadly clashes between Macedonian security forces and an Albanian extremist group in Brodec (Tetovo)
2007-2014	VMRO's Antiquization in full swing; extreme imposition of ethnic policies
April 2008	Greece blocks Macedonia's NATO membership in the Bucharest Summit

12 April 2012	Smilkovo Lake Killings
February 2015	The release of “Zaev’s Bombs”
9-10 May 2015	Kumanovo armed clashes (22 non-civilian casualties)
11 December 2016	Most recent parliamentary election; SDSM the second highest vote getter among Albanians
28 April 2017	Storming of the Macedonian parliament by VMRO supporters
11 January 2018 – 14 March 2018	<i>Sobranje</i> twice passed the Law that made Macedonia officially a bilingual state; VMRO-affiliated president refuses to sign the Law
17 June 2018	SDSM-led government signs the <i>Prespa Agreement</i> with Greece
30 September 2018	SDSM’s failed referendum bid (34 per cent turnout)
11 January 2019	<i>Sobranje</i> ratifies the <i>Prespa Agreement</i> with 2/3 majority; VMRO boycotts; country name officially becomes North Macedonia
6 February 2019	North Macedonia signs NATO accession agreement to become the 30 th member state
5 May 2019	Albanian voters swing the run-off presidential vote in favor of the SDSM candidate Stevo Pendarovski against VMRO’s Gordana Siljanovska (51.66 vs. 44.73 per cent)
17 October 2019	EU Summit in Brussels declined to open accession talks with North Macedonia (and Albania) due to objections from Denmark, France, and the Netherlands
12 April 2020	Snap parliamentary election scheduled in North Macedonia after the failure to open EU accession talks

Chapter 4

MAJORITY NATIONHOOD COHESION, ELITE COOPERATION, AND INTERETHNIC PEACE IN POSTCOMMUNIST BULGARIA

The two main ethnic Bulgarian parties that oversaw the process of political and economic transition in what was formerly People's Republic of Bulgaria were firmly united on the nationhood question. For both the legal successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and the anticommunist coalition of newly formed parties, Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), ethnic Bulgarians constitute a distinct Slavic people, Orthodox in faith and the modern Bulgarian state formed in the aftermath of the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano was established as the state of and for the people of Bulgarian origin/ common physical descent (*bulgarski proizkhod*). The most defining feature of the Bulgarian nationhood model that both parties embrace is its strong opposition to Turkishness (Dal 2018; Tahir 2018). Güner Tahir, former Turkish-descent UDF parliamentarian, argues that the Bulgarian nation is exclusively built upon the idea that “all of Bulgaria's developmental, economical, and societal ills are caused by 500 years of Ottoman rule and the Turks. No other ethnic identity in the Balkans is as extreme as the Bulgarian one in its extent of anti-Turkishness.” (Tahir 2018). Similarly, Kasım Dal, former MRF deputy, claims that for all Bulgarian political parties the “building block” of Bulgarianness is anti-Turkishness (Dal 2018).

This defining feature determines also the stance of both Bulgarian mainstream parties toward ethnic diversity, namely, denying the existence of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. Stated differently, a single monoethnic body is said to constitute the Bulgarian nation. As Ibrahim Yalimov, former (Turkish-descent) BSP parliamentarian and academic, eloquently explains:

If we would analyze Bulgaria's minority policy during the monarchical period, during totalitarian socialism and now, we would realize that the main goal of Bulgarians has always been to cut off Bulgarian Turks from Turks in mainland Turkey. I always emphasize this point, different Bulgarian regimes have always claimed that Bulgarian Turks have no relation whatsoever with the Turkish nation ... As the Kemalists, Atatürkists attempt to develop national awareness, Bulgarians are strongly against them. The main aim of Bulgarians is to stall the development of national awareness. In Bulgaria there are Muslims, Islam can be

tolerated, but not Turkishness. Nowadays, the aim is the same, no change whatsoever ... There is an extreme nationalism here, and this is so evident (Yalimov 2019).

For former MRF deputy Ahmed Yüsein, the denial of the existence of ethnic minorities in the postcommunist period is a continuation of the communist regime's assimilationist policies (Yüsein 2018). All in all, the two main ethnic Bulgarian parties share a firm non-multiethnic vision of nationhood that is built upon anti-Turkishness and denies the existence of ethnic minorities. In the words of Daniel Chirot, Bulgaria possesses "firmly established majority nationalism" (2005: 155).

4.1 Historical Roots of the Nationhood Cohesion

What are the historical roots of this cohesion on the nationhood question? Building on Anthony Marx's (2005) thesis that cohesion/unity is forged through exclusion, I argue that BSP-UDF nationhood cohesion is a result of more than one century of Bulgarian nation-building based mostly on the violent exclusion and assimilation of Ottoman Muslims/Turks (1878-1989). The nation-building process initially took the form of several waves of violent expulsion beginning in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat in the 1877/8 Ottoman-Russian war, during which some 350,000 Ottoman Muslims/Turks left Bulgaria (Eminov 1997: 79), an episode that according to a knowledgeable observer constitutes "the first example of massive ethnic cleansing in modern European history" (Chirot 2005: 157). The next wave of emigration occurred after Ottoman defeat in the first Balkan War (1912), during which about 400,000 Muslims/Turks were violently expelled from Bulgaria. Thereafter, between 150,000 and 200,000 Turks emigrated from Bulgaria during the interwar period with the 1925 Bulgarian-Turkish bilateral agreement (Höpken 1997: 55). Once the Communist Party took over Bulgaria, initially around 162,000 Turks were evicted from Bulgarian territory in 1950-51 as part of Vulko Chervenkov's¹ plans to break Turkish resistance to the forceful collectivization of agriculture in the northeastern Dobrudja region, "the richest arable area of Bulgaria" (Crampton 2005: 191; Neuburger 2004: 67)².

¹ Chervenkov was the Bulgarian Communist leader that succeeded Georgi Dimitrov, the founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party and former head of the Communist International (Comintern).

² Although this wave of emigration was conducted under an (un)official agreement with Turkey, historians Richard Crampton and Mary Neuburger point out that the element of coercion in it was self-evident. After Turkey closed the border in 1952, this wave of emigration ceased. Family members of those who emigrated during this wave were also allowed to emigrate as part of another agreement with Turkey in 1968. A decade later, by 1978, when the term of the agreement had expired, Turkey had admitted around 54,000 Bulgarian Turks (Neuburger 2004: 73). Crampton (2005: 199) gives a figure of 130,000.

Bulgarian nation-building shifted from exclusion to assimilation during 1958-60 when the then newly crowned communist leader Todor Zhivkov, in a direct emulation of his counterpart in China, launched the Bulgarian “Great Leap Forward” and the accompanying “Cultural Revolution”, during which “Campaigns against the fez, turban, veil, shalvari, circumcision, and household culture penetrated the most intimate reaches of Muslim homes and bodies” (Neuburger 2004: 199). The assimilation process, that continued at a lower pace ever since, reached its peak during 1984-85 with the forceful name-changing policy, the so-called “rebirth process” (*vuzroditelen protzes*; henceforth VP). In March 1985, communist dictator Todor Zhivkov would publicly declare that “there are no more Turks in Bulgaria” (Eminov 1997: 127). After it became clear that the VP failed to break Turkish resistance to its implementation, in May 1989 the communist regime opened the border with Turkey and as a result, around 350,000 Turks left in June-September 1989 in what Neuburger (2004: 82) considers “the biggest mass exodus in Europe” since the Second World War.³ Table 4.1 summarizes the different phases of Bulgarian nation-building from 1878 until 1989.

Table 4.1: Different Phases of Bulgarian Nation-Building 1878-1989.

Nation-building based on ethno-religious exclusion	
<i>Period</i>	<i># of emigrating Ottoman Muslims/Turks</i>
1878-1910	350 000
1912-1914	400 000
1925- 1933	150 000
1950-1951	162 000
1968-1978	54 000
June-September 1989	350 000
TOTAL	1 466 000
Nation-building based on assimilation	
<i>Period</i>	<i>Name of the Process</i>
1912-1913	Name-changing campaign during the First Balkan War

³ More than half of those who emigrated later returned once the communist regime collapsed (Höpken 1997: 55).

1941-1944	Assimilation policies in Bulgaria and occupied territories during the period Bulgaria was a Nazi ally
1958-1960	Bulgarian Great Leap Forward/ Cultural Revolution
1960-1980	Cultural Revolution proceeds at slower pace
1984-1989	Rebirth Process (VP)
Nation-building based on accomodation	
<i>Period</i>	<i>Reason of Accomodation</i>
1914-1919	Accomodation of Muslims/Turks during the First World War since Bulgaria was in the same alliance with the Ottoman Empire
1919-1925 ; 1933-1940	Interwar accomodation of Bulgarian Muslims/Turks because Bulgarian authorities feared spread of Kemalism; viewed Kemalist Turkey as a potential threat to Bulgarian territorial integrity
1944-1956	Emulation of Soviet multiethnic policies “national in form, socialist in content”

Sources: Crampton 2005: 191-199; Eminov 1997: 79; Höpken 1997: 55; Neuburger 2004: 45-82; 199.

Several observations are in order. First, during more than one century of nation-building, Bulgarian policies have been mostly exclusionary and assimilationist towards ethno-religious diversity. Accomodation has been a policy implemented only for around 30 years and even in those cases, as Table 4.1 shows, there were clear geostrategic imperatives that led Bulgaria adopt accomodationist policies. By contrast, exclusionary and assimilationist policies together constitute more than 80 years of Bulgarian nation-building process.⁴ Former BSP deputy Ibrahim Yalimov confirms this pattern by arguing that the common aim of different Bulgarian regimes has been to exclude and/or assimilate its Turkish minority (Yalimov 2016: 270). Second, assimilation as a nation-building policy has been mostly employed by the communist regime in Bulgaria, while *pre-communist* regimes relied mostly on exclusionary policies. Stated differently, with the exception of the initial years after the communist takeover in 1944, Bulgarian communist regime's policies towards Bulgarian Muslims/Turks have been consistently

⁴ Exclusionary policies that led to mass emigration have been adopted for 54 years while assimilationist policies for 31 years.

assimilationist. In this respect, communist Bulgaria radically deviated from the Soviet nationhood model in its approach towards ethno-religious diversity.

Given that the communist legacy temporally constitutes the most proximate legacy, it affected significantly the nationhood visions of postcommunist Bulgarian elites. Indeed, the very fact that postcommunist Bulgaria still does not constitutionally recognize the existence of any minority is in itself a clear proof of the persistence of the communist legacy on the nationhood question (Yüsein 2018; Yalimov 2019). To sum up, building on Anthony Marx's (2005) thesis that cohesion/unity is forged through exclusion, I have argued that BSP-UDF nationhood cohesion is a result of more than one century of Bulgarian nation-building based mostly on the ethno-religious exclusion and/or assimilation of Ottoman Muslims/Turks (1878-1989).

All this stands in marked contrast to North Macedonia. As argued above, Yugoslav Macedonian nation-building was based on the violent exclusion of those ethnic Macedonians that denied the Yugoslav-imposed ethnogenesis. Thus, the most significant conclusion that emerges from an overview of comparative communist nation-building processes is that the legacy of violent minority assimilation/exclusion generated nationhood cohesion in postcommunist Bulgaria, while the legacy of violent *intraethnic* exclusion generated nationhood cleavage in postcommunist Macedonia.

4.2 Ethnic Structure - Did Bulgarian Nation-Building Policies Succeed or Fail?

Referring back to Table 4.1, the data show that since the founding of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878, around one and a half million Ottoman Muslims/Turks have emigrated from Bulgaria. While reliable data on the share of the Turkish ethnic group after several waves of emigration are hard to come by, the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute reports that during the censuses from 1900 to 1926, the share of the Turkish ethnic group was over 10 % and since 1934 it was in the range from 9.7 % in 1934 to 8.4% in 1975 (Bulgaria Census 2011: 23). According to the most recent Bulgarian census (2011), 588,318 citizens self-identify as ethnic Turk, thus constituting 8.8 % of the 7.3 million population. Table 4.2 lists in descending order the Bulgarian districts where Turks constitute more than 10 per cent of the population. Figure 4.1 locates in the map those districts.

Table 4.2: Bulgarian districts (/28) where ethnic Turks constitute more than 10 % of the population.

District	% ethnic Bulgarian	% ethnic Turk
<i>Kardzhali</i>	30.2	66.2
<i>Razgrad</i>	43.0	50.0
<i>Silistra</i>	57.4	36.1
<i>Targovishte</i>	54.7	35.8
<i>Shumen</i>	59.2	30.3
<i>Dobrich</i>	75.4	13.5
<i>Burgas</i>	80.5	13.3
<i>Ruse</i>	81.4	13.2
<i>Haskovo</i>	79.4	12.5

Source: Bulgaria Census (2011).



Figure 4.1: Bulgarian districts where Turks make up more than 10 % of the population.

As the data from Table 4.2 shows, ethnic Turks outnumber ethnic Bulgarians only in two districts, Kardzhali (southern Bulgaria along the border with Greece) and Razgrad (northeastern Bulgaria), where they constitute a majority of the population. On the other hand, taken together, Turks constitute a significant part of the population in 9 out of 28 Bulgarian districts (32 %).

Given that Bulgarian censuses apart from ethnic self-identification survey also mother tongue and religion, the strong correlation among the three in the case of Bulgarian Turks deserves emphasis. Accordingly, among citizens who self-identify as ethnic Turk, 96.6 % indicate Turkish as mother tongue and only 3.2 % indicate Bulgarian as mother tongue. The correlation is comparatively less strong in the case of religion but still significant. 88 % of those who self-identify as Turk also identify themselves as Muslims, whereas the second largest group (6.7 %) chose not to state their religion (Bulgaria Census 2011: 26-27). Taken together, the data bring home a major finding: *Bulgarian nation-building policies of exclusion and assimilation toward ethnic Turks have largely failed*. First, despite several waves of expulsion, during which around one and a half million Turks left Bulgaria, ethnic Turks still constitute a significant part of Bulgaria's population. Indeed, if one accepts the reliability of Bulgarian statistical data that gives the share of Turks in 1900 at over 10 %, this means that 111 years later (1900 – 2011) the share of Turks (8.8 %) hovers around the same range. Second, despite several decades of assimilation, Turks still embrace and strongly identify with the two main markers of their ethnic identity: Turkish language and Islam.

4.3 Political Context and Background

The Bulgarian transition began on 10 November 1989, one day *after* the Berlin Wall fell, when a reformist clique within the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) led by Petar Mladenov (then Foreign Minister), Andrei Lukanov (Minister for Foreign Trade and Exports), and Alexander Lilov (main party ideologue) deposed the ageing tyrant Todor Zhivkov (in power since 1956) in a peaceful palace coup. Both former presidential advisor Mihail Ivanov and former BSP deputy Ibrahim Yalimov argue that three wings could be observed within BCP. The first was represented by Alexander Lilov and Petar Mladenov and they sought to “democratize socialism” in a way similar to Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. The second wing was that around the last communist prime minister Georgi Atanasov that was deeply conservative and sought to preserve totalitarian socialism. The third was the wing around Andrei Lukanov who sought to radically change the system from totalitarian to democratic and from planned economy to capitalist (Ivanov 2018; Yalimov 2019). Both Ivanov and Yalimov argue that Andrei Lukanov was connected to Boris Yeltsin and to the oligarchic circles around *Gazprom* in Russia, and thus, Lukanov's main aim was to radically change the socialist economy so that the circle

around him could become the new bourgeoisie (Ivanov 2018; Yalimov 2019). Mihail Ivanov further explains:

They (the circle around Andrei Lukanov) represented a part of society, they were people who made business. Many of them with the support of the communist regime, with the support of Todor Zhivkov, they started business in the West with dark money. I like to say usually that socialism had created capitalism inside. But for this capitalism, the shirt of socialism was so small. In this new capitalism there was strong power for change. And the circle around Lukanov represented this capitalism, this 'communist capitalism', this 'socialist capitalism' (Ivanov 2018).

With the fall of Todor Zhivkov on 10 November 1989, the conservative wing around Georgi Atanasov was eliminated. The two remaining wings within BCP were both reformist but favored different kind of changes: while Lilov and Mladenov wanted to democratize socialism, Lukanov was totally business-oriented and thus pushed for a radical change of the system (Ivanov 2018; Yalimov 2019). However, in the immediate aftermath of Zhivkov's fall, both reformist wings were confronted by two potentially explosive problems. First, given the developments in East Germany and other Eastern European countries, they feared the prospect of a popular revolution that would have swept them from power (Dal 2018). Second, there was the ethnic problem. The reformist clique clearly understood that the assimilation process (VP) was no longer sustainable and that ending it had become "inevitable" (Dimitrov 2018). In a time when the old continent was being swept by the winds of change, Bulgaria could simply not transition to democracy with the VP intact. Indeed, opposing assimilationist policies became the main marker of being a democrat during those days, and the former communists could not lag behind in this respect if they wanted to preserve power (Dal 2018). The two problems were actually interrelated. While there was a consensus among the reformists on the urgent need to reverse the VP, there was another concern that also loomed large: they were uncertain on how the Bulgarian public would actually react to a reversal of the VP. Given a public that had been imbued with hard nationalistic feelings for decades by the communist regime, there was the real danger that a sudden reversal of the VP could unleash a nationalist backlash and imperil reformists' prospects for preserving power under the new democratic regime. Hence, the dilemma facing the former communists: how to end the assimilation process while preserving power in the new system? In this respect, a moderate and cooperative anti-communist opposition would certainly be in their interests (Ivanov 2018; Ömer 2018).

During the last years before Zhivkov's removal and in its immediate aftermath, several movements, committees, protest associations, and political parties were formed and started to operate in the newly developing pluralist environment. Twelve of these were most prominent and deserve emphasis (Ivanov 2018; Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 202-3):

1. Club for Glasnost and Perestroika co-founded by Zheliu Zhelev and Petko Simeonov
2. Eco-Glasnost Independent Association founded by Georgi Avramov and Deyan Kiuranov
3. Citizens' Initiative Movement founded by Liubomir Sobadziev
4. Federation of Independent Student Societies (FISS) founded by Emil Koshlukov
5. Bulgarian Radical Democratic Party (BRDP) founded by Elka Konstantinova
6. Independent Federation of Labor Podkrepa founded by Konstantin Trentchev
7. Independent Association for the Protection of Human Rights in Bulgaria (ISPHR) founded by Eduard Genov and Ilia Minev
8. Green Party founded by Aleksander Karakachanov and Filip Dimitrov
9. Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience, and Spiritual Values (CPRRFCSV) founded by Christofor Sabev
10. Bulgarian Agrarian National Union Nikola Petkov (BANU Nikola Petkov) founded by Milan Drenchev
11. Club of the Illegally Repressed since 1945 (CIRS) founded by Dimitar Batalov
12. Social Democratic Party (SDP) founded by Petar Dertliev

The most prominent in its opposition to totalitarian socialism was the *Club for Glasnost and Perestroika*. It was founded on 3 November 1988 at the main state university "Kliment Ohridski" (lecture hall 65) by a group of about 100 Bulgarian intellectuals, among whom the dissidents Zheliu Zhelev and Petko Simeonov stood out (Ivanov 2018). Many of the founders of the *Club* were members of the Communist party and their main aim was to democratize socialism. Professor Chavdar Kiuranov, his wife Iskra Panova, Hristo Ganey, and Binka Zhelyazkova were such *Club* founders. However, the aim of other founders of the *Club* was to abolish totalitarian socialism and change the system to democracy. Zheliu Zhelev, Petko Simeonov, and Ivayl Trifanov stand out in this faction of the *Club* (Ivanov 2018). Second, during 1988, other protest movements and associations were also founded. For instance, the *Independent Association for the Protection of Human Rights* was founded by Eduard Genov, who back in 1968 had spoken against Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and later led by Ilia Minev, another prominent Bulgarian dissident. Genov was eventually expelled from Bulgaria, while Minev stayed in prison until Zhivkov was removed (Ivanov 2018). *Independent Labor Association Podkrepa* led by Konstantin Trentchev was another prominent dissident organization found during 1988 (Ivanov 2018). Third, in the autumn of 1989, several traditional Bulgarian parties that had been banned by the communist regime since 1944 were restored. Among them, we can single out the *Bulgarian Agrarian Union* restored by

Milan Drenchev, and the *Social Democratic Party* that was restored by Petar Dertliev, a former political prisoner in the infamous camp of Belene (Ivanov 2018).

All these groups organized several rallies after Zhivkov's resignation and on 7 December 1989 they came together to form the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the umbrella anti-communist opposition organization led by the dissident philosopher Zheliu Zhelev. As Mihail Ivanov, Zhelev's former advisor on ethnic issues, mentions, the nucleus of the UDF was the *Club for Glasnost and Perestroika* and it was complemented by the other associations (like *Podkrepa*) and the restored Bulgarian traditional parties (Ivanov 2018). Although ideologically anti-communist and democratic, many of the founding groups of UDF were actually very nationalist. Indeed, Ibrahim Yalimov (2019) claims that even the *Club for Glasnost and Perestroika*, the nucleus of UDF, refrained from publicly supporting Turkish/Muslim rights because of fear that (ethnic) Bulgarian people would come out against them. Moreover, there was almost unanimous agreement that Bulgarian Turks should not be admitted to the UDF and the staunchest proponents of such a view were actually leaders of human rights organizations (Kolarova 1993: 33).

BCP reformist leadership adopted a two-pronged strategy to deal with the fledgling opposition movement. On the one hand, BCP elites, using a well-organized and disciplined network of former *State Security* (DS) agents, tried to infiltrate some of the "civic" groups that later became UDF founding members (Ivanov 2018). By this strategy, the former communist elites aimed at internally weakening the UDF. Equally important, they pushed some of these newly founded "civic" groups to organize mass rallies after Zhivkov's removal and appeal, among other factors, for a reversal of the VP. The aim was clear: former communist elites wanted to gauge the public reaction to a potential reversal of the VP. As a case in point, Rumen Vodenicharov was a DS agent who had infiltrated the *Independent Association for the Protection of Human Rights* once Ilia Minev was expelled from it. Vodenicharov became a founding member of the UDF and a vocal opposition leader. Eight days after the removal of Todor Zhivkov (18 November 1989), Vodenicharov was one of the speakers at the first anti-communist mass rally organized in Sofia and he made a public appeal that Bulgarian Turks be allowed to reclaim their names. Yet, less than one month later, when he became a UDF founding member, Vodenicharov was also one of the staunchest proponents of the view that political

representatives of Bulgarian Turks should not be allowed to join the UDF.⁵ The aforementioned facts were communicated to the author by one of the witnesses of the first mass rally in Sofia where Vodenicharov spoke. Accordingly, Professor Ivelin Sardamov, a then expert at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the author;

One of the speakers at the first mass rally in Sofia after the removal of T. Zhivkov (Nov. 18, 1989) was Rumen Vodenicharov. At the time he spoke on behalf of a dissident human rights organization – but later became known as a nationalist, and probably an informer for the Communist secret police. He made an appeal that Bulgarian Turks be allowed to reclaim their names. And he was loudly booed by the crowd. To me, this was like a cold shower – and my immediate thought was that the “transition” was unlikely to be smooth sailing.⁶

Indeed, the resentful public reaction at the first anti-communist mass rally and other rallies organized shortly afterwards convinced the reformist communists that the transition was unlikely to be smooth sailing unless they managed to cooperate with opposition elites. But was UDF open to cooperation? Evidence clearly suggests that UDF leadership was willing to cooperate with the BSP for a smooth transition and hardline figures within UDF were initially sidelined and eventually expelled from the party. Former presidential advisor Mihail Ivanov argues that BSP elites since the very beginning made every effort to support UDF leader Zheliu Zhelev and other moderate figures around him and to sideline/push out radical, extreme anti-communists like Ilia Minev (Ivanov 2018). Andrei Raychev, a close confidant of Andrei Lukanov, aptly describes the strategy of the former communists:

This was the strategy. We (former communists) shall choose our opposition. We need, we need opposition. We decided to change the system, in the new system, opposition must be present ... At the beginning of the changes, these circles (around Andrei Lukanov) by using media, they made strong efforts to popularize these people (the moderate UDF leadership) (Ivanov 2018).

⁵ Vodenicharov's rhetoric substantially radicalized in the following years. For instance, in a public interview on 10 September 1994, he expressed himself categorically against granting “too many rights” to Bulgarian Turks [quite surprisingly since the only ethno-linguistic right Turks had, and still have, was the *optional* study of Turkish language in public schools for a limited number of hours per week]. Among other things, he declared that:

In my view, the Cyprus scenario is being applied to Bulgaria right now with the aim of converting it into a confederation of two nations: Bulgarians and Turks. If the constitutional ban on ethnic parties is not enforced by the new, 37th National Assembly, and if the secessionist appetites of Doğan, Hodzha, Kenan and others are not resisted, then it is very likely that in the not too distant future Bulgaria will be divided like Cyprus. And no one will help us then. Like no one has helped Cyprus over the past 20 years (cited in Vassilev 2010: 303).

⁶ Author's e-mail correspondence with Ivelin Sardamov, Associate Professor of Political Science, American University in Bulgaria (27 January 2018)

Likewise, former MRF parliamentarian Hüseyin Ömer (1990-1991) claims that the UDF led by Zheliu Zhelev agreed to be “a soft opposition” (Ömer 2018), while Ibrahim Yalimov (2019) reveals that “Lukanov worked closely with the opposition and guided and influenced the opposition”. All this led the former communists to resort to the second part of their two-pronged strategy: initiating the Round Table Talks (henceforth RTT) with UDF. I argue that the RTT represent the single most important example of majority elite cooperation in devising ethnic policies. Yet, what made RTT possible in the first place, was the nationhood cohesion among the former communists and anti-communist opposition (Tahir 2018).

4.4 Ethno-Nationalist Mobilization and Factors of Deescalation and Restraint

4.4.1 Bulgarian ethno-nationalist mobilization and Turkish counter-mobilization (December 1989-January 1990)

The official beginning of the RTT was preceded by several meetings high level BCP officials had with opposition elites. Petar Mladenov, then head of the state, since the very beginning, showed the willingness of the former communists to cooperate with the incipient opposition when it came to the ethnic problem. Indeed, only four days after the removal of Todor Zhivkov (14 November 1989), Mladenov held a meeting with several dissident intellectuals, many of whom one month later would found UDF, and appealed for their support in face of a potential reversal of the VP (Stamatov 2000: 569; Peeva 2000: 64). Both parties recognized the sensitivity of the issue for the Bulgarian public and concurred upon the need to act with caution. As Peter Stamatov notes, “These considerations seem to account for the relatively late date on which the Party leadership tackled the issue: almost two months after Zhivkov’s resignation” (Stamatov 2000: 569). Subsequently, at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the BCP on 29 December 1989, Alexander Lilov condemned the VP and officially put an end to it by announcing that Bulgarian Turks/Muslims would be allowed to reclaim their names. Vesselin Dimitrov, a prominent Bulgarian scholar, has aptly described Mladenov’s decision to end the assimilation process as a “bold decision” since it was very risky and could have easily backfired in face of public recalcitrance (Dimitrov 2001: 39). Counterfactually, my theoretical framework leads me to argue that Mladenov’s decision would likely have backfired in the absence of majority elite cooperation. Yet, Bulgarian majority elites did cooperate and this is best shown by the fact that BCP’s decision to

officially end the VP and invite UDF elites to negotiate in the RTT was almost simultaneous.

As might have been expected, the official reversal of the VP unleashed a Bulgarian ethno-nationalist backlash. During a period of two weeks (30 December 1989 – 12 January 1990), the country was engulfed in a wave of nationalist mobilization and Turkish counter-mobilization. The Bulgarian ethno-nationalist backlash was organized mainly by the local Communist party elites in ethnically mixed regions and seems to have been also encouraged by the hardline communists within BCP as a protest against the reformist leadership (Tahir 2018). The main instigators of the protests, the local elites in ethnically mixed areas, had every reason to do so since they were “cut off from the symbolic and economic profits they enjoyed during the course of the renaming campaign” and at the same time feared that “The reversal and condemnation of previous nationalizing policies by the Party Center implied that responsibility would be attributed to those who had been involved in their implementation” (Stamatov 2000: 559). Average Bulgarians from ethnically mixed regions, several thousands of whom flooded the streets, had grievances similar to those of local elites. As Güner Tahir, former MRF and UDF parliamentarian, aptly describes:

The ones who gave orders (for the assimilation policies) were from the center in Sofia, however the ones who actually implemented the orders and acted against the Turks were the Bulgarians from ethnically mixed regions – the local communist elites in the police and courts. They knew that if Turks reclaim their names, they would intervene against Bulgarians and prosecute them ... Local elites were the ones who in 1989 took bribes from Turks for giving them *red passports* to leave for Turkey, they were the ones who usurped the property of the Turks when they left, they were the ones who sold to the Turks a 5,000 leva-worth *lada* for 20,000 leva (4 times its actual price). Once the assimilation process ended, the local Bulgarian elites feared for themselves and thus they took to the streets ... For instance, in such a protest in Razgrad, there were about five to six thousand people and I was also there to record. Years later, when I became governor of Ruse, I brought some of those people in front of me in court. They denied, however I showed them the recordings from the protest as evidence (Tahir 2018).

In order to better coordinate the protests, the local nomenclatura on 31 December 1989 founded the Committee for the Defense of National Interests (*Komitet za Zashtita na Natsionalnite Interesi* KZNI) in the district of Kardzhali, where ethnic Turks constitute an overwhelming majority of the population (Ivanov 2018).

This wave of nationalist mobilization and Turkish counter-mobilization seriously threatened the country’s political stability and could well have generated interethnic violence. Indeed, Ivanov (2018) argues that at the beginning of January 1990, “It was very cold at that time, about 10 degree minus but Kardzhali was very hot”. Similarly,

Kasim Dal recalls that when he and other former political prisoners arrived in Kardzhali on 5 January 1990, “the people were at each other’s throats” (Dal 2018). In the midst of raging protests, BCP and UDF leadership had already started negotiations to find a solution to the ethnic problem. As Richard Crampton, the prominent British historian, has argued, “the prospect of continued confrontation persuaded Bulgarian politicians of all stripes to initiate conversations to contain the crisis” (Crampton 2002: 309). What is key to emphasize here is that the two main Bulgarian majority parties distanced themselves from the protesters and rejected their demands, including KZNI’s demand for a national referendum on Turks’ right to reclaim their names. BCP and UDF’s main aim was preventing the instrumentalization of the protests for political ends and they were successful. Unable to find an ally among the mainstream parties, the protesters and the KZNI were quickly marginalized. As Dimitrov aptly concludes, “in the absence of political leadership, the demonstrations gradually died down by the end of the month [January 1990] and Bulgaria managed to avoid the descent into nationalism that afflicted many of its Balkan neighbors” (Dimitrov 2001: 39).

Before the beginning of the first round of official RTT plenary sessions on 22 January 1990 (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 211), BCP and UDF presided over an *ad hoc* committee called the Council for the Discussion of the National Question (CDNQ) and drafted a declaration on 12 January 1990 that was subsequently approved by the Bulgarian National Assembly. While affirming the reversal of the VP, the declaration also stated emphatically that any demand for local autonomy for Bulgarian Turks would not even be considered and that Bulgarian shall be the only official language at both the national and local level (Ivanov 2018). This agreement on the ethnic question even before the actual start of the RTT clearly shows the nationhood cohesion among Bulgarian majority parties and stands in stark contrast to the Macedonian case where SDSM pushed for official status for Albanian language and a host of other rights while VMRO opposed them.

4.4.2 Factors of Deescalation and Restraint: The Bulgarian Round Table Talks (RTT) (January-May 1990)

Once CDNQ declaration had affirmed the unitary nature of the Bulgarian state and the undisputed primacy of the Bulgarian language at both national and local levels, some of the concerns of the nationalist protesters that had flooded the streets for almost two weeks were somehow placated (though they still resented the reversal of the VP). The stage was thus set for the beginning of the official RTT, where BCP and UDF leadership tried to set

the decisions on the ethnic question on a firmer ground. All in all, the RTT between BSP and UDF should be seen as a joint attempt to contain the ethnicization and polarization of political space. Fomer MRF deputy Kasim Dal (2018) argues that the RTT were held specifically to “pacify the people”. Similarly, the leading academic study of the RTT in Bulgaria reports:

The emergence of the NRT [National Round Table] is a result of the common understanding that in the present circumstances the National Assembly ..., the government, and the other state institutions can function adequately only in conditions of national agreement and consent between different social forces. The NRT ... express(es) the will of the Bulgarian people (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 205).

The supreme legislative status attributed to the RTT in itself is indicative of the importance of the decisions agreed upon:

A supreme legislative status was attributed to the agreements signed by the participants in the talks. The acting National Assembly was expected to vote “automatically” and with no corrections to the texts of the constitutional amendments and laws agreed on at the RT (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 190)

Ibrahim Yalimov (2019) evaluates that the RTT “to a certain extent played the role of a parliament. The main aim was how to transition peacefully from the totalitarian regime to democracy, without going to a civil war, without spilling blood.” Still, it was the nationhood cohesion between BCP and UDF that made possible their cooperation in the first place and eventually paved the way for the RTT (Tahir 2018).

The three most important agreements on ethnic policies reached during the RTT were:

1. “Both sides agreed that there should be an explicit ban on parties based on religious or ethnic lines” (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 191). This clause was part of the Party Bill agreed upon by both parties and was officially enacted on 10 April 1990 (Kolarova 1993: 34). It later officially became Article 11(4) of the July 1991 Bulgarian constitution. For some Bulgarian scholars, the constitutional ban on ethnic parties reflects more nationalistic fervor and should be construed as an undisguised attempt to build a “constitutional nationalist” Bulgarian state (Ganev 2004: 71). I disagree with such a view. While I do not dispute the monoethnic nationhood vision of both BCP and UDF, I argue instead that the constitutional ban on ethnic parties was an attempt to de-ethnicize political space and, as I am going to elaborate on further below, restrict minority political representation to one political formation only. Indeed, Filip Dimitrov, former Bulgarian

prime minister (UDF) and participant in the RTT, explicitly states that the ban on ethnic parties “was considered to be a kind of compromise to appease nationalist feelings” (Dimitrov 2018). Again in stark contrast to Macedonia, this shows that the constitutional provisions on ethnic policies in Bulgaria, however illiberal they were, were a result of consensus/cooperation rather than imposition and this fact effectively deethnicized political space.

2. Both BCP and UDF sought to prevent minority *intraethnic* competition and to this end, they *implicitly* agreed to make the Turkish-based Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) the sole legal political representative of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria (Ömer 2018). The MRF was founded on 4 January 1990 in Varna by 33 members of the former Turkish National Liberation Movement (TMKH).⁷ Since the very beginning, MRF was conceived and founded as TMKH’s political successor and as such, TMKH’s leader, Ahmed Demir Doğan, a former philosophy professor at Sofia University and member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, was agreed upon to preside over the MRF also (Dal 2018).



Figure 4.2: Five of the 33 founding members of the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* when they were released from Stara Zagora (Eski Zağra) prison in December 1989. *From left to right: Bahri Ömer, Necmeddin Hak, Ahmed Doğan, Kasım Dal, anonymous.*

⁷ The Turkish National Liberation Movement (*Bulgaristan Türk Milli Kurtuluş Hareketi*) was the underground resistance organization that was formed in 1985 during the assimilation period in Bulgaria. Many of its members were subsequently imprisoned in 1986 and were released only in December 1989 after the communist leader Zhivkov was deposed.

However, recent evidence proves beyond doubt that Ahmed Doğan and many of the 33 MRF founding members were *State Security* agents/informers and they were tightly controlled by the business-oriented circle around Andrei Lukanov (Emin 2018; Dal 2018; Ivanov 2018; Oktay 2018; Ömer 2018; Tahir 2018; Yalimov 2019; Yüsein 2018). There is unanimity on this issue. To substantiate the point, former presidential advisor Mihail Ivanov (2018) explains:

The *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* was founded from the people, many of them were in the prisons. Very good men, very, how to say, idealistic people. They strived for the rights of the Turks and they wanted to restore the rights of the Turks. Not only Turks, but also Pomaks and all minorities in Bulgaria. They wanted to have their own party because they didn't believe that together with Bulgarian parties their rights shall be protected. But very soon, at the top of this party, Ahmed Doğan and the people together with him take the situation in their hands and they connected with the private corporation *Multigroup*. This corporation was created by Andrei Lukanov, simply saying. And look, Ahmet Doğan was connected to *Multigroup* and *Multigroup* was very close to *Gazprom* in the Soviet Union. Do you understand the connection? And you can see at the meetings of the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms*, you can see in the presidium Ahmed Doğan and Iliya Pavlov (president of *Multigroup*) together ... and *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* was very important actor in this theater (nomenklatura becoming the new bourgeoisie).

Hüseyin Ömer, MRF deputy elected in the first multiparty election and later expelled from the party, similarly argues that the main function given to the MRF by the *State Security* was to “keep together Turkish votes and use them for the sake of BSP and the Russians” and this is the main reason behind the ban on ethnic parties agreed upon during the RTT (Ömer 2018). While Kasım Dal (2018), one of the 33 founding members, acknowledges in relation to Ahmet Doğan that “We chose him with our own hands. At that time we had no idea whatsoever on who he really was.” Lastly, Hayri Emin, foreign relations’ expert at the Office of Grand Mufti, claims that the informal, unwritten agreement governing the relations between BSP and UDF was that the Turkish/Muslim votes in Bulgaria belong exclusively to MRF and that Bulgarian parties will never attempt to court Turkish/Muslim votes (Emin 2018). This informal division of the electorate agreed upon at the RTT simply means that “Bulgarians have no responsibility at all toward the Turks. If you have any problem, you have your own party, you have your own leader, go there. As if we are not Bulgarian citizens” avers Güner Tahir (2018).

Unlike the first formal and public agreement in the RTT, the agreement to give MRF monopoly over Turkish/Muslim representation was informal and negotiated behind closed doors. Kolarova and Dimitrov (1996: 193) report that minority-related negotiations:

were held behind closed doors. This was the only closed plenary session of the RT- all participants were afraid to make public statements on issues concerned with MRF.

In an earlier study, Romyana Kolarova (1993) called this informal strategy for dealing with the minority issue a “gag rule” and likewise argued that:

All participants unanimously decided that an open, public discussion of Turkish minority rights would jeopardize the democratization process by further consolidating and strengthening support for the emerging nationalistic parties⁸ (Kolarova 1993: 33).

The way MRF was legally registered was revealing of the “double-standard” at work in the negotiations between BSP and UDF (Kolarova 1993: 34). On the one hand, on 10 April 1990 the Bill banning parties on ethnic basis was enacted. On the other hand, only days after the Bill was passed, MRF was legally registered by the Sofia Regional Court, the sole judicial body that was granted authorization from the RTT to register political parties (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 209). Given that judiciary at the time was almost totally controlled by the communist authorities and had not been depoliticized yet, Kolarova aptly concludes that “The MRF was legally recognized not through a constitutional amendment, but by a tacit agreement negotiated at the RTT and legalized by the judiciary” (Kolarova 1993: 35). All in all,

the MRF had been registered by the Central Committee for the Elections, in spite of the law banning ethnically based parties. Branko Davidov, representative of a pro-Communist nationalistic organization, raised the question of who was responsible for the registration of parliamentary candidates from the MRF. Both the BCP and UDF refused to admit responsibility for this act, however, and this question was not discussed (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 194) ... As a practical matter, however, neither of the negotiating sides wanted to be associated with a pro-Turkish policy. They feared being labelled as the “betrayers of the national interests” and consequently losing public support (Kolarova 1993: 33).

New evidence sheds more light on the topic in question. Hüseyin Ömer (2018) argues that Yuri Bahnev and Miroslav Drmov, two ethnic Bulgarians lawyers brought to MRF by Ahmed Doğan, were the ones who prepared, wrote the charter (tüzük) and programme of the party and eventually had it registered by the Sofia District Court led at the time by Dimitar Popov. Bahnev, Drmov, and Popov were all well-trained *State Security* agents at the time. Yuri Bahnev had served for 22 years as Bulgarian ambassador in Malaysia,

⁸ During January 1990, three small nationalistic parties sprang from the Committee for the Defense of National Interests (KZNI): Bulgarian National Radical Party, the Bulgarian National Democratic Party, and the Fatherland Party of Labor. However, lacking support from both mainstream parties (BCP and UDF), these small parties, like their ‘mother’ organization KZNI, were quickly marginalized and failed to rally any significant mass support in subsequent elections.

while Miroslav Drmov had worked as an informer/spy in East Germany where he had married the daughter of the exiled Turkish communist Ismail Bilen/Marat (Ömer 2018). As Ömer further explains:

We were very gullible at the time, had pure intentions. The only thing we wanted was to have our own party. We were not aware of anything. Actually we were happy that some kind Bulgarians were together with us. Yuri Bahnev was a lawyer, we thought he was a good person. Miroslav Drmov was also a lawyer. (In reality) They were both appointed by the *State Security* to prepare the charter of the party (Ömer 2018).

The greatest problem with this charter, as Hüseyin Ömer and Güner Tahir mention, was a clause stipulating that MRF's charter can not be altered unless its leader agrees and that there were no term limits for the leader. This made it virtually impossible to alter anything in the future and Ahmed Doğan was thus rendered "the unchangeable leader of the party" (Ömer 2018; Tahir 2018). Hüseyin Ömer also mentions several secret documents he had accessed from the personal archive of Miroslav Drmov. Among them, what stand out are the remarks of a high-level *State Security* official to Drmov: "With these agents/informers, we are going to play with Turks as we wish for twenty more years. They (the Turks) will vote for us and will do whatever we want" (Ömer 2018).

In brief, BCP and UDF's implicit agreement to prevent minority intraethnic competition and to divide up the electorate actually complemented the decision to ban ethnic parties since essentially, the aim of both agreements was to *deethnicize* political space. Moreover, I argue that the absence of minority intraethnic competition played a crucial role in fostering peaceful interethnic relations in Bulgaria. A comparison with the Macedonian case is revealing again. As argued in the previous chapter, interethnic relations in Macedonia took a violent turn only *after* the Albanian PPD split and PDSH emerged. The split generated minority intraethnic competition and provided one of the Macedonian majority parties (VMRO) a partner with whom to collude for doubly ethnic outbidding their allied majority and minority counterparts.

3. As part of the third decision on the ethnic question, BCP and UDF agreed that they:

1. will never use violence and will act to prevent any form of it ... 4. will prevent the use of the press and the mass media for political provocations and appeals to violence (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 206)

This clause goes to great lengths to explaining why, unlike Macedonia, anti-minority rhetoric has never played an important role in political competition among the mainstream

parties in Bulgaria. As Ganev aptly puts it, “rabid nationalism is simply not a winning political platform in Bulgaria” (Ganev 2003: 329). It also explains why, unlike the 2015 developments in Macedonia, threatened incumbent elites facing mass mobilization have not resorted to ethno-nationalist themes as a way to preserve political power in postcommunist Bulgaria (Dimitrov 2018). Instead, threatened incumbent elites in postcommunist Bulgaria have internalized the norm that “bowing to popular pressure is a wise policy in such circumstances. That indicates a respect for the popular will which can be an important safeguard in a functioning democracy” (Crampton 2005: 262). Former UDF prime minister Filip Dimitrov (2018) argues that “Bulgaria is an example of very reasonable behavior in all these years.” Indeed, the agreements on the ethnic question reached during the RTT laid the basis for the successful constitutional engineering and democracy development in the following years. Hence, Venelin Ganev is certainly right in arguing that “Construed as an effort to structure the behavior of political elites, constitutional engineering in Bulgaria created powerful incentives for maintaining *nonviolent forms of elite rivalry*” (Ganev 2007: 146; my emphasis in italics). In stark contrast, lack of cooperation among divided Macedonian majority parties has bred violent forms of elite rivalry.

To sum up, I argue that the RTT represent a “critical juncture” in postcommunist Bulgarian politics in that the interparty agreements reached therein effectively deethnicized political space, bred nonviolent forms of elite rivalry, and ultimately paved the way for interethnic peace in subsequent years. Bulgarian and foreign scholars alike appreciate the crucial role played by the RTT. For instance, Kolarova posited that:

The most important accomplishment achieved by the gag rules [implicit agreements between BCP and UDF on the ethnic question] was the avoidance of a radical public confrontation on ethnic-religious issues. These rules averted the dangerous ethnification of the political process that blocked the democratization process in Yugoslavia and in some of the former Soviet republics (Kolarova 1993: 42-3).

Along similar lines, Vesselin Dimitrov (2001: 38) argued that by initiating the RTT, BCP and UDF leadership “created a safe channel” for tackling the ethnic question, while Tom Gallagher (2003: 20) affirms that:

at elite level, the BSP and UDF cooperated to defuse ethnic sentiment and to channel it in safe political directions ... The willingness of the main political players to shape the mechanisms of the transition around negotiations and pacts placed it [Bulgaria] apart from all other Balkan countries confronted with similar challenges.

What these scholars overlook, though, is the fact that it was the nationhood cohesion among BCP and UDF that made possible the RTT in the first place. Both parties shared a firm monoethnic (i.e. non-multiethnic) vision of Bulgarian nationhood. Indeed, the RTT agreements, apart from endorsing the reversal the VP, did not include any ethno-linguistic concession to Bulgarian Turks. Bulgarian was affirmed as the only official language at both national and local levels (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 208). What is more striking, BCP and UDF refrained from even discussing in public *any* minority-related issue for fear that they would be punished electorally in the upcoming election. This clearly illustrates the fact that both Bulgarian majority parties were well-aware that they were operating in a political environment which, while not opposed in principle to the *descriptive representation* of Bulgarian Turks, was adamantly opposed to any *substantive representation*. At long last, it is hard to imagine that the RTT would have ever taken place if, say, UDF had subscribed to a multiethnic vision of nationhood.

Despite all the scholarly writings on the topic, the inner side of the agreements reached between BSP and UDF has not been fully revealed yet. Evidence from interviews suggests however that the primary informal agreement that guided all subsequent negotiations in the RTT was the so-called “soft opposition agreement” (Ömer 2018), whereby UDF was to be handed down political power in return for leaving economic power in the hands of the former communists and for not interfering in their grand project of becoming the new Bulgarian bourgeoisie. This is how former presidential advisor Mihail Ivanov (2018) describes this informal agreement:

The strategy of this line, the line of Andrei Lukanov, was that we (former communists) shall put political power in the hands of the new opposition. We do not want political power. But we shall transform socialist economy into capitalist economy and we shall keep the money.

