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The controversial Antiquisation of the national identity in the Republic of Macedonia – genesis, dynamics and internalisation by the local populace

Master Thesis



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*“Skopje may look like Rome or Paris, but  
the city is going to lose its identity”*

Paul Noritaka Tange, 2012

## Abstract

This thesis examines and explores the impact of a nation-building policy practised by the ruling government of VMRO-DPMNE in the Republic of Macedonia (2006-2016). It explores the policy and campaign of Antiquisation, embodied and jettisoned by the 2008 electoral party manifesto “Renewal” or “Rebirth” as well as assesses its impact and genesis. The research will attempt to shed light into the genesis of the Antiquisation process and its internalisation, which are often missed by the very few people who have engaged with the topic, and also draws parallels with the idea of Slav-Macedonian origin, propagated by Misirkov in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The paper utilises a multifaceted approach of dealing with this issue by employing a case study approach, situated in the interpretive side of the research spectrum, where we aim to understand the idea behind modern Macedonian identity. In addition, the thesis employs discourse analysis (visual imagery), process-tracing (document/archival research), and semi-structured/unstructured interviews – to increase the validity and reliability of the project.

**Key words:** Antiquisation, Republic of Macedonia, nation-building, Skopje 2014, invention of tradition, myths

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## 1. Introduction.

After the newly elected government of the Republic of Macedonia decided to dismantle a monument, part of the cultural project “Skopje 2014” in February 2018, it became evident that the controversial campaign of Antiquisation of the Macedonian national identity has been inadvertently denounced. In addition, the newly proposed name of the country by PM Zaev as “Republic of Ilinden Macedonia” last month, which was eventually rejected by Greece, signified the rejection of the Antique character of Macedonians, linking them to the Ilinden Uprising in 1903 against the Ottoman Empire (Dnevnik, 2018). The reform-minded government, led by Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, denounced the pursuit of isolationist and exclusive national identity policies in the face of the Antiquisation of the Macedonian identity, propagated by former PM Nikola Gruevski, as well as, exacerbating the name dispute with Greece and maintaining hostile relations towards Bulgaria and Albania. These two issues were utilised by Gruevski to further his own domestic agenda of keeping the opposition at bay and keeping the general public distracted from the worsening economic as well as demographic conditions of the state (Courbage, 2003). The ludicrous spending of funds for the anachronistic nation-building project “Skopje 2014” in the hope of solidifying the new view of the identity of the Republic amounted to 80 mln. euros in 2010, but since then it has exceeded 600 mln. euros in 2016 raising questions of money-laundering and corruption schemes, which led to the demise of VMRO-DPMNE.

In light of these developments, the goal of this research is going to be the exploration and understanding the contribution of the campaign of Antiquisation to the construction of the myth and tradition of the contemporary Macedonian identity. History and myth construction have

played a ubiquitous role in framing the Macedonian identity since its beginning in 1945. By creating a tangible version of its identity in the form of arches, statues, monuments (embodied in the project “Skopje 2014”) and naming infrastructural projects after figures from the Antiquity and Middle Ages, the former Macedonian government attempted to emphasise the continuity of the local identity, thereby reaffirming itself as a legitimate nation in the contemporary world and underlining its specificity and authenticity. This represents a continuation of the Slav-Macedonist doctrine, which officially was devised in 1934 by the Comintern and at the same time paradoxically opposes it, as well as polarises the Macedonian society. The theories of myth construction (Schöpflin, 2000) and Hobsbawn and Ranger’s (1992) theory of invention of tradition, supplemented by Balkanism (Todorova, 1997), offer a well-crafted explanation of what exactly represents Antiquisation and how it achieves its goals. The thesis attempts to tackle the question “What is the origin and purpose of the campaign for Antiquisation of the national identity in the Republic of Macedonia?”. The study will be based in the interpretative side of the research spectrum, and employing a qualitative research design. Furthermore, this in-depth study will strive to answer the sub-question that is inextricably linked with the main research question of whether the newly proposed Antique identity has been internalised by the local population. By employing different research methods, such as structured and unstructured interviews, process-tracing, visual analysis, archival research and analysing the gathered triangulated data, the research will solidify its results.

This thesis is going to situate itself broadly into the literature produced on the contentious issue of the Macedonian identity. This area is under-researched in the field of social sciences in comparison to other Balkan states and nations. The research project directly communicates with the works of Vangeli (2011) on the anachronistic project of Antiquisation and Kubierna (2012) on

“Skopje 2014”. To this point, the researcher believes that his study will make a profound contribution to the scholarly debate in understanding the modern Macedonian identity by shedding light into the idea and process behind the nation-building initiative, labelled as Antiquisation. It will provide a new insight related to understanding the genesis and antecedents of Antiquisation and whether it has been internalised by the society.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: literature review, in which the literature, concepts and theory will be discussed; research design, where the case study, methodology and operationalisation will be covered; findings and discussion, which will be subdivided into three subsections regarding the emergence of Macedonian nationalism, the genesis of Antiquisation and its direct link with Hellenism, and the internalisation of Antiquisation; and, finally, the paper will end with a conclusion section.

## **2. Literature review, theoretical framework and conceptualisation.**

### **2.1 Literature review and concepts.**

#### *Literature review:*

The social sciences literature focusing on the Republic of Macedonia primarily puts emphasis on multi-ethnic relations between the majority Slav-speaking Macedonians and ethnic Albanians (Nancheva and Koneska, 2015; Reka 2008) as well as the conflict and resolution of the ethnic strife in 2001 with the Ohrid Framework Agreement, thus relating itself to the field of security studies (Liotta and Jebb, 2004; Karajkov, 2008). The work of Sazdovski (2015) combines security and Macedonian identity studies. He argued that the Antiquisation narrative was a response to internal and external security threats, stemming from the denial of the existence of

the Macedonian nation by its neighbours and the refusal of the Albanian minority to recognise that the State belonged only to ethnic Macedonians as the Constitution stipulates. However, the author fails to take into consideration the multi-layered nature of Antiquisation and its controversial nature by omitting the huge corruption allegations of it.

The literature on the modern Macedonian state and its former Yugoslav counterpart (SR Macedonia) is not that abundant, when pertaining to issues of identity. The seminal works of Cowan (2000), Poulton (1995), and Rossos (1994) deserve merit and are a must-read in the sphere. Their historical and anthropological approaches aid the process-tracing effort and tracking the root causes of many problems that pertain to the formation of the Macedonian identity and Republic of Macedonia. Cowan's "*Macedonia: the politics of identity and difference*" expands the horizon in the field by introducing a broader view of Macedonians as people, not only in the Republic of Macedonia, but in Greece and the diasporas, in the sense that he demonstrates that there is a Macedonian nation, completely independent of the geographical region of Macedonia. Poulton (1995) focuses on a more generalist approach to the issue who are the Macedonians, however, the utility of his treatise is very high due to the fact that we can gauge at the development of the geographical and national region since the Antiquity. Furthermore, he makes several links and causal connections between different historical periods and identity change, basically establishing that Macedonian identity is malleable and susceptible to change based on the particular rulers of the region. Danforth (1993; 1995) gives precedence to the perennial "Macedonian question", which re-emerged after the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation. Furthermore, he emphasises the role that transnational national communities play in reinforcing a particular type of national ethnic identity, regardless that these communities are separated by a great distance from the "mother-state".

Apart from the abovementioned works, there are more recent intriguing studies pertaining to the Macedonian identity, which introduce and link factors related to consumption (Dimova, 2010) and demography (Courbage, 2003). The idea of demography as a significant aspect of identity is correlated to the competition of different national and ethnic groups for the political, material and symbolic resources that the state elicits. Fears of the Macedonian government of the rising fertility rate amongst Macedonian Albanian women for years have been perceived as a threat to Macedonian identity. Whereas, consumption and consumerism have been linked to the changing fortunes of the Macedonian society – during Yugoslav times Albanians were poor; now the situation has changed, allowing them to maintain a higher standard of living (Dimova, 2010: 4). The perception of the Albanian ethnic group in the Republic of Macedonia as inferior and backward is no longer valid, as the rising material well-being of the minority soon will surpass that of the Slav-Macedonian citizens, which can be traced in the ethnically mixed communities where Albanians occupy leading positions in the socio-economic sphere.