Likewise, Hüseyin Ömer (2018) convincingly shows that “there was a soft opposition agreement – a soft opposition, an opposition like the communists wanted, and Zheliu Zhelev implemented it ... the main goal was to save the communist party since that danger existed, and the communists could slowly transform political into economic power ... All our problems lie in the fact that there has been no lustration in Bulgaria.” Kasım Dal and Osman Oktay, two former MRF parliamentarians and deputy leaders, also mention that Zheliu Zhelev, UDF leader, retrospectively came to regret the fact that back in the 1990s they had behaved so softly toward the communists and neglected lustration (Dal 2018; Oktay 2018). As Oktay recalls: “I still blame the UDF until now. I wrote a

book on this issue. At that time I personally asked Zhelev: ‘Why did you leave the state control to the communists? Why did not you take control over the *state security*? There are communists everywhere, there are *drjavna sigurnost* everywhere. Why did you accept?’” (Oktay 2018). Still, Zhelev insisted that the soft opposition behavior was necessary for a smooth, bloodless transition to democracy (Dal 2018). Indeed, “The most positive outcome here is the bloodless transition because the communists softened everything. The only positive side of all this manipulation is the peaceful transition” concludes Hüseyin Ömer.

4.5 Patterns of Majority and Minority Elite Interaction

4.5.1 First Multiparty Election (June 1990)

Conforming to the interparty agreement at the RTT that “free elections should be held by the end of the first half of 1990” (Kolarova and Dimitrov 1996: 207), Bulgaria held its first multiparty election, under a mixed PR-majoritarian system, on 10 and 17 June 1990. BSP swept the elections capturing an absolute majority of 211 out of the 400 seats in the *Sŭbranie*, UDF capturing 144 seats and the MRF secured 23 seats. In light of the above discussion, it should not come as surprising that more than half of MRF’s 23 elected deputies were former *State Security* agents, among whom three were ethnic Bulgarians – precisely Yuri Bahnev, Miroslav Drmov and Ivan Palchev (Dal 2018; Ismailov 2018; Oktay 2018; Ömer 2018). Hüseyin Ömer was one of those 23 elected deputies in the Bulgarian grand national assembly. Retrospectively, he sees that “In the first election, MRF won four deputies from the city of Razgrad. Out of those four, I was the only one who was not an agent/informer” (Ömer 2018).

Unlike the first multiparty election in Macedonia then, the minority party in Bulgaria did *not* have a swing role in deciding the executive. Hence, theoretically there was little incentive for UDF to continue its moderate line and not resort to nationalist themes seeking to ethnically outbid BSP in future polls. Similarly, shortly after BSP government took over under Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov, a wave of mass demonstrations rocked the country because of a deepening economic crisis. Crampton (2002: 310) reports that “food shortages were so severe that rationing had to be introduced in the countryside and extended to Sofia in September [1990].” Under these circumstances, the Lukanov government as a threatened incumbent elite, theoretically could have resorted to anti-minority rhetoric and ethnicize political space in order to

deflect popular anger onto a convenient ethnic target. Instead Lukanov stepped down in late November 1990, after only 5 months of incumbency and a government of experts took over led by an independent Prime Minister (Dimitar Popov). In brief, in the aftermath of the founding elections in Bulgaria, neither of the two major parties tried to heighten interethnic tensions, although theoretically both had incentives to do so. The reason for this, I argue, is that the relations between BSP and UDF were governed by an agreement that sought explicitly to *deethnicize* political space (see also Peeva 2000).

Viewing the first democratic elections from a somewhat different perspective, Vesselin Dimitrov argues that winning an absolute majority had surprised even the reformist clique within BSP that was actually expecting a more balanced result that could have enabled a coalition government with the UDF (Dimitrov 2001: 44-5). Aware of the fact that economic “reforms are expected to make things worse before they get better” (Hellman 1998: 203), the reformists were keen on sharing responsibility with UDF for the inevitable transitional costs (Dimitrov 2001: 45). Once the June 1990 elections had failed to fulfill reformists’ expectations, the key “reformer” in BSP, PM Andrei Lukanov, employed a different tactic. Resorting once more to what he was best known for, behind-the-scenes string-pulling and backdoor deals, Lukanov was able to co-opt a sufficient number of hardline BSP parliamentarians to meet the two-thirds majority quorum and elect Zheliu Zhelev, the leader of the UDF, as president in July 1990 (Dimitrov 2001: 46-8). In return, Zhelev promised Lukanov that he would stick to the RTT implicit agreements and do his best to refrain his party from indulging in lustration and other “acts of retributive justice” against former communist functionaries (Kolarova 1993: 24; Oktay 2018). Eventually, BSP’s control of the parliament and UDF’s takeover of the presidency “gave the two major political forces a stake in the political order” (Dimitrov 2001: 47).

Subsequent research has convincingly shown that Lukanov was merely setting the stage for the former nomenklatura’s “predatory project” of plundering postcommunist Bulgarian state resources (Ganev 2007). Hence, what Dimitrov (2001) referred to as “economic reforms” were essentially a series of institutional rearrangements that would dramatically weaken postcommunist Bulgaria’s governing structures. For instance, in a pioneering work on the subject in question, Venelin Ganev shows how the Lukanov administration in its very brief five-months incumbency (June-November 1990), adopted a series of decrees that gave some key state Ministries the discretion to “release resources, materials, and foods from the state reserve” and to the respective ministers “the right to

sell and lease property and assets ‘that need to be replaced’ or are ‘no longer needed’” (Ganev 2007: 49-50). Similarly, communist-era state institutions that had assembled data about “embezzlement, corruption, and other similar crimes” were abolished by the Lukanov administration and consequently all information at the center suddenly evaporated (Ganev 2007: 48-55). Thus, to refer to Dimitrov (2001) back again, the inevitable transitional costs Lukanov wanted to share with UDF were essentially the enormous economic dislocation the Bulgarian population was about to experience as a result of the unscrupulous pursuit of wealth by the former nomenklatura. The UDF moderates led by Zhelev acquiesced to this predatory project and Zhelev’s elevation to the post of presidency was without doubt a shrewd move by Lukanov to keep the UDF hardliners in check (Oktay 2018). Ultimately, as I am going to elaborate on further below, Zhelev failed to placate the UDF hardliners, yet the latter group was actually a minority in the party.

One can of course object that UDF’s acquiescence was not the right thing to do in those circumstances. After all, the real cost was paid by the Bulgarian people who literally experienced an economic catastrophe as a result of the plundering of state resources. Moreover, the enormous economic dislocation may have disrupted the process of ethnic reconciliation in the country given the “unequal distribution of ‘transition costs’ among ethnic groups” (Ganev 2003: 334). While such objections are certainly plausible, with hindsight, the acquiescence of UDF moderates to BSP’s predatory project strengthened the spirit of cooperation among the two parties and made moderation prevail, an indispensable ingredient of democratic politics. To be sure, politics always entails trade-offs. In this respect, UDF moderates overlooked the initial transition “pains” for the sake of sustaining the spirit of elite cooperation. After all, this was the implicit “soft opposition agreement” reached at the RTT (Dal 2018; Ivanov 2018; Ömer 2018; Oktay 2018). What is equally important, I would also contend that the hard-won ethnic accommodation reached during the RTT was perhaps never seriously threatened thereafter. My major argument has been that the principle of upkeeping a deethnicized political space was a “done deal” that politicians of all stripes within BSP and UDF largely subscribed to. Put differently, both moderates and hardliners within BSP and UDF *never* seriously challenged the principle that the ethnic issue and provoking ethnic violence would not be instrumentalized for political ends. Lukanov’s prompt stepping down after mass protests

in November 1990 represented the first, but certainly not the last, instance of postcommunist Bulgarian elites' allegiance to such a principle.

In brief, what was at stake in the intraparty struggle between moderates and hardliners in both BSP and UDF was *not* the issue of elite cooperation on ethnic issues. This issue had already been resolved during the RTT. What was at stake instead was whether the spirit of cooperation on ethnic issues should also spill over to *nonethnic* issues (in this case, acquiescence to the former communists' political, *not* ethnic, crimes and to their plundering of state resources). The UDF hardliners, who were actually a minority, answered this question in the negative. They wanted BSP to account for its political past (again, not ethnic past!). The moderates, who were a majority within UDF and had the strong institutional support of president Zhelev, insisted that ethnic cooperation should spill over to nonethnic issues and this view initially prevailed.

Once Lukanov resigned, it was the negotiations between BSP and UDF moderates that led to the establishment of the first, yet not the last, non-partisan government led by Dimitar Popov. Taking over in December 1990 as a "government of national consensus", the Popov administration, like all other non-partisan governments in postcommunist Bulgaria, was merely a joint tactic by BSP-UDF moderates to "absolve themselves of responsibility" for the deep socio-economic crisis the country was passing through (Dimitrov 2001: 48). In this respect, the Popov administration was a good illustration of the fact that BSP-UDF cooperation had spilled over to nonethnic issues also.

4.5.2 *Promulgation of the Postcommunist Constitution (July 1991)*

By far the most important issue the first non-partisan government was entrusted with was the passing of the first postcommunist constitution. The debates over the adoption of the basic state document only reinforced the recalcitrance of the hardline minority faction within UDF and ultimately led to the split of the main opposition party into three different groupings, all retaining the prefix UDF: the hardline faction became UDF-National Movement while the two moderate factions reestablished themselves as UDF-Centre and UDF-Liberals⁹ (Melone 1998). The inter-factional animus within UDF was not about disagreements over the constitutional provisions on ethnic policies (Ömer). The RTT

⁹ Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, the acronym UDF will refer only to the hardline UDF faction, UDF-National Movement, led by Filip Dimitrov. The other two moderate factions retained the prefix UDF when they participated in the October 1991 parliamentary elections. Thereafter, they further split among themselves, merged with other political groupings and changed name altogether.

agreements on this point were faithfully observed. For instance, there was almost unanimous agreement on the constitutional provision banning parties on ethnic basis (Ganev 2004: 71). The animus instead was about the hardliners' uncompromising stance towards the former communists over nonethnic issues. The UDF hardliners, or the "dark blues" as called insightfully by Brown (1994: 105-114), resented the fact that BSP was using its majority in parliament to dominate the constitution-making process. The dark blue deputies, who numbered around 39 out of 144 deputies the opposition had at the time, even left the parliament in protest in May 1991 (Kolarova 1993: 41). Ultimately, though, BSP with the support of the two moderate UDF factions, garnered the required two-thirds quorum and the first postcommunist Bulgarian constitution was passed by the *Sŭbranie* on 12 July 1991. Hüseyin Ömer, a MRF deputy during the constitutional debates, interestingly remarks that the 39 UDF deputies who left the parliament did it actually to facilitate the former communists' job in passing the constitution, and that the leader of that faction was Vyacheslav Dimitrov who was himself a *State Security* informer (Ömer 2018). It was all "a parliamentary game" concludes Ömer (2018).

What is key for my argument here is that there was no disagreement among the parties and the intraparty factions about the constitutional provisions on ethnic issues. These provisions essentially were a ratification of the clauses BSP-UDF had agreed upon during the RTT. Accordingly, compared to the Albanian minority in Macedonia and Montenegro, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria:

- a. would not have constitutional recognition of its minority status

The preamble of the 1991 constitution defines Bulgaria as:

We, the Members of the Seventh Grand National Assembly, guided by our desire to express the will of the people of Bulgaria (*bŭlgarskiya narod*) ... in awareness of our irrevocable duty to guard the national and state integrity of Bulgaria, hereby proclaim our resolve to create a democratic and social state (Bulgaria Constitution 1991)

The use of the Slavic word *narod* connoting common descent makes clear that the constitution expresses the will of a people defined in ethnic terms, while the lack of reference to any other ethno-national group affirms the fact that the Bulgarian state is conceived as consisting of a monoethnic body of people.¹⁰ In comparative terms, although

¹⁰ The interesting fact is that the Bulgarian constitution does not provide legal minority status for its ethnic and religious minorities even though it acknowledges the existence of ethnic and religious diversity. For instance, Art. 54(1) declares that "Everyone shall have the right to avail himself of the national and universal human cultural values and to develop his own culture in accordance with his ethnic self-identification, which shall be recognized and guaranteed by the law." whereas Art. 37(1) establishes that "The freedom of

the preamble of the 1991 Macedonian constitution also defined Macedonia as the national state of the *makedonskiot narod*, it also clearly established “full equality as citizens” for a host of other ethno-national groups, among whom the most important was the *albancite nacionalnosti* (Albanian nationality). While VMRO pushed for a preamble similar to the Bulgarian one, lacking any reference to nationalities, its vision was sidelined and SDSM’s nationhood vision prevailed instead. By contrast, in Bulgaria, the constitutional provision of the preamble was agreed upon by both BSP and UDF. Ibrahim Yalimov (2019), who was part of the BSP parliamentary group during the constitutional debates, explicitly states that the parliamentary groups of both major parties and the then parliamentary speaker Nikolay Todorov did not accept his and some MRF deputies’ proposal for “national minority status” for the Turks. Similarly, Hüseyin Ömer recalls:

I made a speech during one of the sessions concerning minority status. Based on the European standards for minority rights, I demanded that we as Bulgarian Turks should have the same rights here. Of all the MRF parliamentary group (23 deputies), only Yaşar Şaban supported me. The next day, I noticed that my speech had not even entered into the parliamentary proceedings. Then Ahmed Doğan decided that we are going to leave parliament allegedly because Turks are not granted any rights in the constitution. However, this was not his purpose. The purpose was to take out our parliamentary group and prevent anyone else like me from voicing minority demands. And he (Ahmed Doğan) took them out, but I did not leave the parliament, Adem Kenan didn’t, Yaşar Şaban didn’t, Sabri Hüseyin from Plovdiv didn’t. However, Sabri Hüseyin didn’t go out in order to be able to control us since he was an agent/informer. Yuri Bahnev and Miroslav Drmov also did not go out (Ömer 2018).

Ömer’s account is corroborated also by Kasım Dal, who claims that MRF parliamentary group’s leaving the parliament was “only for show”. The logic through which Ahmed Doğan deceived the Turks was this, concludes Dal “Let’s not do much now, let’s not show any resistance. After all, one day we are going to enter EU and we are going to get all our rights” (Dal 2018).

- b. Turkish language would not have an official status even at the local units where Turks constituted a significant part of the population

A single article established the constitutional provision on language: Art. 3. Bulgarian shall be the official language of the Republic (*Ofitsialniyat ezik v republikata e bŭlgarskiyat*). Ibrahim Yalimov (2019) argues that Article 3 was the most debated one:

The draft for Art. 3 was as follows: ‘Bulgarian shall be the official language of the Republic. It shall be prohibited to speak other languages.’ I proposed to alter the second part as ‘Ethnic communities shall be allowed to use among them their mother tongue.’ The meeting

conscience, the freedom of thought and the choice of religion and of religious or atheistic views shall be inviolable. The State shall assist the maintenance of tolerance and respect among the believers from different denominations, and among believers and non-believers.” (Bulgaria Constitution 1991)

dissolved into acrimony and I understood they will not accept it ... After these debates, I left BSP parliamentary group and became an independent MP.

However, apart from Yalimov and a few MRF deputies, the overwhelming majority of MRF's parliamentary group did not object to this provision. As established above, MRF parliamentary group even left the parliament during the constitutional debates in order not to voice any ethno-linguistic demand. Interestingly enough, for former UDF prime minister Filip Dimitrov, MRF's conceding to this constitutional provision was a wise move. He explains:

Doğan was smart enough to understand that if they want to benefit from being part of the Bulgarian state, this will not help them. It will rather make their situation difficult. All this stuff about ethnic language is valuable if you want to produce low-class workers with limited possibilities, but if you want for these people not only to integrate, but also to have prominent positions within the country, then probably the demand to learn the national language, the state language is very helpful. There are now some human rights groups who argue against what I just said, in my view causing tremendous harm to minority groups which listen to them. It is for the lazy people. If you want to live in America and speak only Spanish, you can perfectly clean houses and that's great, but that's it. If you want to become member of congress or high-ranking official in some company, you have to speak English, I am sorry. And this the logic which probably was very clear to Doğan and his people. And I have to mention that they were probably *the* party which in this period of time managed to create a large number of well-educated, smart, young people to take over. I am not sure if there was any other party, the UDF included, which put so much effort into creating modern, well-educated, Western-style functionaries. Which you don't achieve by sticking to the local language of a minority only. So, instead of fighting to speak Turkish, which they have the right to and all of them do, they make the effort to learn Bulgarian, plus English, French, or something else, which is the European way (Dimitrov 2018).

Apparently, for Dimitrov, the Turks should not put much effort in fighting to speak Turkish, or having their language official in majority-Turkish towns because that's not *the European way*. Practically, he seems to be right because *the European way* in most cases is indeed *assimilationist*. However, there is not and there should not be any contradiction between speaking fluently both one's mother tongue and the language of the state one resides in. In other words, speaking fluent Turkish does not and should not prevent Bulgarian Turks from becoming also "modern, well-educated, Western-style functionaries". Clearly then, even high-level Bulgarian officials like former prime

minister Filip Dimitrov are quite assimilationist in their approach to the expression of ethnic diversity.

- c. Turks would not have the right of primary and secondary education *in* Turkish language, but only the right to study the Turkish language

Art. 36(2) established that “Citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language.” Again Ibrahim Yalimov argues that he was the one who proposed the article in question. In the draft proposal he submitted, Yalimov demanded that Turks shall have the right to study their mother tongue in Turkish public schools, however this part was not accepted by any of the parliamentary groups and was eventually deleted from the draft (Yalimov 2019).

Even though this was, and still is, the *only* ethno-linguistic right Turks enjoy, and despite the fact that this right is constitutionally guaranteed, its implementation was delayed many times and eventually could begin only in November 1991 (Tahir 2018). As I am going to explain further below, even this constitutional right in practice was encumbered with a series of hedging devices because the two main Bulgarian parties feared a nationalist backlash. More precisely, the right to study Turkish language was, and still is, optional, arranged as an extracurricular activity, limited to only four hours per week from the third (later starting from the first) to the eighth grade, and available only when there was “sufficient” demand for it. The constitutionally guaranteed right to *use* one’s mother tongue has also been encumbered with a series of hedging devices. For instance, it is still illegal in Bulgaria and subject to fines the use of languages other than Bulgarian during electoral campaigns (Ismailov 2018; Yüsein 2018). Likewise, street signs and other topographic information, even in regions with significant Turkish population, are written only in Bulgarian, and after Bulgaria became an EU member, in English also (Necib 2017).

Article 36(2) of the Bulgarian constitution also makes clear that the right to study one’s own language is established as a citizen right, not as a collective minority right. Indeed, as should be clear, constitutionally Bulgaria does not recognize any minority and therefore there can not be any collective minority right. The rights are strictly citizen-based (Cambazov 2019).

To sum up, the 1991 constitution was established on a clear non-multiethnic nationhood vision where Turks as “citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian” had

very restricted and minimal ethno-linguistic rights. Yet, by constitutionally claiming to create a *pravova i sotsialna dŭrzhava* (democratic and social state) based exclusively on citizen rights, BSP-UDF elites deliberately projected an image of a civic, “liberal” interethnic model. In projecting this image, they had MRF’s unflinching support. As MRF’s former minister and current parliamentarian Nihat Tahir Kabil (2018) claims: “MRF played a big role in securing ethnic and religious peace and harmony in Bulgaria. This is our great success. No one can take the credit from us, and no one can deny this.” In reality, however, as Güner Tahir told the author, what is referred to in the literature and in practice as the “Bulgarian ethnic model” (Zhelyazkova 2001; see also Rechel 2007) is a “myth” purposefully projected to conceal an essentially monoethnic/ non-multiethnic nationhood vision (Tahir 2018). As Yalimov (2019) also aptly puts it:

On the one hand, the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* does not voice our demands. On the other hand, they create the false impression that the ethnic problem in Bulgaria is solved. They say ‘We made up this model, we created this model, and we can even export it. We can be role models for other Balkan countries.’ However, just think about it. They say there is a model, but nowhere in Bulgaria it officially says that minorities exist, or that a Turkish minority exists. The constitution also does not accept this.

Yet, what mattered at the end of the day for the pattern of interethnic relations was that this myth was a product of elite cooperation and not of imposition, like VMRO’s ancient nationhood myth was.

4.5.3 Internal Frictions in the MRF

Even though MRF deputies under the tutelage of Ahmed Doğan refused to sign the constitution, this was merely symbolic and did not certainly mean that MRF disagreed with the constitutional provisions on ethnic issues. Indeed, as argued above, Doğan did not put forward any demand for the constitutional recognition of minority status for the Turks and/or the status of Turkish language (Ömer 2018). The logic behind that seemed quite straightforward. Ivan Palchev, a member of MRF’s parliamentary group and a close confidant of Doğan, reveals that for Ahmed Doğan “If you put the question of recognizing the statute of national minority ‘you will be thrown out even from the Medzlis in Ankara’” (Palchev 2002: 88). As a matter of fact, when Adem Kenan, a MRF deputy (1990-1991), publicly challenged the constitutional provisions and called for recognizing the status of Turks, he was promptly expelled from the party. During his one-year mandate, Kenan became also famous for his speech in the parliament where he proudly proclaimed in

Turkish “How happy is the one who says I’m a Turk” (Ömer 2018), and for his demands for territorial autonomy for the Turkish regions in Bulgaria (Dal 2018). Kenan was among the first, but certainly not the last, victim of Ahmed Dogan’s totalitarian style of ruling the MRF. Hüsein Ömer, was likewise expelled from the party in 1991 for protesting the constitutional provisions on the ethnic question (Ömer). Halim Pasajov, Yaşar Şaban, and Younal Bekir were other prominent party figures that were expelled by Doğan from MRF (Ivanov 2018). Unlike the others though, Adem Kenan would eventually found a new party, the Turkish Democratic Party (TDP), in December 1992, yet it was denied registration based on the constitutional ban on ethnic parties (Detrez 2015: 332). Unable to find political support from the Bulgarian mainstream parties, TDP quickly disappeared even from public discourse. Still, the TDP case is revealing in two regards. First, it illustrates once more the nationhood cohesion among the majority parties. Second, it illustrates the instrumental use of the constitutional ban on ethnic parties by both BSP and UDF. Sticking to their RTT agreement, BSP and UDF were resolved to upkeep a deethnicized political space and thus they used the constitutional ban selectively on those Turkish parties that threatened to ethnicize political space. If this is the case, why did several BSP deputies petition the Constitutional Court in October 1991 to ban MRF, despite MRF’s overtly moderate and submissive line? This brings us to the next hot button political issue in early postcommunist Bulgarian politics.

4.5.4 The Drive to Constitutionally Ban the MRF: An Attempt to Ethnicize Political Space?

93 BSP parliamentarians petitioned on 8 October 1991 the then newly established Constitutional Court to ban MRF on the ground that it was an ethnic party. Almost seven months later, on 21 April 1992, the Court, with six votes in favor of banning, five against and one non-participating judge, rejected BSP’s petition and upheld the constitutionality of the MRF¹¹ (Ganev 2004: 66-72). The Bulgarian, Turkish, and Western scholars alike regard this case as illustrative of the nationalistic fervor of the former communists and as an attempt to deny even descriptive political representation to Bulgarian Turks (Crampton 2005; Eminov 1997; Ganev 2004). Ganev even averred that “The forceful dissolution of the Turkish ethnic minority’s only viable political organization could trigger

¹¹ Since in accordance with Art. 151(1) of the Bulgarian Constitution (1991) “A ruling of the Constitutional Court shall require a majority of more than half of the votes of all judges”, BSP’s petition was thus rejected since it failed to garner the support of at least 7 judges (out of the 12 judges the Bulgarian Constitutional Court consists of).

unpredictable, perhaps tragic, consequences” and “might have exploded the ethnic peace in the country” (Ganev 2004: 72; 67). A closer look at the chronology of events and some basic facts surrounding the case do not substantiate this interpretation though. To begin with, who were exactly the 93 BSP deputies who petitioned the Constitutional Court and what was their status/standing within BSP? Most of these deputies were part of the unreformed, hardline faction within BSP and they were informally led by Velko Vulkanov, a radical Bulgarian nationalist. Bearing in mind the fact that the BSP at the time had 211 deputies in the National Legislature and its leadership was in the hands of the reformists led by Alexander Lilov, it should become clear that the hardline BSP faction that petitioned the Court was actually a minority within BSP and it was not in control of the party executive. In other words, more than half of BSP parliamentarians did not actually sign the petition to ban MRF. Nor did any of the 144 UDF deputies. This should not be surprising since, after all, MRF was first registered as a political party by the implicit agreement between the reformist BSP and UDF elites at the RTT. As I have already argued, the MRF was *the* key component of the BSP-UDF strategic plan to deethnicize political space.

Second, it is very significant to point out that the day when the Vulkanov-led faction filed the petition, 8 October 1991, was just five days *before* the scheduled parliamentary elections of 13 October 1991. If we assume that Vulkanov’s aim was to prevent MRF from participating in the elections, then petitioning the Court was extremely ill-timed since it would have been procedurally impossible for the Court to reach a legally binding decision within five days. What seems more likely is that Vulkanov’s petition to ban MRF is an instance of intraelite power struggle in the BSP. In other words, by filing a petition related to the delicate ethnic question just five days before the parliamentary elections, the BSP hardliners sought to outdo the reformist leadership in the struggle for the party executive. A strong showing at the polls under the anti-MRF banner was perceived as increasing hardliners’ prospects for grabbing the BSP executive during the party’s fortieth congress scheduled to take place only two months after the parliamentary elections (i.e. December 1991). Eventually, Vulkanov’s bid would fail as the reformist Lilov’s protégé, the then-32 years old Zhan Videnov, became BSP’s new leader in December 1991.

Third, even if we assume that the BSP hardliners in reality sought to restrict Bulgarian Turks’ access to the political arena and thus ethnicize political space, the way

they chose to do this was via institutional channels: they simply filed a petition to the Constitutional Court. This stands in stark contrast to the way radical nationalist politicians in Bulgaria's neighbors routinely use to ethnicize political space: sending armed thugs and criminals into the ethnically mixed regions and incite violence. To be sure, at the time Bulgaria was not in short supply of criminal gangs that formed the armed wings of the emerging *mafiosi* conglomerates that gradually overtook Bulgarian economy (most prominently "Multigroup" and "Orion" (Ganev 2007)). Moreover, these criminal groupings had links exclusively with BSP politicians. Hence, if Vulkanov wanted to ethnicize political space, practically there was nothing preventing him from sending criminal groups into ethnically mixed regions and provoking violence. Yet, the Bulgarian radical nationalists refrained from employing such tactics. To be sure, Velko Vulkanov was a corrupt, opportunistic, and unscrupulous politician. Yet, he was not Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, or for that matter even Nikola Gruevski (the former VMRO leader and strongman). It is in this sense that I fully agree with Zoltan Barany (2002: 153) when he avers that the "human element of transition" has significantly affected postcommunist political developments in Bulgaria:

Can there be any doubt that postcommunist Slovakia would have been better off without Vladimir Meciar, or that Macedonia was fortunate to have Kiro Gligorov as president? Bulgaria has been lucky in this regard. Its postcommunist leaders may not have always been competent, but they have all supported parliamentary democracy and upheld basic constitutional norms (Barany 2002: 153)

Likewise, Tom Gallagher (2003: 20) shrewdly observed that:

Bulgaria was also noteworthy due to the reluctance of most ex-communists to play the nationalist card to prolong their influence ... In Bulgaria, there were no counterparts to Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Adrian Paunescu, who would shamelessly praise aspects of the pre-1989 Ceaușescu era on television and in parliament. Unlike Romania, a virulent nationalist media was conspicuous by its absence in Bulgaria.

All in all, the adduced evidence leads me to conclude that the drive of the BSP's hardline faction to constitutionally ban the MRF is an outcome emanating more from the intraelite power struggle within BSP than from a genuine attempt of the hardliners to deny minorities access to the political arena and ethnicize political space. Indeed, several former MRF deputies told the author that this was just "a political game" and that there was no real possibility that the Constitutional Court would have banned the MRF (Dal 2018; Kabil 2018; Ömer 2018; Tahir 2018). The other possibility that this case might have brought Bulgaria to the brink of interethnic violence is even more far-fetched.

Eventually, the MRF did participate in the October 1991 parliamentary elections and for the first time came out of them as the “kingmaker” in Bulgarian politics.

4.5.5 The Second Parliamentary Election and the Rise of the MRF as the Kingmaker in Bulgarian Politics (October 1991–September 1994)

The parliamentary elections of 13 October 1991 were the first to be held under the new electoral system: proportional representation (PR) with a 4 % electoral threshold and the number of seats in the unicameral national legislature was reduced from 400 to 240. Of the three parties that managed to clear the threshold¹², the UDF came first with a razor-thin margin over BSP (110 to 106 seats), while MRF held the balance with 24 seats. Strikingly similar to the Albanian PPD’s position after Macedonia’s founding election, the Turkish-based MRF could now theoretically swing the executive into whichever camp it chose. Theoretically, MRF could also barter parliamentary support for securing ethno-linguistic rights for its constituency, like PPD actually did in Macedonia. Yet, according to the theoretical framework developed here, the nationhood cohesion among Bulgarian majority parties would prevent MRF from doing so. Instead, I expect MRF to barter parliamentary support for mere resource distribution. Stated differently, in cases of majority nationhood cohesion, the minority will not prioritize any majority party since neither will push for changing its status of ethno-linguistic rights. Hence, the minority party will try to collude with both of them (dyads C-A and C-B in Table 2.3) and in the end ally with the party promising more resources. This practically meant that MRF was bound to support the highest vote getter in the Bulgarian camp.¹³ Indeed, MRF provided its parliamentary support to the UDF and a minority government led by Filip Dimitrov took over on 8 November 1991.

The Dimitrov administration consisted mostly of the hardline anticommunist faction of the UDF. Filip Dimitrov himself had started his political career as vice-president of the Bulgarian Green Party and later, when the Greens joined a host of other political groupings in forming the UDF, he became a vocal opposition leader. Although

¹² The three factions that formerly constituted the UDF, UDF-National Movement, UDF-Centre, and UDF-Liberal, participated as separate parties in the October 1991 election. Yet, only the hardliners/dark blues of the UDF-National Movement (henceforth UDF) managed to clear the 4 % threshold and enter parliament.

¹³ This contrasts markedly with PPD’s behavior after Macedonia’s founding election. It did not ally with the highest vote getter in the Macedonian camp, VMRO, because of its non-multiethnic vision. Instead, PPD threw its support behind the multiethnic majority party SDSM and together formed the first postcommunist ruling coalition.

Dimitrov was initially eclipsed by the charisma and reputation of the first UDF leader, Zheliu Zhelev, after the latter became president in August 1990, “the left-wing intellectuals who had dominated the UDF in its founding days were displaced by vocal right wingers” (Dimitrov 2001: 49). Filip Dimitrov would gradually emerge as the leader of the UDF’s vocal right wingers and he supported the parliamentary boycott of the 39 hardline UDF deputies in May 1991 in what was essentially a bid to capture the party executive. By doing so, Dimitrov led to the split of the UDF into three different factions and himself presided over the most radically anticommunist one, UDF-National Movement. As Brown (1994: 108) aptly puts it, “Dimitrov’s was probably the most ideological leadership in all of East Europe.”

Yet, as I have already pointed out, Dimitrov’s virulent anticommunism pertained only to nonethnic issues: he was bent on making the former communists account for their totalitarian *political* past. There is no indication whatsoever that Dimitrov wanted to punish the former communists for their violent assimilation policies towards the ethno-religious minorities. Apparently, for the anticommunist camp the rebirth-campaign (VP) did not even constitute a crime. Moreover, the UDF “dark blues” had accepted all of the RTT agreements and later constitutional provisions pertaining to the ethnic question.¹⁴ There were even several radical Bulgarian nationalists who were affiliated with Dimitrov’s administration. As a case in point, Volen Siderov, who in 2005 was to found the overtly anti-minority, xenophobic *Ataka* party, was initially affiliated with the UDF (Ganev 2006: 86). In brief, there is ample evidence to substantiate the claim that the Dimitrov-led UDF was as nationalist as BSP, if not more.

As far as nonethnic questions were concerned though, once in power, the Dimitrov administration “indulged in lustration” (Crampton 2005: 219) by prosecuting former communist leaders, including Zhivkov, Georgi Atanasov (the last communist PM), and Andrei Lukanov (the first postcommunist PM), confiscating communist party property (Kolarova 1993: 46), passing a law for the restitution of property that Bulgarian Turks had to sell or simply leave behind during the 1989 exodus, the so-called “Dogan Law” (Neuburger 2004: 194), and even indicting the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for collaboration with the former totalitarian regime (Dimitrov 2001: 51). Brown (1994: 111) interestingly asserts that Dimitrov’s ideological crusade actually was in line with a

¹⁴ Ultimately, their refusal to sign the July 1991 constitution did not have anything to do with the constitutional provisions on the ethnic question. It emanated from their resentment that the former communists were dominating the constitution-making process (Dimitrov 2001: 49).

historical tradition of Bulgarian politics, where “Vengeance, bitter, bloody, and widespread, has been a depressing feature of Bulgarian history.” However, when it came to ethnic issues, the Dimitrov administration’s anticommunist ideological crusade stalled. As Rumyana Kolarova aptly puts it, when it came to minority-related issues, Bulgarian elites of all stripes strictly followed the “gag rules” laid down during the RTT. Hence, by implicit understanding with his coalition partner, Dimitrov decided that there would not be any MRF ministers or even vice-ministers in his administration (Kolarova 1993: 44). Dimitrov’s cabinet even delayed several times the implementation of what was a constitutionally guaranteed right for Bulgarian Turks: the right to study their mother tongue in public schools. Ultimately, when the Turkish classes began in March 1992, the Dimitrov administration encumbered the constitutionally-protected language policy with a number of hedging devices. Concretely, the right to study Turkish language in public schools was, and still is, made optional, arranged as an extracurricular activity, limited to only four hours per week from the third (later starting from the first) to the eighth grade, and available only when there was “sufficient” demand for it.

While Dimitrov’s language policy restricted the only constitutionally ethno-linguistic right Bulgarian Turks enjoyed, his economic policies had catastrophic consequences for them. Draping the neoliberal garment and presenting himself as an impeccable neoliberal knight, Filip Dimitrov also indulged in severe austerity policies by sharply cutting subsidies for state-owned enterprises. This most adversely affected the interests of the Bulgarian Turks who were traditionally employed in heavily subsidized enterprises. Most prominently, the economic collapse of *Bulgartabak*, the state-owned enterprise holding a monopoly over the tobacco trade, depressed the overwhelmingly Turkish tobacco workers in the southeastern district of Kardzhali (Ganev 2003: 331). This led to “an uncontrolled wave of Turkish emigration” and indeed, during 1992, “120,000 Turks were reported to have emigrated from Bulgaria” (Kolarova 1993: 48). Scholars argue that Dimitrov’s economic policies actually alienated Ahmed Dogan since the mass emigration of the Turks was depleting his voter base. Accordingly, Dogan withdrew his parliamentary support and the Dimitrov government fell on 28 October 1992 (Dimitrov 2001: 53; Kolarova 1993; Crampton 2002). I partially agree with such a view. While economic considerations certainly played a role in Dogan’s calculations, they were not the primary reason why Dogan withdrew his support from the UDF.

What loomed more threatening both for Dogan's short-term electoral interests and his long-term political career were the lustration laws the Dimitrov administration was indulging in. Indeed, Hüseyin Ömer (2018) explicitly states that "The only reason why Dimitrov's government was brought down was because it threatened the (former) communists. If Dimitrov had stayed loyal to the *soft opposition agreement*, his government would not have fallen." Likewise, former MRF deputy leader Osman Oktay (2018) argues that Ahmed Doğan withdrew his support from the Dimitrov government because "the communists ordered him (Doğan) to do so". Since the very beginning, MRF's coalition with the UDF was afflicted with the uneasiness of MRF's high-ranking officials that they could be indicted for having collaborated with the former totalitarian regime (Oktay 2018). The first public revelation about the collaboration of Doğan came in 1991, before the October parliamentary election of that year and the subsequent UDF-MRF coalition government. As reported by a series of parliamentary investigative commissions:

The person who first publicly revealed Dogan's collaboration as an agent was Colonel Radoslav Raikov, Deputy Director of the National Intelligence Service. In 1991, he announced that the leader of the MRF has worked for the First Main Directorate of the SSS (external political intelligence) under the pseudonyms 'SERGEI' and 'SAVA'. Dogan did not deny this, but Raikov began to receive death threats and left Bulgaria, never to return.¹⁵

As such, having the explicit support of president Zhelev, Dogan initially began to protest the lustration laws under the pretext that they were damaging the spirit of elite cooperation and polarizing the Bulgarian society (Brown 1994: 112; Palchev 2002: 38). Once it became clear that Dimitrov was oblivious to such concerns, Dogan shifted gears and this time allied with the BSP in rejecting a vote of confidence forced by Dimitrov himself. As a result, the first noncommunist government of postcommunist Bulgaria fell after barely one year in office (8 November 1991- 28 October 1992).

In accordance with the constitutional provisions¹⁶, after the Prime Minister-designates nominated in turn by the UDF and BSP failed to form a government, President Zhelev entrusted the task to the Prime Minister-designate nominated by the third largest parliamentary group, which in this case was the MRF. Dogan subsequently nominated Zhelev's advisor on economic affairs, Liuben Berov, and entrusted to him the task of forming a non-partisan government. Relying also on the overwhelming support of the

¹⁵ Accessed from the online database: The REGISTER of collaborators with the State Security Services (SSS) and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army. Available at <https://agentibg.com/index.php/en/a/286-ahmed-demir-dogan>

¹⁶ Article 99 of the 1991 Bulgarian constitution.

BSP deputies, Berov was finally able to form what was the second non-partisan government in barely two years after transition. Similar to the first non-partisan government led by Dimitar Popov, the Berov administration was also merely a tool to evade responsibility for Bulgaria's economic hardships as the former nomenklatura was ready to resume its project of "preying on the state" (Ganev 2007) after the hiatus during the short-lived Dimitrov administration. With hindsight, there is no doubt that the Berov government was a cover for what in reality was a BSP-MRF coalition government. It could rule Bulgaria for almost two years only with the unwavering parliamentary support of the BSP and MRF as it survived six consecutive motions of no-confidence requested by the UDF (Ganev 2003: 326). In that respect, what Venelin Ganev (2003: 326) has described as the

awkward alliance ... a somewhat unexpected alliance between representatives of the Turkish minority and the former communist party which had previously subjected ethnic Turks to ruthless coercion and brutally forced thousands of them out of the country.

should not be surprising according to the theoretical framework developed here. As already stated, in cases of majority nationhood cohesion, the minority party will not prioritize any majority party since neither will push for changing its status of ethno-linguistic rights. Hence, the minority party will try to collude with both of them and in the end ally with the party promising more resources. A main observable implication of this theoretical framework is that in countries with majority nationhood cohesion, the minority representative is expected to shift its allegiance frequently. Indeed, within one year after the October 1991 parliamentary elections, MRF shifted its allegiance twice. First, it decided to support the highest vote-getter in the elections (i.e. UDF) and then, after it felt threatened by the lustration policies of the anticommunists, it shifted its support to the former communists, who only three years earlier were subjecting MRF's constituency to a brutal assimilation campaign.

For Ahmed Dogan and the MRF, the potential pay-off from an alliance with the former communists was enormous. The period during which the Berov administration ruled (December 1992- September 1994) is known in Bulgarian politics as the period when powerful *mafiosi* conglomerates established strong links with government officials and took over almost every sector of the Bulgarian economy (Dimitrov 2001: 77). The most notorious of these groups was *Multigroup Bulgaria*, which "relied exclusively on the expertise of former Communist cadres", and for which Ganev relates that "There was hardly a branch of the national economy in which Multigroup did not have a stronghold,

and the fairly dense web of companies it controlled covered virtually the entire country” (Ganev 2007: 100-1). The fact that the Bulgarian *Cosa Nostra* rose to prominence exactly during the rule of an administration that Ahmed Dogan had sponsored and formed should not be surprising given the close affiliation Dogan had with Ilia Pavlov, the president of Multigroup (Dal 2018; Ivanov 2018; Oktay 2018). In fact, the “non-partisan” government of Liuben Berov is often referred to as the government of Multigroup, or “the mafia government” as aptly put by former MRF deputy leader Osman Oktay (2018).

All in all, I argue that the October 1991 parliamentary election in Bulgaria should be marked for the disproportionate influence a minority-based party and its leader exerted in its aftermath. Perhaps no better words capture the zigzags of Bulgarian politics from October 1991 until September 1994 (when the Berov administration fell) than the phrase; Ahmet Dogan: The Bulgarian Kingmaker. The minority leader initially threw his weight behind the “dark blues” only to withdraw it within a year for fear of being overwhelmed by the latter’s ideological crusade. Subsequently Dogan threw in his lot with the former communists and sponsored a “non-partisan” government that allowed the former nomenklatura to resume its project of “preying on the state”. During the periods when Berov was incapacitated because of his poor health, Dogan’s appointees from the MRF even de facto ruled Bulgaria. And finally, in doing all these, Dogan also set the stage for the meteoric rise of the Bulgarian mafia whose powerful conglomerates took over the entire economy and brought it to the brink of collapse. Among postcommunist minority leaders, Ahmed Dogan is perhaps unrivalled in terms of the influence he exerts on the national political developments. Yet, perhaps he is also equally unrivalled in terms of the minimal ethno-linguistic rights he has secured for his constituency. The gap between descriptive and substantive representation can hardly run deeper.

4.5.6 The Emergence of Minority Counterelites in a Country with Majority Nationhood Cohesion

Up to this point, I have argued that the MRF was an overtly moderate and submissive actor pertaining to the ethnic issues. Yet, after the October 1991 parliamentary elections it quickly became a formidable political player able to challenge the two mainstream Bulgarian parties with its frequently shifting alliances. Hence, concern about MRF’s increasing electoral influence and the prospects of it becoming a rival *national* party led both BSP and UDF leadership to implicitly support the formation of splinter parties among the Muslim/Turkish constituency. This move, though, should not be seen as an

attempt to ethnicize political space. To the contrary, by instrumentalizing the constitutional clause that bans ethnic parties, the BSP and the UDF actually determined which minority political formations would be allowed to access the political arena. As such, the mainstream Bulgarian parties were bent on supporting only parties that didn't threaten to ethnicize political space and followed an ethnic policy as moderate and submissive as that of the MRF. This is why Adem Kenan's TDP was denied registration while permission was granted to the Party of Democratic Change (*Partiya na Demokratichnite Promeni*, PDP) founded by the former MRF parliamentarians Mehmed Hoca, Recep Çınar, and İsmail İsmail in February 1994 and the Democratic Party of Justice (*Demokraticheska Partiya na Spravedlivostta*, DPSpr.) founded by the former Chief Mufti of Bulgaria Nedim Gencev (Eminov 1997: 170; Detrez 2015: 331-2). Both parties were formed not as a result of disagreements with MRF's ethnic policies but rather because Dogan's totalitarian style of ruling had deprived them of their share of spoils. Concretely, PDP's founding triumvirate had left MRF because Berov administration's economic policies favoring the *mafiosi* conglomerates were marginalizing the profits from the tobacco trade in the southeastern Bulgarian district of Kardzhali, where Hoca, Çınar, and İsmail were elected from (Detrez 2015: 331). On the other hand, the Former Chief Mufti, who already was notorious for his direct involvement in the implementation of the "rebirth campaign" (Neuburger 2004: 163-4), had been removed from his post by Dogan in 1992 and thus sought to regain his position by forming a new party. All these developments are in line with the theoretical expectations of the model developed here. I have argued that in countries with majority nationhood cohesion, if minority counterelites (D-type actors) do emerge, they will merely compete with the incumbent minority representative over which gets a better deal on resource distribution from the majority parties. There will not be competition over improving the ethno-linguistic status of rights for the minority.

4.5.7 The December 1994 Parliamentary Election and the Following Economic Catastrophe (December 1994-January 1997)

Eventually, both the PDP and DPSpr. failed to clear the four per cent electoral threshold in the December 1994 parliamentary elections, yet Dogan's MRF also fell short of the expectations with 5.44 % of the vote, regressing by two points and nine seats since the October 1991 election. The entrance of two minority political formations into the political arena coupled with a wave of Turkish emigration since 1992 had costed Dogan around

135,000 votes compared to the last election.¹⁷ In the aftermath of the elections, a faction within MRF displeased with the election results and with Doğan's authoritarian style of ruling called for an extraordinary Congress of the party in order to amend the party's charter. Eventually, this attempt failed since, as argued also above, MRF's charter had a clause stipulating that no changes can be made to the charter unless the party leader (i.e. Ahmed Doğan) agrees to do so. Güner Tahir, the informal leader of this internal opposition, explains:

After the December 1994 parliamentary elections, we (our faction) were called by the journalists as "the Young Turks". Our party's MP number had fallen to 15 (from 24), 15, that's too less. Two of them were ethnic Bulgarian, and 13 were Turk. Out of these 13 MPs, nine supported me. Only four supported Ahmed Doğan. Who were they? Ahmed Doğan, Younal Lyutvi, professor Ibrahim Tatarlı, and Osman Oktay. All four were *State Security* agents ... The charter of the party had been designed in such a way so that all decisions within the Central Council of the party could be taken not with 50 per cent + 1 normal majority but with 2/3 majority, *and* only if the party leader approved such a decision. Obviously, such a charter and such clauses are against any laws. Anyhow, there were 35 delegates at the Central Council, and 24 of us (2/3) voted in favor of holding an extraordinary Congress and amending the charter of the party. However, given that Ahmet Doğan did not approve it, he blocked all of us. That Central Council meeting lasted 13 hours, from 10 a.m. until 11 p.m. and in the end Doğan just told us 'I am ending the meeting, everybody to his home'. Imagine, we had 2/3 majority and we still could not take any decision (Tahir 2018).

MRF's electoral backslide in the 1994 general election certainly pleased the two mainstream Bulgarian parties, among whom the BSP swept the elections by gaining a majority of 125 seats while the "dark blues" of the UDF retrograded to 69 seats. The results should not lead to the conclusion that the former communists were back in power. They had already been in power since, as I have argued, the "non-partisan" Berov administration was merely a cover for what essentially was a BSP-MRF coalition government. In that sense, the December 1994 election practically changed nothing in Bulgarian politics. It only further strengthened BSP's grip on power and thus allowed the former nomenklatura to continue unperturbed its unscrupulous project of "preying on the state". This time though, the predatory project was carried out in such a large and irresponsible scale that it brought Bulgaria to the brink of total collapse. More concretely, two examples will suffice to substantiate the claim that the socialist administration led by Zhan Videnov was "the most corrupt, inefficient, and inept government in the post-1989 period not only in Bulgaria but possibly in the entire region" (Ganev 2007: 139):

¹⁷ The total number of votes for the MRF in the October 1991 parliamentary election was 418,168. It fell to 283,094 by the December 1994 election (European Election Database) Available at http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/country/bulgaria/electoral_system.html

1. The country's grain was shipped abroad by BSP-affiliated "trading companies," which pocketed hefty profits while the country was thrown into the vertigo of a disastrous grain shortage (Ganev 2007: 139).
2. The savings of millions of citizens simply evaporated when BSP-appointed "bank managers" siphoned off bank deposits into private accounts in foreign banks and then promptly disappeared abroad. Inflation reached 320 percent in 1996 (Ibid.)

As a result, by December 1996, Crampton (2002: 317) reported that "soup kitchens had been established in Sofia and a number of other towns. Not even in the terrible winter of 1991 had recourse had to be made to such emergency measures", while Ganev (2007: 145) bitterly recalls that "by the end of 1996, Bulgaria had become the poorest country on the continent, with an average monthly salary of \$ 12 and an average monthly pension of \$4 – considerably less than in war-torn Bosnia." What these scholars overlook though, is the fact that initially the organized crime network had spread its tentacles throughout Bulgarian politics during the Berov administration sponsored by the MRF and BSP. The subsequent BSP-majority government simply carried on with the process of blurring the lines between politics and organized crime. In that respect, the MRF and especially its leader Ahmed Dogan, the self-styled Bulgarian kingmaker, is as responsible as the BSP for the economic catastrophe that engulfed Bulgaria by the end of 1996.

The economic crisis provoked mighty, if predictable, waves of civic anger expressed in unprecedented demonstrations and strikes. In the midst of such a profound crisis when "Civil war seemed a real possibility" (Crampton 2002: 319), existing theory tells us that threatened incumbent elites will have every incentive to ethnicize political space with the aim of "demobilizing" the masses and preserving power (Gagnon 2004). Theoretically, such a scenario should have been even more likely during the 1996 crisis in Bulgaria as the Videnov administration could have placed the blame squarely on the minority-based MRF for the crisis. This would not have been unreasonable at all, since as I have already made clear, the MRF and its leader Dogan had its fair share of responsibility for the crisis. Yet, the threatened BSP elites kept to the agreement of not ethnicizing political space. They did not resort to ethno-nationalist themes to deflect popular anger onto a convenient ethnic target. Instead, they bowed to popular pressure and stepped down, paving the way for the early election of April 1997 which they lost to the UDF. This stands in stark contrast to how a very similar crisis was dealt with in neighboring Macedonia two decades later. As I analyzed in detail in the previous chapter, the then incumbent VMRO government led by Nikola Gruevski was facing an

unprecedented wave of demonstrations after public revelations of the government's involvement in a wiretapping scandal. Unlike BSP elites though, Gruevski refused to step down and the outcome was the May 2015 violent interethnic clashes in Kumanovo, in what was a clear attempt by the VMRO to deflect civic anger onto a convenient ethnic target.

To sum up, outbursts of civic anger have been a constant of postcommunist Bulgarian political landscape. Yet, in none of the cases have Bulgarian political elites tried to deflect this anger onto a convenient ethnic target. Instead, the norms of elite cooperation and peaceful elite rivalry have always had the upper hand. Former prime minister Dimitrov (2018) links these norms of peaceful elite rivalry to "a certain common sense in Bulgarian culture and tradition." He avers that "Bulgaria is an example of very reasonable behavior in all these years". As Ganev (2007: 147) also puts it, "What the Bulgarian experience [Bulgarian transition from communism] shows us is that it is possible to make a first step from authoritarian repression to elite cooperation and even the second step toward democratic consolidation." These are precisely the norms (elite cooperation and peaceful elite rivalry) that Macedonian elites have *not* been able to master until now because of the salient nationhood cleavage that divides them.

To be sure, postcommunist Bulgarian political elites might be among the most corrupt and unscrupulous in the region, yet they are equally exceptional in their endorsement of parliamentary democracy and respect for constitutional principles. They have shamelessly plundered state resources but at the same time have never appealed to violence to reach their political aims. This makes postcommunist Bulgaria a "showcase example of a rare hybrid: a democratic polity with an unreformed economy, whose population seemed more confident of the durability of democracy than their neighbors elsewhere in Eastern Europe" (Barany 2002: 152-3). Later, in developing a typology of different outcomes of state-building, Venelin Ganev (2007) would characterize the hybrid case of postcommunist Bulgaria as "weak-state constitutionalism ... an institutional configuration characterized by a relatively high degree of functionality of constitutional structures and a much lower degree of functionality of existing tools of governance" (Ganev 2007: 145). I have argued that it is the nationhood cohesion that has enabled elite cooperation and respectful/responsible elite attitudes toward the constitutional structures in postcommunist Bulgaria.

4.6 Post-1997 Bulgaria: Break or Continuity?

The parliamentary elections of April 1997 took place in the immediate aftermath of the most profound economic and political crisis Bulgaria faced in the 1990s. Not unexpectedly then, the election produced a complete reversal of the results of the December 1994 election as the UDF received an absolute majority of 137/240 seats while the BSP incurred a loss of 67 seats. In that respect, the year 1997 is said to politically constitute a critical juncture for postcommunist Bulgaria as “the political order that emerged under the obtrusive hegemony of the former Communist Party collapsed and the country embarked on a new path of development” (Ganev 2007: 32). The UDF administration led by Ivan Kostov¹⁸ launched sweeping reforms during its four-years tenure in an attempt to revamp Bulgaria’s financial system, internal security, and foreign policy (Fish and Brooks 2000).

While in principle I do not dispute the claim that the year 1997 was a turning point for Bulgaria, I would qualify this claim. More specifically, the year 1997 was a turning point only in terms of breaking the dominance of the communist successor party BSP. Other than that, an analysis of the long-term trends (1997-2017) will show that post-1997 Bulgaria in many respects did *not* diverge significantly from the pre-1997 period. Specifically, I argue that post-1997 Bulgaria is largely similar to the pre-1997 period in four main dimensions:

- a. *“Weak-state constitutionalism”* (Ganev 2007) *persisted in the post-1997 period*. Stated differently, although in a relatively lower scale, exceptionally corrupt and unscrupulous elites who at the same time uphold basic constitutional norms and democratic principles is still the defining feature of Bulgarian politics. Post-1997 Bulgaria is still the rare hybrid case mixing democracy and weak/corrupt governance structures.
- b. *The mainstream political elites still keep to the principle of preserving a deethnicized political space*. The persistence of weak/corrupt governance structures has led to frequent outbursts of civic anger, yet in no case have mainstream elites tried to deflect the popular anger onto a convenient ethnic target. Nonviolent elite rivalry is still the hegemonic norm guiding political competition in post-1997 Bulgaria.
- c. *The MRF has preserved its monopoly of minority representation and its swing role in determining national political developments*. Among all ethno-religious minorities in

¹⁸ Kostov was the former UDF Minister of Finance under the Dimitrov administration (November 1991-October 1992).

postcommunist countries, Bulgarian Turks are the only ones that are still represented by the same political party in the national legislature.

d. *Despite MRF's enormous and persistent political clout, Bulgarian Turks still have minimal ethno-linguistic rights and the regions inhabited by them are still economically among the poorest regions of Bulgaria.* Stated differently, the Turkish-inhabited areas are still among the poorest parts of the poorest EU member state.

It is to an explanation of the two contradictory patterns laid out in the last point that I now turn. While doing so, I will also elaborate on various issues related to the other three dimensions mentioned above.

4.7 Political Representation Without Rights: Explaining the Democratic Deficit in the Case of Ethnic Turks in Postcommunist Bulgaria

An analysis of the long-term trends in postcommunist Bulgarian politics throws into sharp relief two contradictory patterns as regards the Bulgarian Turks. On the one hand, nearly three decades after transition, the MRF is still the only minority representative party that has entered the Bulgarian National Assembly. Despite the presence of a host of other parties claiming to represent the interests of the Bulgarian Turks, MRF's monopoly of minority representation is still unbroken. This makes this case unique among all other political representatives of ethno-religious minorities in postcommunist countries. On the other hand, nearly three decades after transition and more than one decade after Bulgaria's EU accession, Bulgarian Turks still have minimal ethno-linguistic rights and the regions inhabited by them are still among the economically poorest regions of Bulgaria. Why is this the case? Why is there such a deep gap between the enormous political clout of a minority representative party and the level of ethno-linguistic rights and socio-economic development of the constituency it represents? I will first present original data to illustrate the aforementioned two contradictory patterns and then explain the empirical puzzle.

To begin with, let's analyze the results of all postcommunist parliamentary elections until present. Table 4.3 presents the election results for the mainstream center-left and right and the two balancing parties (MRF and Ataka). An analysis of the results of a total of ten postcommunist parliamentary elections puts into stark relief two main patterns.

Table 4.3 – Results of parliamentary elections in postcommunist Bulgaria (1990-2017).

	Bulgarian Socialist Party BSP	Union of Democratic Forces UDF	National Movement Simeon II NDSV	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria GERB	Movement for Rights and Freedoms MRF	ATAKA Coalition
<i>June 1990</i>	211 seat / 47,15 %	144 / 36,21 %	-	-	23/ 8,03 %	-
<i>October 1991</i>	106 / 33,14 %	110/ 34,36 %	-	-	24/ 7,55 %	-
<i>December 1994</i>	125/ 43,5 %	69/ 24,23 %	-	-	15/ 5,44 %	-
<i>April 1997</i>	58/22,07 %	137/ 52,26 %	-	-	19/ 7,6 %	-
<i>June 2001</i>	48/ 17,14 %	51/ 18,17 %	120/ 42,73 %	-	21/ 7,45 %	-
<i>June 2005</i>	82/ 30,95 %	20/ 7,68 %	53/ 19,88 %	-	34/ 12,81 %	21/ 8,14 %
<i>July 2009</i>	40/ 19,14 %	-	-	116/ 43,06 %	38/ 15,79 %	21/ 10,05 %
<i>May 2013</i>	84/ 26,61 %	-	-	97/ 30,54 %	36/ 11,31 %	23/ 7,3 %
<i>October 2014</i>	39/ 15,40 %	-	-	84/ 32,67 %	38/ 14,84 %	11/ 4,52 %
<i>March 2017</i>	80/ 27,19 %	-	-	95/ 32,66 %	26/ 8,99 %	27/ 9,07 %

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union: PARLINE database on national parliaments. Last accessed November 27, 2018, from http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2045_arc.htm.

4.7.1 (Quasi-)Monopolization of the Balancer Role by a Minority Party

Political competition in postcommunist Bulgaria is anchored in a bipolar model in which the balance is regularly held by a third party. There are two main parties whose rotation in and out of power has basically defined the government and opposition for nearly three decades after transition. While the left pole has been continuously represented under a single party label, the BSP, the right pole has been reintroduced under three different party labels. During the first decade after transition (1990-2001), the antipode to the BSP was the anti-communist umbrella organization, the UDF, which after having contested the first multiparty elections as a single body, split into three and had its core captured by the hardline anticommunist faction led initially by Philip Dimitrov and then by Ivan Kostov. After the defeat in the June 2001 parliamentary elections, the UDF again fell

apart due to factional struggles within the party but this time could not recover and practically lost political significance in subsequent elections.

The right pole was thus reintroduced under a different label, the eponymous Simeon II National Movement (NDSV). Simeon II is the former Bulgarian King who in 1946 at the age of nine had been forced to flee Bulgaria by the communist regime. Having founded NDSV merely three months before the June 2001 parliamentary elections, Simeon II captured half of the parliamentary seats and thus became prime minister of the country he was exiled from around six decades ago, in what is considered “a first for Bulgaria, for Europe, and the world” (Crampton 2005: 248). Although NDSV self-identified as liberal, given the traditional affiliation of the monarchists with the right, it makes sense to consider NDSV as the new antipode to the BSP. After having ruled Bulgaria in two successive governments (2001-2009), the NDSV all at once disappeared from the Bulgarian political scene. Yet, it left behind a lasting legacy for the Bulgarian right pole: that of come-from-nowhere political formations, centred exclusively around the charisma of their founders, formed a short period of time before elections, subsequently winning them and then suddenly evaporating from the political scene. As such, after the NDSV became a relic of the past, the Bulgarian right pole for the third time was reintroduced under a different label, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). Founded three years before the July 2009 parliamentary elections by Boyko Borisov, formerly the personal bodyguard of the communist despot Todor Zhivkov and later of Simeon II, GERB has thus far proved more resilient than the NDSV by winning a plurality in each of the four parliamentary elections since its founding (2009, 2013, 2014, and 2017). It thus represents the current antipode to the BSP.

The balancer role in postcommunist Bulgarian politics has mostly been taken over by the Turkish-based MRF. Its leader Ahmed Dogan has assumed the position of Bulgarian kingmaker in *five* different instances: two times after the October 1991 election when he first swang the executive to the UDF and later to the BSP; after the June 2001 election when Dogan returned Simeon II to the “throne”; after the June 2005 election when after teaming up with NDSV, he brought the former communists to power after the latter’s absence for nearly a decade; and finally, after the elections of May 2013 when Dogan, after having somehow gained the support of the xenophobic *Ataka* coalition through an impressive back-door deal typical of his style of ruling, returned the former

communists to power. All in all, it seems that Ahmed Dogan has mastered the art of bringing former communists and former kings back to power.

As the above discussion makes clear, for two decades (1990-2009) the balancer role in Bulgarian politics was monopolized by the MRF. Yet, in the post-2009 period this role was up for grabs as a number of populist and xenophobic political formations began to compete with the MRF for taking over the position of Bulgarian kingmaker. Hence, in the aftermath of the July 2009 parliamentary election, it was the *Ataka* coalition that provided the swing vote that secured the then newly-formed GERB the parliamentary majority to form a government. Likewise, after the snap election of October 2014, it was the centre-right populist electoral alliance, the Reformist Bloc, and the far-right Patriotic Front (PF) coalition that returned Boyko Borisov and GERB to power. Most recently, in the aftermath of the March 2017 parliamentary election, it was again the United Patriots (UP) coalition (PF + *Ataka*) that swang the executive to GERB. All in all, three decades after transition, political competition in Bulgaria seems to have stabilized around a bipolar model with a balancer in between.

4.7.2 Monopolization of Turkish Minority Representation

The second main pattern that the election results brings to light is that among all Bulgarian parties, the MRF has the most solid and loyal electorate and it is the only party that has steadily increased its vote share since the beginning of transition. The vote shares of all other parties have not followed a stable path, but have instead fluctuated up and down, often quite wildly. The following time series graph illustrates the downward trend in the percentage vote shares of all the main Bulgarian parties and the contrasting upward trend in the MRF's vote shares since the beginning of transition. The downward trend is starkest in the cases of the UDF and the NDSV, which after hitting a peak during the 1997 and 2001 elections respectively, then practically lost political significance. As far as the BSP is concerned, the decline is more gradual but eventually reached the point when its downward line intersected with MRF's upward line in the 2014 elections. On the other hand, MRF's percentage vote share has moved from a reasonable 8.03 % in the first multiparty elections to an impressively high 15.79 % and 14.84 % in the July 2009 and October 2014 elections respectively. Although it saw a sharp drop in the most recent 2017 election, MRF's average vote share across ten parliamentary elections still hovers around 10 % and its average number of parliamentary seats around 27 (11.25 % of all seats).

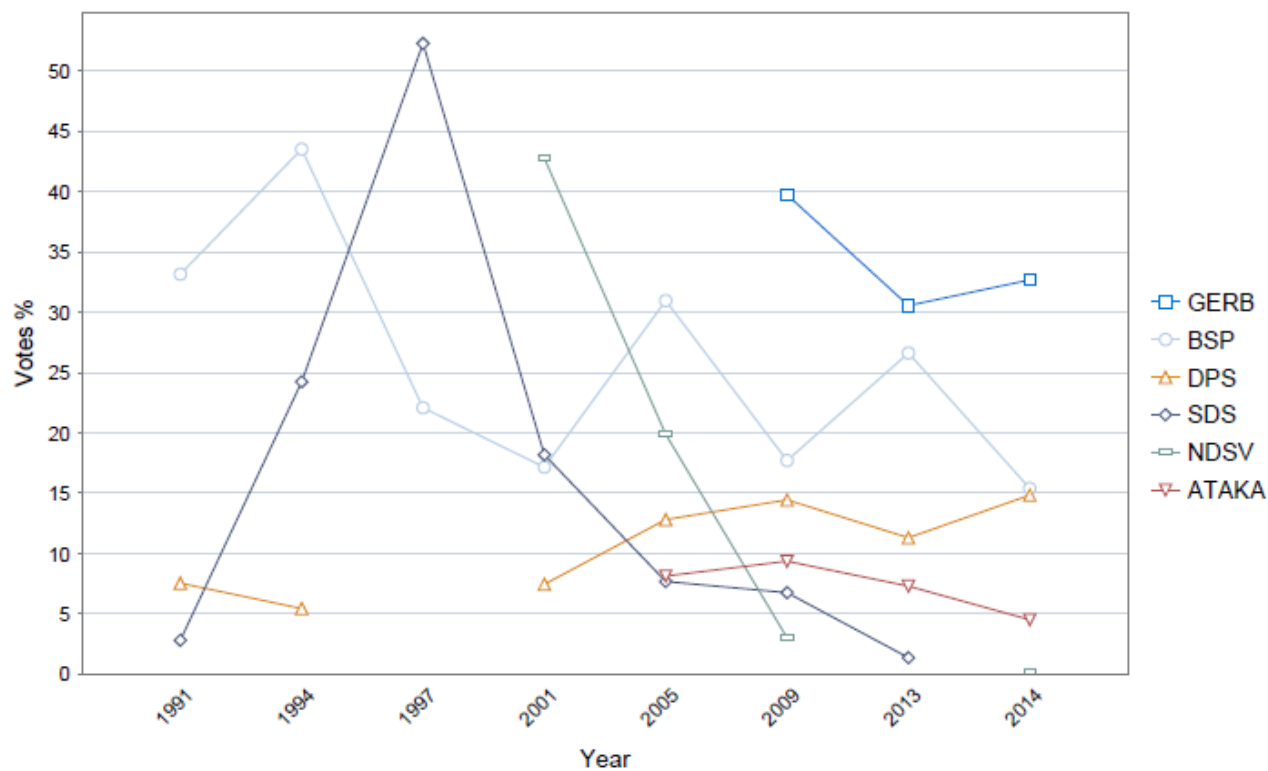


Figure 4.3: The percentage vote share of the main centre-left and centre-right Bulgarian parties (BSP, UDF, NDSV, GERB) and of the two main balancing parties (MRF and Ataka) in the postcommunist parliamentary elections (1991-2014).

Source: Graph created by the author using data from the European Election Database (EED) *Note:* SDS is the Bulgarian acronym of the UDF, DPS is the Bulgarian acronym for MRF.

Hence, both MRF's average vote share and seats exceed the percentage of its core constituency (Bulgarian Turks comprise 8.8 % of the population). What this practically means is that while the MRF commands the support of an overwhelming majority of Bulgarian Turks, 1-2 % of its vote share is regularly tied to a non-Turkish constituency, which in most cases has been the Gypsy/Roma population. Arguably, the single most important reason why, unlike other parties, MRF's vote share has not fluctuated but has instead steadily increased over time is that the MRF commands an exceptionally solid and loyal electorate. I use two different ways to empirically substantiate this claim. First, let's refer to the sheer number of votes the party has gained in each of the ten parliamentary elections up to present. Table 4.4 presents the relevant data.

Table 4.4: Number of votes gained by the MRF in the postcommunist parliamentary elections (1990-2017).

<i>Election</i>	1990	1991	1994	1997	2001	2005	2009	2013	2014	2017
<i>Votes N</i>	491,596	418,168	283,094	323,429	340,395	467,400	610,521	400,466	487,134	331,025

Source: European Election Database (EED). *Note:* The figure for the 2017 election is calculated by the author consulting different newspaper election reports in Turkish.

As the table shows, the general trend concerning MRF's number of votes is also upward. The party has experienced drops only in three elections because of, among other factors, the formation of a number of breakaway parties from former MRF parliamentarians. Thus, in the 1994 elections, the MRF lost a total of 40,000 votes to Mehmed Hoca's Party for Democratic Change (PDP) and Nedim Gencev's Democratic Party of Justice (DPSpr.) In the 2013 elections, the then newly-formed People's Party for Freedom and Dignity (NPSD), co-founded by Korman İsmailov and Kasım Dal, "took away" 60,000 votes from the MRF. Finally, in the most recent 2017 parliamentary election, the newly-founded Democrats for Responsibility, Solidarity, and Tolerance (DOST) in alliance with the NPSD denied the MRF around 100,000 votes. Yet, all these parties' electoral progress is very unsustainable as they tend to participate in certain electoral cycles and then all at once disappear from the political scene. Indeed, before the founding of DOST in 2016, the combined percentage vote shares of PDP, DPSpr. and NPSD barely exceeded 2 % and the total number of votes they have received together is around 100,000. In stark contrast, MRF's *average* number of votes across ten elections hovers around an impressively high 415,000 which amounts to 70 % of the total number of Bulgarian Turks.

The second way to illustrate the solid and loyal electorate the MRF commands is to analyze the district-level electoral data. Table 4.5 outlines the Bulgarian electoral districts with the largest percentage of MRF vote in the postcommunist parliamentary elections (1994-2014). A major finding is beyond doubt. The Bulgarian electoral districts with the largest percentage of MRF vote are those districts in which the Turks constitute more than 10 per cent of the population (refer back to Table 4.2). In all of these districts, MRF's vote share has steadily increased since 1994. What is equally significant, the average percentage vote share gained by

Table 4.5: Bulgarian electoral districts with the largest percentage of MRF vote in the postcommunist parliamentary elections (1994-2014).

District Election	Kardzhali Vote % (66.2 %)	Razgrad Vote % (50 %)	Targovishte Vote % (35.8 %)	Silistra Vote % (36.1 %)	Shumen Vote % (30.3 %)	Blagoevgrad Vote % (8.8 %)	Burgas Vote % (13.3 %)	Dobrich Vote % (13.5 %)	Haskovo Vote % (12.5 %)	Ruse Vote % (13.2 %)	Smolyan Vote % (4.9 %)	Abroad Vote %
1994	50.47	34.38	20.65	18.25	18.13	9.76	8.7	5.69	5.94	6.29	4.97	-
1997	59.94	36.47	23.37	23.32	22.03	12.21	10.34	11.72	9.5	8.03	6.6	-
2001	58.07	30.85	27.20	28.30	20.93	10.87	10.56	29.22	8.46	6.88	6.19	-
2005	67.32	45.97	37.84	36.12	27.48	18.51	15.06	14.05	16.55	11.76	15.25	53.99
2009	68.60	55.14	42.88	39.14	32.47	17.74	15.61	13.32	15.98	14.11	23.46	61.18
2013	59.77	46.62	35.23	28.28	28.73	12.81	11.56	12.33	15.02	9.95	17.65	49.13
2014	70.43	55.88	43.17	34.30	34.44	16.57	15.56	19.75	17.86	13.33	22.40	43.40
Average Vote %	62.08	43.61	32.90	29.67	26.31	14.06	12.48	15.15	12.75	10.05	13.78	

Source: Table constructed by the author using data from the European Election Database (EED) *Note:* District-level data for the 1990, 1991, and 2017 parliamentary elections are not available. The percentage of ethnic Turks inhabiting each district according to the 2011 census is given in parantheses.

the MRF in these districts roughly matches the percentage of the Turks living there, in two cases even exceeding it (Dobrich and Haskovo). There are only two districts, Blagoevgrad and Smolyan, where the percentage of Turks is below 10 per cent and yet the MRF has a disproportionately high vote share. The reason is that the two districts in question historically have been densely populated by the Pomaks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Similarly, MRF's average vote share in Dobrich and Haskovo exceeds the percentage of Turks living there because of the significant number of Roma inhabiting also these two districts. Indeed, as far as the Gypsies/Roma are concerned, since 2005 the Bulgarian districts with the highest concentration of the Roma have ended up with suspiciously high vote shares for the MRF. Table 4.6 presents empirical data to bear out such a claim.

Table 4.6: MRF's percentage vote share in the Bulgarian districts with the highest Gypsy/Roma concentration.

District Election	Montana (12,7)	Sliven (11,8)	Pazardzhik (8,3)	Stara Zagora (7,8)	Vidin (7,7)	Vratsa (6,2)
1994	0.23	3.15	4.10	1.87	0.12	0.31
1997	2.3	7.49	6.67	2.98	1.73	3.45
2001	1.63	4.58	5.27	1.99	1.01	1.9
2005	4.12	9.99	11.91	5.58	13.29	1.29
2009	2.74	9.07	17.68	5.14	5.25	6.8
2013	3.51	7.21	14.32	8.15	1.07	8.97
2014	7.9	10.64	16.07	10.12	6.11	12.99

Source: Table constructed by the author using data from the European Election Database (EED) *Notes:* District-level data for the 1990, 1991, and 2017 parliamentary elections are not available. The percentage of Gypsy/Roma inhabiting each district according to the 2011 census is given in parantheses. Overall, the Roma ethnic group makes up 4,9 % of Bulgaria's 7,3 million population.

As can be clearly seen, before 2005 the MRF had marginal electoral support in most of the Roma- inhabited districts. Yet, beginning with the 2005 election, there is a spike in MRF's vote share in every district with a substantial Roma population. In general terms, the increase is sharpest during the 2009 and 2014 elections and these are precisely the two electoral cycles when MRF's national vote share reached a peak. Roma's come-from-nowhere electoral support, can be largely attributed to the MRF's indulging in vote-buying since 2005 (Dal 2018; Ismailov 2018). Last but not least, the MRF has also been able to command the support of a majority of the Bulgarian Turks living in Turkey,

although since 2009 it has experienced a downward trend in these votes. All in all, the district-level data presented in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 bear out the claim that throughout a period of twenty years (1994-2014), the MRF has commanded the electoral support of an overwhelming majority of Bulgarian Turks and since 2005, this voting bloc has significantly expanded to include the support of the Pomak and Roma-inhabited regions. Not surprisingly then, MRF's vote share reached a peak in the 2009 and 2014 elections when the support from the Pomak and Roma-inhabited regions was at its highest.

To summarize all the findings up to this point, in almost three decades after transition, a minority-based party, the MRF, succeeded in becoming a formidable political player in Bulgarian politics. First, the MRF monopolized the balancer role in Bulgarian politics for two decades (1990-2009) by swinging the executive mostly to the former communists and the former king and presently it is competing with a host of relatively new centre-right and far-right parties for preserving this key role. Second, among the Bulgarian mainstream and balancer parties, the MRF has the most solid and loyal electorate and therefore is the only party that has steadily increased its vote share since the beginning of transition. Last, despite the presence of a host of other parties claiming to represent the interests of the Bulgarian Turks, MRF's monopoly of Turkish representation is still unbroken. In spite of these outstanding political achievements of their representative party, the Bulgarian Turks, MRF's core constituency, still enjoy minimal ethno-linguistic rights and the regions inhabited by them economically are among the poorest in Bulgaria.

4.7.3 The Level of Ethno-Linguistic Rights of Bulgarian Turks

Constitutionally, the Bulgarian Turks do not have any *collective* minority rights since the postcommunist Bulgarian state, although it acknowledges the existence of ethnic diversity, does not legally grant the status of "minority" to any collective group of people. Instead Bulgarian Turks are constitutionally defined as "*citizens* whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian" (Bulgaria Constitution 1991). In this respect, there is a clear continuity with the constitutional provisions of the communist period (Yüsein). The 1971 Bulgarian constitution, a quintessential monoethnic state document that was used also to justify the brutal assimilation campaign of the 1980s, also did not recognize Turks as a minority but instead referred to them as "*citizens* of non-Bulgarian origin". As can be clearly seen, the wordings of the 1971 and 1991 constitutions on the status of Bulgarian Turks are

essentially the same. Therefore, I disagree with Koinova's (2013) claim that the constitutional status of Turks experienced an upgrade after the collapse of communism. It is certainly true that the end of the "rebirth process" marked a major improvement and break with the past, yet the decision to end the assimilation campaign was dictated almost exclusively by the recognition that such a policy was simply unsustainable in newly democratizing Bulgaria. It did not certainly emanate from any moral imperative on the parts of the former communists or any sense of guilt. Indeed, even the most uncompromisingly anticommunist administration led by Filip Dimitrov (1991-1992) did not indict former regime officials on charges related to the "rebirth process". As Kasım Dal (2018) bitterly remarks, "Until now, no one has given responsibility for this crime against humanity."

As "citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian" the only constitutionally linguistic right Bulgarian Turks were granted was "the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language." (Art. 36(2)). Besides that, Bulgarian Turks were not granted the right of education *in* their mother tongue. In nearly three decades after transition, there are still no Turkish primary and/or secondary schools in Bulgaria. Second, the Turkish language does not have an official status even in the districts where Turks make up a majority of the population (i.e. Kardzhali and Razgrad). Therefore, street signs and other topographic information in Turkish-majority districts are written only in Bulgarian and English. Similarly, Bulgarian Turks do not have the right to request and receive information in Turkish from local institutions/municipality in Turkish-majority districts. It is also illegal and subject to fines to conduct electoral campaigns in the Turkish language. As a case in point, Lyutvi Mestan, both as the former MRF leader (2013-2015) and the current DOST leader, has been fined several times for having greeted his constituency in Turkish during the electoral campaigns. Similar fines have been imposed also on Hüseyin Hafızov, former MRF parliamentarian and current DOST deputy leader (Ismailov 2018).

Even the constitutionally guaranteed right to study the Turkish language in public schools was seriously restricted when it came to implementation. Accordingly, even though the constitution was passed in July 1991, limited Turkish classes in public schools could begin only in March 1992 and the then UDF government of Filip Dimitrov encumbered the new education policy with a number of hedging devices: the right to study Turkish language in public schools was, and still is, made optional, arranged as an

extracurricular activity, limited to only four hours per week from the third (later starting from the first) to the eighth grade, and available only when there was “sufficient” demand for it. Apparently, government officials reserved for them the right to determine what constituted a “sufficient” demand given that despite the frequent efforts of local Turks to have the Turkish classes as mandatory, they are still optional (Necib 2017). Evaluating the situation in general and the effect of these ethnic policies 30 years after transition, prominent Bulgarian Turk journalist and writer Ismail Cambazov (2019) remarks:

At the very beginning (in 1991), 114,000 Turkish children demanded to study their mother tongue in public schools. Nowadays, in all Bulgaria, only 5,255 children study Turkish. The child who does not study his mother tongue gradually *Bulgarifies*. Noone tells him to change his name or not to speak his mother tongue, however, gradually you lose your identity. Many of our intellectuals here are becoming more Bulgarian than the Bulgarians themselves. In their homes they don't speak Turkish. Among themselves Turkish intellectuals speak Bulgarian. (Moreover) In Bulgaria, all Turks less than 60 years old have only studied in Bulgarian schools. They can't even express themselves in Turkish ... The Bulgarian state here does not recognize our Turkishness. (The official policy is) There are no Turks in Bulgaria, there are Muslims. And Turkey knows this. If we are abandoned like this on our own, and in fact now we are abandoned, don't look for any sign of Turkishness here after 25-30 years. We are going, we are melting away.

Turkish/Muslim representation in some key state institutions is almost non-existent. Ahmed Yüsein, former MRF deputy (1997-2009) and current DOST deputy leader, provides some useful statistics:

30 years since transition, in the (army's) ground forces, we still don't have a single commander – neither in the air, nor in the naval forces. Another example, in the Kardzhali office of the National Intelligence Organization, there is only one Turk out of a total of 15 employees. What does this mean? This means that they Bulgarians do not trust us. Let's come to the area of justice. I was an MP until 2009, and got some official statistics from the Ministry of Justice. Out of 250-260 public prosecutors in all Bulgaria, only three are Turk. Keep in mind that all municipalities have at least one public prosecutor, while the big ones have three to four. And there are only 4 Turkish judges, I even know their names. Then, let's take the 15-member Constitutional Court. 30 years have passed since transition, not a single Muslim has ever been a member of the Constitutional Court. If MRF proposes a candidate in the parliament, for sure he will not be approved. Who can then do this? There is actually a quota reserved for the President of the Republic who has the right to appoint two to three members to the Constitutional Court. In this case, the parliament does not need to approve the choice of the president. If the Bulgarian president is really an institution that symbolizes the unity and integrity of the state, as he claims to be, then he should appoint a Muslim to the Constitutional Court. However, past presidents whom we supported to get elected did not do this, the present president is also not doing it. In front of the world and the West, Bulgaria is presented as a country where our rights are protected in the best way. In reality, we are oppressed here (Yüsein 2018).

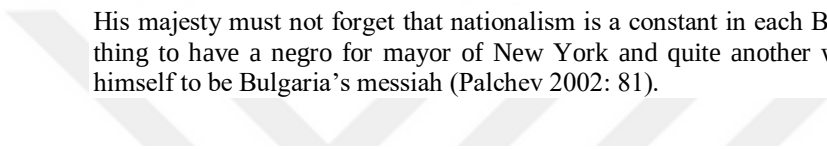
Adding to the gloomy situation on the level of ethno-linguistic rights is the utter unwillingness of *the* minority-based party, MRF, to put forward any demand for the recognition of the minority status of Bulgarian Turks and/or the upgrading of the status

of Turkish language. Given MRF's immense political clout in national politics, theoretically this unwillingness is quite puzzling. As I pointed out above, the MRF for two decades monopolized the balancer role in Bulgarian politics and carried to power mainstream parties of all stripes: hardline anticommunists, former communists, and the former king. With such a diverse clientele, theoretically the MRF could have easily bartered its swing role for advancing the level of ethno-linguistic rights of its constituency. Not only did the MRF refrain from such demands but it also actively sidelined, silenced, and eventually expelled from the party those voices that strayed from the official party position. In one occasion even, MRF acted explicitly against the ethno-linguistic demands of its constituency. In 1999 when Güner Tahir was a (the only Turkish) UDF parliamentarian, he succeeded in persuading UDF's parliamentary group and the then UDF-affiliated president Petar Stoyanov to pass a law for starting limited Turkish language broadcasting in the Bulgarian national television. While the law passed with a majority in parliament (because UDF had a majority during that mandate), MRF parliamentary group surprisingly walked out and boycotted the vote. The only three MRF deputies that remained, one of them was Ramadan Atalay, actually voted *against* the law (Tahir 2018). Since then, there is a 10-minute Turkish language broadcasting in Bulgarian national television every working day. This is perhaps the only minority right that a mainstream Bulgarian party has supported in parliament.

All in all, compared to the stunning success of the Albanian parties in Macedonia and Montenegro in securing ethno-linguistic rights for their constituency, the failure of the MRF in this respect in Bulgaria points to a major finding: *political clout of a minority representative might be a necessary factor in bringing about changes in minority's level of ethno-linguistic rights, but it is not a sufficient one.* A comparative analysis of the postcommunist Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Montenegrin cases teaches us that bringing about ethno-linguistic changes is contingent upon the presence of majority parties holding a multiethnic nationhood vision. In this regard, such parties are conspicuously absent in Bulgaria. Both the mainstream party of the left (BSP) and the three different mainstream parties of the right up to now (UDF, NDSV, and GERB) subscribe to a non-multiethnic vision of Bulgarian nationhood.

Among the four parties, the NDSV of Simeon II might have been expected to be somewhat closer to the interests of minorities for two reasons. First, Bulgarian Muslims have often supported the monarchy in Bulgaria, especially during the interwar

period when Simeon's father, Boris III, broke with the policies of his predecessors and tried to accommodate the Muslims (Crampton 2005: 248). Second, in line with this historical record, many Bulgarian Turks actually voted for Simeon II in the June 2001 parliamentary elections, contributing to NDSV's stunning success in those elections. Thereafter it was the Turkish-based MRF that provided the swing vote and returned Simeon to the "throne" after six decades. Yet, Simeon was well aware of the rules of the game in Bulgarian politics and did not stray from the line of the other Bulgarian mainstream parties. Indeed, Ivan Palchev, former MRF deputy and a close confidant of Dogan, soberly declared that, before returning to Bulgarian politics, Simeon II had become well acquainted with the maxim that:



His majesty must not forget that nationalism is a constant in each Bulgarian party. It's one thing to have a negro for mayor of New York and quite another when Dogan proclaims himself to be Bulgaria's messiah (Palchev 2002: 81).

Moreover, former MRF deputy leader Osman Oktay (1990-1997) argues that NDSV's alliance with MRF was more than normal since it was Ahmet Doğan and *Multigroup's* mafia boss/oligarch Iliya Pavlov that actually brought Simeon from Spain and founded a party for him just two months before the parliamentary elections. "Ahmet and Simeon formed a mafia government in June 2001 ... 'Tourists' come from Madrid and London to Bulgaria to serve the mafia here" concludes Oktay (2018). This account is corroborated also by Hüseyin Ömer who claims that Simeon is a former KGB informer and that his businesses in Madrid were being financed by the KGB. According to Ömer, Ahmet Doğan and two other prominent MRF deputies (sent by KGB), Younal Lyutvi and Ivan Palchev, had already visited Simeon in Madrid in the early 1990s, setting the stage for his comeback a decade later (Ömer 2018).

The current mainstream party of the right, GERB, is an even less likely candidate for becoming one day a multiethnic party. One main reason for this is that, since its founding, GERB is stuck in an uneasy but resilient relationship with a host of far-right Bulgarian parties that have provided the swing vote to carry it to power after the 2009, 2014, and most recently, 2017 elections. Yet, the dependence on the parliamentary support of far-right nationalist parties does not mean that GERB may one day emerge as a multiethnic party if it can capture a parliamentary majority on its own. Its founder and up to now three-time Bulgarian prime minister, Boyko Borisov (formerly the bodyguard

of the communist tyrant Zhivkov), in essence is no less nationalist than his far-right coalition partners (Yüsein 2018).

4.7.4 The Level of Economic Development

MRF's enormous clout in national politics has not only failed to secure ethno-linguistic rights for its constituency. It has also not improved the economic well-being of Bulgarian Turks. On the one hand, it is certainly true that during the 1990s economic hardships and poverty were not peculiar to Bulgarian Turks. As argued above, the country as a whole plunged into a devastating economic crisis because of the somehow inevitable costs of economic transition and more importantly because of the former nomenklatura's unscrupulous plundering of state resources (Ganev 2007). What is more, during the 1990s Bulgarian Turks plausibly had to bear heavier transitional costs than ethnic Bulgarians. The unemployment rate for Turks spiked during the early 1990s mainly because of the sharp cuts in state subsidies for the enterprises Turks were overwhelmingly employed in (Ganev 2003: 330-32). Likewise, the ineffectual implementation of the law for restitution of the property Turks had left behind during their 1989 exodus worsened their economic situation and led to another "uncontrolled wave of Turkish emigration" after 1992 (Kolarova 1993: 48). Yet, on the other hand, in the post-1997 period, Bulgarian economy quickly recovered due to the sweeping financial reforms of the Kostov administration and the beginning of the EU membership process (Fish and Brooks 2000). While the prospect of EU membership in this period made Bulgarian elites of all stripes to act cautiously when implementing the required economic reforms (Ganev 2013), in the post-accession period (i.e. post-2007) the EU Structural Funds provided the necessary financial tools aimed at reducing regional income and wealth disparities.

In brief, MRF's persistent political clout coupled with the structural changes in the Bulgarian economy and the EU membership arguably should have improved the economic well-being of the Bulgarian Turks in the post-1997 period. Indeed, some Bulgarian scholars even claim that the MRF in this period parted with its narrow ethnic agenda because of a more pressing need to emphasize economic issues. For instance, Boyka Stefanova (2012) argues that in order to ensure "minority representation beyond ethnicity", the MRF in the post-1997 period adopted a liberal centrist ideology and "gradually reoriented its policy priorities from the political platform of rights and freedoms to programmatic objectives related to economic opportunities, participation,

and better living standards for ethnic minorities” (Stefanova 2012: 774-7). If this were the case, if the MRF had indeed sacrificed its ethnic agenda for a more economic-oriented one, then we should have expected an improvement in the economic well-being of Turkish-inhabited regions. This should have been even more likely in the post-EU accession period. Was this the case?

To answer the question, I present time-series data on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Bulgarian Levs (BGN) of the five Bulgarian districts where Turks constitute more than 30 per cent of the population (Kardzhali, Razgrad, Targovishte, Shumen, and Silistra). The data cover the period from 2000 until 2016 and are presented at two-year intervals. I then build a time-series graph to compare the districts’ GDP per capita patterns with the Bulgarian national average. Table 4.7 and Figure 4.4 display the results.

Two patterns stand out from the graph. First, over the years the gap between the average Bulgarian living standard and that of the Turkish-inhabited districts has steadily widened. Disparities between living standards began to increase especially since 2005, two years before EU accession, and then have continued to grow ever since. This gives credence to the claim that, compared to the national average, the economic well-being of Turkish-inhabited regions has declined after the 2007 EU accession.

Table 4.7: The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Bulgarian Levs (BGN) of the five Bulgarian districts where Turks constitute more than 30 per cent of the population.

	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2016
	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs	GDP per capita, Levs
Total for the country	3418	4647	6027	8285	9622	10990	11310	13206
Razgrad (50%)	2362	3639	4341	5099	5406	6775	7890	8379
Silistra (36,1%)	2457	3154	3957	4515	4922	5621	5618	6080
Targovishte (35,8 %)	2429	3071	3944	5353	5517	6739	7351	8867
Shumen (30,3%)	2497	3436	4195	5248	5786	6694	7280	8060
Kardzhali (66,2 %)	2119	3315	4309	4929	5528	5665	6189	6854

Source: Republic of Bulgaria National Statistical Institute (<http://www.nsi.bg/en/content/5437/gross-domestic-product-gdp>)

Note: The percentage of ethnic Turks inhabiting each district according to the 2011 census is given in parantheses.

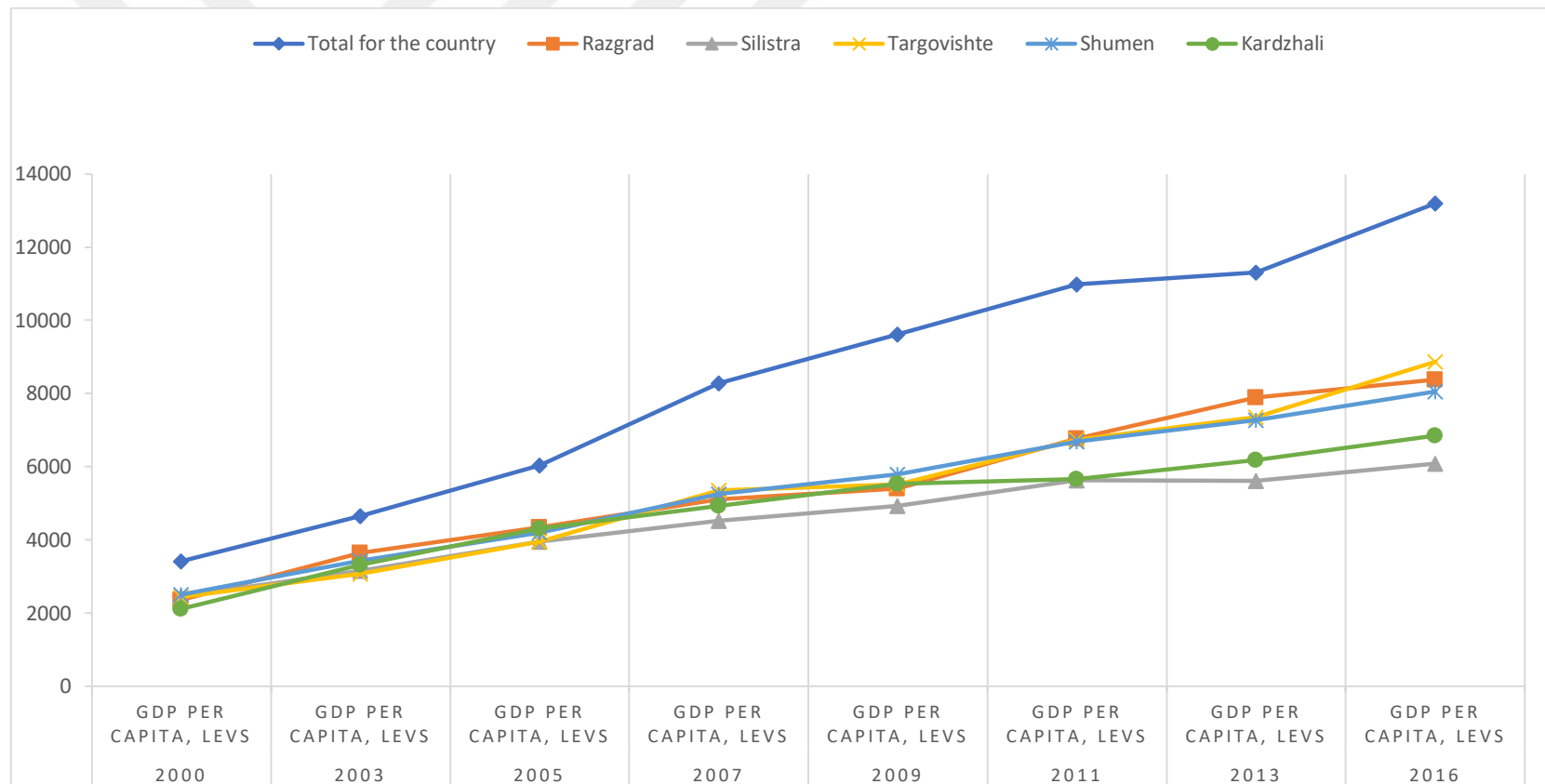


Figure 4.4: Level of Economic Development of Turkish districts in Bulgaria.

Second, even in absolute terms, the above graph makes clear that the living standard in two of the five districts (Silistra and Kardzhali) have barely improved at all in the post-2007 period. Indeed, during the period in question Silistra together with Sliven (a Bulgarian district with a significant Roma population) have persistently been the two districts with the lowest GDP per capita. The situation is not markedly different in Kardzhali, the Bulgarian district with the largest Turkish concentration (66,2 %). The growth in GDP per capita there has almost stalled in the post-2007 period, making Kardzhali among the districts with the lowest standard of living. All in all, the data does not support the thesis that in the post-1997 period the MRF parted with its ethnic agenda in favor of a more economic-oriented one aimed at improving the economic well-being of minority-inhabited regions. More than a decade after EU accession, the Turkish-inhabited districts, both in relative and absolute terms, are still among the least economically developed Bulgarian districts (to say nothing of the Roma concentrated districts). Stated differently, the Turkish-inhabited areas are still among the poorest parts of the poorest EU member state.