A very narrow strand of the literature links to the notion of a particular nation-building policy linked to the construction and cultural appropriation of ancient relics as a means of claiming a lineage of national identity to ancient times (Gori, 2014). In addition, this trend of situating the Macedonian nation and identity greatly antagonises Greece, and leads to the affirmation of the continued policy of vetoing the Republic of Macedonia in international institutions and further isolating the country. Gori's (2014) paper is linked to the idea of Antiquisation and its two most prominent works that of Vangeli (2011) and Kubierna (2012). This is the reason that this thesis is important to the scholarly field because of the virtually non-existent work on the topic. The two scholars in their journal articles emphasise the necessity to study this phenomenon and provide introductory remarks, giving the essential information for future scholars on the subject. They

provide background information on the subject, outlining the major developments linked to VMRO-DPMNE and focus primarily on it as a pure nation-building initiative, partially accepting at face value the official discourse of attempting to root the Macedonian identity to the Antiquity. However, there is more to it and the corruption schemes and mismanagement of the whole situation turn it into a misguided initiative. Moreover, Kubiena (2012) assumes the Antiquisation is a recent phenomenon, which this thesis illustrates that it is not the case. Furthermore, both social scientists do not offer any estimates or discussion about the support and internalisation of the Antique Macedonian identity among the population. Nonetheless, both can be absolved from this due to the fact that they were writing in the beginning of this campaign. Hence, leaving this thesis to fill the gap in the literature with regards to genesis/origin of Antiquisation and its internalisation.

*Concepts:*

An integral part of this research is going to play the concept of **Antiquisation** (Georgievski, 2009). It represents the process of discovery or re-discovery of a nation and tracing back its roots to the period of Antiquity. In the contemporary Macedonian discourse the concept highlights the connection between modern-day ethnic Macedonians and Ancient Macedonians (Koteska, 2014). This term, which is also a policy, opposes the idea of the Slav-Macedonian origin, an idea propagated by intellectuals, such as Krste Misirkov, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who emphasised the Slavic origin and distinctiveness of the Macedonian nation, especially in comparison to its Bulgarian counterpart. Slav-Macedonism, on its own, is a contentious process, which began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and reached its climax in the 50s, when Tito created the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in which Macedonian communists reinvented, as well as, codified their

“new” language and performed a sort of bulgarophobic state-building process within Yugoslavia (Thiessen, 2011). However, after independence in 1991 the government of VMRO-DPMNE tried to invent a tradition, a primordial perspective, going back to the times of Alexander the Great (Troebst, 2003).

In order to understand the concept of Antiquisation we need to look at also the concepts of national identity and nation-building. According to Berg-Schlosser et al. (2011) the concept of identity is “ambiguous and contentious”. Moreover, it could carry different connotations depending on the context – personal, social, cultural, and national. For the purposes of this research, we should adopt the “systematized version” (Adcock and Collier, 2001) of the concept – **national identity**. The precise definition given in Berg-Schlosser et al. (2011: 1645) is “[A] special form of a collective, political identity, which consists mostly of a self-image based on certain assumptions about common features as history, language, culture, subjective feelings of belonging, and/or citizenship”. These attributes are often thought to overcome contrasting utilitarian interests of the members of that community and facilitate their integration. By instilling people with a shared sense of purpose, the drive of ethnic political entrepreneurs diminishes. In the Republic of Macedonia before 2016 the national identity concept was politicised by VMRO-DPMNE on an exclusive matter, relegating Albanian minority interests to a minor position by refusing to acquiesce to their demands for a co-official status of Albanian language (Ahn, 2017).

Furthermore, the concept of **nation-building** is related to the research as it represents the thrust of almost three decades of Macedonian politicians to trace back their roots and build an independent state, resulting in the policy and campaign of Antiquisation. As a result nation

building in this thesis is a process of “*collective identity formation to assert power in a certain territory. It refers to existing institutions, customs, and traditions, and it redefines national characteristics.*” (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2011: 1645). The authors capture this process with its characteristic and link it to the process of state-building, which depends on this uniqueness of the collective identity.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework.

The employment of theories that aid the understanding of identity construction and formation, help the thesis to stand out from others by emphasising the genesis and the internalisation of the misguided nation-building project of Antiquisation in Macedonia. Three theories will explain why this Antique form of Macedonism that has taken roots in the Macedonian society. Todorova’s (1997) notion of Balkanism, as opposed to Orientalism is linked to “imagining the Balkans” and Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” (1991: 6), is one answer to the puzzle. Todorova’s (1997) Balkanism has a pejorative meaning and elicits negative connotations. It invoked characteristics as barbarianism, lack of civility, crudeness and unrefinement. It was constructed by Europeans as “the other”, but in reality the region was, and still is, experiencing the nation-building effects due to the unfortunate historical circumstances that Western European states did in the last centuries (Todorova, 1997: 34). The negative connotation that the Balkans elicited, pushed PM Gruevski to redefine and reconstruct the Macedonian identity, so as to distance itself from the nations that inhabit the Balkan Peninsula – the Slavs, thus making way for the Antiquisation campaign, a sub-facet of the Macedonist doctrine (Vangeli, 2011).

The thesis will attempt to reaffirm and provide an empirical example to the two main theories that are applied to this thesis - Hobsbawn and Ranger's (1992) theory of invention and mass-production of tradition and Schöpflin's (2000) notion of the construction of the national myth – by examining the case of Antiquisation in Macedonia. Essentially, these two theories tell us that the process of Antiquisation is a process of re-reading and re-interpreting history, connected to myth construction and invention of traditions. **Myth** is one of the ways through which nations establish the foundations of their own being and establishes the boundaries between “them” and “us” (Schöpflin: 2000: 74). It is about perception and not historical accuracy. Myth construction is used to solidify the self-identification of a community and enables a new identity to be superimposed on an older one. Through myths politicians can convey their messages to foster solidarity (Alexander the Great), or equally portray a mythic enemy, such as the depiction of Bulgarians as Tatars. Both theories are being used for the purpose of this research because they surpass the other literature on identity construction, as they do not regard the historical accuracy of a particular figure or event as being of primary importance, and in fact it is pushed to the fringes. This notion of rejection of historical accuracy was deliberately used by Gruevski and Macedonian politicians beforehand. The whole existence of Macedonia represents an example of myth construction. In addition, Schöpflin's (2000: 90-98) taxonomy of national myths helps us to locate and explain in which type the campaign of Antiquisation fits in. This research fits within the seventh and eight types of myths (foundation; ethno-genesis and antiquity), thus reaffirms and advances the theory in the respective dimensions:

Taxonomy of myths	
Types of myths	Definition
1. Myths of territory	Claim a territory that the nation discovered itself for the first time.
2. Myths of redemption and suffering	Claim that the nation has undergone a process of redemption and vindication.
3. Myths of unjust treatment	History is a malign actor that has singled out the nation for a negative treatment.
4. Myths of election and civilising mission	Claim that the nation is entrusted with a special mission by God.
5. Myths of military valour and resistance	Give saliency to special deeds performed by the collectivity itself.
6. Myths of rebirth and renewal	The present is demonised and must be cleansed.
7. Myths of foundation	The group has to make a start, and seeks to mark it by a special act, accorded with mythical qualities.
8. Myths of ethno-genesis and antiquity	Answer the question of where “we” originate from.
9. Myths of kinship and shared descent	The concept of nation as family.

The construction of the myth of foundation and ethno-genesis, point 7 and 8 from the table, are utilised by the former government of Gruevski to reconstitute the Macedonian identity by creating a mythical halo around the country’s foundation and linking modern with ancient Macedonians, hence the process of Antiquisation. The second theory, **inventing and mass producing the traditions** (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1992) of celebrating national holidays and building monuments of ancient battles and heroes targets the lack of continuity of the Macedonian identity and the ability to siphon funds under the pretext of “building a nation”, a process evident in volatile and rapid transformations such as in the post-Yugoslav countries. The project “Skopje 2014” embodies and gives tangibility to myth construction, since it is easier for the general public to comprehend the policy of Antiquisation. Hobsbawn and Ranger (1992: 47) envisage the possible instrumental usage of the invention of tradition for malign purposes and enriching a particular entrepreneurial faction. By moving the debate away from the academic and historic tables, the Gruevski government aimed to strengthen its grip on power and present itself in a favourable image. Through “Skopje 2014”, which represents the reshaping of building facades in the old centre of Skopje, giving them neo-baroque and classical style, the government

symbolized its drive and ambition to show the continuity of the Macedonian nation (Kubienna, 2012). In addition, the accompanying erection of several monuments of historical figures from the Antiquity greatly characterizes the project. Moreover, the state utilised all its machinery to promote and propagate this new invented tradition amongst the populace. This is facilitated and evidenced by the low educational attainment of the population (See section 4.3).

### **3. Research design.**

In terms of research design, the thesis is situated in one of the two epistemological traditions of social science scholarship, which is precisely interpretivism (as opposed to empiricism). The dichotomy between the two represents the tension between the idea that natural sciences methods should be applied to them as opposed to the idea that the social world is not subject to study through scientific methods (Lamont 2015: 17). Interpretivism reflects upon the social meanings and narratives embedded within the socio-political sphere, and focuses on the investigation and exploration of norms, ideas and beliefs that underline domestic and international politics. The research agenda of the interpretivists seek to understand culture, norms, and national identities in social sciences. This strand of research is appropriate in cases such as this thesis aims to elaborate on. The Antiquisation of the Macedonian identity is best observed by the underlying norms and beliefs of the ruling elite as well as their attempt to reinvent the traditions and history.