Why is this the case? Why is there such a deep gap between the enormous political clout of a minority representative party and the level of ethno-linguistic rights and socio-economic development of the constituency it represents?

4.7.5 Explaining the Democratic Deficit

The single most important variable that explains the gap between descriptive and substantive representation (i.e. the democratic deficit) in the case of Bulgarian Turks is the nationhood cohesion among the Bulgarian majority parties. I have argued that it was a shared non-multiethnic vision that initially enabled the former communists and the anticommunist opposition to cooperate when instituting ethnic policies. The Bulgarian Round Table Talks (RTT), the single most important evidence of such cooperation, and the decisions agreed upon therein essentially generated the gap between descriptive and substantive representation for the Bulgarian Turks. On the one hand, the BSP and the UDF decided to officially end the assimilation process and grant the minorities the right to be politically represented. On the other hand, with the overall aim of deethnicizing postcommunist political space, both parties sought to prevent minority *intraethnic* competition and to this end, they implicitly agreed to make the Turkish-based Movement

for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) the sole legal political representative of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria.

The importance of Bulgarian majority parties' explicit/implicit support for the MRF cannot be overstated. To begin with, notwithstanding the law banning ethnic parties, the MRF was officially registered in April 1990 only as part of a BSP-UDF tacit agreement during the RTT (Kolarova 1993: 35). In return, the MRF has duly accepted the constitutional provisions that do not recognize the existence of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria and establish Bulgarian as the sole official language at both the national and local levels. Second, by instrumentalizing the constitutional clause banning ethnic parties, Bulgarian mainstream parties have persistently denied registration to those Turkish parties that have put forward ethno-linguistic demands for its constituency and thus could have challenged MRF's primacy. Thus far, the minority-based formations that have been allowed to access the political arena have been marginal players that only have served any short-term electoral interest of the mainstream parties and thus have not competed with the MRF in any real sense. It remains to be seen whether the newly founded DOST will be able to mount the first real challenge to the MRF. The prospects look fairly dim given the prevalence of a deethnicized political space in Bulgaria and the far superior financial and organizational resources the MRF possesses.

The implicit support of the mainstream parties for the MRF has had tremendous repercussions for the latter's political clout in Bulgarian politics. The MRF on its part has cashed in on this support and has thus far cemented the notion that it is the sole guarantor of ethnic peace in Bulgaria. By extension, it has also successfully projected the image that challenging MRF's privileged position in national politics would be tantamount to imperil the hard-won interethnic coexistence. Indeed, current MRF deputy Nihat Tahir Kabil openly told the author that "we need to be continuously present in politics in order to stop nationalism from being revived and strengthened. That is why we (MRF) shall have no mercy toward those who try to sow divisions among us and found new (minority) parties" (Kabil 2018). It would not be an exaggeration to argue that this constitutes the single most important winning electoral strategy of the MRF and it explains why the party commands the most solid and loyal electorate among all Bulgarian parties. Hüseyin Ömer once more emphasizes the fact that MRF's main function is to keep together all Turkish/Muslim votes and for this the party tries always to keep alive the potential threat coming from Bulgarian nationalism. Before almost every election, argues Ömer, MRF

members write on the walls in Turkish villages and deliver messages with threatening contents such as “Turks to Turkey”, “Kill the Turks” or “Your names will again be changed” (Ömer 2018).

Hence, it should be clear that MRF’s implicit deal with the Bulgarian mainstream parties of the left and right to uphold a non-multiethnic nationhood model and keep together the Turkish/Muslim votes explains the gap between descriptive and substantive representation in the case of Bulgarian Turks. As aptly put by Korman Ismailov (2018), “MRF used the Bulgarian parties, the Bulgarian parties also used MRF”.

In the terminology of game theory, this gap, and ethnic peace more generally, is sustained by the shared expectations political actors have about what will happen if they cheat. Ultimately, shared beliefs about what happens off the equilibrium path renders it unlikely to bridge the gap between descriptive and substantive representation.

Apart from fulfilling a crucial role in upholding a non-multiethnic nationhood model, the MRF also assumed a leading position in assisting the former nomenklatura’s predatory project of converting state property into private wealth (Ivanov 2018; Oktay 2018; Ömer 2018). While the first role entailed that the MRF parts with its ethnic agenda, the second transformed the party into a virtual corporation synonymous with the brutal oligarchic power in Bulgaria. As already explained above, the MRF is directly responsible for the political ascent of the Bulgarian mafia during the 1990s. It was precisely during the “non-partisan” Berov administration sponsored by the MRF (December 1992–September 1994) that powerful mafiosi conglomerates like *Multigroup* gradually began to take over almost every sector of the Bulgarian economy. While the Berov administration was merely a cover for what essentially was an alliance between MRF and the former communists (BSP), Ahmed Dogan managed somehow also to buy off the UDF founder and then-president Zheliu Zhelev, in what Veselin Dimitrov described as “one of the strangest concoctions in Bulgaria’s post-communist politics” (Dimitrov 2001: 53).

The MRF further extended its oligarchic affiliations when it enjoyed a share of executive power for two consecutive administrations during the 2000s, one with the former king (2001–2005), while the other with the former communists (2005–2009). In one instance, Dogan himself publicly admitted what his party stands for. Merely two days before the scheduled parliamentary elections of 25 June 2005, in a public appearance Dogan soberly declared that his party relied on “‘a circle of firms’ that gave him as much money as he needed, while in return he made sure that they were awarded as many

government contracts as they wanted” (cited in Ganev 2006: 84). Furthermore, given that Bulgaria became an EU member during MRF’s coalition government with the BSP (and NDSV), EU’s Structural Funds provided MRF’s officials a plethora of opportunities to line their pockets. As Ganev (2006: 85) aptly puts it:

it became clear that its [MRF’s] enhanced ambitions might generate tensions that had nothing to do with ethnic identity. Instead, they sprang from the preference of Dogan and his entourage for practicing the types of corruption that they had learned during the 1990s and their unwillingness to adjust to an evolving matrix of strategic opportunities. Dogan was not interested in expanding the number of economically active agents allowed access to the Bulgarian economy, and instead continued to direct resources exclusively toward his cronies. He blocked major foreign investors who threatened to interfere with his corrupt schemes – for instance, he torpedoed the sale of the state-owned tobacco company Bulgartabak to Deutsche Bank, a corporate newcomer whom everybody else was ready to welcome. His reckless “appropriations” compromised several programs funded by the European Union.

When analyzed in conjunction with the GDP per capita data presented above in Table 4.7, it should be clear by now why the EU Structural Funds failed to fulfill one of their major goals: reduce the income and wealth disparities in the minority-inhabited Bulgarian districts.

The gradual transformation of the MRF into the stronghold of oligarchic power had important repercussions for its evolution of vote share during the 2000s, which cannot be overstated. As the data from Table 4.3 clearly show, beginning from the 2005 parliamentary election, the MRF’s percentage vote share increased substantially. Indeed, compared to its average percentage vote share during the 1990s’ elections (7.2 %), the party almost doubled its average vote share during the post-2001 elections (12.74 %). While the MRF has preserved the overwhelming support of the Turkish-inhabited regions in both periods, since 2005 its “loyal” electorate has substantially expanded to include also the Roma-inhabited regions (as Table 4.6 shows). It is mainly through transforming itself into a vote-buying party machine that the MRF could afford itself to expand electorally into the non-Turkish districts (Dal 2018; Ismailov 2018). According to Kasım Dal, “one of Ahmet Doğan’s greatest mistakes has been to transform MRF into a corporation. Second, we are doing to ourselves what the communists could not do to us: we are melting away (in terms of losing our identity)” (Dal 2018).

Taken together, since the very beginning of the transition, the MRF has assumed two major roles in Bulgarian politics: upholding a deethnicized political space by acquiescing to a non-multiethnic nationhood model and becoming the stronghold of brutal oligarchic power in Bulgaria. In both of these roles, it has had the implicit support

of both the mainstream parties of the left and right. On the one hand, the nationhood cohesion between the mainstream parties has enabled them to cooperate and unconditionally support MRF's first role. On the other hand, their shifting electoral interests has led them to acquiesce to MRF's second role and strategically employ its swing vote to come to power. Under these conditions, it becomes highly unlikely to bridge the gap between descriptive and substantive representation in the case of Bulgarian Turks. The first role essentially entails that the MRF parts with any ethnic agenda. Likewise, there is little incentive for a highly corrupt hegemonic (minority) party, ruled with an iron fist, to invest in the socio-economic development of the regions its constituency inhabits.

4.8 The Rise of the Bulgarian Nationalist-Populist Parties NPP (2005-present): A Threat to the Mainstream Consensus and the Deethnicized Political Space?

Beginning with the 2005 parliamentary election, a number of parties/coalitions espousing boldly nationalist and populist ideas for the first time entered the Bulgarian National Legislature and later gained a share of executive power. Initially, it was the *Ataka* coalition led by the charismatic Volen Siderov that captured 21/240 assembly seats in the 2005 election and thus became the first openly nationalist/xenophobic political formation to enter the Bulgarian parliament. Subsequently, *Ataka*'s power expanded as it provided the swing vote in two consecutive elections: in the 2009 election when it carried to power for the first time the center-right GERB and in the 2013 election when it returned to power the former communists (BSP). The October 2014 snap election saw the emergence of the second nationalist-populist coalition, the Patriotic Front (PF) composed from the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) and IMRO-Bulgarian National Movement. PF's electoral debut was outstanding as it gained a share of executive power by carrying GERB to power for the second time. The PF would later join forces with *Ataka* and compete as the United Patriots (UP) in the most recent 2017 parliamentary election. The UP is currently part of the ruling coalition headed again by GERB.

For a country where the nationalist-populist parties (NPPs) previously "could not muster more than 1 or 2 percent of the vote" (Ganev 2006: 86) and where "Nationalism had remained at the fringes of Bulgarian party politics" (Stefanova 2009: 1538) such developments could hardly fail to grab the attention and puzzle scholars and policymakers alike. The emergence and subsequent rise to power of the NPPs through electoral alliances with both the mainstream parties of the left and right seems also to

pose a challenge to my argument that Bulgarian mainstream parties continue to be committed to upholding a deethnicized political space. This in turn lends credence to the claim that in the absence of a deethnicized political space, the hard-won ethnic peace in Bulgaria may well be upset. Indeed, the closest postcommunist Bulgaria has been to experiencing interethnic violence was in May 2011, when Ataka supporters staged a rally outside the Banya Bashi Mosque in Central Sofia to protest against the Muslims' use of loudspeakers for the call to prayers, and worshippers praying in public spaces outside the mosque. They subsequently attacked some Muslims during the Friday prayer and injured them (*Kırcaali Haber* 20 May 2011). These developments raise two important questions. Has the emergence and presence in government of the NPPs actually impaired the mainstream consensus on preserving a deethnicized political space? Are interethnic relations in Bulgaria headed toward a more violent turn? Although the developments in question are certainly concerning, answering the aforementioned questions in the affirmative would still be untenable for three main reasons.

First, the Bulgarian NPPs' nationalism is flexible and opportunistic and does not reflect any substantive commitment to act upon the ideas they boldly espouse (Dimitrov 2018). As former prime minister Filip Dimitrov (2018) remarks "If we compare, in Germany the far-right is very ardent, ours is flexible." Arguably, what mostly stands behind their inflammatory rhetoric is the quest for gaining a share of executive power (Dal 2018). Probably the best evidence to substantiate this claim is that in the aftermath of the May 2013 parliamentary election, Ataka joined forces with its alleged archenemy, the MRF, and together provided the swing vote that carried the former communists to power. Likewise, two former Ataka and Patriotic Front parliamentarians, Slavi Binev and Kamen Petkov, joined the MRF and ran as its candidates in the most recent March 2017 parliamentary election. Both Binev and Petkov were infamous for their previous calls for sending back the Bulgarian Turks to Turkey and abolishing the daily 10-minute Turkish broadcasting in the Bulgarian national television (*HaberTürk* 24 February 2017). Second, the NPPs have never seriously pushed their mainstream coalition partners in converting their xenophobic ideas into legislation. Indeed, virtually all the proposals that the NPPs have boldly put forward have remained at the level of rhetoric and none has become official policy. Such is the case with countless proposals to Bulgarianize the public space by Slavicizing the names of different monuments/places in minority-inhabited districts; ban the holding of public meetings in any language other

than Bulgarian; abolish the limited Turkish broadcasting in national television; prevent Bulgarian Turks from holding dual citizenship; ban the holding of the Friday sermons and other religious preachings in any language other than Bulgarian and enforce the flying of the Bulgarian flag on every mosque. The only NPP proposal that has become law up to now is the September 2016 “burqa ban” that made illegal the wearing of the full-face Islamic veil in the public places (*Reuters* 30 September 2016). Yet, by all accounts this ban is not something peculiar to Bulgaria but follows more a recent disturbing trend of Islamophobia in the Old Continent as many other prominent EU members (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Netherlands) have enacted similar laws that ban the wearing of burqa. Other than this case, the Bulgarian NPPs have never seriously pushed for their bold nationalist ideas to become law. Hence, this supports my claim that preserving a deethnicized political space continues to be a major norm guiding postcommunist Bulgarian politics.

Second, by all accounts it seems that leftist radicalist ideas weigh in much heavier than the rightist nationalist ones in the ideology and substantive commitment of the Bulgarian NPPs. Indeed, they have forcefully advocated the renationalization of Bulgarian economy, the implementation of a number of “chauvinistic welfare” policies, and have lambasted neoliberal capitalism as “ ‘a criminal regime’ responsible for ‘a genocide against the Bulgarian people’ ” (cited in Ganev 2017: S14). Furthermore, in stark contrast to their xenophobic ideas, several of NPPs’ leftist radicalist proposals have actually become laws, such as the ones mandating “hikes in pensions and Christmas and Easter cash subsidies for poor retirees” (Ganev 2018: 94). The very fact that the NPPs have managed to secure the support of the mainstream parties for passing social welfare legislation but have been reluctant/unable to do so when it came to antiminority legislation is an important evidence to substantiate my claim that the emergence of the NPPs in Bulgaria has *not* impaired the mainstream consensus on upholding a deethnicized political space.

Finally, electoral support for the NPPs in Bulgaria largely is *not* a result of antiminority public attitudes. Stated differently, average ethnic Bulgarians mostly do not cast their votes for the NPPs based on the latter’s xenophobic ideas. In an important study trying to explain electoral support for the radical right in Bulgaria during the 2005 election, Boyka Stefanova (2009) convincingly shows that Ataka’s electoral support in the ethnically mixed districts, the regions most likely to respond to Ataka’s xenophobic

appeal, was around or below its national average. Given that “radicalization of the vote did not occur in the ethnically mixed regions”, Stefanova concludes that “support for the radical right cannot be explained as a reaction against the presence of ethnic minorities” (Stefanova 2009: 1541). Rather she points to the importance of political agency and finds that voters’ confidence in the radical right and its charismatic leader are “the strongest single predictors of the radical-right vote” (Stefanova 2009: 1548-9). Indeed, the NPP’s leftist radicalist appeal and its capacity and commitment to deliver on its social welfare promises seems to be more binding to the average ethnic Bulgarians who have persistently grappled with the hassles of being EU’s poorest member country. When it comes to the NPPs’ xenophobic ideas, the Bulgarian public seems as interested and dedicated as the mainstream parties they vote for in preserving a deethnicized political space and maintaining the gap between descriptive and substantive representation for the ethnic Turks.

A last important issue needs to be addressed in this regard. Several interviewees confirmed to the author that *Ataka* was founded in 2005 with the direct financial support of Ahmet Doğan and the MRF (Dal 2018; Ömer 2018; Yüsein 2018). They all cited an authentic document recently leaked to the public where high-level MRF officials inform the party leader Ahmed Doğan that upon his orders they had handed down 1 million 600 thousand leva (800 thousand euros) to the would-be leader of *Ataka* Volen Siderov (Dal 2018; Ömer 2018; Yüsein 2018). The aim behind all this was to create a Bulgarian nationalist threat so that Turks/Muslims would be further unified around MRF. As aptly put by Hüseyin Ömer “You need a wolf to scare the sheeps, and that wolf became *Ataka*” (Ömer 2018). Ömer further claims that *Ataka*’s May 2011 attack on the Banya Başı mosque in Sofia during Friday prayers was ordered by Ahmed Doğan and the MRF, and they cashed on in this event to propagate the view that “the assimilation process had not yet ended” (Ömer 2018). Even if we accept the authenticity of such accounts, it is still very important for my argument the fact that the MRF chose/created a *non-mainstream* political actor (i.e. *Ataka*) to ethnicize political space given that mainstream parties in Bulgaria are still committed to play in a de-ethnicized political environment.

4.9 Concluding Remarks: Bulgaria’s Relations with the West and Russia and the Effect of External Actors on Ethnic Peace

In this dissertation I hypothesize that Western influence on containing violent conflict in multiethnic societies is more likely to be effective in countries with nationhood cohesion

because nationhood cohesion (be it multiethnic or non-multiethnic) facilitates the process of Western integration, and limits the influence of other external actors with agendas opposed to the West (such as Russia). The fact that among the three cases analyzed here, Bulgaria has had the smoothest integration process and it is the only country that is both an EU and NATO member largely confirms this hypothesis. In one aspect this should come out as surprising since, among the three cases, Bulgaria has the strongest pro-Soviet/pro-Russian past. However, Bulgaria's advantage, as Stefanos Katsikas (2012: 185) argues in a recent research, is that:

Bulgaria's post-1989 foreign policy should be seen as an outcome of *the political consensus established among domestic political actors* to fill the country's security vacuum by seeking Bulgaria's integration into structures of international organizations, such as the EU and NATO, and fostering relations with powerful Western states such as the USA, Germany, France, and Britain. This consensus has paved the way for the West's increasing engagement in Bulgaria's foreign policy making (my emphasis in italics)

The best illustration of this domestic consensus is the fact that Bulgaria became a NATO and EU member (January 2007) under the incumbency of political actors that had strong links and business interests with Russian oligarchs and Russian mafia. Respectively, when Bulgaria became a full NATO member in March 2004, the country was ruled by the former king Simeon's party (NDSV) in coalition with the Turkish MRF, two parties controlled by pro-Russian Bulgarian oligarchs (the most prominent among them is *Multigroup's* boss Iliya Pavlov). Likewise, when Bulgaria became a full EU member in January 2007, the country was ruled by the communist successor party (BSP) in coalition with NDSV and the Turkish MRF.

This reveals an interesting pattern concerning postcommunist Bulgarian foreign policy: notwithstanding the fact that most of the domestic political actors foster strong economic links with Russia, their *political* orientation is strongly pro-Western. When the two competing orientations have clashed, Bulgarian political elites have unanimously opted for the latter. The best illustration of this is the decision of first the BSP-led government of Plamen Oresharski and then of the GERB-led government of Boyko Borisov in 2014 to withdraw Bulgaria from the *South Stream*, "the crown jewel" of Vladimir Putin's strategy of building a southeast European gas corridor to bypass Ukraine (Bechev 2017: 105-107). The fact that this decision was taken in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis and was done to comply to EU and NATO orders shows the political

orientation of both mainstream parties in Bulgaria. As Dimitar Bechev (2017: 111-112) concludes:

Moscow no doubt has a strong lobby in Bulgaria, controls key chunks of the economy, and enjoys unqualified sympathies in some electoral segments of the population. On the flip side, Russia has failed to fully co-opt the Bulgarian political elite and enact a “Trojan horse” scenario. The ill-fated ‘grand slam’ (*South Stream*) demonstrates the limits of using corruption as a lever of power. Forced to make a choice between the EU and Moscow, Bulgaria opted, however begrudgingly, for the former.

Contrast this situation with North Macedonia that, despite lacking the shadow of a pro-Soviet past, is a country where Russia has managed to fully co-opt the mainstream centre-right party VMRO. The main reason behind this, as I have argued, is the national division between the major parties in Macedonia. VMRO considers the Americans and NATO as great friends of Albanians and holds them and SDSM responsible for all the major “evils” that have befallen the Macedonian nation, the 2018 *Prespa Agreement* being the most recent example. Hence, it is the national division in Macedonia that provides ample opportunities for Moscow to interfere in its domestic affairs and negatively affect interethnic relations.

While the nationhood cohesion in Bulgaria has paved the way for a smooth Western integration, at the same time it has proven to be a barrier to Western influences for improving minority rights in Bulgaria. Despite being both a full EU and NATO member, Bulgaria is still an assimilationist country that does not legally recognize ethnic minorities, bans ethnic parties, does not allow minority-language schools, and bans election campaigning in any language other than Bulgarian. The interesting part is that both Bulgarian elites in general and the Turkish MRF in particular support the thesis that it was primarily this assimilationist “Bulgarian ethnic model” that preserved ethnic peace in the country, and that European/Western influence is only secondary. As former UDF prime minister Filip Dimitrov told the author:

I think the main bulk of the work was already done domestically. Of course, the European influence from before accession and after, had its role. But I wouldn't say there was a particular pressure on the part of the EU one way or another to keep things in particular way. I would rather say, because of too much talking in the EU on these issues (minority rights), we could have the counterbalance of more talking on these issues in Bulgaria and the emergence of these nationalist parties, which as I said fortunately are rather flexible. Probably there could have been some counterbalance of the big words coming from Brussels. So, big words not always help. To give you a funny example, there was a study in 2004, I think made by the *Center for Liberal Strategies* here: “Fighting Corruption in the Balkans.” Very fashionable topic, everybody is fighting corruption everywhere. It found that the more you fight corruption on the TV, we are not talking about real measures, the more you fight it on the TV, the more it grows. The more you talk about it, the more you publicize the issue, the

more it grows. Because what they call transparency is a double-edged sword. Same with the ethnic issue here. Yes, talking all the time about this, you practically legitimize a certain behavior.

This demonstrates that once there is domestic agreement on how to deal with and “solve” the ethnic issue, there is not much external actors can do. In fact, domestic actors may even feel disturbed by the “big words” coming from abroad.

This chapter concludes by Table 4.8 that summarizes the case analysis of Bulgaria.

Table 4.8: Summary of the Case Analysis of Bulgaria.

Periods of Causal Importance	Developments
3 November 1988	Zhelyu Zhelev founds the <i>Club for Glasnost and Perestroika</i>
10 November 1989	Todor Zhivkov deposed in a peaceful palace coup by the reformist troika Lilov, Lukanov, and Mladenov
18 November 1989	First mass rally in Sofia after the removal of Zhivkov – appeals by human rights organizations to allow Turks reclaim their names were booed by the crowd
7 December 1989 22 December 1989	UDF formed; <i>Committee for National Reconciliation</i> formed 33 members of the underground resistance organization <i>Turkish National Liberation Movement</i> released from prison
29 December 1989	BCP’s Central Committee decides that Turks/Muslims who want to reclaim their names can do so by applying to the courts
30 December 1989 – 12 January 1990	Bulgarian nationalist mobilization in ethnically-mixed regions against the reversal of the assimilation process – Turkish counter-mobilization; ethnic peace under threat

4 January 1990	MRF founded in Varna by 33 former Turkish political prisoners
7 – 12 January 1990	BSP and UDF preside over the <i>Council for Discussion of the National Question</i> to appease the Bulgarian nationalist mobilization; mono-ethnic view of nationhood confirmed; evidences elite cooperation to contain escalation of ethnic tensions
22 January – May 1990	Bulgarian <i>Round Table Talks</i> between BSP and UDF; MRF excluded from participating; evidence of mono-ethnic cohesion and elite cooperation; “ <i>Soft Opposition Agreement</i> ”; preserved ethnic peace
29 March 1990	MRF’s founding conference in Sofia
April 1990	Two former Bulgarian <i>State Security</i> agents, Miroslav Drmov and Yuri Bahnev, write MRF’s charter and programme and register it at Sofia Regional Court
10 June 1990	First multiparty elections; BSP wins absolute majority (211/400); more than half of MRF’s 23 elected deputies former <i>State Security</i> agents/spies
September - November 1990	Mass demonstrations due to economic crisis; BSP government of Andrei Lukanov, as a threatened incumbent elite, peacefully steps down without resorting to nationalist and anti-minority rhetoric; evidences <i>nonviolent</i> forms of elite rivalry
May 1991	39 UDF deputies and most of MRF deputies leave the parliament during the constitutional debates; a game/move/tactic intended to ease BSP’s job in passing the constitution
12 July 1991	Post-communist Bulgarian constitution passes with 2/3 majority; On ethnic issues adopted the decisions of the RTT; fully institutionalized mono-ethnic nationhood
15 September 1991	Turks start protests and strikes for education in mother tongue

8 October 1991	93 BSP deputies petition the Constitutional Court to ban MRF
13 October 1991	MRF as “kingmaker” in Bulgarian politics after the second multiparty election; MRF first sides with UDF, then with BSP; <i>no</i> ethnic rights in return for MRF’s parliamentary support
7 November 1991	Turkish began to be taught as extra-curricular, elective course in public schools
21 April 1992	Constitutional Court rejects BSP’s petition and upheld MRF’s constitutionality
December 1992 – September 1994	MRF/ BSP- sponsored non-partisan <i>mafia</i> government of Liuben Berov
February 1994	PDP led by Mehmet Hoca and DPSpr led by Nedim Gencev founded; emergence of minority counter-elite; <i>no</i> challenge to the mainstream ethnic consensus
1995	Internal opposition in MRF; emergence of a “young Turks” group within MRF; Ahmet Doğan blocks attempts for changing MRF’s charter and programme
December 1996 – January 1997	Post-communist Bulgaria’s severest economic and political crisis; mass demonstrations against incumbent BSP; threatened incumbent elites again do not resort to ethno-nationalism but peacefully step down
12 December 1998	UDF deputy Güner Tahir founds another Turkish party NMRF; UDF leader and PM Ivan Kostov does not support the founding of the new Turkish party
2 October 2000	Nine-minute Turkish news broadcasting per day begin in the Bulgarian National Television; Legislative bill introduced by UDF deputy Güner Tahir and passed with UDF parliamentary support; <i>MRF boycotted the vote</i>
June 2001	MRF joins the government for the first time by carrying Simeon II’s NDSV to power; again

	dubbed as the <i>mafia/Multigroup</i> government (like Liuben Berov's in 1992-1994)
29 March 2004	Bulgaria becomes full member of NATO under its Jewish-descent foreign minister Solomon Passi
17 April 2005	Far-right nationalist party ATAKA founded with direct MRF support; Ahmet Doğan created/revived a Bulgarian threat to unify Turks/Muslims around MRF
June 2005	MRF for the second consecutive time in government with BSP and NDSV
2006	MRF deputy Kasım Dal's Legislative Bill to open former <i>State Security</i> files passed in parliament due to EU pressure; the investigative parliamentary commission could start work only in late 2008
13 March 2006	Center-right Bulgarian party GERB found by Boyko Borisov, former bodyguard of Todor Zhivkov
1 January 2007	Bulgaria becomes full EU member
June 2010	Grand Mufti crisis; massive Turkish/Muslim demonstrations in Sofia
20 May 2011	ATAKA attacks <i>Banya Başı</i> mosque in Sofia during Friday prayer; rumors that MRF ordered it
1 December 2012	New Turkish party <i>People's Party for Freedom and Dignity</i> founded by two former MRF deputies Korman Ismailov and Kasım Dal
May 2013	MRF allying with ATAKA carry BSP to power after snap parliamentary election
14 June 2013	Mass protests begin in Sofia after BSP-MRF-ATAKA coalition appoints mafia boss Delyan Peevski (a MRF deputy) as head of DANS (National Security Agency); government steps down peacefully

10 Nisan 2016	DOST party founded by former MRF leader Lyutvi Mestan; directly backed by Turkish ambassador in Sofia Süleyman Gökçe
26 March 2017	Most recent parliamentary election; DOST alliance falls one per cent short of clearing the threshold; MRF preserves monopoly of Turkish/Muslim representation; GERB's coalition government with three far-right nationalist parties takes over
21 December 2018	New Law on Religious Communities passes in parliament with GERB-MRF support; first time Bulgarian state allots 3 million euro yearly budget to the Office of Grand Mufti; several proposals by nationalist parties to restrict Muslim religious activities rejected by GERB-MRF

Chapter 5

MAJORITY NATIONHOOD COHESION, ELITE COOPERATION, AND INTERETHNIC PEACE IN POSTCOMMUNIST MONTENEGRO

The main ethnic Montenegrin parties that oversaw the process of political and economic transition in what was formerly the Socialist Republic of Montenegro are united on the nationhood question. Both the legal successor of the League of Communists of Montenegro, Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), and the two main ethnic Montenegrin opposition parties, Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), hold a dualistic, tribal, and civic/ multi-ethnic nationhood vision. First, all cling to the view that ethnic Montenegrins constitute a distinct South Slavic people that are culturally the closest to the Serbs. As such, Montenegrin and Serb are not perceived as mutually exclusive ethnic categories but rather as mutually inclusive ones. There does not necessarily exist any contradiction between self-identifying as Montenegrin and Serb at the same time. Xhemal Perovic, former leader and parliamentarian of the most pro-independence party in Montenegro LSCG, argues that his party's core vision is that "peace and harmony in Montenegro can only be built by acknowledging the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity ... What has been historically created can not be suppressed" (Perovic 2019).

Second, all main ethnic Montenegrin parties agree that local/regional/tribal allegiances constitute one of the primary ways of identification in Montenegro and as such differentiates Montenegrin nationhood from other South Slavic people. Ranko Krivokapic, SDP founder and leader, explicitly states that in Montenegro tribal identification runs deeper than political and often national identifications (Krivokapic 2019). Montenegrin historian Srda Pavlovic (2003: 88) writes:

remnants of that old tribal loyalty can still be detected today among the citizens of Montenegro. Many of them display a significantly high level of attachment and loyalty to their regional, local and tribal identities. In most cases, the first level of identification is either the region/nahiya (*Katunjanin, Crmničanin, Lješnjani, Bjelopavlić, Cuca, Bjelica, Malisor, Bokelj*), or the tribe whose geographic boundaries and name usually correspond with the region (*Vasojevići tribe, Drobnjak tribe*, etc.). Only then, and only in terms of a more general level of identification, which is, at present, heavily coloured by the ideologies of the day, does one come across national categories such as Montenegrin, Serb, Serb from Montenegro, Albanian, Muslim or Croat. (*italics in original*)

Although Montenegrin identity is inherently dualistic, the primacy of tribal allegiances sets it apart from the Serbian one (Perovic 2019) and “the persistence at least till very recently of a clan-based society with its own value system – have (has) made Montenegrins different” (Roberts 2007: 37).

Third, all main ethnic Montenegrin parties cling to the view that it is the state that has created the Montenegrin nation and as such Montenegrin nationhood is built upon the link with the state rather than with a community of common descent. According to Krivokapic (2019), although identities are mostly relational, the fact that Montenegrin nationhood is not defined in opposition to anything makes it civic. Moreover, the absence of “the other” in defining Montenegrin nationhood makes it multi-ethnic towards the non-Orthodox minorities (Catholic and Muslim) living in Montenegro. Hence, as DPS deputy Luigj Shkreli points out, Montenegro is the only country in the Balkans where *all* majority parties define themselves as citizen parties, not as ethnic ones (Shkreli 2019). However, when facing great Serbian ideology that totally denies the existence of a Montenegrin south slavic nation and suppresses the dualism inherent in it, Montenegrin identity temporally takes an anti-great Serbian, *not* anti-Serbian, stance (Krivokapic 2019; Popovic 2019).

5.1 Historical Roots of the Nationhood Cohesion

The dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity stems from at least one and a half century of contradictory nation-building policies (Perovic 2019). Due to its mountainous terrain and small size, Montenegro was the only country in the Balkan peninsula that preserved some relative sovereignty/autonomy and never came fully under Ottoman rule (Darmanovic 2003: 146). While Montenegrin dynastic rulers from at least the time of Petar Petrovic II Njegos (1830-1851) took pride in leading the then only autonomous polity in the Balkans, at the same time, driven by dynastic interests they promoted themselves as heir to the medieval Serbian Nemanjic kingdom and leader of the south Slavic nations that were then under Ottoman rule (Pavlovic 2008: 53). These contradictory policies reached the peak with the last and longest-serving ruler from the Petrovici dynasty, Nikola I Petrovic (1860-1918), who aimed at “building the Serbian state around the Piedmont of Cetinje” and becoming “Russia’s main strategic partner and chief agent in the Balkans” (Morrison 2009: 29-31). King Nikola sought to advance his pan-Serbian and pan-Slavic agenda by marrying five of “statuesque and attractive

daughters” to some of the greatest royal houses of Europe: House of Savoy in Italy, Romanov, Habsburg, and Karadjordjevic in Serbia (Roberts 2007: 261-265). In short, dubbed as “Europe’s father-in-law”, King Nikola with his contradictory nation-building policies imprinted on the mass consciousness of Montenegrins a dualism that rendered Montenegrin and Serbian mutually inclusive ethnic categories (Perovic 2019).

Serbia’s annexation of Montenegro in the aftermath of the First World War and Karadjordjevic dynasty’s great Serbian politics during first Yugoslavia (1918-1941) represents the first historical attempt to suppress this dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity and hence deny the existence of a Montenegrin south Slavic nation. As such, Montenegrin identity temporarily gained an anti-great Serbian stance (Popovic 2019). Morrison (2009: 43) rightly points out that “The idea of unification had not been anathema to most Montenegrins, but ... they wanted the union implemented in a way befitting of the proud Montenegrin people. They wanted their dignity maintained, equality guaranteed and their identity preserved.” Serbian annexation thus provided Montenegrin identity with its “other” and “breathed life into the Montenegrin national idea” (Morrison 2009: 40). Prominent Montenegrin academic and intellectual Milan Popovic nicely summarizes the contradictory nation-building policies up to this point:

Here in Montenegro we have never had stabilized, clear identities. As I told you, according to most sources, most of the Montenegrins in the 19th century considered themselves, it was official ideology, being Serbs. By the way, the best Serbs. There is little bit of racism in that kind of proudness of Montenegrins. And even King Nikola who was the greatest victim of the great Serbian politics of the First World War, even him, until the last day of his rule, he pretended to be the king of all Serbs. Then, great trauma after the First World War, lost of kingship, independence, identity, and humiliation in great Serbian Yugoslavia, first Yugoslavia between the wars. So, the first trauma was also the beginning of re-making Montenegrin identity as anti-great Serbian. Let me give you an example. Sekula Drljevic, he was for Yugoslavia after First World War, but in which Montenegro will be equal part with Serbia, Croatia etc. When Montenegro was simply absorbed by Serbia, he and the others considered it being a humiliation of the best Serbs. And Sekula Drljevic development is the most illustrative. He finished in the government of Ante Pavelic’s Ustase in Croatia, fascist Ustase. So, the change was tremendous (Popovic 2019).

Montenegro regained its statehood and identity with the advent of socialist Yugoslavia by becoming one of the six constituent republics. In essence, for five decades socialist Yugoslavia’s nationality policies revived the dualism and ambiguity characterising Montenegrin identity and as such could be viewed as a continuation of the contradictory policies of the Petrovic dynasty. Unlike the other five constituent republics, in Montenegro federal authorities were very slow in establishing the required national institutions for the development of a distinct titular identity (Jenne and Bieber 2014: 443).

Indeed, Ljubisa Stankovic, leader of the first opposition alliance Union of Reformist Forces (SRS), states that the communist authorities did not establish a university in Montenegro until 1974; the Montenegrin Academy of Arts and Sciences was not established until 1976, and the only national newspaper *Pobjeda* (Victory) was weekly until very late (Stankovic 2019). The capital city was moved from Cetinje, Petrovic dynasty's old royal capital, to Titograd/Podgorica (Perovic 2019). Equally significant, communist authorities did not separate the Montenegrin Orthodox Church from the Serbian one (the two had been merged after Serbia annexed Montenegro in 1918), even though in 1967 they had pushed for the split of the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the Serbian one (Bieber 2003: 26). "Communists turned us the state, but not the church" avers Ranko Krivokapic. Last, to guard against great Serbian ideology, the socialist regime rewrote interwar Montenegrin history by removing all traces of the 1918 Serbian annexation. As Krivokapic recalls, "My generation, when we talk for independence, we didn't know about 1918. We didn't learn about it in Yugoslavia. We knew that we existed like a state, but we didn't know about Serbian occupation" (Krivokapic 2019).

It is interesting to note the differing communist nationality policies with regard to Macedonia and Montenegro. As we saw, the communist regime in Macedonia was the first to establish statehood and institute the vision that Macedonians are a distinct south Slavic nation and persecuted and even killed those Macedonians who denied this imposed ethno-genesis. Hence, it generated intra-ethnic exclusion. However, in the Montenegrin case, the communist regime revived the legacy of the pre-communist past and perpetuated the dualism and ambiguity inherent in Montenegrin identity. Hence, by allowing for "overlapping double identity" (Popovic 2019) the communist regime in Montenegro did not generate intra-ethnic exclusion and made everyone from the Orthodox majority have a stake in the system. Indeed, Milovan Djilas, one of socialist Yugoslavia's most prominent leaders (and later dissident) who was native Montenegrin, "denounced those who sowed divisions between Serbs and Montenegrins, as well as those who sought to undermine a distinctive Montenegrin identity" (Jenne and Bieber 2014: 442).

Slobodan Milosevic's rise to power in Serbia and his great Serbian politics represent the second attempt, after Karadjordjevic dynasty during first Yugoslavia, to suppress the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity. By claiming that Montenegrin identity is an artificial creation of communist Yugoslavia, Milosevic's Serbia denied the existence of a distinct Montenegrin south Slavic nation and forced the Orthodox majority

to choose among Montenegrin and Serb as mutually exclusive ethnic categories (Perovic 2019). This once more provided Montenegrin identity with its “other” and remade it as anti-great Serbian (Popovic 2019). As Malesevic and Uzelac also point out, it was the geopolitical shifts that came with Milosevic’s radical policies and Yugoslavia’s subsequent disintegration that “broke this ambiguity” inherited from the past concerning Montenegrin identity and “set Serbian and Montenegrin nationalisms on a direct collision course” (Malesevic and Uzelac 2007: 713).

A useful analogy can be drawn between the policies of Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s and those of Petar and Alexander Karadjordjevic during the interwar years. Just as Karadjordjevic’s annexation of Montenegro and their great Serbian politics had made all political parties self-identifying as Montenegrin support equality and federation at the time, Milosevic’s great Serbian politics also unified Montenegrin parties and pushed them towards supporting independence. While LSCG and SDP came out openly since 1990 in favor of independence, DPS’ position changed more gradually. After seven years of uneasy coexistence with Milosevic pushing for equality, DPS split in 1997 with the Serbian strongman and thereafter supported independence. To sum up, 150 years of contradictory nation-building policies (Petrovic dynasty and socialist Yugoslavia’s long-term ambiguous identitarian policies & Karadjordjevic and Milosevic’s short-term great Serbian politics) unified Montenegrin parties around a nationhood vision that acknowledged the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity and opposed great Serbian ideology.

5.1.1 Civic/Multi-ethnic Nationhood Cohesion

Apart from being dualistic, the nation-building policies of different Montenegrin regimes throughout the past 150 years have been distinctly multi-ethnic towards the non-Orthodox minorities. Especially, the politics of the last and longest-serving ruler of independent Montenegro, King Nikola I (1860-1918), were relatively liberal for “a time when there was neither United Nations nor any European convention on human rights” (Perovic 2019). Indeed, when Montenegro under King Nikola annexed the Albanian settlements of Bar and Ulcinj in the aftermath of the 1878 Congress of Berlin, the local Muslim population was allowed to keep to their local military units, shariat rule and their mosques were preserved (Krivokapic 2019). As Krivokapic further clarifies:

Only Montenegro has done it in the Balkans. Don’t forget, we were Orthodox theocracy until 1852, and still protected Muslims. It was historical maturity and smart behavior of our rulers. That’s the base for Montenegrin success. On the other side was Serbia where they destroyed

all the mosques. Belgrade had about 365 mosques, only one survived. Same with Bulgaria (Krivokapic 2019).

Coupled also with socialist Yugoslavia's multi-ethnic policies, it is safe to argue that, concerning non-Orthodox minorities, the primary aim of Montenegrin nation-building throughout the last one and a half century has been to accommodate their ethno-religious identity and keep them inside Montenegro (Krivokapic 2019; Perovic 2019). This markedly contrast with the primary aim of Bulgarian nation-building throughout roughly the same period, which has been, as we saw, to expel and assimilate its Muslim/Turkish minority. Montenegro's long-term multi-ethnic policy has built confidence within the non-Orthodox minorities and has made them very loyal to the Montenegrin state. Again, if we need to quote Krivokapic, "that behavior [King Nikola's multi-ethnic policies] in the second part of the 19th century protected Montenegro in the 20th and 21st century. That confidence within Albanians and Muslims [Bosniaks] protected Montenegro at the end of the 20th century [during Yugoslavia's disintegration in the 1990s]" (Krivokapic 2019).

This is why postcommunist Montenegrin parties, which all lay claim to the Petrovic and socialism's multi-ethnic legacies, have proclaimed themselves as citizen parties and Albanians and Bosniaks in Montenegro, as we are going to see, cast their votes more often for mainstream Montenegrin parties rather than for their own ethnic parties. Notably, the first election campaign slogan of the opposition SRS (which at the time comprised of LSCG and SDP) during the first multiparty election in December 1990 featured King Nikola's royal family portrait with the inscription "Free Montenegro. For a Lifetime" (Krivokapic 2019).



Figure: 5.1 SRS' election campaign slogan in 1990.

Source: I am grateful to Mirko Stanic, SDP's spokesperson, for providing me with this picture from the party's archive in Cetinje. The picture features the royal family portrait commemorating proclamation of the kingdom of Montenegro in August 1910. *Back row from left:* grand duke Peter Nikolayevich, prince Franz Joseph of Battenberg, 2 of king Nikola's daughters (Vjera and Ksenija) and his 3 sons (Danilo, Mirko, and Petar). *Seated from left:* 3 of Nikola's daughters (Milica, Ana, and Yelena), queen Milena, king Nikola, his other daughter, king Victor Emmanuel III of Italy, princess Natalia. *Seated front, from left:* Nikola's daughter (Zorka), princess Marina Romanov, crown prince Alexandar Karadjordjevic of Serbia.

As SDP founder and leader Ranko Krivokapic recalls, the main reason for choosing this election campaign slogan was to "remind authorities of his [King Nikola's] multiethnic achievements" at a time when great Serbian/Chetnik/Ustase ideology was reigning over a disintegrating Yugoslavia. By featuring five of king Nikola's daughters with their European royal husbands, the slogan aimed also at promoting European values given king Nikola's status as "Europe's father-in-law" (Krivokapic 2019). However, featuring also Serbian crown prince Alexander Karadjordjevic (Nikola's nephew¹), the

¹ One of Nikola's daughters, Zorka, was married to Petar Karadjordjevic. Alexandar was their second son.

picture bears witness also to King Nikola's contradictory nation-building policies and to his aim of uniting and becoming the king of all Serbs under his (i.e. Petrovic) dynasty.² As such, this election campaign slogan illustrates how LSCG and SDP inherited both the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity and its multi-ethnic approach towards minorities.

DPS as the communist successor party, at the beginning, nominally inherited both these features as well. Although it opposed LSCG and SDP's calls for independence, it nonetheless promoted Montenegrin identification throughout the republic and sought to protect equality within the federation with Serbia (Bieber 2003: 20; Jenne and Bieber 2014: 450). Likewise, since the very beginning it proclaimed itself as a citizen party and had many minority representatives (Albanian and Bosniak/Muslim) elected (Perovic 2019). However, DPS' (to a good extent forced upon) alignment with Milosevic's regime for the first seven years (1990-1997) initially tainted its claims to civicness/multi-ethnicity. It was only after the split with Milosevic in 1997 that DPS fully adopted LSCG and SDP's political platform. As the leaders of these parties frequently acknowledge, in the post-1997 period DPS "hijacked" LSCG and SDP's program (Krivokapic 2019; Perovic 2019; Stanic 2019).

5.2 Ethnic Structure

According to the most recent 2011 census, Montenegro has a population of 620,029. Its ethnic composition (in numbers and percentage) is given below in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Ethnic Composition of Montenegro.

Ethnic Group	Total number	% of total population
Montenegrin	278,865	45
Serb	178,110	28.72
Bosniak	53,605	8.64
Albanian	30,439	4.9
Muslim	20,537	3.31
Roma	6,251	1
Croat	6,021	0.97

Source: MONSTAT (2011)

² Paradoxically, eight years after this picture was taken (1918), the opposite of what king Nikola had aimed at occurred. It was Karadjordjevic's Serbia that annexed Montenegro, de-throned the Petrovic dynasty, and thus king Nikola became the greatest victim of great Serbian ideology.

As can be clearly observed from Table 5.1, there is no majority ethnic group in Montenegro. People self-identifying as ethnic Montenegrin make up only a plurality (45 %) of the total population, while ethnic Serbs a very large minority (28.72 %). However, this has not always been the case. Due to the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity (“overlapping double identity”), it has been in a constant state of flux over the past three decades (Popovic 2019). To make this point clearer, a comparison of the data from the last four Montenegrin censuses is necessary.

Table 5.2 Over-time Shifts in Montenegro’s Ethnic Composition

Ethnic Group	1981 Census	1991 Census	2003 Census	2011 Census
Montenegrin	68.5	61.9	43.16	45
Serb	3.3	9.3	32	28.72
Bosniak	-	-	7.77	8.64
Albanian	6.5	6.6	5.03	4.9
Muslim	13.4	14.6	3.97	3.31
Yugoslav	5.3	4.3	0.3	-
Croat	1.2	1.0	1.10	0.97
Roma	0.3	0.5	0.42	1

Source: MONSTAT (2011)

As Table 5.2 shows, Montenegrins constituted an absolute majority of the population during socialist Yugoslavia’s last decade and also during the period it began to disintegrate, while Serbs were clearly a minority. However, over the next two decades we observe a precipitous drop in the number of people self-identifying as Montenegrin and a simultaneous surge in the number of people self-identifying as Serbs. Indeed, census data shows that more than 20 per cent of the people who in 1991 self-identified as Montenegrins a decade later shifted to identifying themselves as Serbs. The majority of these people were from the municipalities in north Montenegro that bordered Serbia (Jenne and Bieber 2014: 447- 449). The reason for these unusual massive identity shifts should be evident in light of our discussion above over the historical roots of Montenegrin nationhood.

Montenegrins constituted a majority during Yugoslav period because, due to the dualistic and ambiguous communist nationality policy, the Orthodox majority population did not necessarily see any contradiction between being Montenegrin and Serb at the same

time. In other words, for them Montenegrin and Serb constituted mutually inclusive ethnic categories. However, Milosevic's rise to power in 1987 and his great Serbian politics thereafter suppressed this dualism and rendered Montenegrin and Serb mutually *exclusive* ethnic categories (Perovic 2019; Popovic 2019). This claim is substantiated by the fact that this massive identity shift had already started by 1991, 4 years after Milosevic had come to power, and only accelerated thereafter throughout the 1990s. Hence, Jenne and Bieber refer to this phenomenon as "situational nationalism ... national identities that shift in response to overarching, compelling geopolitical battles that appeal to the loyalties of individuals in fluid identity settings." (Jenne and Bieber 2014: 439).

At the same time, this means that in absence of any political upheaval in the wider neighborhood in the future, in absence of any other upsurge of great Serbian ideology, "Montenegrin identity will (again) stabilize, Serbian identity will probably return to 10 to 15 percent and it will be consolidated" (Popovic 2019). Indeed, a comparison of the 2003 and 2011 census data shows that five years after the 2006 independence referendum, Serbian identity already started to decline and Montenegrin identity started to rise.

5.2.1 Albanians in Montenegro

As shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, ethnic Albanians, who make up 5 % of the total population, are the fourth largest ethnic group in Montenegro (after Montenegrins, Serbs, and Bosniaks). Out of 30 439 Albanians in Montenegro, 28 741 (94.4 %) identified Albanian as their mother tongue and 1 187 (3.89 %) identified Montenegrin as their mother tongue. What is more significant, 22 267 (73.15 %) among them self-identified as Muslim and 7 954 (26.13 %) self-identified as Catholic (MONSTAT 2011). As such, Montenegrin Albanians with a Muslim majority and a large Catholic minority display a religious pattern that closely matches that of Albania (which in addition has also a smaller Orthodox minority in the south). On the other hand, this contrasts with Albanians in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and south Serbia/Presevo valley who are overwhelmingly (95+ %) Muslim. Table 5.3 below lists the municipalities in Montenegro where ethnic Albanians make up more than 5 % of the local population, and Figure 5.2 presents the ethnic Albanian settlements in a map.

Table 5.3: Municipalities in Montenegro (out of a total of 22) where ethnic Albanians constitute more than 5 % of the population (2011 census).

Municipality	% ethnic Albanian	% other
Ulcinj	70.65	12.43 % Montenegrin

Tuzi	65	25 % Bosniak
Plav	18.88	51.91 % Bosniak
Bar	6	46.5 % Montenegrin
Rozaje	5.04	84 % Bosniak

Source: MONSTAT (2011).



Figure 5.2 Ethnic Albanian settlements in Montenegro

Note: Until very recently, Tuzi administratively was part of the municipality of the capital city Podgorica. Since 1 September 2018, Tuzi was granted full municipality status and thus became the 22nd municipality in Montenegro.

As shown in Table 5.3, ethnic Albanians constitute an absolute majority in only 2 /22 (9%) municipalities in Montenegro, both of them bordering Albania. One of them (Ulcinj) lies in the south of Lake Scutari /Skadar and on the Adriatic coast. The other (Tuzi) lies in the north of Lake Scutari. The religious composition of these two Albanian-majority municipalities is in itself quite revealing. While Ulcinj is a Muslim-majority municipality with a significant Catholic minority, Tuzi is a Catholic-majority municipality with a large Muslim minority. Indeed, according to the 2011 census, of the 14 076 Albanians residing

in Ulcinj, 12 313 (87.47 %) self-identify as Muslim and 1 704 (13.83 %) self-identify as Catholic. Of the 9 538 Albanians residing in Tuzi, 5 929 (62 %) self-identify as Catholic and 3 521 (37 %) as Muslim.

Albanians also constitute a large minority (19 %) in the Bosniak-majority municipality of Plav (bordering also Albania) and a small minority in the Montenegrin-plurality municipality of Bar /Tivar (on the shore of Lake Scutari) and the Bosniak-majority municipality of Rozaje (bordering Kosovo). The overwhelming majority (95+ %) of Albanians living in the municipalities of Bar, Plav, and Rozaje are Muslim.

Two major observations are in order when analyzing the map presented in Figure 5.2. Firstly, the ethnic Albanian settlements in Montenegro, unlike those in North Macedonia, are not geographically continuous. The only two Albanian-majority towns (Ulcinj and Tuzi) lie in opposite shores of the Lake Scutari, Balkans' largest lake. Taken together, Ulcinj and Tuzi are also divided from the municipalities of Plav and Rozaje by the mountain mass that lies in the border between Montenegro and north Albania. Secondly, with the exception of the small Albanian minority that lives in Rozaje, all ethnic Albanian settlements in Montenegro border Albania and not Kosovo. This again differs from the Albanian settlements in North Macedonia which border both Kosovo and Albania. In the Montenegrin case, as Geert Ahrens rightly points out "This closeness to Albania proper was important because the Greater Kosovo concept, which was a problem for Macedonia and southern Serbia, was inappropriate for most of the Albanian areas of settlement in Montenegro. Only the Greater Albania concept ... could become a problem for Montenegro" (Ahrens 2007: 264).

Hence, arguably there are certain demographic factors in the Montenegrin case which make the prospect of interethnic violence less likely than in North Macedonia (i.e. Montenegrin Albanians are much smaller in number; they are not religiously homogeneous, though still non-Orthodox; their areas of settlement are not geographically continuous, and they border Albania, not Kosovo). However, on the other side, the Montenegrin case has also another demographic and ideological element not found in the North Macedonian one, and that is the very strong ethnic Serb presence in Montenegro and the fluidity of Montenegrin self-identification that makes possible instantaneous surges in the number of self-declared Serbs. The fact that most of these Serbs and the parties that represent them are imbued with great Serbian ideology and aggressive rhetoric towards Albanians (and Bosniaks), brought in several instances interethnic relations and

tensions in postcommunist Montenegro to the brink of full-scale violence. What prevented the tensions from escalating into violence, as I am going to argue, is exactly Montenegrin parties' unity around a vision that acknowledges dualism but rejects great Serbianism, is open towards non-Orthodox minorities, and the primacy of local/tribal attachments.

5.3 Political Context and Background

Montenegrin political transition began to take shape with the mass protests the engulfed the country starting from August 1988. What precipitated these protests was the severe economic crisis Montenegro (like all other Yugoslav republics) was passing through, and the austerity measures imposed as a result of by the League of Communists of Montenegro (SKCG) (Bieber 2003: 12- 13). Hence, originally the protests were organized and led by trade union leaders, workers, and students from the University of Titograd (former name of Podgorica) who were then members of the communist youth organization. However, since the very beginning, among the protestors there was also a discernible group whose primary aim was to condemn SKCG leadership for their inaction with regard to the alleged human rights violations of Serbs and their expulsion from Kosovo (Morrison 2018: 31-32). This was precisely the constituency that was being mobilized by Milosevic and his secret services to topple SKCG old party leadership and thus win the support of one more republic in the 8-seat Yugoslav collective presidency.³ As Roberts argues, "Milosevic aimed to unite many Montenegrins behind the traditional banner of the defense of Serbdom and to appeal to their strong support for the Yugoslav idea" (Roberts 2007: 431). In brief, a look at some of the slogans used in these protests shows that what the authorities were facing was actually a toxic mix of economic, political, social, and aggressive nationalistic demands (Morrison 2009: 83-84; Morrison 2018: 29):

- We want to work and earn our living!
- These people are seeking bread, because a better government they need!
- Hey, people of Montenegro, prepare for elections!
- Slobodan, you Serbian son, when will you come to Cetinje? When will you come to Lovcen? We are waiting for you with a medal!
- You have betrayed Milosevic – you have betrayed Serbdom!
- Slobodan, we are your soldiers – we shall kill or we shall die!

³ By the summer of 1988, through mobilizing the Serbs in mass protests and instrumentalizing also the economic difficulties, Milosevic had already succeeded in replacing the old communist leadership in Serbia's autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina. His strategy for Montenegro was identical.

These slogans are also revealing of the fact that the identity shift within a part of the Orthodox majority (i.e. from Montenegrin to Serbian) had already started in the second half of 1988. To sum up, Ljubisa Stankovic, one of the protest leaders from the communist youth organization and later leader of the first opposition alliance SRS, provides a succinct summary of the political situation of the time:

There was an opinion in the society, in the whole society that communist regime and communist system cannot respond and cannot resolve the problems and the challenges that we were facing by that time. And people expected change. So that was I think the dominant opinion. But then I would say that within that general opinion there were many groups and reasons why they protested against the government by that time ... Of course we knew from the beginning, we were aware from the beginning that there were groups protesting for changes of the government because it did not support fully Milosevic and what he wants with Kosovo. But we thought it was marginal. We really in no way thought by that time that they were dominant ... Our opinion was that as young, educated, intellectuals, we will be able to lead all that energy towards democracy and democratic changes, what unfortunately latter did not happen (Stankovic 2019).

After five months of protests, SKCG old leadership collectively resigned on 11 January 1989. A new eleven-man presidency assumed power. What was called “the anti-bureaucratic revolution” was clearly nothing more than an internal party coup, similar to what would happen in November 1989 in Bulgaria when Zhivkov would be deposed in a peaceful palace coup. However, different from Bulgaria, leadership change in the communist party in Montenegro was achieved as a result of genuine mass protests and mobilization, and this would produce at least initially some positive changes for the country. Indeed, Ljubisa Stankovic convincingly argues that many members of SKCG’s new eleven-men presidency were actually reformist and favored democratic changes.

Srdjan Darmanovic, Svetozar Marovic and some other people in the presidency, they were really people for democratic changes, forward-looking, especially Darmanovic who was in youth organization. We wrote a program for democratic society, so we published even the program by that time, official program of our wills and what we want to achieve, and that program was a booklet for democratic changes, for democracy (Stankovic 2019).

And for one year after the January 1989 SKCG leadership change, many positive changes happened politically in Montenegro. Significantly, key posts in the executive and administration were filled with reformist people. For instance, after the old leadership resigned, Veselin Vukotic served as interim party president from January to April 1989. Dragan Radonjic was elected as the new president of the parliament and Ivan Brajovic as the vice-president. Managing editors for both Radio Television Montenegro (RTCG) and the then only (government) newspaper *Pobjeda* were democratically-oriented people.

Thus, as Stankovic recalls, “It looked like, yeah, we’d done the job. Young people are there, democratic people are there. 1989 looked like we were winning ... That we are leading, that we put our people in all important positions and that we will win” (Stankovic 2019). Moreover, in April 1989, the eleven-men presidency voted among them to elect Momir Bulatovic as the new SKCG president and Milo Dukanovic as party secretary. Both were very young at the time (Bulatovic 33 and Dukanovic 27) and were very prominent and outspoken among the youth organization⁴, so “nobody even liked to challenge them” (Stankovic 2019).

Lastly, by the end of 1989, the first anti-communist opposition party was formed in Montenegro, the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG) led by Slavko Perovic. LSCG was the first in Montenegro to come out publicly with the vision that if one of the six Yugoslav republics secedes, Yugoslavia ceases to exist and thus Montenegro reserves the right to become a sovereign country like it was (for the last time) in the 19th century. Party’s emblem featured three olympic rings that symbolised the historical interconnectedness between three civilizations and religions in Montenegro, Orthodoxism, Islam, and Catholicism. Lastly, party’s slogan proclaimed that Montenegro is one family and it belongs to the European family (Perovic 2019).

Another positive political development during 1989 was the election for the new member of the Yugoslav collective presidency from Montenegro. For the first time, the Montenegrin member would be elected among three candidates (Stankovic 2019), and one of the candidates proposed by many organizations was Milan Popovic, who at the time was known as a critic and semi-dissident. As Popovic (2019) himself explains:

I used to be in Brighton, UK. It was my first British scholarship. And I was informed through telephone conversation that I was proposed by many organizations to be in the new federal presidency. When I returned to Montenegro in April 1989, I had a meeting with Svetozar Marovic, I was close with Marovic, he was the best among them [the ruling troika Bulatovic, Dukanovic, and Marovic]. So, I had a meeting with Marovic and Bulatovic, but not with the third Dukanovic ... In these two conversations, I told Marovic and Bulatovic that I am watching and following the developments and that my impression is that greater Serbian forces are dominant. And if that continues, I will not accept the candidacy, if it changes I will accept it.⁵

All the aforementioned facts show that, different from what is claimed in the literature (Bieber 2003; Malesevic and Uzelac 2007; Morrison 2009), the January 1989 anti-

⁴ Bulatovic was one of the student leaders in the 1988 protests while Dukanovic was the representative of the Montenegrin communist youth organization in Belgrade (Stankovic 2019).

⁵ Popovic eventually turned down the proposal for candidacy explaining that he didn’t “want to be part of greater Serbian policy in Montenegro” (Popovic 2019).

bureaucratic revolution in Montenegro did not at the beginning generate a pro-Milosevic regime. Milosevic still did not have control of Montenegro by 1989. Most significantly, this is substantiated by the fact that all those Serbian nationalist groups from the previous 1988 protests began to mobilize again, this time against the new SKCG leadership to protest its alleged inaction with regard to the situation of Serbs in Kosovo. As Stankovic argues:

Of course they [Serbian nationalist groups in Montenegro] were not satisfied because we were satisfied. They were not satisfied with the changes. (They argued that) The new government is not better than the old one, they do not support enough Milosevic and said we are going to organize a new January protest in Montenegro, in front of the parliament. That was January 1990, exactly on the same day [as the anti-bureaucratic revolution of 11 January 1989] (Stankovic 2019).

In order to discuss on how to respond and contain this new wave of Serbian nationalist mobilization, in a development reminiscent of the Bulgarian transition, the ruling SKCG decided to organize a Democratic Forum (DF) inviting the newly formed opposition party, LSCG, and minority representatives (who by that time had not formed a party yet). DF, the Montenegrin variant of the Round Table Talks, began on 11 January 1990 and was led by Ljubisa Stankovic. The major decision coming out of the DF was that Montenegro has to go for multiparty elections in order to be able to face the new challenges from Yugoslavia's potential disintegration and the rising tide of great Serbian nationalism. Although Bulatovic and Dukanovic initially opposed the idea, then they both endorsed it. As such, DF took primarily an institutional function and set out to design the electoral system and laws of the new democratic regime. Accordingly, all participants agreed upon founding a parliamentary system of government and PR-based electoral system with a three percent threshold (Stankovic 2019). The fact that in the Montenegrin case both mainstream parties (SKCG/DPS and LSCG) agreed upon inviting minority representatives (Albanian and Bosniak/Muslim) is revealing of their multiethnic cohesion since, it will be recalled, in the Bulgarian case both BSP and UDF rejected having DPS in the Round Table Talks. Thus, Albanians (and Bosniaks) were *included* in the founding act of Montenegrin democracy while Turks/Muslims in Bulgaria were explicitly *excluded*. In North Macedonia, by contrast, there was no Round Table Talks.

5.3.1 *The Split of the Ruling Communist Party (SKCG)*

Until the DF in January 1990, things appeared to move in a positive direction for the small Yugoslav republic. However, the first real cracks and split in the ruling SKCG came at

the federal level during the crucial February 1990 Congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party (SKJ), which was also going to be its last. In that Congress only two (Ljubisa Stankovic and Srdjan Darmanovic) of the six-member Montenegrin delegation voted in favor of holding multiparty elections in the federal level and also supported Croatia and Slovenia's proposal for a looser confederal arrangement, the other four sided with Milosevic. After all Slovenian proposals were rejected, the Slovenian and Croatian delegation walked out of the Congress. At that point, opposing the other pro-Milosevic members of the Montenegrin delegation, Ljubisa Stankovic proposed to follow suit and leave also the Congress. This is how he recalls the events:

(I said) When Slovenia left, when Croatia left, and there are good signs that Bosnia will leave, we [Montenegrin delegation] should not go back, we should leave all with them because that is not more Yugoslav Congress, that is leading to big problems. Montenegro should abstain as well and wait until they find a common ground to continue. And I was really by that time very much criticized. When we went back to Montenegro ... I left communist party by giving just a paper that I don't want to be a member of that party any more. So, I formally went out of the party, Darmanovic followed and all that youth organization, Krivokapic, Brajovic, all of them, then followed president of Montenegrin parliament (Stankovic 2019).

Hence, February 1990 SKJ Congress marked the end of consensus within SKCG. Once the reformist wing collectively resigned from the party, SKCG was left in the hands of the conservative troika, Bulatovic, Dukanovic, and Marovic. In April 1990, the reformists who resigned from the communist party joined forces with Slavko Perovic's LSCG and together founded *Savez Reformskih Snaga* (SRS), Alliance of Reformist Forces. "It looked like by that time we really had a strong opposition" avers Stankovic (2019), leader of SRS. However, the failure of the February 1990 SKJ Congress marked also the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia as it was. What Milosevic could potentially preserve at that point was only a rump Yugoslavia and to achieve that he needed to control and keep Montenegro at all costs. Montenegro's exceptionally small size, its cultural closeness to Serbia and the very strong pro-Yugoslav feelings among Montenegrins facilitated somewhat Milosevic's mission. Despite this, Milosevic wanted to be fully assured and for this he proceeded to take over the administration, media, and security agencies in Montenegro starting from March 1990. As Mirko Stanic, SDP spokesperson, aptly describes:

It was really state security for the security of Montenegro, but Milosevic put some of his officers in charge, and there were more than 250 officers of this *Siqurimi* agency that were expelled from work in 1990 ... They cleansed the state broadcasting television and the governmental newspaper *Pobjeda* in Podgorica. One of our [SDP] vice-presidents, Rifat Rastoder, a Bosniak, was of the editors of *Pobjeda* from 1986 to 1990, and he was removed

from his position and eventually fired by these pro-Milosevic forces ... So, Milosevic gave really a good choice [to Bulatovic and Dukanovic]. You can have all the power in Montenegro if you want because these guys [Milosevic men who were put in state institutions and media] are working for me. They [Bulatovic and Dukanovic] were like 28 years old, thirty years old, and they said ok, that's good. And they had strongly pro-Yugoslav feelings (Stanic 2019).

Hence, with the ruling SKCG falling under the control of Milosevic, Montenegro entered a dark period. Although the institutions for developing a democratic regime had already been established by January 1990 in the DF, it was clear that after the SKCG split there were no conditions for free and fair elections in Montenegro, which had been scheduled for 9 December 1990 (Stankovic 2019). Milosevic's secret services even supervised the creation of a new political party in Montenegro, People's Party (NS) headed by Novak Kilibarda, that initially endorsed an extreme Serbian nationalist position denying the existence of a Montenegrin identity and favoring the unification between Montenegro and Serbia (Krivokapic 2019).

Three months before the first multiparty election, Albanians in Montenegro also founded their first ethnic party. The Democratic Alliance in Montenegro (LDMZ) was founded on 9 September 1990 in the Albanian-majority city of Tuzi and quite significantly, its first leader was a Muslim Albanian, Mehmet Bardhi, whereas its first deputy leader was a Catholic Albanian, Leke Lulgjuraj. LDMZ was part of the Coordinating Council of Albanian Political Parties in Yugoslavia that was led by the Kosovar Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and his party Democratic Alliance of Kosovo (LDK). As such, initially all its political demands were closely coordinated with the demands of the other ethnic Albanian parties in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and south Serbia/Presevo valley (Bardhi 2019). LDMZ demanded significant decentralization and autonomy for the units of local self-government/municipalities, the establishment of a civic rather than national state, official status for Albanian language and the right to education in Albanian (Ahrens 2007: 267). These demands were identical with the ones put forward by the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD) in North Macedonia, thus the starting point for both Albanian communities in Montenegro and North Macedonia was the same, although their absolute and relative numbers were quite different. However, in terms of advancing these rights, Albanians in Montenegro have always cast their votes equally among mainstream Montenegrin parties (DPS, LSCG, and SDP) and their own ethnic parties, whereas Albanians in North Macedonia have always voted overwhelmingly for their ethnic Albanian parties, which have in turn formed alliances

with either one or both of the mainstream Macedonian parties. This is one of the main evidences to substantiate the multiethnic nationhood cohesion in Montenegro.

Before proceeding further, it is very important to briefly consider why the DPS, after its split in February 1990, ended up aligning with Milosevic. In other words, couldn't have Bulatovic and Dukanovic opposed Milosevic in 1990? All my interviewees from different political orientations are unanimous in stating that DPS at that time lacked both power and international support to oppose Milosevic. Long-serving (Albanian-descent) DPS parliamentarian Luigj Shkreli argues that Milosevic in 1990 explicitly threatened to "crush" tiny Montenegro if it opposed following Belgrade. Equally significant, Shkreli states that the West, and the U.S. specifically, supported Milosevic in 1990. In the Balkans "the strong state is what interests Americans" avers Shkreli (2019). Similarly, Mehmet Zenka, leader of the ethnic Albanian party UDSH and current Minister for Human and Minority Rights, states that Bulatovic and Dukanovic had neither political nor military power to come against Milosevic in 1990 (Zenka 2019). Always very precise in his assessments, Ljubisa Stankovic, who was the leader of the opposition at the time, also argues that:

Dukanovic was calculating, what is the situation? Could I go against or not? He really calculated that by that time Milosevic was ready to do anything and if you want to be in power in Montenegro, you have to be in ... Montenegro was completely covered by that time by Serbian newspapers, by Serbian TV programs so it was very difficult to say I am against but you don't have media, you don't have newspapers, and it's really easy to publish against you anything and you are lost politically ... Calculation would show that in 1990 it was not time. Dukanovic had to make police strong, he had to make television strong, he had to take over newspapers, he had to take over banks and so on ... In 1997 it was time (Stankovic 2019).

While Milan Popovic (2019) condemns the "extreme opportunism" of Bulatovic and Dukanovic in this case, he also admits that Montenegro was not supported by the West in the early 1990s. "In the politics of the region, even Slobodan Milosevic was used and abused as instrument of Western power" deplores Popovic (2019).

That DPS alignment with Milosevic and Serbia was to a great extent imposed is also proven by the fact, as I am going to analyze further below, that their relations throughout seven years have been uneasy and strained. Even in those years, DPS has never identified itself as a pro-Serb party and just like pro-independence parties (LSCG and SDP) it has always promoted titular (i.e. Montenegrin) identification throughout the republic (Krivokapic 2019). Moreover, even in those years, DPS has always identified itself as a citizen party, it has always targeted minority votes and had minority deputies

elected among its ranks (Stanic 2019). That is why LSCG's former leader, Xhemal Perovic (a Muslim Albanian) admits that rhetorically DPS, even in those years, did not have any difference from LSCG and SDP (Perovic 2019).

5.4 Ethno-nationalist Mobilization and Factors of Deescalation and Restraint

Montenegrin politics started to radicalize along ethno-nationalist lines in the aftermath of the first multiparty election in 9 December 1990. However, this occurred not as a result of DPS rhetoric and actions but rather exclusively because of Belgrade and its client party in Montenegro, the People's Party (NS). Very significantly, both Montenegrin ruling (DPS) and anti-communist opposition (Ljubisa Stankovic's SRS) parties ran on quite similar campaigns for the first multiparty election. DPS' first election slogan was *Mi Znamo Kako!* (We know how!) and it stressed its commitment to democracy, human rights and economic efficiency (Morrison 2018: 39). On the other side, SRS' first election slogan displayed King Nikola's royal family portrait with the inscription *Slobodna Crna Gora. Za Vijek Vjekova!* (Free Montenegro. For a Lifetime)⁶ to express its opposition to nationalist forces (mainly greater Serbian) threatening Yugoslavia and to remind authorities of King Nikola's multiethnic achievements in the past (Krivokapic 2019). As such, both the communist successor party and the anti-communist opposition in Montenegro targeted minority votes in the first multiparty election.

DPS won a landslide victory capturing more than 50 per cent of the national vote and 83/125 seats in the *Skupstina Crne Gore*, SRS finished a distant second with 13.56 per cent of the vote (17 seats), whereas the Democratic Coalition (comprised of the Albanian LDMZ and Bosniak/Muslim party SDA) and the extreme Serbian nationalist NS won 13 and 12 seats respectively. As the results clearly show, DPS margin of victory in Montenegro was unsurpassed elsewhere in Yugoslavia (Bieber 2003: 16). There are two main reasons for this. On the one hand, with Milosevic keeping a firm grip on Montenegro, there were no conditions for free and fair elections. As Stankovic (2019) recalls:

Massive fraud happened, absolutely not fair elections. They were really cheating everywhere, by support of intelligence from Serbia, support of intelligence from here and so on ... conditions were such that there was a terrifying media. All ugly stories about me, about other people, appeared in front pages in Serbian newspapers and Montenegrin newspaper. All you

⁶ Refer back to the picture shown in p. 186.

can think of, ugly things, they were in the titles. So, ordinary people said, yeah, this is bad, just go away from these people. Even it was dangerous for life.

On the other hand, in the early 1990s, communism as a system and as an ideology was still more popular in Montenegro than elsewhere in Yugoslavia (Bieber 2003: 17). Indeed, the Montenegrin communist successor party was the only one in Yugoslavia that did not adopt a new name before the first multiparty elections⁷, and as such, it expressed once more its commitment to social justice and multiethnic policies. Unsurprisingly then, DPS (then SKCG), had a few minority deputies elected among its ranks. Of the 83 MPs it won after the first multiparty election, four were Bosniak/Muslim-origin (Asim Dizdarevic, Mevludin Nuhodzic, Smajo Sabotic, and Asim Telacevic) and one was Catholic Albanian (Fran Dedvukaj). While 6 per cent (5/83) of DPS' deputies were minority-origin, this rate for the anti-communist opposition SRS was a stunning 41 per cent. Indeed, of the 17 SRS deputies, five were Bosniak/Muslim-origin (Resad Rastoder, Ruzdija Redzepagic, Ferid Sarkinovic, Ibrahim Rekovic, and Ramo Bralic) and two were ethnic Albanians (Gjergj Berishaj- Catholic and Skender Elezagic – Muslim).⁸

Two observations are in order. First, nowhere in postcommunist southeast European countries have *both* the communist successor party and the anti-communist opposition been able to gain minority votes and nowhere with such a high rate. This is very significant because in postcommunist countries “One of the most striking aspects of the anticommunist opposition was its fusion with nationalism” (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006: 89). This has been the case in Bosnia, Croatia, North Macedonia (with VMRO), Slovenia, Slovakia. Whereas in Bulgaria and Serbia both the communist successor party and the anticommunist opposition have been nationalistic and anti-minority. Hence, in this aspect Montenegro is clearly an outlier among postcommunist countries. Second, ethnic minority parties in Montenegro have been far less successful than elsewhere in the Balkans in capturing the votes of their ethnic constituency. Even in the first multiparty election, the Albanian vote in Montenegro was split almost equally

⁷ It participated in the December 1990 election with the same name, League of Communists of Montenegro (SKCG). SKCG became Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) only in June 1991.

⁸ I am grateful to Daria Music, Montenegrin Parliament's Library and Documentation Centre and Archive, for sending me the list of elected deputies in Montenegrin parliamentary elections from December 1990 until the most recent October 2016. The identification of minority-origin deputies is mine. I measured a deputy's ethno-national belonging by looking at his/her name and checking other biographical details. Catholic Albanians are easily identifiable by their name patterns in the Albanian language. Arguably, it is more challenging to distinguish between Muslim Albanians and Bosniaks since in Montenegro many Muslim Albanian surnames also have the Slavic suffix “-ic”. When that was the case, I relied on biographical details on the deputies' mother tongue.

among the ethnic Albanian party LDMZ, that elected 4 deputies⁹, and the mainstream Montenegrin parties DPS and SRS, that both elected 3 Albanian deputies. In brief, both observations point to the multiethnic cohesion among mainstream Montenegrin parties. The source of the radicalization of Montenegrin politics after the first multiparty election were the activities of the Serbian People's Party (NS), that had 12/125 deputies at the time.

5.4.1 The arming of the Orthodox population and Chetnik parades through Albanian-majority areas

Troubles for Albanians in Montenegro began in April 1991 when NS made public calls to arm the Orthodox population since Montenegrin Albanians allegedly harboured secessionist aims. The party additionally started to organize its own paramilitary units (Bugajski 1994: 183). The public calls were very soon fulfilled. The Orthodox population living in the Albanian-majority towns of Ulcinj and Tuzi (both 70 per cent ethnic Albanian) were distributed arms by units of the Milosevic-controlled Yugoslav People's Army (YNA) and Serbian secret services (Zenka 2019). Mehmet Zenka, current (Albanian-descent) Minister for Human and Minority Rights, recalls one of those instances in the town of Ulcinj: "It is still very fresh in my mind. There was a blackout and heavy rainstorm during the night, and during that night arms were distributed to the *pravoslav*/orthodox population. In the day after, we were aware that the population was armed. YNA and secret services had armed them" (Zenka 2019). DPS deputy Luigj Shkreli claims that the "ethnic cleansing" scenario that was being prepared for Bosnia was meant to be implemented also in the Albanian (and Bosniak)-inhabited areas in Montenegro (Shkreli 2019). He recalls that in Ulcinj YNA units separated the Orthodox-inhabited villages from the Albanian-inhabited ones. "For two consecutive months I was intimidated and harassed both when going to work and when coming back" avers Shkreli (2019).

Summer 1991 was the period when, apart from the newly-formed NS paramilitary, Serbian paramilitary formations also became active in Montenegrin territory. LDMZ deputy of the time, Xheladin Zeneli, notes that in May-June 1991 several Serbian/Cetnik paramilitary groups paraded through the Albanian settlements in Ane e

⁹ As stated above, LDMZ formed an electoral coalition with the Bosniak/Muslim SDA for the first multiparty election. Of the 13 deputies this coalition elected, four were ethnic Albanian (Gjergj Gjokaj, Tahir Perezic, Mustafe Capuni, and Xheladin Zeneli).

Malit, Katerkolle, Ostros, and Ulcinj, threatening the local Albanians with weapons and shouting “We are Serbian Cetniks, we will cut you, we will kill you” (Zeneli 2011: 159-161). The arming of the Orthodox population and the Cetnik parades in turn caused an Albanian counter-mobilization. Mehmet Bardhi, LDMZ leader and mayor of Ulcinj at the time, explains that he had under his command the local territorial armed forces in Ulcinj and that most of the local Albanian population were mobilized to defend themselves (Bardhi 2019). In brief, it was clear that by arming the Orthodox population and by using YNA and Serb paramilitaries, Milosevic was trying to provoke an armed conflict with the Albanians and use this as a pretext to further control and manipulate the Montenegrin regime and rally the Orthodox population behind Belgrade (Bugajski 1994: 174-176). Then, why did not the interethnic tensions escalate into violence in the summer of 1991? There are two main reasons. Firstly, DPS during that time opposed the directives coming from Belgrade and did not incite the Orthodox population to violence. It thus protected the Albanians (Shkreli 2019). Secondly, the opposition SDP and LSCG mounted a public campaign at the time to calm down interethnic tensions and prevent their escalation. Keeping in mind the exceptionally small size of Montenegro, the vital importance of these public calls for peace becomes clearer. As SDP leader Krivokapic recalls, “All the time we have been with them [Albanians] and they have been with us” (Krivokapic 2019). At the same time, Krivokapic acknowledges that the DPS also “did not touch Albanians” (Krivokapic 2019).

Hence, it was the multiethnic cohesion of Montenegrin parties that saved the country in the summer of 1991. However, again, this multiethnic cohesion is not just something inherited from the past. Rather it is revived and instrumentalized by parties and ethnic entrepreneurs for political ends. For instance, even though in 1991 DPS was allied with Milosevic, it was aware that minority constituencies could be crucial for both its short-term and long-term political objectives. Mirko Stanic rightly points out that the DPS even in those years did not consider Albanians an ethnic problem but rather “a political party problem”, how to get more votes from the Albanians (Stanic 2019). As such, DPS could simply not tolerate losing leverage and public standing vis-a-vis the minorities by inciting violence against them. Rather it was in its interest to preserve the image of a citizen party and protect the minorities. Similarly, SDP and LSCG revived and utilized King Nikola’s image of “minority protector” and at the end of the day it paid off

handsomely for them. As we saw, a stunning 41 per cent of the seats SDP and LSCG coalition captured in the first multiparty election were minority-origin deputies.

Let's also not forget that roughly during the same time period (i.e. summer 1991), SDSM in North Macedonia was publicly calling for the establishment of a citizen state and equal rights for the Albanians whereas VMRO was calling for "gas chambers for Albanians" (Saraç 2019). By also instrumentalizing their opposing nationhood visions for political ends, SDSM and VMRO ended up reinforcing the nationhood cleavage.

5.4.2 *Conscription of Montenegrin Albanians into YNA and the Sutorman Battalion*

Summer 1991 reserved another "dramatic situation" for Montenegrin Albanians that could have led to interethnic armed confrontations (Bardhi 2019; Zenka 2019). In the first days of July 1991 YNA issued general mobilization calls for the impending war against Croatia. From the Albanian-inhabited areas in Montenegro, around 3000 young Albanians (seven per cent of the Montenegrin Albanian population) were forcefully conscripted into YNA units: 1000 Albanians were placed in the Bar/Tivar military barracks; not far from them, another group of 1000 Albanians were placed in the mountain valley of Sutorman and the rest was sent to the outskirts of the capital Podgorica (Zeneli 2011: 89). According to the then YNA laws/regulations, mobilization could last only 24 hours. Within that time period, the conscripts were either sent to the front to fight or returned. However, in the case of the Sutorman conscripts neither of the two occurred (Zeneli 2011: 89-90).

LDMZ leader Mehmet Bardhi mentions that the weapons given to the Albanian conscripts in Sutorman were without ammunition. Buses and trucks were in turn dispatched from Niksic to pick up the conscripts and sent them to the Croatian front but the Albanians, despite being threatened by YNA's military commanders, resolutely refused to go. The bus and trucks thus returned empty-handed (Bardhi 2019). However, the Albanian conscripts subsequently were not allowed to leave the valley and were instead kept there for six consecutive days (Zeneli 2011: 90). A massive mobilization of the Albanian population in Ulcinj followed that was led by LDMZ and the parents of the conscripts in Sutorman. Bardhi and Zenka recall that parents and other family members spent 4-5 nights in the mountain valley to protest and defend their sons (Bardhi 2019; Zenka 2019). The Montenegrin opposition parties LSCG and SDP also gave full support by participating in these protests and asking for the release of the conscripts.

Xheladin Zeneli, a LDMZ deputy at the time, argues that the whole event could have ended up in a “large-scale tragedy” because once the Albanian conscripts evaded the call-up, YNA special units were sent that surrounded the Sutorman valley. “With a single order from ‘above’ everything would have been over” avers Zeneli. Around 1000 Albanian conscripts (both Muslim and Catholic) would have been mass murdered (Zeneli 2011: 93). However, such an order never came. DPS deputy Luigj Shkreli argues that the DPS intervened and once more opposed the Belgrade directives. “My own nephew was enlisted at that time ... We succeeded only because the Montenegrin state supported us” recalls Shkreli (2019). Eventually, the Albanian conscripts in Sutorman were demobilized.

This was the second instance that *both* the ruling DPS and the opposition (LSCG + SDP) acted as factors of deescalation and restraint and hence preserved interethnic peace.

5.4.3 *The Establishment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*

The eruption of the war in Croatia combined with YNA and Serbian paramilitaries’ subversive activities in Montenegro in the summer of 1991 gradually estranged the DPS regime from Belgrade. Bulatovic and Dukanovic were apprehensive that a disastrous war in which Montenegro did not directly have a stake, a worsening economy and Belgrade’s intimidation of Montenegro’s minorities would “broaden support for Montenegrin sovereignty and even independence from Yugoslavia” and DPS as a result would “lose its respectable public backing” (Bugajski 1994: 175). The important point here is that since the very first moment DPS recognized that its alignment with Milosevic was becoming a liability to its domestic standing and electoral prospects, it drew itself closer to the pro-independence opposition parties LSCG and SDP. In a pattern that is to be repeated frequently, whenever the DPS perceives threats to its public backing and to the interethnic stability, it hastens to revive and instrumentalize the nationhood cohesion among Montenegrin parties.

As such, DPS was pressed to undertake concrete steps to show its estrangement from Belgrade. The first of these steps came in September 1991 when prime minister Milo Dukanovic announced that the DPS regime was preparing for a declaration of Montenegrin sovereignty within a Yugoslav federal framework (Bugajski 1994: 190). One month later president Momir Bulatovic withdrew Montenegrin reservists in YNA from Croatian battle fronts after they had participated in the shelling of Dubrovnik (Bieber

2003: 18-19). Perhaps the biggest blow to Milosevic came in late October 1991 when president Bulatovic accepted and signed in Hague the EC-sponsored Carrington Plan that foresaw Yugoslavia's dissolution into six independent successor states. Only days later, however, under extreme pressure from Belgrade, Bulatovic withdrew his original support from the Carrington Plan, and together with Belgrade proposed instead an amendment that would allow those republics that did not want to separate to jointly form a Yugoslav successor state (Morrison 2009: 98-102). Mehmet Zenka argues that "the fact that Bulatovic initially signed the plan of lord Carrington was not a game. Bulatovic liked and supported that idea. Then you have the recordings showing how Milosevic threatened him by saying 'I will now show to you independent Montenegro'" (Zenka 2019).¹⁰ Similarly, DPS deputy Luigj Shkreli relates the threats that came at that time from Borisav Jovic, Serbian member of the Yugoslav presidency: "Who are you [Montenegro] to oppose us? You are only a handful of people. We will crush you" (Shkreli 2019).

As a result, fearing that Milosevic might attack Montenegro or forcefully unseat the government, DPS elites proceeded to organize a referendum on Montenegrin membership in a Yugoslav successor federation. As Janusz Bugajski (1994: 176) argued "With a large army and Serb paramilitary presence in Montenegro, Bulatovic was clearly wary of a direct confrontation with his erstwhile sponsor [Milosevic]." For Shkreli, the decision not to confront Milosevic and to call instead a referendum was a "wise decision" that preserved the Montenegrin state at that time (Shkreli 2019). The way that the referendum was organized and conducted is in itself sufficient to prove its imposed nature. First, it was announced in 20 February 1992 and held only 8 days later in 1 March 1992, making impossible any meaningful public debate (Stanic 2019). Second, by asking "*Do you wish a sovereign Montenegro to remain in association with other Yugoslav republics that wish the same*", the wording of the referendum was misleading because it created the false impression that Montenegrin sovereignty would be preserved and was completely vague about the exact form this "association" would take. Moreover, the word "Yugoslav" was simply put to appeal to the strong pro-Yugoslav feelings of the Montenegrins. As Krivokapic argues, "People who voted, voted for Yugoslavia, not for great Serbia ... People are pro-Yugoslav in this period and this is why Milosevic left the name Yugoslavia. Like in American movies, assassinator took the identity of the victim"

¹⁰ Much later, Bulatovic admitted that his life and the lives of his family members were threatened at the time (Kovacevic 2007: 73).

(Krivokapic 2019). Third, the referendum was not fair as mass election fraud occurred. Mirko Stanic recalls that “people were all voting for their families, and for the friends, and outside the polling stations there was voting on the cars ... It was totally illegal” (Stanic 2019). Unsurprisingly then, official results showed that 95.4 per cent of those who turned out had voted in favor of continuing Montenegrin membership in a new Yugoslav federation. The turnout rate was a relatively low 66 per cent since, given the way the referendum was organized and conducted, the opposition SDP and LSCG and the minority parties (LDMZ and SDA) boycotted it (Bieber 2003: 21).

All this still begs the question of whether the referendum result would have been different if it had been conducted under fair conditions. Ljubisa Stankovic convincingly argues that the margin of victory would have been much lower, however the result most likely would not have changed (Stankovic 2019). Popovic also thinks along the same lines, estimating that the result most likely would have been a 60-40 or 65-35 in favor of continuing the federation (Popovic 2019). The main reasons for this are the dualistic nature of Montenegrin identity inherited from the past, the strong pro-Yugoslav feelings in most of Montenegrin citizens and the fact that Milosevic’s great Serbian policies had not yet fully taken its toll on Montenegro by that time (Krivokapic 2019; Popovic 2019; Stankovic 2019). Even the leaders of the most pro-independence party in Montenegro (LSCG) stated that in principle they were not opposed to a federation of equal republics, and they opted for independence only because they understood that such equality under Milosevic’s great Serbian politics would be impossible (Perovic 2019). It is interesting to note that this is almost the identical argument put forward by those who opposed Serbia’s annexation of Montenegro in the aftermath of the First World War. Eventually, in April 1992 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) comprising only Serbia and Montenegro was established as the legal successor of socialist Yugoslavia.

April 1992 was also the period when the Bosnian civil war started and one month later UN imposed sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As a result, DPS once more reverted to its old tactics of distancing itself from Belgrade and drawing closer to the position of the opposition LSCG and SDP. In June 1992, president Bulatovic proposed in the republican parliament to redefine Montenegro’s relation with Serbia and hold another referendum on Montenegrin membership in the federation (Bugajski 1994: 191). Another blow to Milosevic came when the DPS publicly opposed the Bosnian war

and supported then Yugoslav prime minister Milan Panic's initiatives for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. As Bugajski (1994: 175-176) further points out:

Indeed, Panic survived two votes of no-confidence largely because of Montenegrin support in the Federal Assembly. In addition, Bulatovic publicly voiced his backing for the Vance-Owen plan for decentralizing Bosnia-Herzegovina despite persistent Bosnian Serb and Belgrade government opposition.

There is no doubt that DPS' moves were more for domestic consumption rather than genuine, however it shows once more how vital it was for the party to adopt the stance of the opposition parties whenever facing threats to its public backing and to the stability of the country.

As a further confidence-building measure, the DPS regime agreed to participate in talks with minority representatives under the auspices of the *Minorities Working Group* of the EC-sponsored Conferences on Yugoslavia. In several rounds of trilateral talks between July and September 1992 in Hague, Brussels, and Geneva, DPS representatives expressed their commitment to accommodate the demands of Montenegrin Albanians and Bosniaks (Ahrens 2007: 269-272). LDMZ had formulated the Albanian demands by adopting on 12 September 1992 the *Memorandum on Special Status of Albanians in Montenegro* that outlined six main demands: a) establishment of a constitutionally citizen state, rather than a Montenegrin national one; b) establishment of institutions for protecting and developing Albanians' national identity and use of their mother tongue; c) proportional representation of Albanians in public and local administration; d) protection from majoritarianism; e) restitution of full municipality status to Albanian-majority district of Tuzi; and f) "special status" for the two Albanian-majority municipalities in Montenegro (Ulcinj and Tuzi), based on the provisions of the Carrington Peace Plan, Chapter II.¹¹ While the Montenegrin government in the talks accepted to fulfill the outlined demands, it rejected the last one on "special status" since it was essentially asking for territorial autonomy, not right to local self-government. The government argued that "special status" based on the provisions of the Carrington Plan was developed for Serbs in Croatia and as such could not be extended to a municipality level. The *Working Group* supported Montenegrin government's position on this issue (Ahrens 2007: 269).

¹¹ I am grateful to Muhamed Nika, former LDMZ parliamentarian (1996-1998), for sharing with me the original copy in Albanian of the *Memorandum on Special Status of Albanians in Montenegro*.

LDMZ' demand for "special status" was rejected also by the opposition LSCG and SDP and even by the Albanian members of these parties. For instance, Xhemal Perovic, an ethnic Albanian who was LSCG former leader and parliamentarian, argues that the demand for "special status" was "detrimental to both Albanian interests and to the stability in Montenegro. It generated unnecessary tensions and time proved we were right" (Perovic 2019). Both DPS and the Montenegrin opposition were concerned that such a demand would play right into the hands of Belgrade and Serbian paramilitary groups in Montenegro that were already accusing Montenegrin Albanians of harbouring secessionist aims. This example shows once more how *both* the Montenegrin government and opposition acted as factors of deescalation and restraint. Unlike their North Macedonian counterparts, both Montenegrin mainstream parties sought to *deethnicize* political space. Eventually, LDMZ had to renounce the demand for "special status".

Exactly one month later (12 October 1992), the DPS government rushed to pass the first postcommunist Montenegrin constitution, reflecting its growing estrangement from Belgrade and its commitment to accomodate minority demands and thus preserve interethnic peace. As Elizabeth Roberts points out, this was a constitution "shorn of earlier nationalist references and recognizing the existence of certain minority rights, a move which took cognizance of the growing sentiment within Montenegro against the war" (Roberts 2007: 445). Unlike the Bulgarian and North Macedonian case, the constitution-making process in Montenegro was all-inclusive. It was prepared by experts from all parties and "Regular consultative meetings took place with representatives of municipalities in which national minorities formed the majority" (Ahrens 2007: 270). This confirms my hypothesis that majority parties that hold the same nationhood vision are more likely to cooperate when instituting ethnic policies (dyads A-B and B-A in Table 2.3). In addition to the phrase "Mindful of the historical right of the *Montenegrin people* to have its own state", the preamble of the 1992 constitution also made reference to the "Dedication of the *citizens of Montenegro* to freedom, democracy, and equality among peoples" and to the "Determination of *its citizens* for Montenegro to continue to live in the joint state of Yugoslavia as a sovereign and equitable republic" (Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro 1992: Preamble; my emphasis in italics).

Second, minorities were granted national/ethnic minority status and their languages and alphabets were made official in the municipalities with a majority or substantial minority population (Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro 1992: Art.

9). Third, the constitution contained a special section on the rights of national and ethnic groups, giving them the right to education in their mother tongue, the right to use and display their national symbols, the right to proportional representation in public administration and local self-government, and the right to seek the assistance of international organizations for protecting their rights (Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro 1992: Art. 67-75). Finally, Article 76 mandated the establishment of a Republican Council for Protection of Rights of National and Ethnic Groups that was to be headed by the president of the republic. Among others, the ruling DPS appointed Mark Camaj, a Catholic Albanian, as member of this Council (Perovic 2019).

All in all, the Montenegrin constitution was very similar to the North Macedonian one. The basic model they both relied on was that of a national state of the majority people with extensive rights for the national and ethnic minorities, though arguably, the Montenegrin constitution was slightly more civic-oriented. However, there was also a crucial difference among them. In Montenegro, the provisions for minority rights were a result of cooperation among mainstream parties, whereas in North Macedonia the provisions for minority rights were imposed. This in turn generated very different interaction patterns among majority and minority parties in each country.