#### **3.1 Case selection.**

The case of Republic of Macedonia is significant and relevant for the contemporary understanding of national identity and illuminate how malleable it is. It is an exemplary case of

nation-building from scratch. Moreover, it contributes to our understanding of a country that constantly redefines and shifts its identity, which raises questions about the continuity and permanence of the Macedonian nation. The identity and nationhood of the country have always been contested by their neighbours, refusing to accept the existence of a separate Macedonian nationality. Thus, driving local politicians to devise cultural schemes to distinguish the national identity from that of their neighbours, such as the policy of Antiquisation and project “Skopje 2014”. This is an unusual process, which is rarely evident, but it becomes more problematic when a country decides to forge its history, construct the myth of foundation and invent tradition to create a direct link between the contemporary and ancient world as in the case of the Republic of Macedonia. In the contemporary Macedonian discourse the concept of Antiquisation highlights the connection between modern-day ethnic Macedonians and Ancient Macedonians (Koteska, 2014). When a government embarks upon the usage of culture as a form of nationalism, this ultimately translates into weaknesses in other fields such as the economy or even civil society. The cultural project “Skopje 2014”, which is the tangible part of this myth construction process, serves as an edifice of this campaign, as it is easier to comprehend a change in national identity when you actually can observe, or “touch” it. However, the project “Skopje 2014” can be questioned whether it is a true attempt in rooting the Macedonian identity to the Ancient Kingdom of Macedonia, or it is a blatant corruption scheme of siphoning funds. This thesis is going to shed clarity on these issues.

### 3.2 Methods of data generation, analysis and operationalization.

The concept of Antiquisation is going to be measured and operationalized by the approval rating that the public gives to its tangible expression, cultural project “Skopje 2014”, between 2009 and

2016. In addition, the support of different historical periods and figures by the general public will indicate whether the whole campaign has been internalised or not.

The data that is going to be utilised in this endeavour will be generated by using primary and secondary sources. The Antiquisation of the Macedonian identity is a very unusual phenomenon and the lack of sources on the topic is the main limitation that the researcher had to experience. There are virtually no reports by international or local NGOs on the subject. However, there are existing surveys, which were obtained, by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Skopje and a few websites on the issue of internalisation of the Antique Macedonian identity, which published their results but had to soon take them off from the public presence due to governmental pressure. These existing surveys represent secondary data and are appropriate in measuring the concept of Antiquisation by observing the public support given for the campaign and its tangible expression project “Skopje 2014”. The graphs in subsection 4.3 and Appendix D were conjured via the survey data.

In light of these challenges, the author had to undertake a field research trip in the Republic of Macedonia and Sofia, Bulgaria to gather the necessary primary data in order to answer the main research question about the genesis of Antiquisation, especially in subsection 4.2, and travelling hundreds of kilometres in Macedonia to visit Strumitsa, Skopje, and Ohrid. During the trip he conducted 14 structured and unstructured interviews (See Appendix A for Interview Guide) to ask various questions regarding the background of Antiquisation, whether it had been internalised or not, the level of support, about the exclusivity of it, and etc. The author’s collocutors are exemplary and authoritative public leaders from all walks of life – presidents of NGOs, leaders, famous journalists, TV anchor-men and political party leaders – and from the two major ethnic groups – Macedonians and Albanians (See Appendix B for background info of

collocutors). In addition, the writer performed library/archival research in the National Library in Sofia and the Macedonia Scientific Institute, which has one of the last remaining copies of Vasil Kanchov's "*Macedonia-ethnography and statistics*". Last but not least, the researcher utilised visual imagery, or visualisation, as it is commonly known in the field of social sciences (Rose, 2012: 347). It is an unusual method for the field, but the author found it very useful, especially in cases where there is a large portion of symbolism involved – all the statues, monuments, and buildings of "Skopje 2014" represent the identity discourse and emphasise the current dominance of Antiquisation, so that no other rival view of the Macedonian identity would be tolerated. The reshaping of building facades in the old centre of Skopje, giving them neo-baroque and classical style, symbolizes the drive to show the continuity of the Macedonian nation and the elite perception of it. The author is going to capture the processes and actual objects, highlighting the project, and subsequently attempt to analyse them, showing the power of history and the power relations they elicit.

The most important method for analysis will be process-tracing. Collier (cited in Lamont, 2015) defines it as the "systemic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of the research questions or hypotheses." Process-tracing is utilised to examine and contribute to diverse research objectives – "a) identifying novel political phenomena and systematically describing them, b) assess these new causal claims, and c) gaining insight into causal mechanisms" (Lamont, 2015). By means of process-tracing are the main findings derived in subsection 4.1, and partly in 4.2, about the emergence and antecedents of Macedonian nationalism as well as the genesis of Antiquisation where Hellenism played an enormous part.

## 4. Findings and discussion.

This section is going to shed light into the origin of the phenomenon of Antiquisation and whether it has gained a foothold in the modern Macedonian society. All the findings and results of the study are going to be presented in three sections in the following causal logic: *Slav-Macedonian nationalism->Antique Macedonian nationalism->campaign of Antiquisation->project "Skopje 2014"*. Firstly, the emergence and characteristics of Slav-Macedonism (Macedonian nationalism) will be briefly discussed for the purpose of acquainting the reader, since the Antiquisation of the Macedonian identity is an expression of the Antique version of Macedonism. The second part will present the genesis of the idea of Antiquisation, which is intertwined with the expansion of Hellenism. Here will be the main contribution to the literature, since previous works have focused on the phenomenon under investigation as a completely new occurrence that Gruevski invented. Lastly, in the third subsection the tangible version of this campaign of Antiquisation will be examined – “Skopje 2014”, alongside graphs and tables evidencing whether this Antique idea of origin has been internalised by a segment of the population or not.

### 4.1 The idea of Macedonian nationalism, its antecedents and impact on the Macedonian population.

The first notions of the birth of Macedonian nationalism or Macedonism (as it is used in this paper) revolve around the 1900s with the first notable work espousing the main ideas written by Krste Misirkov, who is considered one of the forefathers of Macedonia. “Za makedontskite raboti” (For the Macedonian affairs) was written in 1903, and interestingly at the time Misirkov was a member of the Bulgarian army, participated in numerous cultural circles and this

construction of a new regional nationalism bewildered many of his compatriots. In his book, which is well preserved in the Sofia library archives, he outlines the idea that Macedonians should not be confused with Bulgarians and Serbs, thus being a separate nation from time immemorial. Misirkov desired the government of the Ottoman Empire to recognise Macedonians as a minority, hence alleviating their enormous burden. He recognised that Macedonia as a geographic region would never be allowed to be incorporated into Bulgaria and, with hindsight, took the matter in his own hands and constructed the myth of a distinct Macedonian identity. This work according to some publicists (Eldarov, 2016; Tsarnushanov, 1992) is the most commonly cited by Macedonian students of history, political science and other social sciences subjects. This distinct nationhood idea did not provoke much enthusiasm at the time but was enough to latch on to the historic VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation), which the current VMRO-DPMNE claims to be a descendant of. VMRO represented an organisation that combined people/fighters from different backgrounds, with many ideals, but ultimately united by the sole purpose of liberating Macedonia and forming an independent state with a predominant Bulgarian element. According to Vasil Kantchov's (1900) *Macedonia: ethnography and statistics*, mentioned in the Methodology section, at the turn of the century Macedonia was a very diverse place with 55% Bulgarians dominating the region, and sizeable minorities of Albanians and Greeks, who lived primarily in Aegean Macedonia alongside ethnic Bulgarians. This is an important point as modern day Macedonism, whether being Slav or Antique, precludes the existence of any other minorities of the geographic region of Macedonia in that period, which is an enormous manipulation of history and myth fabrication.