To sum up, this section process traced several instances of ethno-nationalist mobilization in Montenegro from April 1991 until October 1992 and showed how both Montenegrin mainstream parties (DPS and LSCG/SDP) acted as factors of deescalation and restraint. It also showed how the ruling DPS, whenever faced with threats to its public backing/standing and to the interethnic stability, rushed to distance itself from Belgrade and drew closer to the mainstream opposition parties. By so doing, this section evidenced how legacies of nationhood cohesion can be revived and instrumentalized for achieving political objectives.

5.5 Patterns of Majority and Minority Elite Interaction

I have already developed two hypotheses for countries with majority nationhood cohesion. First, majority parties that hold the same nationhood vision are more likely to cooperate when instituting ethnic policies (dyads A-B and B-A in Table 2.3). Up to this point, I have mentioned and analyzed several instances when DPS and LSCG (and SDP) have directly or indirectly cooperated in instituting ethnic policies and in deescalating interethnic tensions: the January 1990 Democratic Forum; Belgrade's arming of the

Orthodox population and the Cetnik parades through Albanian areas; conscription of young Albanians into YNA; support for the Carrington and Vance-Owen Peace Plans; rejection of the Albanian demand for “special status” for municipalities; passing of the first postcommunist constitution in October 1992.

Second, for countries with majority nationhood cohesion, I hypothesize that the minority party will try to *collude* with either one of the majority parties (dyads C-A and C-B in Table 2.3) and the latter will also do the same in return for enlisting minority’s support in electoral competition (dyads A-C and B-C in Table 2.3). In the case of countries with multiethnic nationhood cohesion, I further hypothesize that the minority will not prioritize any majority party since theoretically both would advance its ethnolinguistic rights. Up to this point, it has not been possible to test the interaction patterns on *party level* since in Montenegro, unlike the Bulgarian and North Macedonian case, the communist successor party DPS won an overwhelming majority of the seats in the first multiparty election and therefore the minority parties (LDMZ and SDA) could not play the “kingmaker” role. However, up to this point it has been possible to test the interaction patterns on *voter level*. Indeed, in the case of Montenegrin Albanians, I have shown the bifurcation of Albanian vote in the first election between the ethnic Albanian party (LDMZ) and *both* mainstream Montenegrin parties (DPS and SRS). Based on these results, I also argued that nowhere in postcommunist southeast European countries have *both* the communist successor party and the anti-communist opposition been able to gain minority votes and nowhere with such a high rate as in Montenegro. Hence, up to this point, the interaction patterns on voter level strongly confirm my hypotheses.

5.5.1 December 1992 parliamentary and presidential elections

The December 1992 presidential election provides the first opportunity to test the hypotheses on a party level too. As the October 1992 constitution mandated that the president of the republic shall be directly elected by the people, Montenegro shifted to a form of semi-presidential system (Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro 1992: Art. 86). The December 1992 presidential election marked the most “serious fallout” between DPS and Milosevic as Belgrade threw its weight behind the Radical Party candidate Branko Kostic against Momir Bulatovic. Likewise, DPS supported the candidacy of the reformist Milan Panic against Milosevic in the Serbian presidential election that took place at the same time (Bieber 2003: 22). The Albanian LDMZ joined forces with the

opposition parties (LSCG and SDP) and voted in favor of the DPS candidate Momir Bulatovic, who won a landslide victory by capturing 64 per cent of the national vote (Zenka 2019). Given that the minority party allied with both of the mainstream Montenegrin parties, my hypothesis is confirmed.

As a side issue, the share of the national vote the Radical Party candidate Kostic won (36 per cent) was still very significant given that he ran on a shovininistic great Serbian platform. Ljubisa Stankovic recalls that in a pre-election rally in Podgorica, Kostic interrupted some of his supporters who were firing in the air and said to them “Keep the bullets, we will need them for Kosovo.” “That was very frightening sentence” adds Stankovic (2019). This also shows that by the end of 1992, a significant share of the Orthodox population self-identified as Serbs since most likely all of those who voted for Kostic identified themselves as Serbs.

Parliamentary elections also took place simultaneously with the presidential one in Montenegro (20 December 1992). The DPS was increasingly concerned about further radicalization of Montenegrin politics since, as mentioned also above, in the run-up to the December 1992 parliamentary and presidential elections, a branch of Vojislav Seselj’s Serbian Radical Party (SRP) had been established in Montenegro along with its respective paramilitary wing (Bugajski 1994: 184). To counter this threat, prior to the elections, DPS rushed to change the number of electoral districts. Although the PR-based system with a four per cent threshold was preserved, the total number of seats was reduced from 125 to 85 and all of Montenegro was made a single electoral district (previously there were 20 districts, one for each municipality). The change intended to make the electoral system more favorable to the opposition parties (LSCG and SDP) and diminish the electoral chances of the radicals (Darmanovic 2003: 153). The change, however, came also at the expense of the Albanian LDMZ that actually objected to the new election law (Bugajski 1994: 187). Indeed, keeping in mind the bifurcation of Albanian vote between LDMZ and mainstream Montenegrin parties in the first multiparty election, it would be very difficult for LDMZ to clear the four per cent threshold with whole Montenegro as a single electoral district. However, the electoral system change in Montenegro actually confirms my hypothesis that institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of cooperation, even though they often might be illiberal/undemocratic in themselves, are more likely to deescalate interethnic tensions. The opposition LSCG and SDP indirectly cooperated with the DPS in this case since the electoral system change was in their favor, while the overall

aim was to counter the threat posed by the Serbian Radical Party (SRP) and to protect the minorities from SRP's activities and its paramilitaries.

The DPS ended up capturing again a majority of the seats in the *Skupstina* (46/85 gathering 44 per cent of the vote), while the NS, LSCG, and SDP won 14, 13, and 4 seats respectively. The unpleasant newcomer, Serbian Radical Party, gathered only 7.76 per cent of the national vote that translated into 8/85 seats in the parliament (Bieber 2003: 23-24). As expected, the Albanian LDMZ could not clear the four per cent threshold while the Bosniak/Muslim SDA boycotted the elections. It is important to note that in the run-up to the December 1992 election, NS underwent a radical transformation from a great Serbian nationalist to a party committed to preserve Montenegrin sovereignty. Its leader Novak Kilibarda argued that the party had finally got rid of the fascist and Cetnik elements that had previously tried to provoke conflict with the minorities, and that it would fully accept the decision of Montenegrin citizens if they opted in a referendum to separate from Serbia (Bugajski 1994: 184). More than anything else, NS' sudden transformation evidences the fluidity of ethnic self-identification among the Orthodox majority. In 1990, NS' leader Kilibarda used to deny the existence of Montenegrins, arguing instead that "we are all Serbs". Only two years later however, in 1992, he accepted the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity, that Montenegrins are culturally the closest to the Serbs but constitute a distinct south Slavic nation (Perovic 2019).

Another significant outcome of the December 1992 parliamentary election was that minorities were represented only by the mainstream Montenegrin parties since their ethnic parties could not clear the threshold, or in the Bosniaks' case, boycotted the election. Six of DPS' 46 elected deputies (13 per cent) were minority-origin (5 Bosniaks/Muslims and 1 Catholic Albanian).¹² Only one of LSCG's 13 elected deputies was minority-origin (Xhemal Perovic, a Muslim Albanian). Likewise, only one of SDP's 4 elected deputies was minority-origin (Ramo Bralic, a Bosniak/Muslim). As such, Montenegro continued to be an outlier among postcommunist southeast European countries in terms of minority representation by *both* centre-left and centre-right parties, and in terms of the weakness/limited success of the ethnic minority parties. This again confirms my hypothesized interaction patterns on a voter level.

¹² The Bosniak/Muslim-origin deputies are Asim Dizdarevic, Hasan Kurtagic, Asim Telacevic, Smajo Sabotic, and Muharem Muratovic. The Catholic Albanian is Fran Dedvukaj.

Despite the resounding victory of Bulatovic against the radical Branko Kostic in the Montenegrin presidential election, in Serbia Milosevic defeated the reformist Milan Panic that the DPS and LSCG/SDP had supported. In this situation, as Bugajski (1994: 177) points out:

With the defeat of Panic in the Serbian presidential election, increasing pressure on Dobrica Cosic to step down from the Yugoslav presidency, and the success of the Radicals in the Serbian ballot, Podgorica appeared to be more exposed to a potential crackdown by Belgrade.

As such, the ruling DPS under the premiership of Milo Dukanovic resorted once more to its time-tested strategy and proposed to the three opposition parties (NS, LSCG, and SDP) to form a grand coalition. There is no doubt that this was a move to counter the perceived threat from Belgrade and the Serbian Radical Party (with its own paramilitary units) in Montenegro, since, technically speaking, DPS had won enough seats (46/85) in the December 1992 election to be able to form a government alone. This is how Xhemal Perovic, ethnic Albanian LSCG deputy at the time, explains the developments:

It was a paradoxical situation. It was war time [Bosnian war] and we [LSCG] were declared [by the Belgrade-controlled Yugoslav media] as enemies [of the federation], identified with Ustashe, mujahideen, Vatican etc. DPS offered us a package comprising a vice-president of the parliament and two ministries. After a debate until the early hours of the morning, we accepted the offer. The aim was to soften and lessen the nationalist tensions in the country (Perovic 2019).

The grand coalition government was officially formed in April 1993 and exactly Xhemal Perovic, a Muslim Albanian LSCG deputy, was appointed as one of the three vice-presidents of the parliament. Furthermore, the coalition decided to invite Miodrag Lekic, a reformist non-party figure, to serve as Montenegrin foreign minister during the chaotic years of the Bosnian civil war (1993-1995). Roberts describes Lekic as a figure whose

views were far closer to Western chanceries than those of almost any other political figure in the FRY. This led to his becoming something of a favorite of Western diplomats and indeed a relatively popular figure in Western foreign ministries ... At the same time Milosevic became increasingly irritated by Lekic's boldness and critical edge (Roberts 2007: 446-447).

All in all, I argue that the formation of this grand coalition evidences the nationhood cohesion among mainstream Montenegrin parties and their cooperation in deescalating nationalist tensions. LSCG, by organizing peace rallies, tried to get popular support even in the northern areas of Montenegro, areas where Serbian identification is the strongest and where Cetnik paramilitary groups were especially active (Bugajski 1994: 180). This

is why Mirko Stanic is absolutely correct in pointing out that “This kind of politics [multiethnic as practiced in Montenegro] is not so popular in the Balkans. It’s always easy to close yourself in your own national group” (Stanic 2019). Eventually, the formation of the grand coalition government “appeared to stabilize the republic by lessening political tensions while isolating the Radicals as the prime instigators of conflict” (Bugajski 1994: 178; see also Roberts 2007: 445).

5.5.2 *Emergence of minority counterelite and the November 1996 parliamentary election*

Based on my theoretical framework, I hypothesize that minority counterelites (D-type actors) dissatisfied with minority’s status of ethnolinguistic rights are *less* likely to emerge in countries with nationhood cohesion – all the more so in countries with multiethnic cohesion since theoretically both mainstream parties would advance minority rights. However, if minority counterelites still do emerge, I further hypothesize that they are more likely to *compete* with the incumbent minority representative (dyad D-C in Table 2.4) merely over which gets a better deal on resource distribution from the majority parties. Under conditions of multiethnic cohesion, minority counterelites too are more likely to collude with *both* of the mainstream parties (dyads D-A and D-B in Table 2.4).

When we look at the empirical evidence from the Montenegrin case, we see that a minority counterelite among Montenegrin Albanians emerged in November 1993 when a splinter faction within LDMZ (until then the only ethnic Albanian party in Montenegro) led by Ferhat Dinosha and Bajram Rexha, both Muslim Albanians, founded the Democratic Union of Albanians UDSH (Zeneli 2011: 169; Bardhi 2019). The timing is suggestive of the likely reasons for UDSH’s formation. Accordingly, in terms of their level of ethnolinguistic rights, Montenegrin Albanians by the end of 1993 were relatively well placed. While the LDMZ could not clear the four per cent threshold in the December 1992 election, still Montenegrin Albanians had two elected deputies from the grand coalition government (Xhemal Perovic-LSCG and Fran Dedvukaj – DPS), one of the parliament’s three vice-presidents was an ethnic Albanian (again Xhemal Perovic), they were granted substantial rights by the October 1992 constitution, and the grand coalition government (DPS, LSCG, NS, and SDP) was formed mainly to protect minorities from the activities of Serbian Cetnik paramilitaries in Montenegro. Equally significant, the first two multiparty elections in Montenegro (December 1990 and December 1992) had clearly shown that nearly half of the Montenegrin Albanian electorate preferred

mainstream Montenegrin parties (DPS, LSCG and SDP) over the Albanian minority party LDMZ. Hence, the founding of UDSH could only split the already limited voter base LDMZ had. All this suggests that the most likely reason for UDSH's emergence was to compete with LDMZ over resource distribution among the ethnic Albanian constituency in Montenegro. Minority rights clearly were not a reason. This confirms the hypotheses outlined at the beginning of this section. Moreover, only two years after UDSH's formation, the DPS-led Montenegrin government opened a Pedagogical Faculty in Albanian language at the University of Podgorica (Zeneli 2011: 170). This complemented the already "satisfactory number of elementary schools as well as several high schools" where the medium of instruction is fully Albanian (Sistek and Dimitrovova 2003: 172).

The signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995 that ended the Bosnian civil war and the concurrent lifting of UN sanctions had a profound effect on Montenegrin politics. "With the return of peace, dictatorships established on war and conquest wobble" avers Filip Kovacevic (2007: 75) in relation to Milosevic's regime in Serbia. Four years of war allegedly in name of the great Serbian cause, economic sanctions, international condemnation, a dysfunctional federation and Milosevic's dictatorship had only brought destruction and misery to the Montenegrins and in the post-Dayton era Montenegrin public opinion began to shift steadily in favor of independence. As SDP leader Zarko Rakcevic commented on the immediate post-Dayton developments:

I am sure resistance and state-building awareness will gain strength in Montenegro. Our republic has no future in this community [FRY] ... Conflicts within the 'modern federation' have so far been in the shadow of the 'struggle for the sacred Serb cause' and 'unjust sanctions'. Now these two balloons have exploded and the bare relations between Serbia and Montenegro have come out to the surface. I believe that this will help Montenegrins realize that the basic interests of Montenegro is Montenegro (cited in Morrison 2009: 149).

In relation to Dayton's effects on Montenegrin politics, Mirko Stanic similarly argues that:

People said OK, this isn't what you [Milosevic] promised to us. We are having sanctions, we are having bombardment, we are not entering EU, and the youth movement was really nationalistic. I was 16 years old. All the youth was extremely pro-Montenegrin ... It was genie out of the bottle (Stanic 2019).

Under these conditions, both DPS and the anti-communist opposition parties (LSCG, NS, and SDP) sought to cash in on this decisive shift in Montenegrin attitudes and thus, in the run-up to the November 1996 parliamentary election, both championed the defence of Montenegrin sovereignty and statehood. What made the headlines in the run-up to the

election was LSCG and NS' decision to form the coalition *Narodna Sloga* (People's Unity). This electoral alliance between the strongest pro-independence party in Montenegro (LSCG) and a party that only four years before had radically transformed from a great Serbian nationalist to a Montenegrin party (NS) is perhaps the most striking example of how nationhood cohesion has been frequently revived and instrumentalized for political ends in postcommunist Montenegro. The coalition's name both parties chose, *Narodna Sloga / People's Unity*, is quite revealing in this regard.

Perceiving electoral threat from *Narodna Sloga*, DPS reverted to its old habit of playing with the electoral system before elections. The number of seats was again decreased from 85 to 71 while the number of electoral districts became 14 (in the previous December 1992 election all of Montenegro had been a single electoral district). However, different from the previous change of the electoral system that was done in consultation with opposition parties (LSCG, NS, and SDP) with the aim of isolating the Serbian Radical Party, this time the change was made "without the foreknowledge or consent of the opposition" (Darmanovic 2003: 153).

Eventually, for the third consecutive parliamentary election, DPS ended up capturing a majority of the seats (45/ 71) in the *Skupstina* while the runner-up was *Narodna Sloga* with 19 seats. The Bosniak party SDA got only three seats while the two ethnic Albanian parties (LDMZ and UDSH) got two seats each.¹³ Both the SDP and the Serbian Radical Party failed to enter parliament. While five of DPS' 45 elected deputies (11 per cent) were minority-origin – four Bosniak/Muslims and one Catholic Albanian¹⁴, there was no minority-origin deputy elected from the coalition *Narodna Sloga*. Two observations are in order. First, taken together with the results of the previous two parliamentary elections (December 1990 and December 1992), the national vote shares of the three main Montenegrin parties (DPS, LSCG, and NS) were relatively stable – a stunning 45-50 per cent for DPS and 12-13 per cent each for LSCG and NS. Second, non-orthodox minority representation in the communist successor party (DPS) slightly increased across three parliamentary elections, while it significantly decreased in the case of the anti-communist opposition parties (LSCG and SDP). Table 5.4 gives the respective percentages.

¹³ All four Albanians who got elected were Muslim: Ferhat Dinosha and Mehmet Gjoni from UDSH; Mehmet Bardhi and Muhamet Nika from LDMZ.

¹⁴ The Bosniak/Muslims elected on DPS ticket were Asim Dizdarevic, Dzemail Ljuskovic, Omer Adzovic, and Hasan Kurtagic. The only Albanian was Fran Dedvukaj.

Table 5.4: Non-Orthodox (Muslim and Catholic) minority representation in the mainstream Montenegrin parties in the first three multiparty elections.

Political Party	% of minority-origin elected deputies			AVERAGE
	<i>December 1990</i>	<i>December 1992</i>	<i>November 1996</i>	
<i>DPS</i>	% 6 (5/83)	% 13 (6/46)	% 11 (5/45)	% 10
<i>LSCG + SDP</i>	% 41 (7/17)	% 11.7 (2/17)	0 (0/19)	% 17.5

Source: Figures calculated by the author based on the list of all elected deputies in Montenegrin parliamentary elections from December 1990 until the most recent October 2016. I thank Daria Music, Montenegrin Parliament's Library and Documentation Centre and Archive, for sending me the list via e-mail.

Arguably, the reason for the absence of minority representatives among anti-communist mainstream Montenegrin parties in the November 1996 election is the coalition LSCG made with NS, a party that only four years ago had been vehemently anti-minority and great Serbian nationalist (after 1992, it radically transformed however). In other words, only the fact the one of *Narodna Sloga*'s constituent parties (i.e. NS) was tainted by a nationalist past most likely pushed the minorities away from it. In November 1996, Albanians and Bosniaks chose instead to cast their votes for their own ethnic parties and the multiethnic communist successor party, and indeed all three minority parties (LDMZ, UDSH, SDA) refused to join the *Narodna Sloga* coalition.¹⁵ Thus, in this election both minority voters and their parties prioritized the centre-left mainstream party (i.e. DPS) over the centre-right.

5.5.3 *The DPS split and the recalibration of Montenegrin politics*

I argued above that the November 1995 Dayton Agreement and the concurrent lifting of UN sanctions heralded a significant shift in Montenegrin public opinion in favor of distancing their country from Milosevic's Serbia and ultimately regaining independence. Therefore, in the post-Dayton period all parties tried to exploit this shift in public attitudes. More than anyone else, it was, up to that point, the dominant/hegemonic DPS that should have had the greatest incentive to disassociate itself from Milosevic and restructure its relations with the West. Problematically, however, in the aftermath of

¹⁵ Furthermore, SDP, the other anti-communist party that had been receiving minority votes up to that point, could not enter parliament in the November 1996 election. SDP too did not join the *Narodna Sloga* coalition.

winning an absolute majority in the November 1996 parliamentary election, there existed no consensus within the DPS over the future relations with Milosevic and Serbia.¹⁶ One wing of the party, DPS' middle and upper echelons, close to the then prime minister Milo Dukanovic opted for moving closer to the West and disassociating from Milosevic, and by implication, from the federation that Milosevic dominated, since a hegemonically-ruled federation allegedly was seen as the greatest obstacle to building closer political and economical relations with the West. The other wing of the party, the lower echelon of the DPS, close to president Momir Bulatovic was for maintaining close links with Milosevic (Roberts 2007: 449-453; Morrison 2009: 143-156).

Notwithstanding the ideological and geopolitical reasons both wings put forward, the lack of consensus within DPS was essentially an intra-elite conflict about economic, political, and personal interests. Ranko Krivokapic explains the three main factors that obliged the Dukanovic-led wing within DPS to change direction in the post-Dayton period. First, four years of UN economic sanctions (1992-1996) had resulted in the emergence of a new class of tycoons in Montenegro that had amassed a fortune through various kinds of sanctions-busting operations – from the notorious pyramid schemes to large-scale cigarette and oil smuggling. These tycoons had close links to the middle and upper echelons of the DPS and to Dukanovic himself, who for six years as prime minister had been in charge of running the economy. Hence, as Krivokapic puts it, “we got new class of tycoons, they needed to be independent from Belgrade” (Krivokapic 2019). Likewise, Slaven Radunovic, deputy leader of the Serbian nationalist party in Montenegro NOVA, argues that Dukanovic and the narrow circle of tycoons around him wanted to make Montenegro an offshore investment tax haven for continuing their smuggling schemes, especially cigarette smuggling. For that, they needed an economic system separate from Serbia. As Radunovic further explains

he [Dukanovic] wanted to separate from Yugoslavia because he needed state stamp [to legalize the smuggled products]. In Yugoslavia, Montenegro was a republic, not a sovereign state. So, when we talk about customs, customs was federal. So, he needed sovereign state (Radunovic 2019)

¹⁶ It will be remembered, an almost identical lack of consensus existed within the DPS six years before also, when the leadership split over whether to support or not Milosevic in the last Congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party in February 1990. Then, the problem was ‘solved’ when the reformist wing of the party that opposed Milosevic collectively resigned and founded the opposition Alliance of Reformist Forces (SRS).

Second, given the rising tide of anti-Milosevic and pro-independence public attitudes in the post-Dayton period, it was indispensable for Dukanovic to change direction if he wanted to survive politically (Krivokapic 2019; Stanic 2019). As Stanic puts it:

It was genie out of the bottle. You are having all these rallies from pro-independence youth in all the cities, especially in the south, in Bar, in Podgorica, in Niksic, in Cetinje, in Kotor. He [Dukanovic] couldn't find people to go against that because there were a lot of families where parents were for DPS and children for Liberal Alliance [LSCG] and SDP. And he felt that in the next elections, these children are going to overthrow him ... For him it was always net issue, balance at the end of the day. He [Dukanovic] said, to preserve government we have to have politics like Liberal Alliance or SDP (Stanic 2019)

Third, international pressure from the West, that was also searching for allies against Milosevic in the post-Dayton period. "Dukanovic needed sovereign state [for his smuggling activities] and at the same time Western countries needed allies against Milosevic. So, they connected" avers Radunovic (2019). However, much more important than this, argues Ranko Krivokapic, is the fact that the West put strong pressure on Dukanovic that, unless he changes direction, he will be convicted of war crimes for having smuggled oil to Radovan Karadzic and to the Serbian paramilitaries during the Bosnian civil war. As aptly put by Krivokapic, "The key is international pressure. The alternative [for Dukanovic] was to stay with Milosevic and go with him to Hague" (Krivokapic 2019). It is interesting to note that, according to Xhemal Perovic, the West put pressure first on Bulatovic to go against Milosevic, yet Bulatovic didn't accept. The reason why Dukanovic accepted instead was that it was Dukanovic as prime minister who had been primarily implicated in the oil smuggling activities during the UN sanctions and thus, it was Dukanovic who had everything to lose if he didn't change direction (Perovic 2019).

Last but not least, as Ljubisa Stankovic points out, it became possible for Dukanovic to challenge Milosevic's rule because by 1997, Dukanovic had both domestic power and strong international backing, two indispensable factors that he had lacked back in 1990 (Stankovic 2019). In seven-year time (1990-1997), Dukanovic had built a well-trained and well-armed police force, he had curbed the activities of Milosevic's secret police in Montenegro, and equally significant, Dukanovic as prime minister had also taken over the media and economy in Montenegro. Hence, by 1997 Dukanovic had teeth to come out against Milosevic, "it was time" avers Stankovic (2019).

All in all, a combination of economic, political, and personal interests obliged Dukanovic in the post-Dayton period to change direction and openly oppose Milosevic's

rule in Serbia. What precipitated the crisis were the mass protests by the Serbian opposition in Belgrade after Milosevic had refused to recognize the results of the November 1996 local elections (in which he was defeated). Dukanovic exploited this opportunity and in an interview he gave in February 1997 to the opposition weekly *Vreme* in Belgrade he criticized Milosevic's authoritarianism and suggested that it was time for him to step down (Kovacevic 2007: 76). This statement and political stance of Dukanovic convulsed the DPS as the Bulatovic-led faction came out against him and demanded his resignation from the party. However, in July 1997 Dukanovic succeeded in securing the nomination of DPS' executive board as the party's candidate for the October 1997 presidential election. It was exactly DPS' middle and higher echelons, among whom the new class of tycoons and others with important establishment interests, that supported Dukanovic in his presidential bid and secured his nomination in the first place (Morrison 2009: 156-157). However, Dukanovic would be running precisely against his erstwhile ally Bulatovic, who in an "unusual 'pre-election infrastructure'" was also accepted by the republican electoral commission as DPS presidential candidate¹⁷ (Morrison 2018: 74).

5.5.4 *The Second Round Table Talks – 1 September 1997 Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro*

The DPS split would have an effect on Montenegrin identity politics very similar to the one Milosevic's rise to power in 1987 and his subsequent great Serbian politics had. This is so because the domestic political upheaval generated by the split once more suppressed the dualism and ambiguity inherent in Montenegrin identity and as such once more rendered Montenegrin and Serb mutually exclusive ethnic categories. To be sure, as I said, such a trend had already started since 1987 and continued during the Yugoslav wars of the early 1990s, however it reached a peak only in 1997 with the DPS split, because the Dukanovic and Bulatovic factions would now instrumentalize the unity of Montenegrin and Serbian nationhoods respectively to mobilize popular support for their political objectives.

It should be clear that the revival and instrumentalization of nationhood cohesion among Montenegrin parties, parties self-identifying as Montenegrin, for political

¹⁷ Bulatovic's candidacy was allowed by the republican electoral commission with the reasoning that DPS was registered as a party at both the republican and federal level. Hence, Milo Dukanovic was the presidential candidate for the DPS registered at the republican level, while Momir Bulatovic was the presidential candidate for the DPS registered at the federal level (Morrison 2018: 74).

objectives had been a recurring pattern in the first seven years after transition too (1990-1997), the years when the DPS was united. As shall be remembered, during those years, whenever the DPS perceived threat from Milosevic's great Serbian politics and from the subversive activities of the Serbian paramilitaries in Montenegro, it drew itself closer to the pro-independence opposition parties (LSCG and SDP), protected the minorities, and rushed to upkeep political separateness from Belgrade. Examples of this recurring pattern include:

- a. DPS, LSCG, and SDP's deescalation of interethnic tensions after YNA and Milosevic secret services distributed weapons to the Orthodox population in Albanian-majority areas (and also during the Cetnik parades through these areas) April-July 1991;
- b. DPS support for the demobilization of Montenegrin Albanians conscripted into YNA in July 1991
- c. DPS' support for the Carrington Plan in October 1991 and Vance-Owen Plan in November 1992;
- d. Bulatovic's withdrawal of the Montenegrin reservists in YNA from the Croatian battle fronts;
- e. DPS, LSCG, and SDP's rejection of the Albanian demands for "special status"/territorial autonomy in September 1992 for fear that this might play right into the hands of Milosevic and his paramilitary groups active in Montenegro;
- f. the October 1992 multiethnic constitution that accommodated minority demands;
- g. DPS' collusion with LSCG and SDP on changing the election law to isolate the Serbian Radical Party in the December 1992 parliamentary election;
- h. the overwhelming support of Montenegrin opposition and minority parties for Bulatovic in his presidential bid against the radical Branko Kostic in December 1992;
- i. DPS support of the reformist Milan Panic in his presidential bid against Milosevic in December 1992
- j. Most importantly, the grand coalition DPS formed with LSCG, SDP, and NS in April 1993 to deescalate nationalist tensions in Montenegro during the Bosnian civil war

For seven years during which the DPS was united, Momir Bulatovic as president and Milo Dukanovic as prime minister designed and carried out together all the above-mentioned strategies/tactics, with the overall aim of preserving political and economic power in postcommunist Montenegro. In the post-Dayton period however, a combination of economic, political, and personal interests (which I explained in detail above) split the erstwhile close allies. Now, Milo Dukanovic would continue alone in the well-trodden path of utilizing Montenegrin nationhood for achieving political ends. Left without alternatives and given the fluidity of ethnic identification among the Orthodox majority, Bulatovic resorted instead to great Serbian nationalism, precisely the ideology he had tried to distance himself from during the first seven years (Zenka 2019). In other words, from 1990 until 1997, Bulatovic as president used to promote Montenegrin identification throughout the republic, while acknowledging the dualism inherent in Montenegrin identity (Jenne and Bieber 2014: 450). In the post-1997 period however, in a remarkable volte-face, he began denying the existence of a distinct Montenegrin identity. Now, political parties self-identifying as Montenegrin consisted of Dukanovic's DPS, LSCG, SDP, and Novak Kilibarda's NS.

After securing the nomination of DPS' main board as the party's candidate for the October 1997 presidential election, Milo Dukanovic lost no time in appealing to all parties self-identifying as Montenegrin and to the minorities to form a united bloc against Bulatovic and by extent, Milosevic. As a result, on 1 September 1997 (less than two months *after* Dukanovic had secured DPS' nomination as presidential candidate), Dukanovic's faction of the DPS, LSCG, SDP, NS, both ethnic Albanian parties LDMZ and UDSH, and the Bosniak/Muslim SDA collectively drafted and signed the *Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro*. The agreement had the long-term goals of building an anti-Serb electoral coalition in Montenegro and guaranteeing free and fair elections in the future (Darmanovic 2003: 148-149; Morrison 2009: 157-158). In addition, in return for their electoral support, Montenegrin opposition parties were promised the establishment of a state of citizens that protects minorities, regaining independence for Montenegro and NATO membership (Krivokapic 2019). As far as Montenegrin Albanians were concerned, the agreement mandated the creation of a special electoral district that comprised all ethnic Albanian settlement areas in Montenegro, out of which five (/78) deputies were to be elected with a very low electoral threshold. These were not guaranteed

seats for the ethnic Albanian parties however, all political parties could compete for these five seats (Zenka 2019). Second, Dukanovic reserved the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights for one of the ethnic Albanian parties UDSH. Since then, all Ministers for Human and Minority Rights in Montenegro have been from UDSH (Zenka 2019).

I argue that the September 1997 Agreement constitutes a kind of Round Table Talks that was convened explicitly to counter the (great) Serbian threat.¹⁸ As such, it was essentially a continuation of the strategies/tactics that the DPS had utilized during its first seven years of rule. In that respect, the grand coalition that was formed in April 1993 against the Serbian Radical Party was a precursor of the September 1997 Agreement. The crucial difference is that then the DPS was united, whereas in the post-1997 period only one wing of the DPS (i.e. the Dukanovic-led one) continued to employ the same strategies, whereas the other one (the Bulatovic-led one) transformed to great Serbian nationalist.

The September 1997 Agreement confirms the theoretically-driven hypotheses I put forward in this dissertation. First and foremost, the agreement is a striking example of how mainstream parties revive and instrumentalize legacies of nationhood cohesion for achieving political objectives. All Montenegrin parties (DPS, LSCG, SDP, and NS) that drafted and signed the agreement shared a nationhood vision that was dualistic (i.e. Montenegrins culturally the closest to Serbs but still a distinct south Slavic nation), multiethnic towards minorities, and deeply opposed to great Serbian nationalism. It was primarily Dukanovic, who after the DPS split, revived and instrumentalized this nationhood cohesion among Montenegrin parties for achieving his economic, political, and personal interests.

Second, the agreement is revealing of the fact that mainstream majority parties that share the same nationhood vision are more likely to cooperate when instituting ethnic policies (dyads A-B and B-A in Table 2.3). As SDP leader Krivokapic remarks in relation to the September 1997 agreement “He [Dukanovic] used us [opposition] and we used him practically speaking” (Krivokapic 2019). Third, the agreement confirms my hypothesis that in countries with nationhood cohesion both the incumbent minority party and the

¹⁸ Actually, it constitutes the second Round Table in Montenegro’s postcommunist transition since the first one was the January 1990 Democratic Forum led by Ljubisa Stankovic that established the institutional bases of the then new democratic regime. Moreover, current Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs, Srdjan Darmanovic, in an article he published in the *Journal of Democracy* in 2003 also called the September 1997 Agreement “a set of roundtable negotiations held seven years late” (Darmanovic 2003: 149).

minority counterelite will try to collude with either one of the majority parties (dyads C-A and C-B in Table 2.3 and dyads D-A and D-B in Table 2.4) and the latter will do the same to enlist minority support in electoral competition. Indeed, both ethnic Albanian parties (LDMZ and UDSH) supported all Montenegrin parties and signed the September agreement. Moreover, my other hypothesis that in countries with nationhood cohesion, minority parties will only compete for resource distribution among them (not over ethnolinguistic rights) is also confirmed. UDSH clearly got a larger share of the pie than LDMZ from the agreement since the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights was reserved by Dukanovic for UDSH.

Fourth and last, the September 1997 agreement confirms my empirical prediction that institutions and policies that are designed out of an interaction pattern of cooperation, even though they often might be illiberal/undemocratic in themselves, are more likely to preserve peaceful interethnic relations. It is very clear that the provisions of the September agreement in relation to Montenegrin Albanians were not quite democratic because, by creating a special electoral district that comprised only Albanian settlement areas, Dukanovic secured actually 5/78 (% 6.4) guaranteed seats for his anti-Serb/anti-Milosevic electoral coalition. However, what mattered at the end of the day is that this rather undemocratic policy was designed by having the consent of the opposition parties (LSCG, SDP, and NS).

All in all, I argue that the September 1997 agreement laid the foundations for the peaceful interethnic relations in Montenegro in the post-1997 period. In other words, by utilizing a nationhood vision that was multiethnic and deeply opposed to great Serbian ideology, Montenegrin parties secured the support of Albanians (and Bosniaks) and thus paved the way for peaceful interethnic relations. My interviewees from different political orientations unanimously agree on this point. For instance, the leaders of both ethnic Albanian parties in Montenegro, Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) and Mehmet Zenka (UDSH) argue that interethnic peace in postcommunist Montenegro is built on the “wise policy” of Montenegrin parties that have always seen and treated the Albanians (and Bosniaks) as “a political partner and ally” against the Serbian parties in Montenegro (Bardhi 2019; Zenka 2019). SDP’s Mirko Stanic suggests that September 1997 agreement merely deepened Montenegrin parties’ dependence on minority support since even in the first seven years (1990-1997), DPS has always treated the minorities as a potential political ally, and consequently has preserved cordial interethnic relations (Stanic 2019). Likewise,

LSCG's Xhemal Perovic claims that by constantly upkeeping an anti-Serb nationhood vision, DPS has been able to create a winning electoral coalition by attracting minority support (Perovic 2019). Even Slaven Radunovic, the deputy leader of the main Serbian nationalist party in Montenegro (NOVA), fully concurs with the above mentioned opinions. Slaven Radunovic, who defines himself as a great Serbian nationalist and considers Dukanovic to be not just a political opponent but an “enemy” of the Serbs, told the author that the main reason for the peaceful interethnic relations in postcommunist Montenegro is:

Because of Dukanovic and we can say thank you Dukanovic for that. Albanians in Montenegro have been very peaceful throughout the last decades. You know Albanian leaders here are very, they become crazy when you say to them that the Albanian leader in Montenegro is Dukanovic. Because more Albanians vote for him than for Albanian parties. In all other Balkan countries where Albanians have big populations, like Macedonia or Kosovo, they have their local leaders. In Montenegro no. Because *a lot of Albanians, Dukanovic bought them, not by money, but ideologically bought them because he [Dukanovic] became enemy of Serbia* (Radunovic 2019; my emphasis in italics).

Last, it is important to give some space to the opinion of Geert Ahrens, who was head of the *Minorities Working Group* of the EC-sponsored Conferences on Yugoslavia (1990-1996), and led several rounds of trilateral talks between the Montenegrin government and Albanian representatives in 1992. In his memoirs *Diplomacy on the Edge*, Ahrens (2007: 272-273) argues:

Fortunately ... the Montenegrin variant of the Albanian dimension did not degenerate into armed conflict ... Toward the end of 1992, relations between the two federated units of the FRY began to deteriorate. They engaged in a type of trade war ... From 1997 onward, an open conflict between Prime Minister (later, President) Djukanovic and Milosevic resulted in a division of the Montenegrin electorate into roughly two halves. One half was led by Djukanovic, the other by (former) President Bulatovic, who remained loyal to the Serb president. This division transformed the Muslim and Albanian minorities, who together accounted for almost one-quarter of the population, into an interesting political partner, useful for securing majorities. As they loathed Milosevic, whom they held responsible for what happened in BiH (Muslims) and in Kosovo (Albanians), Djukanovic could count on their vote. Furthermore, in his conflict with Milosevic, Djukanovic needed Western support, which was easier to get if he observed acceptable standards of human and minority rights. Consequently, he made certain concessions to these minorities, whose situation improved.

Taken together, the above cited evidence clearly shows that the dominant ruling party in postcommunist Montenegro, DPS, has always treated non-Orthodox minorities as a potential political ally against great Serbian forces, even during the first seven years when the DPS was united. That is why even in those years (1990-1997), whenever facing threat from Milosevic or his paramilitaries active in Montenegro, the DPS would always move closer to the opposition Montenegrin parties (LSCG and SDP) and revive the legacies of

the Montenegrin nation as “protector of minorities” in the past. In the post-1997 period, DPS’ reliance on minorities deepened to the utmost as one half of DPS (the Bulatovic-led one) split from the party and embraced great Serbian nationalism. Dukanovic was aware that he could not any more score any electoral victory against the Serbian bloc without the support of other Montenegrin parties and minority support. That is why we had the 1 September 1997 *Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro*. Eventually, post-1997 Montenegrin politics became the story of how DPS used the support of other Montenegrin parties and minorities to secure electoral majorities and preserve its up to now uninterrupted incumbency.

5.6 Post-1997 Montenegrin Politics: DPS’ use of Montenegrin and minority parties to secure electoral majorities and uninterrupted incumbency

5.6.1 October 1997 presidential election and the May 1998 parliamentary election

The first electoral showdown in the recalibrated Montenegrin politics was the October 1997 presidential election that pitted Milo Dukanovic against his erstwhile ally Momir Bulatovic. In the end of a tightly contested election, Dukanovic (after having narrowly lost the first round) squeaked through in the second round with a razor-thin majority, 50.79 per cent to 49.2 per cent (Bieber 2003: 31; Roberts 2007: 453-454). If we compare this result with the December 1992 presidential election contended by Momir Bulatovic and Branko Kostic, the effect of DPS split on Montenegrin identity politics becomes clearer. In 1992 when DPS was united, Momir Bulatovic was the presidential candidate who represented Montenegrin political separateness from Belgrade and had the opposition Montenegrin (LSCG, SDP, and NS) and minority parties’ (LDMZ and SDA) support behind him, whereas Branko Kostic was the Radical Party candidate who stood for a chauvinistic great Serbian platform backed by Milosevic. Then, Bulatovic secured a comfortable win over his rival by gathering 64 per cent of the vote while Kostic gathered 36 per cent. Five years later in the October 1997 presidential race, after the DPS split, Bulatovic took the place of Kostic while Dukanovic this time stood for political separateness from Belgrade and had the Montenegrin and minority parties’ support behind him. In October 1997 however, Dukanovic barely succeeded to defeat Bulatovic by gathering 50.8 per cent, whereas Bulatovic stood at 49 per cent of the vote.

Using the vote share of the (Belgrade-backed) radical Serb presidential candidate as a proxy for measuring Serb self-identification in Montenegro, it becomes clear that the identity shift that occurred in only five years within the Orthodox majority is very significant. While in 1992 36 per cent of the electorate self-identified as Serb, after the DPS split in 1997 this figure jumped to 49 per cent. This crucially means that after the DPS split, Dukanovic was actually a minority among the Orthodox population. That is why he vitally needed non-Orthodox minority (Albanian and Bosniak) votes for securing (razor-thin) electoral majorities against the Serbian bloc. The October 1997 presidential election was only Dukanovic's first victory. Many more are to come employing the same electoral strategy.

However, Bulatovic (read Milosevic) refused to recognize the election results and on the night of 14 January 1998 (the night before Dukanovic's official presidential inauguration) thousands of Bulatovic's supporters and thugs sent directly from Belgrade tried to storm the government building in Podgorica, but were subsequently repelled by the Montenegrin police (Kovacevic 2007: 78; Morrison 2009: 160-162). Mirko Stanic argues that this was a coup attempt organized by Milosevic against Dukanovic, but Milosevic later could not afford himself to focus much on Montenegro because two months after the 14 January events, full-scale civil war started in Kosovo between UÇK insurgents and the Serbian police forces (Stanic 2019). In the meantime, after the presidential election defeat, Bulatovic's wing of the DPS left the party and formed the Socialist People's Party (SNP), the first in a long chain of (radical) Serbian nationalist parties formed in post-1997 Montenegrin politics. Now, the DPS consisted only of the Dukanovic wing, the middle and upper echelons of the formerly united DPS. Since the rump DPS lost the parliamentary majority, early parliamentary elections took place in May 1998 in the midst of full-scale civil war in Kosovo.

Just as Dukanovic had needed the support of Montenegrin and minority parties to win the October 1997 presidential election, so the DPS would need again their support to win the parliamentary elections from 1998 onwards. It was clear that the era of capturing overwhelming majorities on its own (as it had done from 1990 to 1997) was over for the (rump) DPS. Accordingly, prior to the May 1998 parliamentary election Dukanovic formed a coalition with the SDP of Ranko Krivokapic and the NS of Novak Kilibarda, while the LSCG chose to run alone. This time, unlike the presidential election, the Dukanovic coalition (DPS, SDP, NS) won a convincing victory against Bulatovic's SNP

by gathering half of the national vote and 42/78 parliamentary seats, whereas the SNP captured only 29 seats (36 per cent of the vote). For the first time since 1990, Slavko Perovic's LSCG saw its national vote share halved from 12-13 per cent to 6 per cent (only 5 seats). Likewise, both ethnic Albanian parties (LDMZ and UDSH) saw also their support drop by losing one seat each compared to the previous parliamentary election (Bieber 2003: 31-32; Morrison 2009: 164-165).

Two observations are in order. First, of the 42 seats the Dukanovic coalition won, DPS won 30 and its two junior coalition partners won 12 (seven seats for NS and five for SDP). This clearly shows that DPS' number of seats was almost the same as SNP's (30 versus 29), and that the DPS was able to secure a majority only due to the coalition it made with NS and SDP. Second, the representation of minority-origin deputies increased for DPS in this election. Of its 30 deputies, five (16.6 per cent) were minority-origin, three Bosniaks and 2 Albanians.¹⁹ Two of the five elected deputies of its junior coalition partner (SDP) were also Bosniak, Ervin Spahic and Rifat Rastoder. What is more significant, DPS was able to capture three of the five seats assigned to the special Albanian electoral district²⁰, while the remaining two were won by the two ethnic Albanian parties (LDMZ and UDSH).²¹ In other words, more Albanians had voted for DPS than for their own ethnic parties in the May 1998 parliamentary election. Taking into consideration also the fact that after the election both Albanian parties joined the DPS-NS-SDP ruling coalition, it becomes clear that Albanian level of support for Montenegrin parties against the (great) Serbian bloc was indeed stunning. There is no doubt that Dukanovic with his anti-great Serbian and multiethnic nationhood vision had *ideologically* "bought" both Albanian voters and their ethnic parties.

5.6.2 *How Montenegro escaped civil war during NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, March-June 1999?*

While the Montenegrin parties achieved also their first parliamentary victory (after the presidential one in October 1997) against the Serbian bloc, Kosovo was internally

¹⁹ The Bosniaks were Smajo Sabotic, Asim Dizdarevic, and Elvic Omeragic, while the Albanians were Martin Ivezaj (Catholic) and Xhemal Vukovic (Muslim).

²⁰ As it will be remembered, the 1 September 1997 *Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro* mandated the formation of a special electoral district comprising all Albanian areas of settlement in Montenegro.

²¹ I thank Daria Music, Montenegrin Parliament's Library and Documentation Centre and Archive, for sending me via e-mail the list of all elected deputies from postcommunist Montenegrin parliamentary elections (December 1990-October 2016). Ratio calculations and ethnic identification of minority-origin deputies is mine. For the method I used, refer back to footnote 8. in this chapter.

convulsing. The relations between Serbia and Montenegro reached breaking point as a result of three Montenegrin policies in relation to the Kosovo crisis. First, president Dukanovic declared Montenegro's neutrality over the Kosovo war and withdrew Montenegrin reservists from the Yugoslav army (YNA). Instead, Dukanovic employed those reservists to further strengthen the Montenegrin police force which "became increasingly militarized until it evolved into a virtual armed force" comprising about 20,000 troops (Morrison 2009: 171). Among these troops loyal to Dukanovic, there were also many Bosniaks and Albanians. According to Xhemal Perovic, among Albanians whoever wished could enter the police force in those years (Perovic 2019). Second, although formally neutral, the Montenegrin government crucially helped the Albanian UÇK insurgents by allowing the Albanian areas of settlement in Montenegro to be used freely by the insurgents as a supply route for both arms and rebels coming from north Albania (Pettifer and Vickers 2009: 239-240). Third, by hosting about 150,000 Kosovar Albanians who fled the civil war, Montenegro was in a highly unusual situation where refugees came to constitute about 18 per cent of its population. As the Minister for Human and Minority Rights Mehmet Zenka (ethnic Albanian) describes:

We [Montenegrin Albanians] will never forget. At the end of the day, by blood, language and history, Montenegrins are closer to Serbs than Albanians. However, 150,000 Kosovar refugees felt themselves in Montenegro safer than in Tirana. Montenegro hosted them for more than one year and maximally protected them in the best of ways. We Montenegrin Albanians witnessed all of this. Of course, we [Montenegrin Albanians] too hosted them, but it was a brotherhood, moral, blood and religious obligation for us to host the Kosovars, for the (ethnic) Montenegrins it wasn't [an obligation]. Compare this with the situation of the Kosovars who fled to Macedonia, where they were so badly received [by the then incumbent VMRO government] (Zenka 2019).

However, these policies made Montenegro and the heavily armed police force loyal to Dukanovic open targets for about 14,000 Yugoslav army (YNA) troops stationed on Montenegrin soil and the local Serbian paramilitary forces. The danger of civil war became even more imminent when NATO started its 78-day bombing campaign against Serbia on 24 March 1999 (Kovacevic 2007: 79-80; Roberts 2007: 455-457; Morrison 2009: 168-173). Theoretically, Milosevic could well have launched a diversionary war on Montenegro, and this would have been an interethnic civil war given that many among Dukanovic's police troops were Bosniaks and ethnic Albanians. The fear of war was such that even Montenegrin government ministers armed themselves during the period NATO bombed Belgrade (Morrison 2009: 263). Yet, against all odds, Montenegro escaped civil war. How did this happen?

The answer to this question is that both Montenegrin (DPS, LSCG, SDP, NS) and Serbian parties (SNP) in Montenegro a few days after the beginning of NATO's bombing campaign *unanimously* adopted in parliament the *Declaration for the Preservation of Civil Peace* and accordingly urged their respective sides to draw back from attacking each other (Popovic 2019). This clearly begs the question of how was this *Declaration* adopted by two sides that had diametrically opposed nationhood visions. This would seem to disconfirm my hypothesis since I empirically predict that cooperation is more likely to happen among parties that share the same nationhood vision. However, besides all their differences, Montenegrin and Serbian parties in Montenegro share only one element on which their respective nationhood visions converge, and that is the primacy of *tribal* identity which often cuts across national and political divisions (Krivokapic 2019; Popovic 2019). More specifically, Montenegro as a polity that has preserved tribal structures has many families and clans whose members are roughly equally divided among those who self-identify nationally as Montenegrin and those who self-identify as Serb. Hence, a potential civil war in Montenegro would pit members of the same family or clan against one another and it is precisely the spectre of such fratricide that deters both sides. Milan Popovic, who innovatively refers to this unusual social set-up as “neo-patriarchy”, further elaborates on how Montenegro survived civil war in 1999:

In 1999, at the end of March, I think the main factor and force which produced the *Declaration for Peace* was exactly neo-patriarchy ... For instance, I am from the tribe or clan of Kuci, bordering Albania. Several times my life was at stake but I was helped, supported, and saved thanks to my Kuci tribe, who are at the same time great Serbian nationalists. So, great Serbian Kuci used to say Milan Miloradov [Milorad is my late father's name] is against Slobodan Milosevic, and they are angry about that but he is a good guy, he is our Kuci ... So, according to my personal statistics, at least 50 per cent of all Montenegrin nuclear families are divided 50-50 [among those who self-identify as Montenegrin and Serb]. For example, Miodrag Vlahovic, who is currently Montenegro's ambassador to Vatican [and is a proud Montenegrin], his born brother was, and still is, a great Serbian nationalist. This is quite a common pattern ... So, my guess is that most of the people, including political people in Montenegro, at the peak of the dangerous developments and risk of full-scale civil war, were terrified with the very idea that I will be on the opposite side of my born brother and have to shoot at him and he to shoot at me. So, quite atypically, this is my conclusion. In 1999, neo-patriarchy which is regularly the source of aggression and nationalism, was the source and factor of salvation. In my conclusion, it was deterrence (Popovic 2019).

Similarly, SDP leader Ranko Krivokapic argues that family and tribal allegiances in Montenegro trump the national and political ones. “That's the rule” he avers and exemplifies his point:

I will give you an example. In June 1994 I had a verbal clash with Vojislav Seselj [founder and leader of the Serbian Radical Party] in the federal parliament in Belgrade. It was publicly

broadcasted in Serbian TV. I told you are a war criminal, he told me you are a white hat [because Krivokapic's SDP protected Montenegrin Albanians and the white hat is an Albanian national symbol] ... After the clash I had with Seselj, Serbian nationalists tried to beat me in Kotor, I am from Kotor [coastal town in Montenegro]. And my cousin in this period was the second guy in the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. And they [Serbian nationalists] came to ask him. We will beat your cousin, we would like to ask you. He told them in a sentence. Don't touch him. Krivokapic, that's my second name, are lasting, whereas states and parties expire. Don't touch him. Tribe names are more important than parties and states. They didn't touch me (Krivokapic 2019).

All in all, it was the primacy of tribal allegiances that both Montenegrin and Serbian parties shared that made possible their political cooperation (i.e. the adoption of the *Declaration for the Preservation of Civil Peace*) and preserved peace in Montenegro. This clearly shows that even nationhood visions that are diametrically opposed to each other (as the Montenegrin and (great) Serbian one), if they converge on certain factors, cooperation among them becomes possible. Hence, this actually confirms my hypothesis that cooperation is contingent on similar nationhood visions. Montenegrin and Serbian nationhood visions share the primacy they attach to tribal allegiances and this enabled them to react with unity to the civil war threat in 1999. Even the former leader of the strongest pro-independence Montenegrin party LSCG, Xhemal Perovic, acknowledges that what averted civil war in Montenegro was “the wisdom of the Serbian party [SNP] which unanimously voted for the *Declaration for Peace* in the parliament”. Further assessing the 1999 developments, Perovic argues that “whenever the state faces the threat of war, it reacts with unity” (Perovic 2019).

5.6.3 DPS: The only uninterrupted ex-communist incumbency in southeast Europe

Having survived the war, Dukanovic's DPS reverted once more to its time-tested tactic of cultivating the distinct Montenegrin nationhood with its opposition to (great) Serbianism to *ideologically* buy the support of both Montenegrin and minority parties. DPS after the 1997 split had already secured two important electoral victories using this strategy: Dukanovic's win in the presidential race against Bulatovic in October 1997 and DPS' subsequent triumph in the May 1998 parliamentary election. Employing the same strategy DPS will be able to preserve its uninterrupted incumbency up to present and achieve also what is undoubtedly its greatest victory, Montenegrin independence from Serbia in the referendum of 21 May 2006.

First, to better understand how the DPS, a communist successor party, has succeeded in ruling uninterruptedly since 1990, let's have a look at the results of all

parliamentary elections in Montenegro from December 1990 until the most recent in October 2016. The results are presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Results of parliamentary elections in postcommunist Montenegro (December 1990 – October 2016).

Election Party	December 1990 /125 seats	December 1992 /85	November 1996 /71	May 1998 /78	April 2001 /77	October 2002 /75	September 2006 /81	March 2009 /81	October 2012 /81	October 2016 /81
Democratic Party of Socialists DPS	83	46	45	30	30	31	33	35	30	36
Social Democratic Party SDP	17 ²²	4	-	5	6	7	7	9	6	6
Liberal Alliance of Montenegro LSCG	-	13	19 ²³	5	6	4	1	-	-	-
People's Party NS	12	14	-	7	11	5	-	-	-	-
Socialist People's Party SNP	-	-	-	29	19	19	11	16	9	9 ²⁴
Serbian SNS /NOVA	-	-	-	-	3	6	12	8	20 ²⁵	18 ²⁶
Movement for Changes PZP	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	5	-	-
Alb. LDMZ	4	-	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	-
Alb. UDSH	-	-	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
Bosniak/Muslim parties SDA/BS	9	-	3	-	-	-	2	3	3	2

Source- PARLINE database on national parliaments. Available online at http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2385_arc.htm. I used also the list of all elected deputies sent to me by Daria Music, Montenegrin Parliament's Library and Documentation Centre and Archive.

²² SDP with LSCG formed the coalition *Alliance of Reformist Forces* and together won 17 seats.

²³ LSCG with NS formed the coalition *People's Unity* and together won 19 seats.

²⁴ SNP with DEMOS and URA formed the *Key* coalition and together won 9 seats.

²⁵ NOVA with PZP formed the coalition *Democratic Front* and together won 20 seats.

²⁶ NOVA with PZP formed the coalition *Democratic Front* and together won 18 seats.

An analysis of the results of 10 parliamentary elections is revealing of two main patterns concerning postcommunist Montenegrin politics. First, the communist successor party (DPS) was able to secure alone an overwhelming majority of the national vote and parliamentary seats in the three elections before its split (December 1990, December 1992, and November 1996). However, in the seven post-split (i.e. post-1997) parliamentary elections, DPS has never been able to garner a majority on its own. Taken together, the post-split elections show that DPS' national vote share and number of seats has been relatively stable. It has consistently gathered 40-42 per cent of the vote with an average number of seats 32 / 81. Hence, to secure majorities in the post-1997 period, DPS has always needed junior coalition partners, and its long-time partner in this respect has been Ranko Krivokapic's SDP. An analysis of SDP's election results shows that its voter base has also been relatively stable, as in the post-1997 period SDP has consistently gathered 7-9 per cent of the national vote.

Second, to avoid the risk of falling 1-2 per cent short of achieving a majority, Dukanovic's DPS, in addition to SDP, has also consistently invited the minority parties (Bosniak, Albanian, and Croat) as junior coalition partners. However, the consistent support of minority parties is only one facet of the support minorities have provided for DPS (and SDP). As also previously pointed out, in the Montenegrin case, minorities cast their ballots for Montenegrin parties as much as for their own ethnic parties. As I showed in Table 5.4, even in the pre-1997 period, on average 10 per cent of DPS' elected deputies were minority-origin, while the average for the then anti-communist opposition parties (SDP and LSCG) was even higher (17 per cent). When we compare these figures with the ones from post-1997 parliamentary elections, we see that minority representation in both DPS and SDP has more than doubled. As clearly shown in Table 5.6 below, on average 21 per cent of DPS' elected deputies in the post-1997 elections were minority-origin, whereas for its junior coalition partner (SDP) the rate is a stunning 40 per cent.

Table 5.6: Non-Orthodox (Muslim and Catholic) minority representation in DPS and SDP in the post-1997 parliamentary elections.

% minority-origin elected deputies	DPS	SDP
<i>May 1998</i>	% 16.6 (5/30)	% 40 (2/5)
<i>April 2001</i>	% 16.6 (5/30)	% 33 (2/6)
<i>October 2002</i>	% 22.6 (7/31)	% 42.8 (3/7)

<i>September 2006</i>	% 21.2 (7/33)	% 42.8 (3/7)
<i>March 2009</i>	% 34.3 (12/35)	% 55.5 (5/9)
<i>October 2012</i>	% 26.6 (8/30)	% 50 (3/6)
<i>October 2016</i>	% 11 (4/36)	% 16.6 (1/6)
AVERAGE	% 21	% 40

Source: Figures calculated by the author based on the list of all elected deputies in Montenegrin parliamentary elections from December 1990 until the most recent October 2016. I thank Daria Music, Montenegrin Parliament's Library and Documentation Centre and Archive, for sending me the list via e-mail.

Table 5.7: Albanian deputies elected from ethnic Albanian and Montenegrin parties in the parliamentary elections (1990- present).

Parliamentary Election	<i>Deputies elected from ethnic Albanian parties</i>	<i>Albanian deputies elected from Montenegrin parties</i>
December 1990 (/125)	Gjergj Gjokaj (LDMZ) C Mustafe Çapuni (LDMZ) M Tahir Perezic (LDMZ) M Xheladin Zeneli (LDMZ) M	Gjergj Berishaj (SDP) C Skender Elezagic (SDP) M Fran Dedvukaj (DPS) C
December 1992 (/85)	0	Xhemal Perovic (LSCG) M Fran Dedvukaj (DPS) C
November 1996 (/71)	Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) M Muhamed Nika (LDMZ) M Ferhat Dinosh (UDSH) M Mehmet Gjoni (UDSH) M	Fran Dedvukaj (DPS) C
May 1998 (/78)	Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) M Ferhat Dinosh (UDSH) M	Martin Ivezaj (DPS) C Xhemal Vukovic (DPS) M
April 2001 (/77)	Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) M Ferhat Dinosh (UDSH) M	Nikole Gegaj (DPS) C Luigj Shkreli (DPS) C
October 2002 (/75)	Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) M Ferhat Dinosh (UDSH) M	Luigj Shkreli (DPS) C Rexhep Taganovic (DPS) M Xhemal Perovic (LSCG) M
September 2006 (/81)	Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) M Ferhat Dinosh (UDSH) M Vasil Sinishtaj (ASH) ²⁷ C	Luigj Shkreli (DPS) C
March 2009 (/81)	Mehmet Zenka (UDSH) M Mehmet Bardhi (LDMZ) M Genci Nimanbegu (FRD) ²⁸ M Amir Hollaj (IQ) ²⁹ M	Nikole Gegaj (DPS) C Luigj Shkreli (DPS) C
October 2012 (/81)	Nik Gjeshaj (ASH) C Genci Nimanbegu (FRD) M	Nikole Gegaj (DPS) C Luigj Shkreli (DPS) C Dritan Abazovic (PCG) ³⁰ M

²⁷ ASH stands for *Albanian Alternative*, ethnic Albanian party in Montenegro founded in 2006 by Gjergj Camaj.

²⁸ FRD stands for *New Democratic Force*, ethnic Albanian party in Montenegro founded in 2005 by Nazif Cungu.

²⁹ IQ stands for *Citizens' Initiative*, ethnic Albanian party in Montenegro founded in 2006 by Gjeto Sinishtaj.

³⁰ PCG stands for *Positive Montenegro*, Montenegrin party founded in May 2012 by Darko Pajovic.

October 2016 (/81)	Genci Nimanbegu (FRD) M	Luigj Shkreli (DPS) C Dritan Abazovic (URA) ³¹ M
TOTAL	24 deputies	21 deputies

Source: Table prepared by the author based on the list of elected deputies in Montenegrin parliamentary elections sent to me by Daria Music, Montenegrin Parliament's Library and Documentation Centre and Archive. For the way I identified Muslim and Catholic Albanians, please refer to footnote 8 in this chapter. Bold M and C in the table stand for Muslim and Catholic.

When we look only at Albanian minority representation among mainstream Montenegrin parties in the post-1997 period, we see that it is dominated by the communist successor party DPS. Table 5.7 above evidences such a pattern. Three observations are in order. First, Montenegrin Albanian vote is bifurcated among ethnic Albanian and mainstream Montenegrin parties. Indeed, the results of all ten postcommunist parliamentary elections clearly show that the total number of Albanian deputies elected from Albanian parties (24) is almost equal to the total number of Albanian deputies elected from mainstream Montenegrin parties (21). This pattern clearly sets Montenegrin Albanians apart from their co-ethnics living in North Macedonia and south Serbia/Presevo valley who vote overwhelmingly for their own ethnic parties. Second, as already stated, Albanian representation among mainstream Montenegrin parties is dominated by the communist successor party DPS. Indeed, of the total of 21 Albanian deputies elected from Montenegrin parties, 15 (71 per cent) have been elected from DPS. Table 5.7 also shows that in each of the three pre-1997 elections, DPS had only one Albanian elected among its ranks, while in the post-1997 elections this rate doubled – in each election DPS had on average two ethnic Albanians elected. It is also interesting to note that DPS' long-time coalition partner SDP, in the post-1997 elections never had any Albanian elected among its ranks. Given that minority representation rate in SDP was a stunning 40 per cent (as shown in Table 5.6), this means that the minority represented in SDP consisted entirely of Bosniak/Muslims. Albanians instead in the post-1997 period cast their ballots mostly for DPS and much less for a couple of other Montenegrin parties (LSCG, PCG, and URA). Third, given that Montenegrin Albanians, unlike their co-ethnics in Kosovo, south Serbia and North Macedonia, are not religiously homogeneous but consist instead of a Muslim majority (75 per cent) and a large Catholic minority (25 per cent), it is interesting to briefly look at the confessional representation of Albanians

³¹ URA stands for *United Reformist Action*, Montenegrin party founded in 2015 by Zarko Rakcevic and currently led by an ethnic Albanian, Dritan Abazovic.

in Montenegro. Table 5.8 below presents some statistics on the confessional distribution of elected Albanian deputies among Albanian and Montenegrin parties.

Table 5.8: Confessional representation of Albanians in Montenegro (1990-present).

	# of elected <i>Muslim</i> Albanian deputies	# of elected <i>Catholic</i> Albanian deputies
Ethnic Albanian parties	21	3
Montenegrin parties	7	14
TOTAL	28	17

Source: Figures calculated by the author by classifying all elected Albanian deputies presented in Table 5.7 as either Muslim (M) or Catholic (C).

As Table 5.8 clearly shows, Muslim Albanians are overwhelmingly (21/28 – 75 per cent) elected in ethnic Albanian parties whereas Catholic Albanians are overwhelmingly (14/17 – 82 per cent) elected in mainstream Montenegrin parties. Moreover, of the total of 15 Albanian deputies elected from DPS ranks, 13 are Catholic Albanians and only two are Muslim (Xhemal Vukovic and Rexhep Taganovic). However, Albanians that have been elected from all the other Montenegrin parties (SDP, LSCG, PCG, and URA) have been all Muslim (with the single exception of Gjergj Berishaj). In other words, the communist successor party in Montenegro (DPS) dominates not only the representation of the Albanian minority but also the representation of the Catholic minority within it.

Taken together, Tables 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8 above clearly evidence a pattern of *double minority support* for mainstream Montenegrin parties - both minority voters and their ethnic parties overwhelmingly supporting the mainstream Montenegrin parties. This pattern of double support is very unusual, or perhaps unique, among other postcommunist countries but it is, I argue, the single most important evidence to support my thesis that it is the anti- (great) Serbian nationhood vision of the Montenegrin parties that has secured them minority support and has made interethnic relations in postcommunist Montenegro exceptionally peaceful. Additionally, considering that minorities (Bosniak - 12 per cent, Albanian - 5 per cent, and Croat - 1 per cent) altogether make up 18 per cent of Montenegro's population (MONSTAT 2011), double minority support is also the main element that has enabled the communist successor party DPS to rule uninterruptedly since 1990. Especially in the post-1997 period, there is no doubt that Milo Dukanovic would *never* have been able to achieve an electoral majority without the individual minority votes (both for DPS and its junior coalition partner SDP) *and* the parliamentary support of their minority parties. As one recent study on the topic also concludes, the national set-

up of the Montenegrin society “hinders the movement of votes” between the two main blocs (Montenegrin and Serbian) and it is a main factor that has enabled DPS to win all postcommunist elections (Komar and Zivkovic 2016: 791)³².

Undoubtedly, the greatest electoral victory postcommunist Montenegrin parties have ever achieved utilizing minority support is the 21 May 2006 independence referendum. The final result was 55.53 versus 44.47 per cent in favour of Montenegrin independence from Serbia³³ – the 55 per cent threshold set by the EU had been surpassed by only 0.53 per cent (Morrison 2009: 218-219). As observers rightly point out, the threshold imposed on Montenegro “was a precedent, as a rule of this nature had not been seen before in the EU or elsewhere. In a certain sense, it meant that a vote of those for independence was worth less than the vote of those against it” (Kovacevic 2007: 89). The margin of victory had been only 11 per cent and the Serbian parties were quick to charge that Montenegrin diaspora and the minorities were the ones that actually swang the result in favour of independence. As the deputy leader of NOVA, Serbian nationalist party in Montenegro, told the author:

By Montenegrin constitution, somebody can vote if he lived in Montenegro in the last two years. For referendum, people from abroad who had left Montenegro thirty years ago came, paid by Dukanovic, his dirty money. There were people from Chile, from U.S, came by charters, hundreds of them (charters). In small Montenegro, it was 10 per cent of the people. So, somebody who does not live in Montenegro decided that Montenegro will be a sovereign country (Radunovic 2019).

Fundamentally, and symbolically at the same time, the strongest support for independence came from two towns that are overwhelmingly minority-inhabited – Ulcinj (70 per cent Albanian) and Rozaje (85 per cent Bosniak). In each of these two towns, more than 90 per cent voted in favor of independence (Abazovic 2019). Perhaps it is difficult to find any other postcommunist country where minorities have played such a crucial role in the country’s political trajectory. Indeed, in Montenegro “minorities have sealed every political process” avers Mehmet Zenka, Minister for Human and Minority Rights.

Despite the narrow margin of the referendum victory, by now (13 years later) even the Serbian parties do not dispute any more Montenegro’s statehood and independence.

³² The other two reasons Komar and Zivkovic have put forward to explain DPS’ uninterrupted rule are “the image of invincibility (DPS has created)” and the “non-participant political attitudes which are inherited from the previous political culture” (Komar and Zivkovic 2016: 791).

³³ The turnout was a staggering 86.49 per cent (Morrison 2009: 219).

As a Serbian nationalist leader says “Now Montenegro is independent, is in NATO. All this is behind us” (Radunovic 2019). Having lost the referendum, Serbian parties would find it difficult in the post-referendum period to mobilize their constituency with similar degree of success.

5.6.4 *The Declining support of Serbian parties in Montenegro and the prospects for breaking DPS’ monopoly of power*

Table 5.5 is also revealing of the fluctuations in the voter base and support of the Serbian parties/bloc in Montenegro. In the period before the DPS split (i.e. pre-1997 period), there were only two Serbian parties in Montenegro: Novak Kilibarda’s NS and the Serbian Radical Party (SRP) led by Acem Visnjic. Given that the NS radically transformed after 1992, it is safe to argue that the Serbian bloc in the pre-1997 period was represented only by SRP. While the party scored only 8 per cent in the December 1992 parliamentary election, the best way to measure the support of the Serbian bloc during this period is by looking at the vote share of SRP’s candidate, Branko Kostic, in the presidential race against DPS’ Momir Bulatovic in December 1992. Accordingly, Kostic gathered 36 per cent of the national vote. After the DPS split in July 1997, the Serbian bloc came to be represented by Momir Bulatovic who gathered 49 per cent of the vote in the October 1997 presidential election against Milo Dukanovic. However, this stunning vote share was only temporary because less than one year after the October 1997 presidential election, SNP, the new Serbian party founded by Bulatovic, gathered only 37 per cent of the vote in the May 1998 parliamentary election, a share identical to that gathered by Branko Kostic in 1992. Thereafter, in the two parliamentary elections before the May 2006 independence referendum (April 2001 and October 2002), the electoral coalition of three Serbian parties SNP-NS-SNS³⁴ gathered respectively 40 and 38 per cent of the national vote (Bieber 2003: 32-38). After having scored a stunning 44.5 per cent in the May 2006 independence referendum (but still not sufficient to block Montenegro’s independence from Serbia), the hitherto unified Serbian bloc split and its vote share thereafter precipitously dropped.

In the post-referendum period, the Serbian bloc in Montenegro is represented by a number of small parties which have mostly run in coalition with opposition

³⁴ Serbian People’s Party (SNS) is a splinter party formed in 1997 by former NS members who disapproved of the then decision of their leader Novak Kilibarda to form an electoral coalition with Dukanovic’s DPS. In 2009, SNS changed its name to New Serbian Democracy (NOVA), a change that its deputy leader, Slaven Radunovic, says was “more cosmetic than real” (Radunovic 2019). Once the NS ousted its leader Novak Kilibarda in 2001, it subsequently joined the electoral coalition with SNP and SNS in the run-up to the May 2006 independence referendum.

Montenegrin parties. In the 2006 and 2009 parliamentary elections, the combined vote share of the two main Serbian parties, NOVA and SNP, was 28-29 per cent (23-24 seats/81). However, in each following election, Serbian parties' support will further decline. As such, three months prior to the October 2012 parliamentary election, arguably the most radical Serbian party NOVA, together with the Montenegrin party PZP established the *Democratic Front* (DF), however even as a coalition they could only get about 22 per cent of the vote. In March 2015, DF split as its leader Miodrag Lekic left the party to form the Democratic Alliance DEMOS (Morrison 2018: 151-152). In the most recent October 2016 parliamentary elections, DF could only gather 20 per cent of the vote (18 seats)³⁵ while the other opposition Montenegrin parties together gathered 26 per cent of the vote (21 seats).³⁶ If we combine the number of seats captured by the small Serbian parties running in different coalitions, it amounts to 18 seats – NOVA's 9 seats, DNP's 4 seats, SNP's 3 seats, and UCG's 2 seats – out of the total of 39 opposition seats.

Taken together, if we compare the pre-referendum (i.e. pre-2006) and current state of Serbian parties in Montenegro, we see a huge difference. In the pre-referendum period, the Serbian parties were united (the SNP-NS-SNS coalition) and they consistently gathered 36-40 per cent of the national vote (almost the same as DPS' vote share alone). Currently, the Serbian parties are more than ever divided, run in coalitions with different Montenegrin parties, and their combined vote share is about 20 per cent, half of what it used to be in the pre-referendum period. Equally significant, after the most recent October 2016 parliamentary election, the combined seats of Serbian parties (18) do not constitute even half of the total opposition seats (39), whereas in the pre-referendum period, Serbian parties (SNP-NS-SNS) were *the* opposition in Montenegro – they constituted almost the whole opposition.

The decline of Serbian parties, of course, should be bad news for Dukanovic and DPS since their ability to attract Montenegrin and minority votes is primarily premised on the strength and radical nationalistic rhetoric of Serbian parties. With these parties'

³⁵ Only 13 of these 18 seats belonged to the two Serbian parties that were part of DF - 9 for NOVA and 4 for Democratic People's Party DNP – whereas 5 seats were of the Montenegrin party PZP. I thank Mirko Stanic, SDP's official spokesperson, for providing me this updated information.

³⁶ Big Coalition Key (SNP-DEMOS-URA-UCG) gathered 11 per cent; Democratic Montenegro (DCG), new centrist party formed prior to the elections by Aleksa Becic, gathered 10 per cent, and SDP, which left its 18-year-long alliance with DPS, gathered 5 per cent (Morrison 2018: 164). Within the Big Coalition Key, there were two Serbian parties, SNP with 3 seats, and United Montenegro (UCG) with 2 seats. The Montenegrin coalition partners DEMOS and URA together had 4 seats. I thank Mirko Stanic for giving me this updated information.

electoral support further declining, one could expect support for DPS also drop, and consequently, its ability to preserve its uninterrupted rule to weaken. Indeed, there are already signs that support for DPS has also started to decline. In January 2016, SDP, that has been DPS' junior coalition partner for 18 years (since 1998), decided to leave the coalition government with the reasoning that they (i.e. SDP) had already fulfilled all their main party goals and saw no need in supporting DPS any more. As SDP's official spokesperson, Mirko Stanic, told the author:

We were supporting Milo Dukanovic fulfilling our party program, because he actually took most of our principles, like introducing a fully multi-ethnic state, regaining independence, and entering NATO ... Our support was pragmatic ... And we exited the government because we fulfilled all our political program, by having an independent state, by entering NATO, and by having a multi-ethnic state. We said we are going to be in the Dukanovic government until the day we get NATO invitation. We got NATO invitation in December 1st 2015, and we exit the government in January 15th 2016. So, only 45 days after that we decided in our main board meeting that we are not going to be in a government that does not fulfill the socio-economic needs of the citizens, and implement the rule of law ... The party (SDP) recognizes that it's not easy to have a leader of a Eastern European country (i.e. SDP's leader Ranko Krivokapic) that was 18 years in power and nobody says he is corrupt. Nobody is going to say for SDP, they are corrupt. Not even the biggest enemies of SDP (Serbian parties in Montenegro). They are going to say ok, they (SDP) are pro-Muslim, pro-Albanian, pro-Croat party, they are separatists, they are NATO lovers and stuff, but nobody is going to say they are corrupt. So, we have this zero tolerance towards corruption (Stanic 2019).

Another sign that Montenegrin politics with the decline of Serbian parties is shifting from identity-based (i.e Montenegrin versus (great) Serbian) to citizen-based politics is the most recent agreement (30 March 2019) signed by all 39 opposition deputies in the Montenegrin parliament (among whom 18 are Serbian), that asked for the resignation of Dukanovic, the formation of a Government of Civic Unity, and the holding of free and fair elections (Popovic 2019). The signing of *Sporazum za Buducnost* (Agreement for the Future) marked the culmination of two months of massive opposition protests (February-March 2019) that were precipitated by the leakage of a video showing a tycoon close to Dukanovic giving an envelope of 100,000 euros for buying votes in Podgorica's mayoral election (Abazovic 2019; Popovic 2019). Professor Milan Popovic argues that *Agreement for the Future* is very significant because it was adopted by both Montenegrin and Serbian (opposition) parties and thus transcended the traditional national divides for the sake of achieving civic unity. In this respect, Popovic argues that this agreement is very similar to the March 1999 *Declaration for the Preservation of Civil Peace*, that was adopted by all incumbent and opposition parties then in parliament (DPS, SDP, NS, LSCG, SNP, LDMZ, UDSH) and prevented civil war in Montenegro during

NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia (Popovic 2019). However, under the present circumstances, Popovic predicts that the ruling DPS might try to "fabricate identity-related issues" and "mini-crises" to provoke Serbian parties and push them again towards aggressive, great Serbian nationalist rhetoric. The aim, according to Popovic, is:

to remove the picture of the mighty citizens against the government, and instead of that picture, to have a picture of the state that is in question. We must support Dukanovic, we know Dukanovic is mafia boss but better mafia boss than Chetniks (Popovic 2019).

All these developments, of course, beg the question of whether a reorientation of Montenegrin politics from identity-based to citizen-based will have any repercussions for interethnic relations in the country, which up to this point have been exceptionally peaceful. After all, my main argument is that interethnic relations have been so peaceful because minorities have been ideologically "bought" by the Montenegrin parties with their multiethnic and anti-(great) Serbian nationhood vision. If great Serbian ideology recedes in Montenegro, and the declining support of Serbian parties shows that this ideology is in fact gradually receding, does this not mean that the link between Montenegrin parties and the minorities will be severed?

I argue that there are some signs that great Serbian ideology is somehow receding among Serbs in Montenegro, however, it is very unlikely that it will ever lose political weight. As already seen from our discussion of past developments, the resonance of great Serbian ideology in Montenegro fluctuates wildly depending mostly on the political developments in neighboring Kosovo and Bosnia. But, as long as Belgrade shows that it definitely lacks the political will both to recognize the independence of Kosovo and rein in Republika Srpska, great Serbian ideology will continue to have political weight in Montenegro and hence, Dukanovic will continue to count on the minorities as political allies. Indeed, Slaven Radunovic, deputy leader of the Serbian nationalist party NOVA, told the author that:

It's absolutely normal for us to say in our campaign that if we become ruling party, if we get 51 per cent of votes, we will revoke recognition of Kosovo³⁷. It's normal. But we can not get it (51 per cent). (However) If I don't say that, we will not even get 20 per cent. Serbs will not vote for me (Radunovic 2019).

³⁷ Montenegro recognized Kosovo's independence on 8 October 2008. This decision caused a Serbian nationalist backlash when on the evening of 13 October 2008, supporters of the Serbian parties (SNS-SNP) during a demonstration to protest Kosovo's recognition, tried to storm the parliament building. Thereafter, SNS' leader Andrija Mandic (current NOVA leader) "embarked upon a well-publicized hunger strike which lasted almost two weeks" (Morrison 2018: 140).

Similarly, Mehmet Zenka, UDSH leader and current Minister for Human and Minority Rights, says:

How could we (Montenegrin Albanians) collaborate with them (Serbian parties) when they call Kosovo a terrorist state? Even nowadays, in their political rallies, we hear them calling ‘we shall kill Albanians, we shall kill Bosniaks’ (Zenka 2019).

Taken together, unlike professor Popovic’s gloomy prognosis, I argue that, as long as Serbia’s problems with Kosovo and Bosnia persist, Dukanovic and DPS do not need to “fabricate” any crisis to incite Serbian parties and win over Albanians and Bosniaks (and Croats). Great Serbian ideology and rhetoric most likely is always going to be an important part of Montenegrin politics. Indeed, both Albanian (FRD) and Bosniak (BS) parties did not sign the 30 March 2019 *Agreement for the Future* adopted by the Montenegrin opposition, only because Serbian parties were also there (among the signatories). Minorities in Montenegro are still close allies of DPS.

Last but not least, what are the chances of Montenegrin opposition breaking DPS’ monopoly of power? URA leader Dritan Abazovic admits that it is not going to be easy. He claims that Montenegro’s exceptionally small size is the main factor that enables DPS to preserve power:

[Even though Montenegro’s population is slightly more than 600 000] We are dealing here with an electorate of about only 300 000, since many people don’t live here. And Dukanovic with 160 000 votes, sometimes 170-180 000 votes controls Montenegro. 60 000 are employed in the public administration [effectively 20 per cent of the electorate] and 90 per cent of these state employees cast their ballots for DPS since you can’t get a job in the public sector without being a member or activist of DPS ... Second, Dukanovic has developed a vast clientelistic network by which he controls business, criminals, drug trafficking, and cigarette smuggling ... We as opposition are in a position where it is very difficult for us to find sponsors (Abazovic 2019).

Despite all this, Dritan Abazovic further remarks on opposition’s prospects for breaking DPS’ monopoly of power:

We can, absolutely. I am optimistic. Despite having all this control, DPS has still difficulty in winning elections. In 2016 [parliamentary election] the opposition altogether won 39 [out of 81] deputies, never before it won so many deputies. In other words, there is great dissatisfaction among many people (Abazovic 2019).

Montenegro’s recent membership into NATO has also boosted optimism in the opposition parties. As Abazovic concludes his remarks:

The West has its own interests, and because of NATO and some geopolitical concepts that I even myself support, they have turned a blind eye to some injustices that occur in this system,

only for the sake of further integrating Montenegro and making it a NATO member. Now that we are a full NATO member, I expect many more factors to help us in breaking this political monopoly (Abazovic 2019).

5.7 Concluding Remarks: Montenegro's NATO membership and its relations with Russia

In this dissertation, among others, I hypothesize that Western influence on containing violent conflict in multiethnic societies is more likely to be effective when the mainstream parties are united on the nationhood question because external influences essentially are endogenous to favorable/permissive domestic conditions. In this respect, I argue that Montenegro's formal invitation to join NATO on 2 December 2015 and Russia's opposition to it presented a golden opportunity for Dukanovic and the ruling DPS to once more amplify the great Serbian (and Russian) threat domestically, get closer to opposition Montenegrin parties, and further cement DPS' close relationship with the minorities (Albanians and Bosniaks). Given that DPS' ability to hold on to power is premised on the strength of Serbian parties, every move that further consolidates Montenegro's integration into the West is expected to provoke Serbian parties and as a consequence unite the Montenegrin with minority parties. In brief, Western integration can only make interethnic relations in Montenegro more peaceful. Indeed, this is precisely what happened.

Once Montenegro received formal invitation to join NATO in December 2015, the Serbian nationalist party NOVA began organizing mass anti-NATO protests in Podgorica. This move however was not supported by NOVA's Montenegrin coalition partner PZP, and by the other Montenegrin opposition parties - DEMOS, URA, and SDP (Morrison 2018: 158), an ideal scenario for Dukanovic to deflect attention from the public dissatisfaction with his uninterrupted rule. NOVA's further move in June 2016 to sign a cooperation agreement with Vladimir Putin's *United Russia* party (Bechev 2017: 70) only lend further credence to Dukanovic's claims that Serbian parties in Montenegro were essentially Russian clients, and served to further unify the Montenegrin and minority parties against this perceived threat.

Russia's recent activism in southeast Europe after its tense standoff with the West over Crimea and eastern Ukraine – on the logic that “if you interfere in our backyard, then we can and will most certainly do the same in yours” (Bechev 2017: 84)- has also provided Dukanovic enough substance with which to run the October 2016 parliamentary election campaign. Clearly exaggerating the Russian threat, Dukanovic and the DPS run

on the notion that “Montenegrin voters were about to decide whether they would uphold national sovereignty and the country’s Euro-Atlantic direction or become a ‘Russian colony’” (Darmanovic 2017: 124). As if this were not enough, on election night (15 October 2016) the Montenegrin police announced the arrest of twenty Serbian citizens that allegedly backed by Russia were attempting to stage a coup and assassinate the premier Dukanovic (Darmanovic 2017: 125; Bechev 2017: 70-71; Morrison 2018: 163). Playing on the Russian threat payed off handsomely for Dukanovic, as amidst the chaos created by the news of the alleged state coup, DPS gathered 41.41 per cent of the vote and 36 /81 seats – it was the first time since the 1997 party split that DPS gathered so many seats on its own – and once more secured the unflinching support of the Albanian, Bosniak, and Croat parties. This episode represents only the most recent manifestation of a pattern that we have already become used to: instrumentalizing the nationhood cohesion among Montenegrin parties to ideologically “buy” the non-Orthodox minorities. It is this permissive domestic condition that allows Western influence to be effective on Montenegro. To conclude, while Montenegro’s Western orientation may only further cement the peaceful interethnic relations in the country, paradoxically it may also gradually erode Montenegrin democracy. As Dimitar Bechev aptly concludes in relation to the recent Russian activism in the Balkans:

The most serious concern, therefore, is that the soaring competition between Russia and the West may reinforce the alarming trend towards democratic backsliding: by increasing the wiggle room of political elites, providing a handy excuse for ignoring corruption and the lack of rule of law, and ultimately weakening external pressures for domestic change in a vulnerable European region (Bechev 2017: 84).

Chapter 5 ends by Table 5.9 that summarizes the case analysis of Montenegro.

Table 5.9: Summary of the Case Analysis of Montenegro.

Periods of Causal Importance	Developments
11 January 1989	Anti-bureaucratic revolution; Old SKCG leadership resigns collectively; new 11-man SKCG presidency takes over
11 January 1990	First meeting of the Democratic Forum, Montenegrin Round Table Talks, to establish the institutional bases of the emerging democratic regime; minority representatives present

February 1990	SKJ Congress in Belgrade; first cracks in Montenegrin delegation; SKCG's reformist wing subsequently resigns
February – December 1990	Milosevic's secret services take over security agencies, radio-television, and the only government newspaper in Podgorica
9 December 1990	First multiparty election; Albanian vote split almost equally between ethnic Albanian and mainstream Montenegrin parties
April – June 1991	NS public calls for arming the Orthodox population; YNA and Serbian secret services distribute weapons to the Orthodox population; Serbian/Chetnik paramilitary groups, including Vojislav Seselj's <i>White Eagles</i> , parade through Albanian-inhabited towns in Montenegro (Ulcinj and Bar)
July 1991	Conscription of young Albanians into YNA in the mountain of Sutorman in Bar and their refusal to go and fight in Croatia and Bosnia
September 1991	Prime minister Milo Dukanovic announces that the DPS regime is preparing for a declaration of Montenegrin sovereignty within a Yugoslav federal framework
October 1991	Montenegrin reservists participate in YNA's shelling of Dubrovnik; Bulatovic later withdraws Montenegrin recruits from Croatia; Bulatovic initially supports the Carrington Plan, then forced to back down
March-April 1992	LDMZ boycotts the Montenegrin referendum and opposes the forming of FRY; Bosnian civil war starts; UN sanctions against FRY
June 1992	President Bulatovic proposes holding another referendum on Montenegrin membership in Yugoslav federation
July – September 1992	Several rounds of trilateral talks between DPS and LDMZ representatives under the auspices of the Minorities Working Group
12 September 1992	LDMZ adopts The Memorandum on Special Status of Albanians in Montenegro; DPS and LSCG reject the Albanian demand on "special status" to deethnicize political space

12 October 1992	First post-communist Montenegrin constitution; all-inclusive constitution-making process; Albanians granted national minority status, right to education in their mother tongue and Albanian language granted local-official status
December 1992	DPS proposes the formation of a grand coalition with LSCG, NS, and SDP to counter the threat from great Serbian ideology and appease nationalist tensions in Montenegro; sign of nationhood cohesion; LDMZ with LSCG and SDP support Bulatovic in the presidential race against the Radical Party candidate Branko Kostic
November 1993	Foundation of UDSH; emergence of minority counter-elite
September 1995	Opening of the Pedagogical Faculty in Albanian language at the state university in Podgorica
July 1997	DPS split; Anti-Milosevic faction led by Dukanovic and pro-Milosevic faction led by Bulatovic
1 September 1997	“Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro”; signed among DPS’ Dukanovic faction, LSCG, SDP, NS, LDMZ, and UDSH; second Round Table Talks in Montenegro
5-19 October 1997	Minority votes swing the presidential race in favor of Dukanovic (against Bulatovic)
End of March 1999	“Declaration for the Preservation of Civil Peace”; Adopted among all parties (DPS, SNP, LSCG, SDP, NS, LDMZ, and UDSH); sign of nationhood cohesion; prevented full scale civil war in Montenegro during NATO’s bombing of FRY
June 1999	Founding of <i>Koha Javore</i> newspaper, the only weekly in Albanian language published in Montenegro
14 March 2002	Belgrade Agreement that founded the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro; Albanian parties opposed the Agreement
12 July 2004	Law on the State Symbols (flag, national holiday, anthem) adopted in parliament with minority support

21 May 2006	Minority votes swing referendum result in favor of independence (55.5 – 44.5)
19 October 2007	Second post-communist Montenegrin constitution; Albanians granted national minority status, right to education in their mother tongue and Albanian language granted local-official status
8-13 October 2008	Montenegro recognizes Kosovo's independence; large demonstration by Serbian parties in Podgorica; protestors attempt to storm the parliament building
2 December 2015	Montenegro receives formal invitation to join NATO; Russian-backed DF reverts to street politics
September 2016	Agreement between DPS and Albanian parties to restitute full municipality status to Tuzi in return for Albanian support to DPS in parliamentary election
16 October 2016	Allegations that 20 Russian-backed Serbian citizens attempted to stage a coup against Dukanovic on the eve of parliamentary election
28 April 2017	Montenegro's parliament ratified the membership agreement with NATO 46-0 in favor; Russian-backed DF boycotts the voting session
1 September 2018	Tuzi restituted full municipality status; Second Albanian-majority municipality in Montenegro (after Ulcinj)
30 March 2019	"Agreement on the Future" signed by all 39 opposition deputies of the 81-seat Montenegrin parliament; demands Dukanovic's resignation, formation of a temporary Government of Civic Unity, and free and fair elections

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to answer an important question in the comparative studies of ethnicity and nationalism: why do some ethnically diverse countries frequently experience interethnic violence whereas others remain peaceful? Outcome variation in three otherwise similar postcommunist Balkan countries -Bulgaria, Montenegro and North Macedonia- provides an excellent opportunity to test extant theories and inductively develop new ones for addressing this puzzle. Accordingly, in explaining patterns of interethnic peace and violence, my chief finding is that countries that are divided on the definition, limits, and origins of the national identity –what I call “nationhood cleavage”- are more likely to experience interethnic violence, while countries that are largely unified over the definition of nationhood and ethnogenesis – what I call “nationhood cohesion”- are less likely to experience violence. Focusing on the existence or lack of a nationhood cleavage enabled me to uncover the specific causal mechanisms that lead to violence and peace. As such, I find that existence of a nationhood cleavage generates authoritarian imposition of ethnic policies, whereas nationhood cohesion facilitates elite cooperation in designing ethnic policies. Drawing on constructivist insights, I have also argued that the specific nationhood visions in the three case studies were forged politically by the pre-communist and communist state policies and were later revived and instrumentalized by postcommunist elites to achieve their political objectives.

This concluding chapter addresses two loose ends in the dissertation: analyzing the three cases together and the theoretical implications of my findings for the study of ethnicity, nationalism, and postcommunist transitions.

6.1 Explaining the puzzle of violent ethnic conflict: what do we learn from postcommunist Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia?

First and foremost, each of the three cases analyzed here takes a different value on the key independent variable and together they exhaust the three empirically possible dyads in the property space: postcommunist North Macedonia (henceforth Macedonia) is the example of a country with nationhood cleavage while Bulgaria and Montenegro represent

non-multiethnic cohesion and multiethnic cohesion respectively. Macedonia is deeply divided among two competing nationhood visions – mainstream left's (SDSM) Slavic, pro-Yugoslav and multiethnic vision and mainstream right's (VMRO) non-Slavic/ancient, anti-Yugoslav and monoethnic vision. In Bulgaria the two dominant sides of the political spectrum (BSP and UDF/NDSV/GERB) share a nationhood vision that is based on anti-Turkishness and on denial of the existence of ethnic minorities. In Montenegro, both DPS and SDP/LSCG converge on a vision that is dualistic, multiethnic, anti-great Serbian, and acknowledges the primacy of tribal affiliations. All these nationhood visions were forged politically by pre-communist and communist state policies. As such, to put it in constructivist terminology, they were endogenous to state-building processes in the past.

Among the three cases, Macedonia is the one that attained statehood the latest, when in 1944 it was recognized as one of the six constituent units of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Still, this did not constitute independent statehood given that Macedonia was part of an ethno-territorial federation. By contrast, Bulgaria and Montenegro have a longer tradition of independent statehood. Both countries first attained independence in the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, that is 66 years before Macedonia became part of socialist Yugoslavia. Arguably, Montenegro has a longer statehood tradition than Bulgaria given that Montenegro had significant degree of autonomy from Ottoman rule during the 17th and 18th centuries mainly due to its rough terrain. Taken together, this clearly suggests an empirical pattern: among the three countries, the newest state is also the one that is the most nationally divided (Macedonia), while the two countries with longer traditions of statehood are unified over the definition of nationhood and ethnogenesis (Bulgaria and Montenegro). The statehood tradition in itself may offer important clues to understand the formation of the respective nations but we still need to look at the pre-communist and communist nationality policies to find out how specific nationhood visions were forged politically.

Accordingly, the Yugoslav communist regime was the first to institutionalize the view that ethnic Macedonians are a distinct south Slavic nation and for that they were the first to standardize the modern Macedonian language in the Cyrillic script and create an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church. This generated intra-ethnic exclusion as those ethnic Macedonians who did not subscribe to this imposed ethnogenesis were either persecuted or killed – hence the nationhood cleavage in postcommunist Macedonia. In

the two countries that experienced pre-communist statehood also, what is distinct is that in both of them the communist regime continued and even further reinforced the pre-communist nationality policies. In Bulgaria, the communist regime complemented the pre-communist nation-building that was based on several waves of violent expulsion of Ottoman Muslims/Turks from Bulgarian territory, and from 1960 onwards shifted to forced assimilation of its Turkish minority. The exclusion and assimilation of the ethnic and religious “other” generated nationhood cohesion in postcommunist Bulgaria. In Montenegro, successive rulers of the native Petrovici dynasty from the 17th until the early 20th century pursued contradictory nation-building policies: while nominally rulers of an autonomous and later independent south Slavic state, they aimed to united all Serbian lands in the Balkans under the banner of the Petrovici dynasty and considered Montenegrins to be “the best of Serbs/Serbian spatha”. This imprinted on the mass consciousness of Montenegrins a dualism that rendered Montenegrin and Serb mutually inclusive ethnic categories. At the same time, Petrovici rulers accomodated and protected the non-Orthodox minorities (Catholics and Muslims) and (unlike Bulgaria) preventing them from leaving Montenegro was their core strategy. The communist regime perpetuated this dual identity: it made Montenegro one of the six constituent republics, vehemently opposed the great Serbian ideology of the interwar period, yet it was deliberately very slow in developing the institutional pre-requisites for a distinct Montenegrin identity separate from Serbian. Hence, postcommunist Montenegrin parties share a nationhood vision that is dualistic, multiethnic, and anti-great Serbian.