This notion of the distinctiveness of Macedonians was soon adopted by one of the wings of VMRO, which was influenced by leftist ideologies and most prominent proponents were Goce

Delchev, Damyan Gruev and Nikola Karev (see Graph on the “Most important historical figure” in subsection 4.3). These three people have a leading place in the Macedonian pantheon of heroes and VMRO today is represented in the Macedonian historiography by this small leftist wing, expunging the unnecessary and inconvenient parts of the Organisation’s history. Another building block and legitimation of Macedonism was the decision of the Communist International in 1934 in Moscow, where the Communist parties in the Balkans proposed the creation of a separate Macedonian nation to fill in the vacuum in the region, as all countries before used to lay claims on Macedonia (Angelov, 2003). Joseph Stalin at time had already consolidated his power in the Soviet Union and was looking for opportunities for expansion and VMRO was a very consolidated and potent force that fought a national liberation war, which was enough to gain the attention of the Soviet leader. With this decision made on the international arena there was no turning back and millions of funds were poured to split VMRO and support the leftist section in the Organisation. The first contact with Stalin was established in the early 1920s, culminating in the May Manifesto, which called upon all the unification of the region of Macedonia under one state. However, as one of my collocutors - Miroslav Rizinski – authoritatively pointed that:

*“VMRO was not a barbaric organization; it was a mass civic movement with an armed wing. The leadership was comprised of the so called Central Committee – at the time Todor Aleksandrov (founder of VMRO), Petar Chaulev, and General Aleksandar Protogerov. And, the last two had succumbed to Stalin’s pressure in signing this May manifesto, which essentially meant the eradication of the Bulgarian character of the Organisation. However, this process did not succeed and these leaders were expelled.”*

Where Stalin failed, the Yugoslav and Bulgarian communist branches succeeded. After WWII, Macedonia was included in Yugoslavia after the withdrawal of the Axis and the Bulgarian army

in 1944. Under the guidance of the Yugoslav Communist Party a massive campaign of indoctrination began, which left a huge traumatic mark on the local population. Anyone who refused to accept the newly imposed regional Macedonian identity on the local Macedonian Bulgarians was threatened and harassed. Tito was instrumental in this process as he wanted to showcase the unity of all South Slavic nations, and since Macedonia was essentially in an **identity vacuum**, the Comintern decision in 1934 was very beneficial. During the Yugoslav period the standardization and codification of the language happened under the guidance of Blazhe Koneski, who utilized numerous phrases and semantic structures from the Serbian language in order to make Macedonian more distinct from Bulgarian. The invention of tradition played a huge role here, as every year the day that the official language was legitimised has turned into a national commemoration day. Even in Pirin Macedonia, which remained in Bulgaria, scholars of the new language were brought in to teach Macedonian to the locals, who mounted serious opposition to this act (Gruev et al., 2014: 127). During the period most of the Macedonian intelligentsia was wiped out due to their failure to conform to Macedonism. In 1945 a Law on the sanctity of the Macedonian honour was implemented and purged everyone from Slavic background who refused to accept the newly-imposed identity. Angelov (2003: 45) reports of more than hundred people from upward social classes sentenced to death for abusing and ridiculing the new Macedonian identity in December 1945. A rare document retrieved from the Macedonian Scientific Institute (1998: 12) highlights that between December and mid-1946, 4700 Macedonians with Bulgarian consciousness had been executed and over 15 000 were accused of collaboration with the Bulgarian Fascist Occupier and sentenced to the labour camps of Goli Otok and Idirizovo for indoctrination. There are several monographies that came out

after the independence of Macedonia, i.e. Zdravko Zdraveski and Temelko Neshkov that shed light of what happens when one failed to conform to the official national doctrine.

Today this aggressive form of Macedonism is still present, especially with regards to establishing other Slavic organizations in the country (mostly Bulgarian), as their existence on its own will bring down the newly imposed identity on the population. Vladimir Pankov, whom the author met in Ohrid, elaborated on his bad experience in establishing the RADKO Association in 2000 that took a stand against both Slav-Macedonism and Antique Macedonism (Antiquisation):

*“On October 27, 2000, I created the RADKO Citizens Association, which was officially presented at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Skopje, where it was accompanied by a smoke throwing grenades and other provocations, conjured by people wearing masks and the stars of Vergina. And the state institutions remained silent. They condoned this aggressiveness. Later, the association was declared unconstitutional by the Macedonian judiciary. However, in 2008, RADKO won the case at the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg versus Macedonia.”*

The above mentioned quote illustrates the aggressive and expansive features of Macedonian nationalism. Moreover, what was stressed in our conversation was that Slav-Macedonism and its Antique counterpart are “*cancerous formations*”. This is a very strong statement, and the fact that the nation-building, invention of culture/tradition and myth construction in Macedonia are compared with medical term that elicits strong emotions in many people, means essentially that there is no place for dissent and people who have a different opinion are persecuted in modern democratic Macedonia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Vladimir Perv (2018) puts it “*Macedonian nationalism is aggressive inside the country, but mellow outside Macedonia*”. The case of Vladimir Pankov is not the only one. One of my interviewees, Vlado Trenevski, leader of NGO

“Interakcija” in Ohrid has an Interpol prison sentence for publicly refusing to accept Antiquisation, and now is an asylum seeker in Bulgaria.

## 4.2 The genesis of Antiquisation and the beginning of Antique Macedonism.

The previous section is to be utilised by scholars who engage in the various scholarly debates about different trends and dynamics in the Republic of Macedonia, as it offers an insight that is neglected in the English-speaking publications on the topic of Macedonian nationalism. As mentioned in the very beginning of this paper, the thesis is going to engage in a debate with the major work in the field of Antiquisation, that of Vangeli (2011) and aims to further this knowledge by giving more insight on the genesis and beginnings of the particular phenomenon, as well as contribute by verifying whether it has succeeded in gaining support among the Macedonian population.

Superficially, it seems that the campaign of Antiquisation had started a decade ago when Gruevski announced in VMRO-DPMNE’s party manifesto “Rebirth” (2008) that he would strive to “safeguard Macedonian traditions, ensure that the Macedonian identity is protected, conserve and preserve national monuments, build new cultural institutions, statues and tombs, implement cultural programmes in the educational system”. In addition, the party manifest explicitly states that a new Agency of Culture shall be built to promote and internalise all the new trends that the Macedonian archaeology and historiography would discover (Popiliev, 2018). Essentially, this represents a propaganda machine dedicated to the indoctrination of the local populace in accepting the Antique identity of Macedonians. Furthermore, another prominent slogan was that “everything will be done to preserve the identity of the Macedonian people, the Macedonian language, and the Macedonian culture”. However, conveniently when numbering the several

building projects, the party manifesto did not elaborate about the architectural style or the proposed changes or what these “new trends” were going to encompass. At the time no one of the middle class was expecting that the myth construction would become a topic of primary importance for the state in the next decade. In addition, the main competitor the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, anticipating the change of the status quo also adopted the name “Sontse” (Or Sun) for its electoral campaign to imply and reiterate its commitment to the ancient roots of the Macedonian nation – “Macedonia as old as the Sun” (Mitev, 2008: 78).

An interesting development that is worthwhile analysing and pointing out is the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, two months prior to the Macedonian parliamentary elections and the creation of the “Rebirth” Manifesto. The Republic of Macedonia at the time was expecting to be formally invited to begin negotiations, due to the favourable trend in Greece. However, at the very last moment Greece decided to veto the application (BBC, 2008), which fundamentally infuriated the Macedonian delegation. Perev (2018) personally oversaw the disappointed Nikola Gruevski and heard his negative comments. We can safely deduce that from this moment onwards the whole of Antiquisation reached its moral high-ground and legitimised it as a way of showing to the world that Macedonia is not inventing its own traditions but actually is a descendant from a far more ancient polity that predates most of the current NATO members. That objective of the newly elected government was clear and they received popular support from the people by winning the elections, which led into the cultural project “Skopje 2014” and to a critical disjuncture in the official Macedonian nation-building doctrine (Muhic and Takovski, 2013). The next subsection will cover the intricacies of this project.

The actual project “Skopje 2014” represents a crescendo of a long-lasting process of Antiquisation, situated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when in Macedonia fought three competing

nationalisms – Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek (Dimitrov, 2011: 128). Nikola Popiliev (2018) confined to the author that this process started during the time of Vladika or Bishop Germanos Karavangelis, who during the Ottoman Empire was assigned to control and influence the Christian population in what is today in modern Greece the *periphery* of Western and Central Macedonia. During these turbulent years of the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the newly independent Greek state was exercising a huge influence on the Christian population of the Empire and engaged in massive propaganda among them. During this era, being able to adhere to Greek ceremonies, traditions, being a member of the Constantinople Patriarchate and had Greek schooling, was certainly going to guarantee you a prime position in the society. With the geographical proximity of the Greek state this process of Hellenisation of Bulgarians in Macedonia was intensified, and in fact those who were quick to adopt this, bolstered their reputations and material well-being. Hence, distancing themselves from their compatriots. A facilitative and instrumental role played the Greek Orthodox Church, which with its vladikas and bishops promoted Christian values as well as abided to the official Greek state doctrine of Hellenising its northern borders at turn of the century (Marinov, 2013: 283). Consequently, there were numerous ethno-religious clashes between Christians in the Ottoman Empire, and interesting the Sultan stayed at bay without interfering, adopting the centuries-old strategy “divide and rule”. These bordering regions had a small minority of ethnic Greeks as borders during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were fluid and the real borderlines were *ethnic belts* with mixed populations. The Greeks as privileged members of the Empire enjoyed numerous benefits alongside with their Church, this promoted envy among the other Slavic peoples and many of them decided to embrace and voluntarily undergo the process of Hellenisation. This process is facilitated by what Anthony Smith (1986: 229) calls “mythomoteurs”: the communal-political,

the communal-religious, and the dynastic. These represent propelling engines, so to speak, which are the driving force behind the propaganda of the Church and its bishops. And, the main myth construction that was put forward was of the ancient legacy of Alexander the Macedon and his father Phillip II. Up until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the names of these two historical figures had negative connotations, since they were linked with the Ancient Macedonian invasions of the Greek city-states in the Antiquity. Just after the establishment of the modern Greek state these two figures were rehabilitated to serve an instrumental purpose – spreading the Greek idea of identity and culturally assimilating neighbouring Slavic populations. With this attempt the Greek state aimed to convince the Slavic people inhabiting the region of Macedonia that they had common ancestors. However, with hindsight as we observe the dynamic developments today, we can conclude that this step that the Greek elite made backfired akin to a boomerang.