In line with my theoretical expectations, I observed that in countries with nationhood cohesion the largest majority parties cooperated during the transition period and when designing ethnic policies, however this was not the case in the cleft country. Both Bulgaria and Montenegro had their respective Round Table Talks (RTT) for transitioning to democracy (both in January 1990), while Macedonia didn't. In Macedonia the institutional bases of the new democratic regime were unilaterally decided by the communist successor party (SDSM). An important difference between the Bulgarian and Montenegrin RTTs is that in the former the Turkish minority was not allowed to participate while in the latter the Albanian minority participated. Furthermore, the non-multiethnic Bulgarian constitution of July 1991 and the multiethnic Montenegrin constitution of October 1992 were both agreed upon by the largest parties in each country. By contrast, in Macedonia the centre-right VMRO opposed the November 1991

multiethnic constitution that was designed single-handedly by the communist successor party. Hence, since the very beginning I observe in Macedonia the emergence of a majority counterelite (VMRO) dissatisfied with the ethnic status quo and seeking to continuously keep the political space ethnicized. In the Bulgarian and Montenegrin cases, the largest parties consistently sought the opposite – to deethnicize and stabilize the political space. Perhaps this contrast is best captured by the fact that by early 1991 VMRO was publicly calling for “gas chambers” for Albanians while the largest Bulgarian and Montenegrin parties were organizing peace rallies and meetings in minority areas to calm down interethnic tensions – in the latter case, after Serbian paramilitaries had armed the Orthodox population and started harassing Albanians.

The interaction patterns of the minority parties are also quite revealing in this regard. I observed in the Macedonian case that the Albanian PPD after the first multiparty election allied with the multiethnic majority party (SDSM) despite the fact that it was VMRO that actually won the largest share of votes in that election. On the other hand, in Bulgaria the Turkish MRF after the October 1991 parliamentary election played a double swing role as it first carried the anti-communist UDF to power and thereafter allied with the communist successor party BSP, tactic moves driven primarily by material gains and not by any expectation of advancing Turkish minority rights. In a unique pattern among postcommunist Balkan countries, in the first multiparty election in Montenegro in December 1990, Albanians voted for both mainstream Montenegrin parties as much as they voted for their own ethnic party (LDMZ), and in the December 1992 presidential election LDMZ joined all other Montenegrin parties in supporting the DPS candidate Momir Bulatovic against the Belgrade-backed Radical Party candidate Branko Kostic.

Understandably then, minority counterelite emergence took on quite different meanings across the three countries. In Bulgaria and Montenegro, as the alliance patterns of the respective minority parties clearly showed, the issue of minority rights was not a politically salient issue for partisan competition, though for opposite reasons in each country. In Bulgaria the rampant nationalism in the ethnic Bulgarian electorate compelled both the BSP and UDF to “remove” ethnicity from the political arena and thus head off any potential demand for minority rights improvement. The constitutional ban on ethnic parties and the strictly individual-based (rather than collective) way the rights were formulated provide the clearest examples. By contrast, in Montenegro advancing collective minority rights has never been an issue to start with. This is why minority voters

have often cast their ballots more for mainstream Montenegrin parties than for their own ethnic parties. Hence, the emergence of minority counterelites in both countries did not challenge the agreed-upon deethnicized political space. As theoretically expected, minority counterelites (PDP/DPSpr in Bulgaria and UDSH in Montenegro) merely competed with the incumbent minority parties (MRF and LDMZ respectively) for material benefits.

A completely different story unfolded in Macedonia. In an already highly ethnicized political environment because of VMRO's aggressive and openly fascist rhetoric, it was comparatively easy for a minority counterelite to instrumentalize the allegedly insufficient level of minority rights for outbidding the incumbent minority party. In this, the minority counterelite could also count on the support of the majority counterelite (VMRO) which had similar grievances against SDSM. This is exactly what the Albanian PDSH did. Its highly able leader, Arben Xhaferi, even put forward the famous thesis that unitary multiethnic states, no matter how small they are, can not survive – the only solutions are either federation or partition. In stating this, Xhaferi clearly was laying the ideological foundations for PDSH's long-term alliance with the monoethnic VMRO. Hence, it is no coincidence that interethnic tensions escalated into violence in Macedonia *after* PDSH was founded in February 1994 and subsequently allied with VMRO. Indeed, I argued and evidenced that the February 1995 and July 1997 deadly ethnic riots in Tetovo and Gostivar were engineered by PDSH and VMRO (that were both in opposition at the time) to outbid their incumbent ethnic counterparts (i.e. the SDSM-PPD coalition government)- hence the causal mechanism of “double ethnic outbidding” that leads to ethnic violence. Eventually, VMRO did come to power for the first time after the October 1998 parliamentary election and unsurprisingly invited PDSH to join the government, even though PDSH had not won the largest share of votes among Albanians (PPD did). Actually, until present PDSH has *never* had the support of the majority of Albanians. Once in power, VMRO and PDSH put to life their respective nationhood visions and de facto federalized Macedonia, as VMRO assumed control of the eastern part of the country (overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Macedonians) and PDSH was allowed to take over west Macedonia where ethnic Albanian settlement areas are concentrated. Arguably, this in itself can well be considered an example of ethnic power-sharing, however it did not emerge out of a pattern of elite cooperation – it was unilaterally imposed by both VMRO and PDSH on their ethnic counterparts in

opposition. As such, it was bound once more to generate deep opposition and attempts to outdo it by force. This is precisely what happened during the six-months-long NLA insurgency in 2001. This is how a hitherto (relatively) unknown Albanian insurgent group and its leader (Ali Ahmeti) were catapulted to power. The lack of elite cooperation in resolving ethnic questions will continue to haunt Macedonian politics.

In marked contrast to Macedonia, the Bulgarian and Montenegrin largest parties have consistently cooperated to defuse ethnic tensions and prevent them from escalating to violence. Among such instances in Bulgaria, we can mention BSP and UDF's forming of the *Council for Discussion of the National Question* in 12 January 1990 that appeased the nationalist mobilization by both Bulgarians and Turks over the reversal of the assimilation process; the actual Round Table Talks (late January-May 1990); the peaceful resignation of BSP prime minister Andrei Lukanov in September 1990 without resorting to nationalism as a strategy to deflect public dissatisfaction; several ad hoc meetings to resolve the severe political crisis of December 1996-January 1997, that eventually led once more to the peaceful resignation of BSP prime minister Zhan Videnov without resorting to nationalism; the widespread condemnation of ATAKA's mosque attack in central Sofia in May 2011; BSP and GERB's opposition to several of ATAKA's xenophobic law proposals.

Among similar-dynamic events in postcommunist Montenegro, we can mention the January 1990 *Democratic Forum*; the peace rallies organized in minority-inhabited regions in April-June 1991 after Serbian/Chetnik paramilitaries had armed the local Orthodox population; DPS' peaceful demobilization of young ethnic Albanians drafted into YNA; DPS and LSCG/SDP' change of the electoral system in December 1992 to contain the Serbian Radical Party; the forming of the grand coalition (DPS+LSCG+NS+SDP) in April 1993 to contain the threat coming from the Serbian Radical Party and its Belgrade-backed paramilitaries active in Montenegro; the September 1997 *Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro* that spearheaded the creation of a long-term anti-great Serbian alliance between Montenegrin and minority parties; the March 1999 *Declaration for the Preservation of Civil Peace* (adopted unanimously by all parties, including the Serbian ones) that prevented civil war in Montenegro during NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia.

Taken together, a chief finding emerges from the above-mentioned examples. Any institutional formula proposed without first taking into account the interaction patterns among the majority parties which design them, will not tell us much about the prospects such institutions have for containing violence. Instead, I find that institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of cooperation, even though they often might be illiberal/undemocratic in themselves, are most likely to contain interethnic tensions from escalating into violence. On the other hand, institutions that are designed out of an interaction pattern of imposition, even though they often might be democratic in themselves, are less likely to contain violence. To exemplify this point, Turks were excluded from the Round Table Talks in Bulgaria, they were not recognized as a minority, their language was not granted official status even in the local level, and ethnic parties were banned, yet the Round Table Talks were successful in containing the dangerous nationalist mobilization in Bulgaria in January-May 1990, because both of the largest parties had agreed upon such policies. Likewise, Montenegrin parties' frequent and arbitrary changes of the electoral system, and the creation of a special Albanian electoral district according to the September 1997 Agreement clearly were undemocratic, but again, they succeeded in generating peaceful interethnic relations because all Montenegrin parties saw the minorities as indispensable political allies against (great) Serbian parties in Montenegro.

Contrast this with Macedonia, where much more liberal and democratic institutional designs were tried, but they failed. For instance, VMRO and PDSH's division of the spheres of influence (de facto federalization of Macedonia) when they came to power in November 1998 is a classic example of ethnic power-sharing, that theoretically should have stabilized interethnic relations in the country, yet the complete opposite happened. As I have evidenced, it was this informal arrangement between VMRO and PDSH that precipitated the 2001 NLA insurgency. Similarly, the August 2001 *Ohrid Framework Agreement* (OFA) that officially put an end to the insurgency was internationally hailed as "the constitution of peace", and indeed, many of the clauses therein theoretically justified such public praise: the constitutional status of all minorities was elevated to that of constituent nation of the Macedonian polity, Macedonia constitutionally became a bilingual state at the national level and significant decentralization laws were mandated. However, post-Ohrid Macedonia unfortunately was not more peaceful than the pre-Ohrid one, for the simple reason that OFA was an

internationally-imposed agreement and it failed to diagnose the real source of interethnic violence in Macedonia: the lack of cooperation among two nationally divided parties (SDSM and VMRO). Unsurprisingly then, in the immediate aftermath of Ohrid, both VMRO and PDSH (two reluctant OFA signatories) publicly denounced OFA as a “dead agreement” and called for the partition of Macedonia. All in all, a comparison of the different institutional formulas enacted thus far in postcommunist Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Montenegro clearly shows that context matters for institutional success. While it is certainly true that there is no single formula that is going to work across different contexts, there are also certain contexts that complicate matters even further and these are the nationally divided polities like Macedonia. This dissertation suggests that in such political environments even well-designed institutional formulas might not work.

Ohrid Framework Agreement is very significant since it shows not only how nationhood cleavages dilute the effectiveness of different institutional designs but also how nationhood cleavages limit external actors’ influence on containing violent conflict. After all, OFA was a Western-designed agreement but it failed to commit to its implementation local actors (i.e. VMRO) whose nationhood vision was at odds with OFA’s multiethnic spirit. The West (together with Greece) likewise could not stop VMRO from making antiquization official state policy for ten consecutive years during their incumbency (2006-2016). Most recently, despite strong Western pressure, VMRO (now in opposition) still does not accept the June 2018 Prespa Agreement with Greece (considers it to be a capitulation) and still does not recognize country’s official new name North Macedonia. Hence, VMRO’s actions are proving to be Macedonia’s real stumbling block to EU integration and continue to harm the already fragile interethnic stability. Contrast this with Bulgaria and Montenegro where the process of Western integration has proceeded much more smoothly and as a result Western influence on preserving interethnic peace has been more effective – because these countries are not nationally divided. Bulgaria is both an EU and NATO member since 2007 and 2004 respectively, while Montenegro became the newest NATO member in 2017. In the latter case, the process of NATO integration brought the Montenegrin and minority parties even closer as it revived once more the great Serbian threat in Montenegrin politics.

Bulgaria’s and Montenegro’s successful integration compared to Macedonia’s lagging behind might seem counterintuitive in one aspect since both Bulgaria and Montenegro societally have a well-established and a much stronger russophilic tradition

than Macedonia. However, the empirical analysis of these three cases leads me to conclude that nationhood cohesion in both Bulgaria and Montenegro has prevented these countries from being exposed to the influence of other international actors with political agendas opposed to the West (i.e. Russia). The opposite is the case in Macedonia. Indeed, as recent developments clearly illustrate, among the three countries analyzed here, only Macedonia (which was then ruled by VMRO) refused to join EU sanctions against Russia over the annexation of Crimea in late 2014. If even a small and weak country like Macedonia could do this, it means we need to take seriously the implications of nationhood cleavages.

Lastly, and related to the preceding discussion, what is striking about the three case studies is the persistence in the political salience of nationhood visions. In Bulgaria, a nationhood vision built on anti-Turkishness was hegemonic since at least the formation of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878 and is still hegemonic among mainstream Bulgarian parties. In Montenegro, a dualistic and multiethnic nationhood vision was hegemonic since at least mid-19th century when king Nikola I Petrovic took over power, and became also anti-great Serbian after Serbia's annexation of Montenegro in 1918. More than a century later, this three-pronged nationhood vision is still hegemonic among mainstream Montenegrin parties. In Macedonia, the diametrically opposed Slavic and non-Slavic nationhood visions were politically salient since at least 1944 when Macedonia for the first time attained statehood by becoming one of the six constituent republics of socialist Yugoslavia. More than seven decades later, as the most recent Prespa Agreement clearly evidences, these two nationhood visions are still politically salient in Macedonia.

In explaining the persistence in the salience of nationhood visions, my chief finding is that postcommunist elites in all three countries have revived such visions from the pre-communist and/or communist past and instrumentalized them for achieving political objectives. To exemplify the point, all mainstream Bulgarian parties are/have to be anti-Turkish given the rampant nationalism in the ethnic Bulgarian electorate. For either party, conceding to demands for improving Turkish minority rights might be fatal in terms of partisan competition. Likewise, all mainstream Montenegrin parties are/have to appear anti-great Serbian in order to secure minority support in the electoral competition against Serbian parties. Lastly, VMRO simply can not accept the Prespa Agreement because it could mean losing the support of the majority of the ethnic

Macedonian electorate. As the September 2018 referendum on the name issue evidenced, a majority of the ethnic Macedonian electorate did not support the country's name change and I assume those ethnic Macedonian voters share VMRO's nationhood vision. Taken together, in what would constitute a constructivist argument, I find that persistence in the salience of nationhood visions is endogenous to partisan competition and competitive politics. Certainly, it is not something given, natural and exogenous to political processes as postcommunist ethnic entrepreneurs make it appear.

6.2 Theoretical implications of the findings for the study of ethnicity, nationalism, and postcommunist transitions

The most theoretically distinctive dimension of my argument concerns the ways in which the existence or lack of national divisions within majority ethnic groups impacts the patterns of interethnic relations in ethnically diverse societies. This has several implications for the comparative study of ethnicity and nationalism. First and foremost, my argument challenges the dominant assumption in the ethnicity and nationalism scholarship according to which the nation-state establishes the dominance of a unified majority ethnic group and that minority groups either will have to assimilate into the dominant culture or they will eventually be excluded. In other words, the dominant assumption is that there can only be a non-multiethnic model for nation-states and that nation-building is most likely to succeed on a non-multiethnic basis. My in-depth research shows, by contrast, that majority ethnic groups often may not be unified but rather deeply divided over the definition/origins of nationhood and over how to approach minority rights. More importantly, this research shows that there are different paths to nation-building: nation-states may also be built on a multiethnic model, in addition to the standard non-multiethnic model. Indeed, of the three empirical cases analyzed here, only Bulgaria fits the standard model, while Montenegro and Macedonia follow completely different trajectories – Montenegro typifies a multiethnic model while Macedonia has oscillated between the two depending on which mainstream party is incumbent.

However, major recent works on the topic still subscribe to the standard view. In an award-winning book published just last year *Nation Building: Why some Countries Come Together while Others Fall Apart*, Andreas Wimmer surprisingly considers the Soviet Union a case of failed nation-building. He argues that the exclusionary ethnopolitical configuration of power in the Soviet Union, where ethnic Russians dominated the highest echelons of power, and the failure of Soviet elites to forge “a single

Soviet, Russophone melting pot” shows that “nation building ... largely failed in the Soviet Union” (Wimmer 2018: 167). “The linguistic and scriptural heterogeneity of Russia [Soviet Union] represented a handicap its nation builders could not overcome” concludes Wimmer (2018: 170). The issue with this argument is that it assumes that nation-building can only succeed if some kind of supra-ethnic national identity is formed and overlooks alternative nation-building models. It is certainly true that the “melting pot” constitutes the standard non-multiethnic nation-building model, however Soviet elites never tried to create such a model to start with. Soviet Union definitely was neither in theory nor in practice a Russian nation-state (like socialist Yugoslavia was not Serbian). To the contrary, Soviet Union is arguably the first example of multiethnic nation-building (Aktürk 2012).

Second, by challenging the dominant non-multiethnic model assumption in the literature, the argument developed in this dissertation challenges also the explanation for interethnic violence that follows from this assumption. By seeking to impose ethno-linguistic homogeneity into an otherwise heterogenous social space, the argument goes, the nation-state generates political inequality, polarized identities, and excludes non-core groups from executive power, thereby often leading to violence (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Hechter 2000; Wimmer 2002; 2013; Cederman et al. 2013). The Bulgarian case shows that this causal path might not always hold. Postcommunist Bulgaria is clearly an assimilationist country (a perfect fit to the standard model) but still interethnic relations have been remarkably peaceful. My comparative research shows instead that interethnic violence is the most likely outcome of majoritarian or authoritarian imposition of ethnic policies by nationally divided parties, whereas interethnic peace results from cooperation among parties that share similar nationhood visions. Hence, we need to pay more attention to the nationhood visions of majority parties and their implications for elite interaction patterns. At the same time, we should caution against the tendency to reify ethnic groups. After all, ethnic groups do not rule by themselves, instead their representatives rule, and they often may be very divided over *how* to rule – hence, the interaction patterns among them deserve much more attention.

Third, in trying to explain the origins and persistence of the respective nationhood visions I develop a constructivist argument: nationhood visions were forged politically by pre-communist and communist state policies and their persistence in the postcommunist period is endogenous to partisan competition and competitive politics. By

theorizing about why nationhood visions do not change, my argument contributes to constructivist theories of ethnic identity that largely focus on explaining why ethnic identities do change. In other words, in addition to change, the persistence in the salience of nationhood visions should be equally puzzling for constructivist theories to consider. Indeed, in a very recent study, a leading constructivist scholar, Kanchan Chandra, acknowledges this gap:

Paradoxically, although we often think of constructivism as a body of theory that explains how ethnic identities change, it is just as appropriate to think of constructivism as a body of theory that explains why ethnic identities *do not* change. From a primordialist perspective, stability in ethnic identities is simply a natural fact. From a constructivist perspective, however, stability becomes a puzzle in search of an explanation. If we see stability in ethnic identities, we need to ask why (Chandra 2012: 135; *italics in original*).

Moreover, in constructivist scholarship, partisan competition and competitive politics has been largely used to explain why ethnic identities are so fluid and frequently change (Brass 1991; Chandra 2004; Wilkinson 2004; Posner 2005). In this dissertation, by contrast, I use partisan competition to explain why nationhood visions persist.

Fourth, my in-depth comparative research that points to the primacy of domestic dynamics in explaining ethnically- related domestic outcomes challenges a growing body of literature that singles out external/geopolitical factors as the primary causal force (Janos 2000; Anastasakis and Bechev 2003; Petersen 2005; Grigoriadis 2008; Mylonas 2012; Jenne 2015). In several important aspects, all three countries analyzed here should constitute “most likely cases” to observe the primacy of international dynamics: they are small countries both in size and population; they all have long histories of external domination and occupation by the Ottomans, Tsarist Russia, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, and they were all challenged by the burden of a “triple transition” to political democracy, free market economy and (with the exception of Bulgaria) from ethno-territorial federalism to independent statehood. All these factors should have made these countries extremely vulnerable to external influences and direct external imposition. However, I find that domestic actors with certain nationhood visions have resisted external imposition and have trumped international influences. To exemplify the point, despite significant pressure and leverage over Bulgaria’s European integration, the EU has not been able to push and convince any Bulgarian mainstream party to pass minority legislation and advance Turkish ethnolinguistic rights. Presently, despite being EU’s poorest member state and despite being highly dependent on EU structural funds,

Bulgaria persists in its assimilationist policies towards the Turks: still denies that there are ethnic Turks in Bulgaria, bans ethnic parties, refuses to open any minority language school and bans election campaign in any language other than Bulgarian.

A more striking example is Macedonia. Of the three empirical cases analyzed here, structurally Macedonia is arguably the weakest and the most susceptible to international influences because it has the shortest statehood tradition (since 1944) and it vitally needs international support over its name dispute with Greece. However, among the three cases, Macedonia is also the one that perhaps has resisted external imposition the most. It needs to be underlined that the mainstream centre-right party (i.e. VMRO) has refused to recognize and condemned *all* major agreements that have been externally imposed by Western powers: the September 1995 *Interim Accord* with Greece (signed by the then incumbent SDSM) that mandated the change of the Macedonian flag (by removing the ancient symbol of the 16-rays sun of Vergina); the August 2001 *Ohrid Framework Agreement* that VMRO was initially forced to sign but thereafter denounced as a “dead agreement”; and the most recent June 2018 Prespa Agreement that VMRO still considers to be a capitulation. There could hardly be a better public spectacle in support of my argument about the primacy of domestic dynamics than the decision of Nikola Gruevski’s VMRO government, despite strong EU and Greek opposition, to fill the capital Skopje for ten consecutive years with endless ancient statues that allegedly showed the direct continuity between ancient and contemporary Macedonians. In brief, what I am arguing is that, if international influences have not been effective even in these “most likely cases”, then perhaps we should lower our expectations regarding the causal effect of such factors.

Fifth, the argument and evidence presented in this dissertation put some well-established empirical patterns concerning postcommunist transitions in new light. One of such patterns is the fusion of the anticommunist opposition with nationalism and anti-minority stances (Bunce 2005). With varying degrees of success, the anticommunist opposition in almost all former communist countries that underwent political transition sought to mobilize the masses by claiming to redress the historical injustices committed by the communist regime on the titular nation (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006: 89-90). More recent research provides more nuances to the topic but largely supports the previous findings. Jan Rovny (2014: 680) argues that the anticommunist opposition in countries that were formerly federal peripheries and hosted politically significant

minorities from the federal center are more likely to embrace ethnic nationalism, while the communist successor party in such countries tends to be socially liberal and supportive of minority rights. However, in former communist countries that were unitary states, Rovny argues that the opposite is the case: the communist successor party is more likely to espouse ethnic nationalism, whereas the anticommunist opposition tends to adopt socially liberal values and support minority rights (Rovny 2014: 681-682). Of the three empirical cases analyzed in this dissertation, only Macedonia fits the aforementioned well-established pattern, while Montenegro and Bulgaria follow completely different trajectories. Montenegro stands out as a “deviant case” in this respect since the anticommunist opposition not only opposed nationalism, but fully 41 per cent of its elected deputies in the first multiparty election (December 1990) were minority-origin (Catholic/Muslim Albanians and Bosniaks). What is equally significant, the Montenegrin communist successor party (DPS) also did not embrace nationalism although as we saw, it was initially allied with Milosevic. In brief, with both mainstream parties opposing nationalism and espousing pro-minority stances, Montenegro stands out as deviant among other postcommunist countries. Bulgaria also displays quite unusual dynamics given that *both* mainstream parties were nationalist and anti-minority. All this leads me to suggest that we need to look closer into the effects of pre-communist and communist nationality policies to better understand postcommunist patterns of party competition, and this can be done primarily through in-depth comparative research. Unfortunately, most studies do not do this as they rely only on inferential statistics to establish the empirical patterns mentioned above, and as a result, you get many “off the regression line” cases (as Bulgaria and Montenegro are). By contrast, in-depth comparative research would show that in Macedonia the right-wing VMRO was fiercely anti-communist and nationalist because communist nation-building had generated national division within ethnic Macedonians (by excluding those Macedonians that opposed the imposed Slavic ethnogenesis). In Bulgaria, both mainstream parties were nationalist and anti-minority because both pre-communist and communist Bulgarian states had followed the same nation-building policy: expelling and assimilating the Turks. Lastly, in Montenegro, both mainstream parties were anti-nationalist and pro-minority because both pre-communist and communist Montenegrin states had followed the same nation-building policy: protecting the non-Orthodox minorities and opposing great Serbian ideology.

Another well-established empirical pattern concerning postcommunist transitions is the near-exclusive support minority parties have been able to gather from their ethnic constituencies. In a political landscape devoid of any salient cleavage other than ethnicity (because of the communist legacy), the argument goes, ethnic divides stabilize voting behavior since minority voters have relatively stable preferences (see summary in Moser 2005; Birnir 2007). However, minority parties in Montenegro are conspicuously deviant in this aspect also. As I evidenced concerning the Montenegrin Albanian electorate, there exists a clear bifurcation as the Albanian vote is equally split between Albanian parties and mainstream Montenegrin parties of the left and right. The same situation applies to the ethnic Bosniak/Muslim electorate that actually votes more for mainstream Montenegrin parties than for their own ethnic parties (Sistek and Dimitrovova 2003: 165-167). On the other hand, Bulgaria perfectly fits to the standard pattern as both mainstream Bulgarian parties almost never have had Turkish-origin deputies elected among their ranks – the minority party MRF has a monopoly over Muslim/Turkish minority representation in Bulgaria. Until 2016, Macedonia also largely resembled the Bulgarian pattern, however since then it is moving closer to the Montenegrin pattern. Indeed, in the most recent December 2016 parliamentary election, among the Albanian electorate, the centre-left SDSM got roughly the same number of votes as the largest Albanian party BDI (Hajredini 2019), while, as expected, VMRO has never had any support among ethnic Albanian voters. All this suggests that even in political contexts where ethnicity constitutes the most salient and significant cleavage (as in postcommunist countries), minority parties might not be able to secure enough support from their constituencies, if mainstream parties with certain nationhood visions prove equally or more appealing to minority voters. To exemplify the point, there is no doubt that mainstream Montenegrin parties have ideologically “bought” the minorities in Montenegro by their anti-great Serbian vision. Likewise, SDSM gathered an impressive share of Albanian votes in the last election because it had been the fiercest opponent of VMRO’s antiquization policies. On the other hand, the nationhood vision of Bulgarian mainstream parties has no potential whatsoever to attract Muslim/Turkish votes because in itself it is built on anti-Turkishness.

The last well-established empirical pattern concerning postcommunist transitions is the association of democratization with the removal of the communist successor party from power – communist exit is seen as a prerequisite for the democratization of former

communist countries (Levitsky and Way 2002; McFaul 2002). Of the three empirical cases analyzed here, Montenegro represents the only uninterrupted ex-communist incumbency in south east Europe but still it is being rated as a democracy. Indeed, the *Polity IV* dataset, which codes countries on a democracy scale from -10 (total autocracy) to +10 (full democracy), gives Montenegro a score of +9 (democracy) from its independence in 2006 until present in 2018 (Polity IV 2018). *Freedom House*, another widely used dataset which rates countries on a freedom scale from 1 (free) to 7 (not free), gives Montenegro a score of 2.5 (free) from 2010 until 2015 and a score of 3 (partly free) from 2016 until 2018 (Freedom House 2018). Hence, Montenegro once more stands out as a “deviant case”. While providing a definite answer to this puzzle is outside the scope of this dissertation, some thoughts are in order. Both the secondary literature and some of my interviewees point to Montenegro’s exceptionally small size (620 000 people), to the communist successor party’s (DPS) total control over the state administration and its far superior resources (Komar and Zivkovic 2016; Abazovic 2019; Radunovic 2019). Furthermore, even though officially the population is slightly more than 600 000, the actual electorate is somewhere between 350-400 000 voters since many (both Montenegrin and minorities) have emigrated from Montenegro. Of these 350-400 000 voters, 60 000 (15-17 per cent of the electorate) are employees in the state administration and almost all of these are said to vote for the ruling communist successor party DPS (Abazovic 2019). So, apparently DPS enters each election with a guaranteed 15-17 per cent vote share. Still, I will argue that this is not sufficient to explain DPS’ uninterrupted incumbency. As I have already evidenced in the Montenegrin chapter, after its split in 1997, the DPS, despite all this alleged control and far superior resources, has *never* been able to gather a majority on its own. It has always needed the support of at least one small Montenegrin party (until now this party invariably has been SDP) *and* the Albanian and Bosniak minority parties. And the most effective way used by the DPS to attract these parties and keep them committed to the ruling coalition is by trying to keep alive the great Serbian threat to the Montenegrin state and nation. The events surrounding Montenegro’s entry into NATO (i.e. the alleged state coup) are only the most recent illustration of such a pattern. As nicely put by professor Milan Popovic, Dukanovic and the DPS seek to perpetuate the image of a state under threat so as to leave little alternative to the Montenegrin voters: “we must support Dukanovic, we know Dukanovic is mafia boss, but better mafia boss than Chetniks” (Popovic 2019). Hence, to conclude, I would say

that the specific anti-great Serbian nationhood vision goes a long way towards explaining also DPS' uninterrupted incumbency – it prevents the formation of a unified opposition among Montenegrin and Serbian parties; and it also prevents Montenegrin voters voting for Serbian parties and vice versa.

6.3 *Employing and Testing my Argument in Other Contexts*

My main argument that nationally divided countries are more likely to experience interethnic violence whereas nationally united ones are more likely to preserve peace can be employed, tested, and modified in studying other comparable cases of ethnically diverse countries that have suffered violent conflict or preserved peace in otherwise equally challenging conditions. Studying other fellow postcommunist countries might provide an excellent setting to start over. Perhaps the big puzzle among postcommunist Balkan countries still continues to be Serbia for two main reasons. First, it was in the name of great Serbian ideology that all the catastrophic wars in former Yugoslavia were fought. Second, Serbia demographically and economically is the largest Balkan country, yet it is also the least Western-integrated one. Serbia is the only Balkan country that has failed to join even NATO and consequently it is also blocking the Euro-Atlantic integration of both Bosnia and Kosovo. Are these outcomes indicative of the existence of a nationhood cleavage in Serbia? To be sure, great Serbian ideology constitutes a specific nationhood vision that traces its roots back to the Serbian defeat in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and was later revived in the run-up to the First World War by the Karadjodjevic dynasty and later by the Cetnik movement of Draza Mihailovic during the Second World War, but is great Serbianism *the only* nationhood vision prevalent in Serbia? Is it shared by the largest parties in Serbia or is it opposed by an equally strong competing nationhood vision? Perhaps great Serbianism was dominant until the Second World War but since that point onward it was fiercely opposed by the socialists, who sought to create a new nationhood vision among Serbs. Indeed, during the Second World War, Tito's partisans, the majority of whom were ethnic Serbs, fought both against the Nazi Germans and the Serbian Cetniks led by Draza Mihailovic (the latter two were allied actually). Hence, the Second World War for Serbia signified an actual civil war that pitted the socialist Serbs against the Cetnik Serbs. Did this civil war create a nationhood cleavage among Serbs? After the victory of the partisans, did communist nationality policies that were built on anti-great Serbianism/anti-Cetnik fully institutionalize this cleavage (like they did in

Macedonia by excluding those who opposed the Slavic ethnogenesis)? During Yugoslavia's disintegration, Slobodan Milosevic, despite being nominally the leader of the communist successor party, first used great Serbian/Cetnik ideology to consolidate power and then disowned it, while the main opposition Democratic Party of Zoran Djindjic consistently opposed this ideology. In brief, is there a salient nationhood cleavage among the Serbs and what causal role did it play during the disintegration of Yugoslavia? To the best of my knowledge, no study has approached the wars in former Yugoslavia from this perspective.

Another avenue for further research would be to employ and test my argument in other cases that share some basic background conditions with postcommunist countries. Postcolonial countries come to mind because they share with postcommunist countries long histories of external domination/imposition/occupation; colonial powers like the communist regimes institutionalized ethnicity as the most salient cleavage as part of their divide-and-rule policies; and postcolonial countries also attempted a double political and economic transition after seceding from the center – indeed, postcolonial regime transitions are commonly included in the “second wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991). For instance, it would be quite interesting to employ and test my argument in comparing Algeria and Morocco, two very similar neighboring, North African, Sunni Arab-majority, former French colonies that experienced widely diverging patterns of interethnic relations with their Berber minorities. If we apply the nationhood cleavage perspective, can we explain why were interethnic relations in postcolonial Algeria violent while in Morocco peaceful? To be sure, a lot has been written on these cases, and we know that the two largest political actors in postcolonial Algeria, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the National Liberation Front (FLN) held diametrically opposed visions – the former defined Algerianness primarily by Islam while the latter by the secular (socialist) Arab identity- that ultimately resulted in a bloody civil war in 1991 (Aktürk 2015: 796-798). Whereas in postcolonial Morocco recent research has revealed that the two largest political actors, the monarchy and the Istiqlal party, despite other differences, largely shared a definition of Morocanness as primarily defined by Islam (Aslan 2015: 81). Indeed, in a very important analogy with republican Turkey, Aslan claims that “Istiqlal shared a number of similarities with the RPP (CHP) in its vision of state-society relations ... The main point of departure between the Kemalists and the Istiqlalis, however, concerned the role of religion in society and politics” (Aslan 2015: 85-87). So, may we

reconceptualize the Algerian case as one in which nationhood cleavage lead to violent interethnic relations, while in Morocco nationhood cohesion preserved ethnic peace with the Berber minority?

Another avenue for further research would be to employ and test my argument in “most-different” cases, countries that differ from post-communist ones on many causally relevant independent variables but which share a common violent pattern of interethnic relations. A comparison between post-imperial/post-Ottoman Turkey and post-communist North Macedonia could be a nice fit for a “most-different-systems” analysis since in terms of country size, population, economy, culture, statehood tradition, ethnolinguistic and religious differences between majority and minority ethnic groups, existence of minority’s kin-state, history of external domination, and communist legacy, Turkey is very different from North Macedonia yet in both countries interethnic relations have turned violent. A recent within-case comparative analysis of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict can be used to show that the dynamics of the Kurdish conflict and that of the Albanian question in North Macedonia converge to some point. Indeed, as I have frequently referenced throughout the text, Somer (2016: 155-158) argues that the Kurdish conflict emerged as a “by-product” of both intra-Turkish divisions over the definition of the nation, and intra-Turkish divisions over issues unrelated to ethnicity and nationhood, such as modernization visions, nature of secularism, leadership and so on. Still, does the causal mechanism of *double ethnic outbidding* pointed out in this dissertation apply to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict also? More specifically, is the insurgent PKK, as the primary Kurdish minority counter-elite, such a destabilizing factor in Turkish politics because it has some kind of support from the divided Turkish mainstream parties, like the insurgent NLA had indirect support from SDSM in North Macedonia? Has PKK been used by Turkish mainstream parties as an “ally” to ethnically outbid one another in the struggle for power? If future research can somehow answer these questions in the affirmative, it would provide strong support to the *double ethnic outbidding* mechanism presented here, since it would show that this causal mechanism can also travel across “most-different” contexts like the Turkish one.

Lastly, what are some possible policy implications of this study? If indeed nationhood cleavage is what leads to double ethnic outbidding and eventually makes violent ethnic conflict more likely, can nationhood cleavage somehow be overcome? In terms of the cases presented here, can the mainstream Macedonian parties follow the

example of their Bulgarian and Montenegrin counterparts and come to a more unified view of the nation? Recent evidence suggests that civil society organizations (CSOs) can play an important role in bringing about more inclusive configurations of power that transcend political divides. For instance, Wimmer (2018: 29-30; 45) argues that dense networks of CSOs facilitate successful nation-building and make the citizenry more likely to identify with and feel loyalty to an overarching national community. Likewise, in a recent comparative democratization analysis of Tunisia and Turkey, Somer (2017: 1031-1035) singles out the role of the Tunisian general labour union and the National Dialogue Quartet, both powerful civil society organizations, in facilitating cooperation among the otherwise divided Tunisian religious and secular elites during both erosion of authoritarian regime phase and after transitioning to democracy. Hence, empirical evidence clearly suggests that any step toward the development of strong CSOs can play a role in trying to overcome nationhood cleavages. However, it has also to be noted that some nationhood cleavages might be more irreconcilable than others. For instance, the divisions among Turkish religious and secular elites were much deeper than the divisions between evolutionary and revolutionary secular elites (Somer 2016: 156). In that respect, the cleavage between SDSM and VMRO in North Macedonia definitely resembles more the Turkish religious-secular divide than the other one, and hence, even strong CSOs might not be efficient in trying to overcome the nationhood cleavage. On the other hand, when we consider Bulgaria and Montenegro that, unlike North Macedonia, held Round Table Talks when transitioning to democracy in 1990, civil society-related variables did not play any role in bringing together former communist and anti-communist elites, since five decades of communist rule had not left any trace of civil society and had levelled any socio-economic distinction in these countries. This is even more the case concerning Bulgaria, that was probably the most Stalinist-type totalitarian dictatorship in Eastern Europe. What took place in Bulgaria and Montenegro instead is that broad agreement among majority elites over the ethnic question facilitated their cooperation over *non-ethnic issues*. In other words, it was the majority nationhood cohesion that paved the way toward Round Table Talks and a relatively smooth transition to democracy. To sum up, CSOs facilitating cooperation among otherwise divided elites can be a policy implication, however its effectiveness may greatly vary from case to case depending on how deep a nationhood cleavage is and on how much it is amenable to reconciliation.

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APPENDIX A (Reported Instances of Violent Ethnic Group Mobilizations in Postcommunist North Macedonia)

September 1991- August 2001

6 November 1992 Skopje paramilitary police fired on a peaceful ethnic Albanian protest in the Bitpazar area of the town. Clashes erupted between ethnic Albanians and police, and 3 ethnic Albanians and one ethnic Macedonian were killed.

18 June 1994 As tensions concerning the forthcoming July population census escalated, ethnic Albanian and Macedonian clashed in the western city of Tetovo. A Macedonian youth was stabbed fatally in the dispute.

17 February 1995 Macedonian police clashed with Albanian students and local residents gathered for the second day of classes in the then-unrecognized University of Tetovo, resulting in 15 injuries to demonstrators and police and the shooting death of one ethnic Albanian, Abduselam Emini.

9 July 1997 Rufe Osmani and Alajdin Demiri were respectively mayors of

Gostivar and Tetovo when they were arrested for ordering the Albanian flag to be flown from public buildings during public holidays. They were jailed for failure to obey a constitutional court order to remove Albanian flags from municipal buildings. Rioting followed their arrests in Gostivar.

Macedonian police clashed with several hundred ethnic Albanian demonstrators. It shot and killed three of them. Hundreds of demonstrators, including those who had not used or initiated violence, were beaten by police.

December 1999 Macedonian police raid the home of an ethnic Albanian suspect believed to have stockpiled illegal arms, the suspect's father was killed by police gunfire in Gostivar.

11 January 2000 Three Macedonian police officers were shot dead at a police checkpoint on the edge of the village of Aracinovo (*Haracine* in Albanian) on the old road linking Skopje with Kumanovo. The officers had been stopping traffic at

the checkpoint. The village has an ethnic Albanian majority. NLA claimed responsibility.

18 January 2000 An ethnic Albanian, Sabri Asani, was shot dead by the Macedonian police in a raid on his house at Gostivar as a suspect of the Aracinovo killings.

25 January 2001 NLA claimed responsibility for a rocket attack on a police station in the predominantly ethnic Albanian municipality of Tearce-Tetovo, which left one officer dead and wounded another three.

9 February 2001 Macedonian police arrested and beat to death an ethnic Albanian, Murtezan Saiti, who was suspected of hiding weapons used in the deadly Tearce police station attack in Tetovo.

February 2001- August 2001
Insurgency

26 February 2001 An ethnic Albanian was killed by a Macedonian sniper in the ethnic Albanian village of Tanusevci bordering Kosovo (then Serbia) and ethnic Albanians began moving their families out of the village.

4 March 2001 Three members of Macedonian security forces were killed by landmines planted by NLA.

8 March 2001 Ethnic Albanian rebels attack government convoy, killing driver.

9 March 2001 A Macedonian policeman was killed by NLA gunmen near the village of Brest.

15 March 2001 Macedonian military gunfire killed a civilian in the mountains around Tetovo.

22 March 2001 Macedonian police killed two ethnic Albanians after stopping their car in a checkpoint in downtown Tetovo.

28 April 2001 The NLA ambushed a mixed Macedonian police-army patrol at

Vejce (near Tetovo), killing eight security force members.

21 May 2001 A mortar shell launched by Macedonian security forces killed one villager and wounded six others in Tetovo.

6 June 2001 NLA combatants ambushed a Macedonian army ambulance near Slupcane (Lipkovo) and killed five soldiers.

9 June 2001 Macedonian police beat an ethnic Albanian journalist, Metush Ajeti, to death in a Skopje police station. Ajeti's body was later found in the street.

12 June 2001 An ethnic Albanian activist, Naser Hani, was shot and killed as he resisted efforts to abduct him in Struga, a town close to Lake Ohrid, where the peace plans were being discussed.

23 July 2001 Macedonian security forces shelled the ethnic Albanian village of Poroj, on Tetovo's eastern outskirts, by killing nine civilians.

29 July 2001 An NLA landmine explosion on the Lesok-Zelce road north

of Tetovo killed two ethnic Macedonian civilians.

6 August 2001 Macedonian police killed five ethnic Albanians they said were NLA guerrillas in an ethnic Albanian neighborhood of Skopje.

August 2001 NLA members killed 10 government soldiers in an ambush on the road between Skopje and Tetovo, sparking a riot in Prilep in which ethnic Macedonians burned down the local mosque.

10 August 2001 Eight Macedonian soldiers were killed, and eight others were wounded, on the morning of 10 August, when a Macedonian military truck ran over two anti-tank mines on a remote country road on the Skopska Crna Gorna mountain just north of Skopje.

12 August 2001 Macedonian police dragged 10 ethnic Albanian civilians from their homes and killed them in cold blood and burned 22 civilian buildings during a military operation at the village of Ljuboten. Then-Interior Minister Ljubo Boskovski would be tried in the UN War Crimes Tribunal in Hague for ordering these extrajudicial killings.

12 August 2001 Macedonian vigilantes reportedly beat unconscious three ethnic Albanian men who later fled Ljuboten as police stood by and watched. Police shot dead one ethnic Albanian, Atulah Qaini, in the head while he fled from the vigilantes.

13 August 2001 Macedonian police severely beat four ethnic Albanian men at the Skopje hospital reportedly after finding weapons in the trunk of their car. Following the beatings at the hospital, police took the men to the police station, beat them, and threatened to kill them. One of the men, Nazmi Aliu, died from the injuries he sustained.

August 2001- 2017

26 August 2001 NLA members killed two ethnic Macedonian employees in a bomb explosion at a Macedonian-owned restaurant in Tetovo.

15 September 2001 Five members of a Macedonian paramilitary group, the so-called "Red Berets", kidnapped Muharrem Ibrahim, an ethnic Albanian who worked for a local humanitarian NGO, and attempted to kill him by throwing him into the Vardar river.

18 October 2001 Macedonian police in Tetovo shot and killed one ethnic Albanian youth and injured another when they failed to stop at a police checkpoint.

10-11 November 2001 NLA members ambushed a police convoy near Trebos, a village northeast of Tetovo, killing three police officers and wounding others.

22-25 November 2001 12 ethnic Macedonians and 6 ethnic Albanians physically disappeared from their villages around Tetovo, suspected of having been killed by NLA and Macedonian security forces respectively.

December 2001 Members of the "Lions" ethnic Macedonian police paramilitary unit shot an ethnic Albanian farmer, Sabit Alili, in the leg while he was working in his field at Ratae in Tetovo. The "Lions" then purposely tied a tourniquet on his leg too loosely; Alili subsequently died from blood loss. The "Lions" detained and tortured Alili's son, Nexhat Alili.

March 2002 Five ethnic Macedonians were killed when the paramilitary group Albanian National Army attacked a former NLA headquarters on the outskirts of Tetovo; the most serious rupture of

Ohrid Peace agreement since November 2001.

26 April 2002 The Macedonian Border Brigade shot and killed one ethnic Albanian and injured two others after the ethnic Albanians drove a truck through an illegal crossing.

26 August 2002 Unknown assailants shot and killed two ethnic Macedonian police officers, Daniel Jankovski and Aleksandar Nikolic, near Gostivar. Among the suspects detained by police was Selam Selami, an ethnic Albanian, who was severely beaten and sustained permanent injuries.

30 August 2002 A "Lion" (i.e. member of an ethnic Macedonian paramilitary unit) shot and killed an ethnic Albanian man and beat at least seven others during an operation to secure the Gostivar-Tetovo highway. The operation was in response to the aforementioned kidnapping of five ethnic Macedonians.

19 October 2002 In what police and OSCE believed was a revenge shooting for August killings, one ethnic Macedonian youth was killed and two others wounded in Gostivar.

12 September 2002 Fadil Elmazi, an ethnic Albanian policeman, was shot and killed during an attack on the temporary police station at Bogovinje near Tetovo.

October 2002 Several ethnic Albanian students were abducted and tortured in Skopje. An October students' protest in Skopje of the killing of an ethnic Macedonian student in Tetovo turned violent. The students beat at least four ethnic Albanians, and vandalized several automobiles. Six students were arrested and the case was pending at year's end. In October a group of ethnic Albanians in Tetovo shot three young male ethnic Macedonians, killing one. Police were still investigating the incident at year's end. This was possibly in retaliation for the police killing of an ethnic Albanian the previous day.

2 March 2006 Macedonian police shot an ethnic Albanian Enver Xhaferi while serving arrest warrants on three ethnic Albanian men in the Skopje suburb of Kondovo. Xhaferi died from gunshot wounds en route to the hospital.

7 November 2007 “Mountain Storm” operation Macedonian security forces killed six members of what it called an ethnic Albanian extremist group during heavy clashes in the village of Brodec located in the hills above the mainly ethnic Albanian town of Tetovo, centre of the 2001 guerrilla insurgency.

12 May 2010 Macedonian police attempted to arrest four men it identified as ethnic Albanian extremists who were smuggling a significant number of weapons into the country near the village

of Radusha, close to the border with Kosovo. The police shot and killed the four after they opened fire.

12 April 2012 5 ethnic Macedonians shot dead on the shores of Lake Smilkovo in Skopje during Orthodox Easter.

9-10 May 2015 Macedonian security forces raid on a heavily armed ethnic Albanian paramilitary group in the northern town of Kumanovo. 2 consecutive days of heavy clashes resulted in the deaths of 8 security forces and 14 rebels.