Lyupcho Kurtelov and Nikola Popiliev, whom the author interviewed in Skopje and Bitola, reiterated that in their regions of southern Macedonia a hundred years ago, at least half of the population constituted of Hellenised Macedonian Bulgarians, who later adopted the Macedonist doctrine and identity. Kurtelov (2018) who is a prominent local community leader elaborated on the issue by mentioning the importance and magnitude of 1924 Molov - Kafandaris, and later Kalfin – Politis treaties of population exchange between Bulgaria and Greece, and the fact that most Bulgarians left, but not all. Why is this significant for the genesis of Antiquisation? The answer lies in the fact that prior to these agreements, a Greek-Turkish war was waged and both sides agreed on population exchanges as well. This meant that in Aegean Macedonia the Muslim population was replaced by Pontic Greeks, and the local Hellenised Bulgarians from a privileged position turned into second-class citizens – they had culturally assimilated into the Greek society, however the majority still could not speak Greek (Tsarnushanov, 1992: 36) and they were

ridiculed for it. The marginalisation and stigmatisation of the so called Slavophonic Greeks was enormous, thus leading them to support the Communists in the Greek Civil War, who were fighting for internationalisation and the proletariat. After the defeat of the Communists most of these Hellenised Bulgarians (now Macedonians, since they accepted the Comintern decisions from 1934) were spread into the Eastern Bloc and were allowed to return to SR Macedonia after the Cuban Missile Crisis (Perev, 2018). This particular large group of people became the proponents of Antiquisation in modern Macedonia and their peak was the Gruevski's governments from 2006 to 2016. Viktor Kanzurov (2018) offered a very interesting point that is almost virtually non-existent in the official public discourse in Macedonia:

*“The family and relatives of the former PM Nikola Gruevski are descendants of these Hellenised Macedonians (Bulgarians prior 1934), even the grandfather of Gruevski – Nikos Gruyos – fought for the Greek Army in the Second World War against Mussolini’s Italy. So, in reality his true nature and ideas may remain subtle with his constant bickering with Greece, it may be out of past grudges or subtle economic interests.”*

By occupying the highest governmental position in Macedonia, the prime minister position, and securing the parliament, the Antique Macedonists adopted a bolder and more aggressive posture. The descendants of these former Greek civil war rebels have essentially adopted their values and attitudes, utilising the constant infighting between parties, and within VMRO-DPMNE itself, they gained power through the party, and set the agenda for a decade, which led to the so-called campaign of Antiquisation. In addition, the campaign stayed in the limelight of the media for years, alongside the discourse of the government in that period that led to the cultural project “Skopje 2014”. This campaign represented an official nation-building initiative and amplified further the myth of foundation (Schöpflin, 2000: 90-98) and the narrative of origin of Alexander

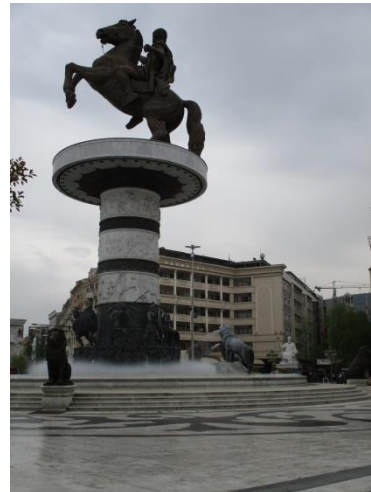
the Great and Phillip II. In addition, the Macedonian diaspora – situated in North America and Australia – played, and continues to play, an important role in this process. Immediately after independence pamphlets and propaganda materials with the Star of Vergina and images of Macedonian phalanges flooded the public discourse in the country (Kolev, 2018).

### 4.3 The cultural project “Skopje 2014” and the tangibility of the Antiquisation of the Macedonian identity: internalised or not.

The previous section elaborated on the genesis of Antiquisation and Antique Macedonism. Now we will disentangle the complexities of project “Skopje 2014”, which represents the culmination of the event being discussed. It is the infamous embodiment of the Antiquisation campaign, financed and orchestrated by the Gruevski wing of VMRO-DPMNE and his government. The project represents a change in the official identity narrative in Macedonia and attempts to define as well as reconstitute the Macedonian nation, thereby explicitly announcing to the world the continuity of the nation from the Antiquity. It is the tangible version of the Antiquisation, or as Kanzurov (2018) comments: “the tangible version of Bucephalism” – used by the opponents of this campaign in a derogatory way to denote the horse of Alexander the Great (Tsanov, 2009).

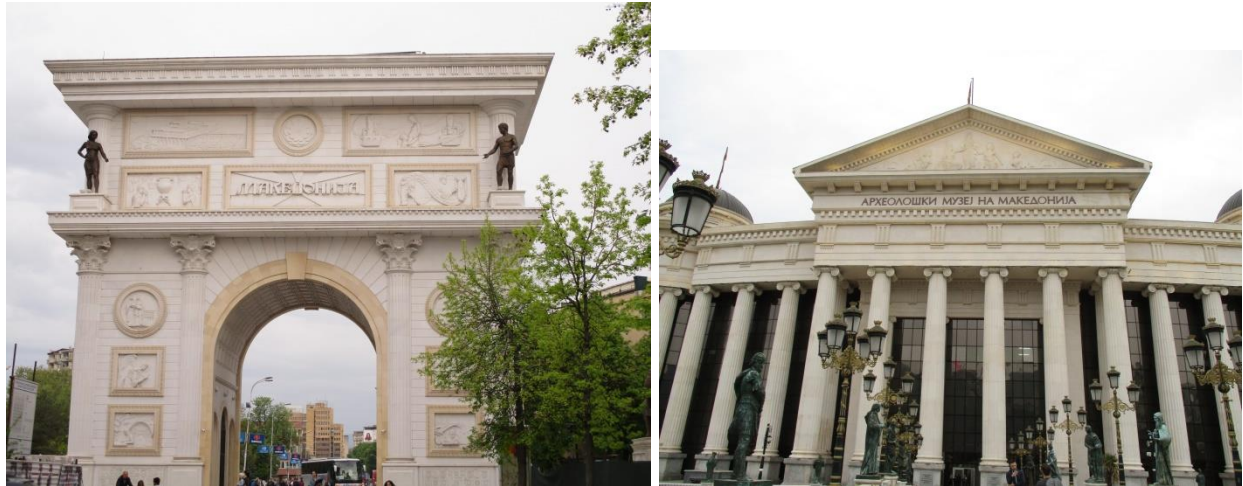
The cultural project “Skopje 2014” is a way of the Republic of Macedonia to shed itself out of the shackles of its neighbours and Slavic background, which links to the derogatory aspect of Balkanism that was discussed into the theoretical framework as well as to the invention of tradition. As such the government of Nikola Gruevski realised that in order a precarious thing, such as identity, to be changed, a tangible way of explaining this shift in identity to the population had to be used, and this is where the project serves its purpose. A quick overlook of the visual imagery that the author gathered in Skopje help the readers acquaint themselves that

the Antique Macedonism has appropriated historical figures and architecture not only from the Antiquity but from various periods such as the Middle Ages, the Balkan Renaissance and the recent history, which aims to reaffirm the continuous existence of the Macedonian nation from millennia ago. The aim of this is to instil symbolic values and pride of the ancient origin of Macedonians. Furthermore, the spatial proximity signifies a particular continuity on the viewer between the monuments and buildings as they are drawn from different periods. This suggests a linear trajectory:



The monument of Alexander the Great is located in the very centre of the City Centre at Macedonia square. The symbolism is self-evident: Alexander is at the cornerstone of the Macedonian identity; he is at the centre of the Macedonian cosmology and occupies the ideological and physical centre of the Republic of Macedonia (Angelovski, 2014: 14). This statue and the one of Phillip II are the most problematic as they mount a superficial attack on the Greek mythology, and respectively are the greatest of all other monuments in Skopje. However, not only Ancient warrior and kings are used to promote the new Antique identity. The architectural style of Ancient Greece is put into motion, with the Doric order from that period, and neo-baroque from the Renaissance. Below on the following images you can observe the

Triumphal Arc, which is an exact copy of the from Paris, located next to the statues of Alexander the Great, and the other building in Doric order is the new Archaeological museum:



From the Middle Ages we can observe a gross audacious misappropriation of historical figures of all sphere of life. Most of this period is characterised in the project “Skopje 2014” by adopting contentious Slavic figures that are claimed by a number of nations, which deliberately keeps up the debate heightened:

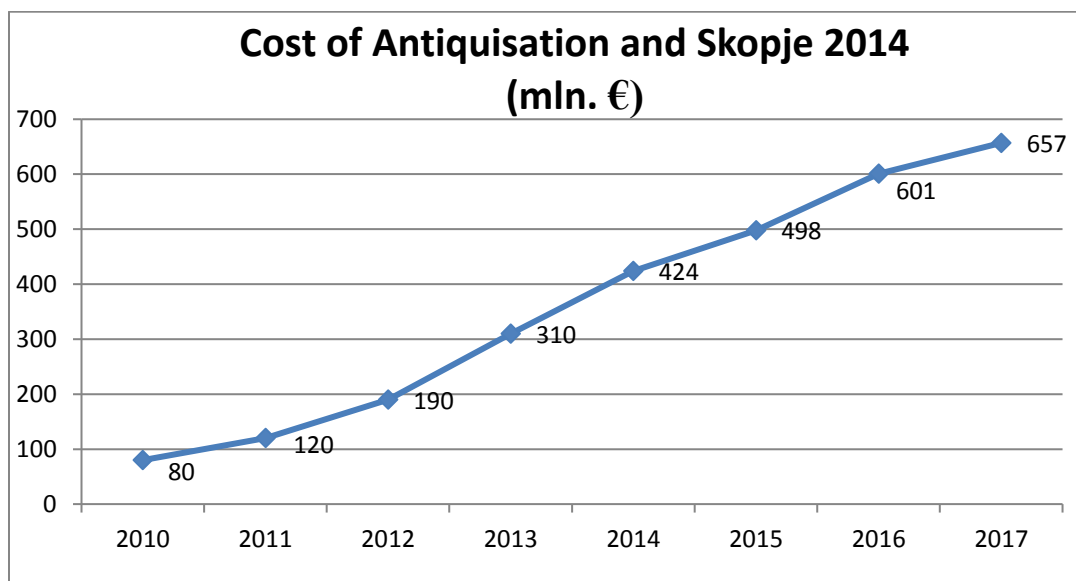


Brother Cyril and Methodius are very hotly debated within the Slavic world of who “has the more right on them”. The other monument is dedicated to Emperor Justinian the Great of Byzantium, who was according to Macedonian propaganda born and raised in Skopje. This aggressive attitude that the country adopts towards its neighbours in its attempt to construct a new Macedonian identity is an actual characteristic of Macedonian nationalism, as Vasilevski (2018) states “... *because Macedonia is economically and militarily weak, the only channel through which the battle of nationalisms could be fought is via culture*”.

The critiques of this project are enormous – one of the most prominent of them is Michael Kubiena (2012: 83) who labels the term “musealisation”, turning the city into a living museum, a sort of a historical “Disneyland”, Crevar (2016) focuses on the huge density of the statues and all the project buildings, numbering 137 as of last year. The author claims that this kitsch is overwhelming and actually does not conform to the expectations of the locals. They ought to have been consulted but the decision-making process was solely in the hands of PM Gruevski. The two Albanian collocutors of this endeavor asserted that the disappointment with “Skopje 2014” is enormous among the Albanian community and this instrumentalisation of history does not serve any of the actors. It just heightens the atmosphere of animosity. Initially, the idea of the government was to create a supranational all-encompassing national identity that would have superseded the old divide between Macedonians, Albanians, Vlachs and others. However, Gruevski renegaded from his promise to include Albanian heroes and lost the support of the community. His myth construction turned into a personal vendetta against the opposition and utilised the whole project as a way to siphon off funds to his cronies. He did not even consult with the general public and with the Association of Architects of Macedonia. The President of the Association, Danica Pavlovska (Build, 2010) stated: “*We, architects, together with citizens,*

are placed in unworthy position. Professional and general public opinion are excluded from making important decisions from the Skopje 2014 project”.

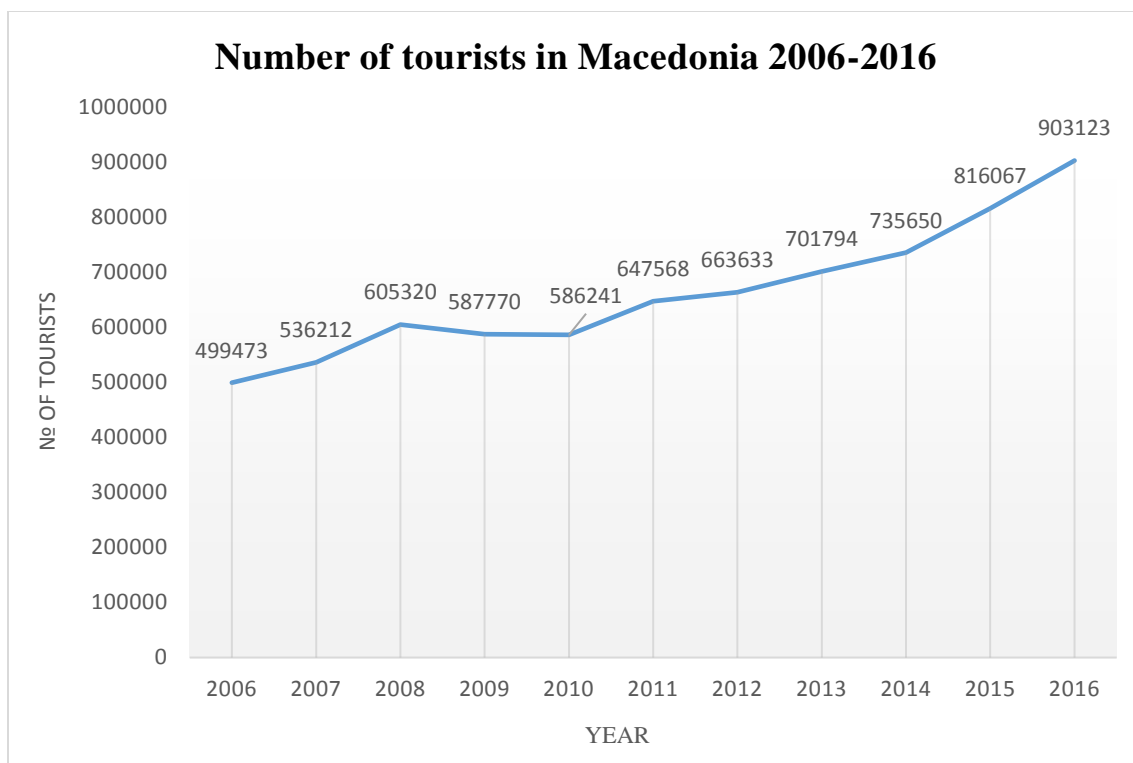
“Prizma news agency” (2018) is the main source that holds the government accountable by keeping track and estimates of the continuously rising costs:



Based on the graph above, an interviewed member of SDSM, who wished to maintain confidentiality, confined to the author the information that at the moment the General Prosecutor Office is preparing charges against Nikola Gruevski and hold him accountable for the public misuse of funds and giving out governmental contracts to companies close to the regime like Štip-based “Beton” or sculptor Violeta Stefanovska that won around a third of the total sculptures to design. In addition, the bidding process for these contracts was only limited to local actors, thus breaking the law for healthy competition. A blatant case was the erecting of the statue of Tsar Samuil and its cost. Vesna Damchevska (2015) makes a comparison with the statues of Samuil in Skopje and that of him in Bulgaria. The journalist concludes that in terms of

architectural style and design they remain almost identical, however the cost of the monument in Skopje was astronomical, equaling 1.5 mln euros, whereas that in Sofia only 50 000 euros. This is a notorious example of the rising misuse of funds in the graph above. The myth of foundation mentioned in the theoretical framework actually perversely turns into money laundering nation-building initiative.

However, it would be a one-sided argument if we fail to acknowledge the positive aspects of the project. The author met with a renowned expert and a professor from Skopje University – Dr. Zhidas Daskalovski, who has observed the trend of the process. Dr. Daskalovski (2018) is a partial supporter of “Skopje 2014” and in his view the project is divided into two aspects – one related to the monuments and statues, the other is the functional aspect. The functional part is the one that is not controversial and erecting buildings for the different national ministries and institutions represent the structural strengthening of the state. Previously, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Trade shared the same building. Nikola Gruevski always used to vindicate this project by claiming the economic benefits that it would bring to the tourist sector. A brief investigation yielded and confirmed this positive aspect of it. Kurir newspaper (2014) reports a tremendous increase in numbers caused by the newly built monuments in Skopje. According to the State Statistical Office Report from 2016 there has been a substantial increase in numbers after 2010, when the project was in full motion:

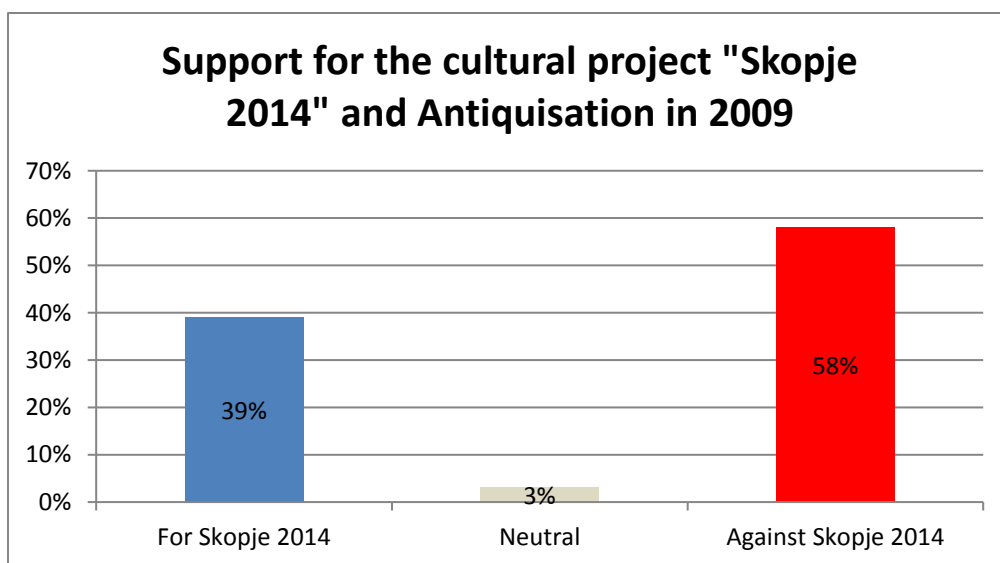


This invaluable information proves that the partial utility and effectiveness has been achieved as well as solidifying the presence of the state.

Finally, we come to the question whether the endeavor “Skopje 2014” and the campaign of Antiquisation have been internalized and achieved the desired outcome to link the Macedonian identity to the Antiquity. No study before has included information on this matter, but it is actually paramount to determine whether this misguided attempt in redefining a particular national identity has succeeded or not. The interviewees, whether in support, or not, of the campaign, agreed that there is a correlation between the level of support and the educational attainment of people. The majority that support for the project come from a lower educational background. According to the old Macedonian population census in 2002 the people with lower than University-level training are a substantial part of the society:

<p align="center">Educational attainment in the Republic of Macedonia – Macedonian census 2002</p>
<p>18.2% of the population of 15 years or older are without elementary education</p>
<p>36.8% have attended secondary school</p>
<p>31% have studied in high school</p>
<p>6.8% are graduates only</p>

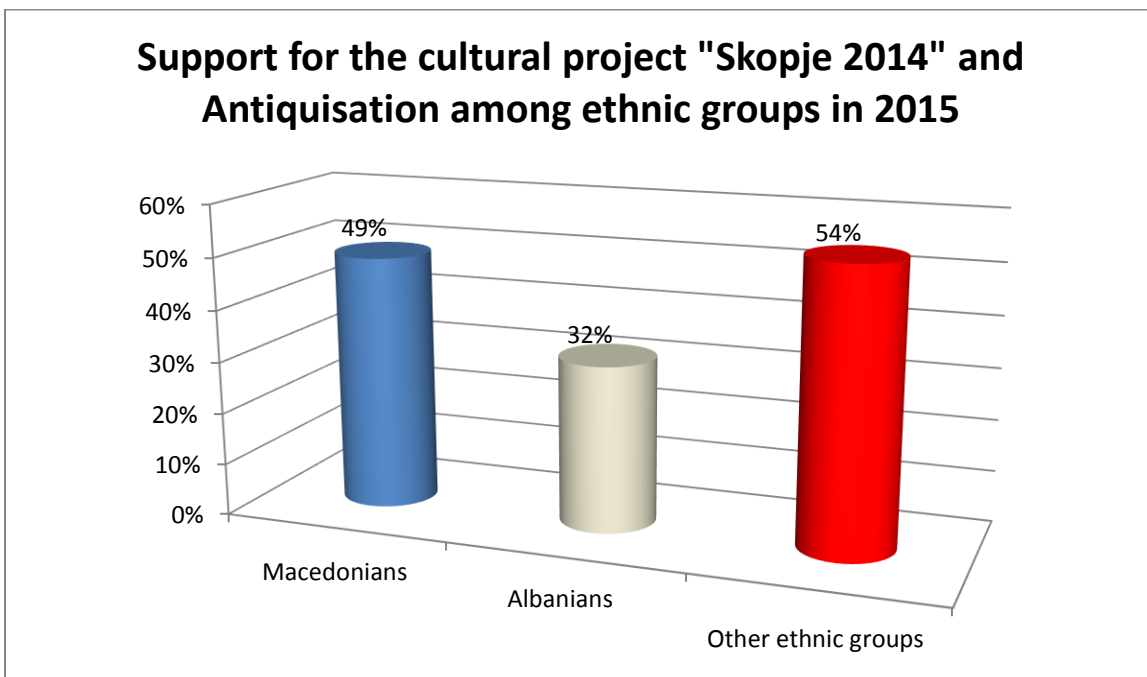
Unfortunately, Macedonia did not hold a population census in 2011, so the paper is not able to establish the exact numbers at present. Another source of measurement is the news agencies in the country. Curiously, most of the surveys done had always been removed by the former government, so the researcher had to directly go to their offices to acquire the necessary data. From the graphs and table below we can measure the changing trend in the beginning and towards the end of “Skopje 2014, which generally arrived around 40-45% internalization or even less, depending on the survey. The first graph is conjured from data from “Invidivi.com”:



In the beginning we can observe that people were still feeling optimistic, and the large part of the negative opinion is based on the unfamiliarity of the project. But still only 39% is not indicative

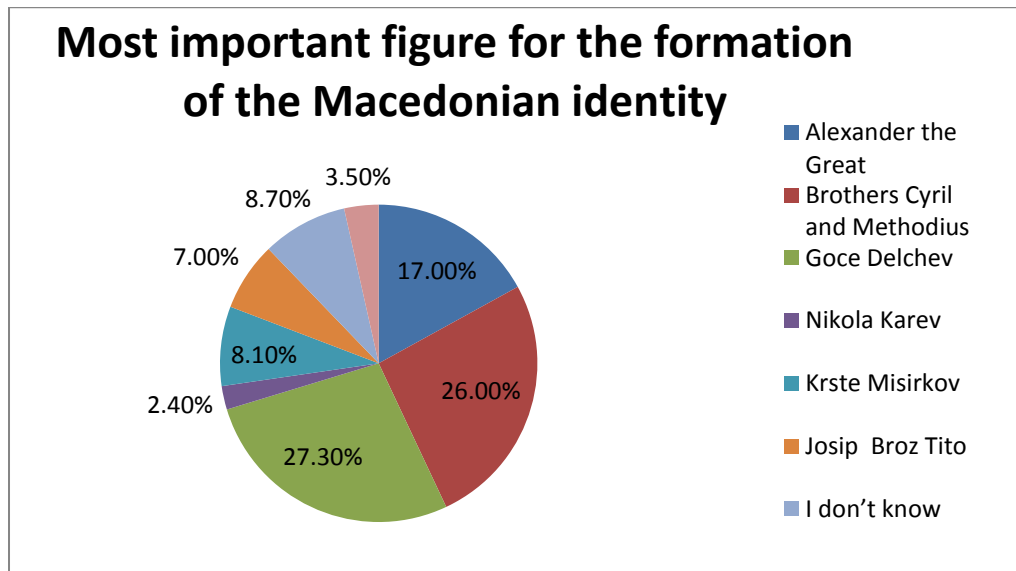
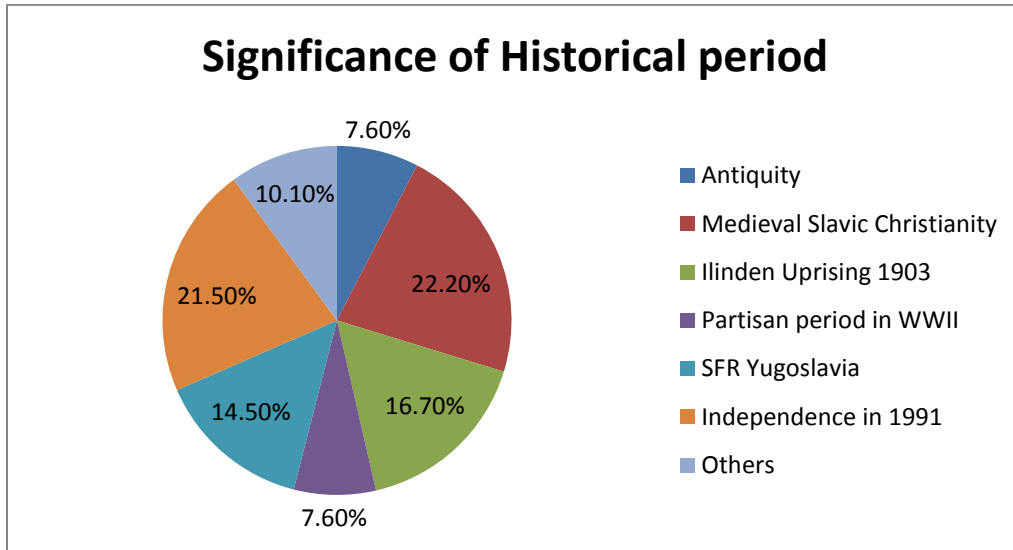
of a project that is deemed to succeed. And this percentage is virtually identical that VMRO-DPMNE won in their last parliamentary elections prior to the project “Skopje 2014”.

The following graph is constructed from data obtained from the “Denesen.mk” News Agency, which measured and analyzed the support among different ethnic groups of the project “Skopje 2014” in 2015. It is self-evident that the public support is at standstill and compared to 2009 it has not changed much and the idea of a new inclusive Antique Macedonian identity does not fare well within the Albanian community:



Another important longitudinal survey done for a long period from 2014 to 2016 is from the “Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Skopje” yields very intriguing information of why actually the campaign of Antiquisation will never reach 50% internalization and support or

above. The following graphs present the significance of the historical period the local people perceive, the most important historical period and figure for them:



From the graphs, in addition the other graphs are shown in Appendix D, we can observe that when asked about personally the period of Antiquity is only significant for 7.6% of the people and Alexander the Great is supported by 17%. Despite the strong indoctrination attempts from the government of Gruevski, it is evidenced by the studies of the abovementioned institutes and

websites that the Antiquisation has reached its limits. Eldarov (2016: 4) stresses the massive campaign of invention of tradition that the state machine undertook to promote this vision. The authoritarian rule and state capture of VMRO-DPMNE enabled the party to spend millions to help their Antique entrepreneurial venture. In 2013, the “St. Cyril and Methodius” Skopje University produced a series of monographies labeled “The Macedonian freedom fighters” ranging from Alexander the Great to Goce Delchev, series of foreign literature mostly about the Antique period was financed to be translated and given freely to schools and libraries, so as to internalize the image of Alexander and the Antiquity on a subconscious level, for younger people are more prone to indoctrination. Furthermore, 25 documentary TV episodes were commissioned by the government, named “Tvrđokorni” or the “The Relentless” that aimed to instill in the Macedonian society a sense of pride in the military victories of Ancient Macedonia, as well as the theme of ritual sacrifice for the motherland, embodied by the tragic deaths of the old VMRO leaders and rebels during the Ottoman period. However, even with this massive governmental propaganda the percentages for the importance of Alexander the Great and the period of Antiquity are marginal, bordering to even irrelevancy.

## **5. Conclusion.**

This research project aimed to present, understand and shed light into the dynamics, genesis and the internalisation of the campaign of Antiquisation and cultural project “Skopje 2014”. By applying the process of triangulation and collecting large amounts of data, the paper attempted to communicate and engage with the main works in the field of Vangeli (2011) and Kubierna (2012). It aimed to fill the gaps that were left by these scholars in the field of the genesis and internalization as well as a brief discussion about the emergence of Macedonian nationalism. The

paper showed that through purposefully using the construction of the myth and invention of tradition, a single individual with enough power could engage himself in a misguided nation-building project. The reason that the respected authors omitted these processes is that their significant works were published at the beginning of the Antiquisation in the early 2010s. Furthermore, one of the research goals was to evidence that the Antiquisation was not only about redefining the national identity but had a functional aspect as well, which is often neglected by people writing on this topic. Moreover, the noble goal of shifting the identity to the Antiquity perversely turned into a money laundering scheme, whereby particular companies and individuals secured all the governmental contracts. In addition, the Macedonian society was not consulted on the whole idea, thus provoking often popular backlash. However, due to lower educational levels and increased dependency on the state many people embraced the idea without questioning it at all, but Antiquisation has certainly reached its limits and is on the decline with the new government in Macedonia. The readers observed that this nation-building initiative did not achieve its goals to unite the people within Macedonia, and create a new all-encompassing identity that would finally succeed in fostering a new civil society. Unfortunately, it retained the aggressive character of the Slav-Macedonism, disregarding the rights and opinions of the minority. Moreover, the whole phenomenon is not a recent creation but is linked to Hellenism in late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Certainly, there are avenues for further research and scope that this endeavour did not manage to encompass, due to the enormity of the phenomenon. One aspect that needs more investigation is the complexities that ethnic minorities experience with regards to the campaign of Antiquisation. This would be a challenging project because most of the minorities in Macedonia do not speak English, and occasionally even Macedonian. So far, their support is analysed by the opinions of

Albanians, but they are not the only minority in the country. This article touched upon them, but lightly and marginally. Another sub-facet that needs investigation is the future of this campaign in terms of corruption allegation sentences and the infighting between various factions within VMRO-DPMNE – this was the reason that informants from the party refused to accept an interview with the author. A future study must secure collocutors from the original creators of the project to gain a more in-depth insight behind their reasoning. Also, it is interesting to research, whether the support of the society would wane or continue to increase because at present it is at stand-still with a tendency to lower down. Finally, a study of the recently appointed new government of SDSM and its actions with regards to “Skopje 2014” would be a promising endeavour.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Guide

Explain what the project is about and what do I mean with Antiquisation; Last two questions reserved for Macedonians with Bulgarian consciousness, who were a majority prior to 1945.

1. What is your opinion of Gruevski's 10-year-old rule?
  - Was it successful in terms of the economic and social development?
2. Are you familiar with his cultural projects, such as Skopje 2014, and the campaign of Antiquisation?
  - Did it have the intended impact on the Macedonian identity?
3. Do you consider the cultural project Skopje 2014 as representative of your identity?
  - In your view, are all these historical figures, depicted on the monuments, linked to Macedonia?
4. What do you think about the constant emphasis of Alexander the Great and his father?
  - Are they really Macedonians? What purpose do they serve?
5. Is the policy of Antiquisation inclusive towards other ethnic groups, such as the Albanians, in fostering a new civic identity?
6. Do you consider that there is a clash between the Antiquisation policy and the Macedonist version of origin, which was postulated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
7. I am curious to see do you consider the Antiquisation project as a true attempt to show the continuation of the Macedonian identity since Antiquity or a way for Gruevski to siphon funds into his allies/cronies and further his ambition?
  - Do you have any such information linking Gruevski to corruption schemes?
8. What portion/percentage of the society do you think have internalized and embraced the idea that they are descendants of Alexander the Great?
9. What is your opinion about the current situation of Macedonians with Bulgarian consciousness in Macedonia?
  - What is the reason for your optimism/pessimism of the status quo?
10. What policies or measures does Macedonia need to undertake in relation to the protection and preservation of the Macedonians with Bulgarian consciousness?
  - Is there a specific law? Role of Bulgaria and EU

## Appendix B – Author interviews and conversations

Some of the interviewees kindly requested to remain anonymous, thus not all would be listed.

Lyupcho Kurtelov (2018) – Member of the executive committee of RADKO, cultural figure with constant media articles and interviews.

Miroslav Rizinski (2018) – Co-founder and member of the Executive board of the Bulgarian Cultural Club – Skopje and Strumica. Chief Editor of the internet news portal <http://tatkovina.info/>

Nikola Popiliev (2018) – President of the Macedonian Business Club, served as Under-General Secretary responsible for organisation matters of VMRO-DPMNE until Nikola Gruevski came in power in 2003.

Petar Kolev (2018) – Leader of the newly created liberal political party “Civil Democratic Union”

Radojko Vasilevski (2018) – Secretary of the newly created liberal political party “Civil Democratic Union”

Viktor Kanzurov (2018) – a Macedonian journalist, who promotes liberalism and tolerance. Advocates more rights and freedoms for minorities, and especially for ethnic Macedonians who feel Bulgarian, or the so-called Macedonians with Bulgarian consciousness.

Vladimir Pankov (2018) – Leader of “RADKO” Association, which opposes both Slav Macedonism and the Antiquisation campaign. Lives in Ohrid and is several time harassed by the authorities for his refusal to accept the newly aspired identity.

Vladimir Perev (2018) – a long-standing anchor-man for the Macedonia Radion and Television national channel, worked for forty years there, now engaged in analysis of geopolitics around the Balkans.

Vlado Trenevski (2018) – Founder and leader of cultural movement “Interakcija” Ohrid. Several times beaten by Macedonian police for “insulting the honour of an ethnic Macedonian” and refusing to comply with the newly promoted Antique identity. Has a prison sentence by Interpol and since 2016 living in Bulgaria.

Dr. Zhidas Daskalovski (2018) – member of the Centre for Research and Policy Making, University professor at Skopje “Sv. Kliment Ohridski” University, expert in the field of Antiquisation and a partial supporter.

Two members of the Democratic Party of Albanians, a member of SDSM – Skopje, and a member of VMRO-NIE.

## Appendix C – Confidentiality and Ethics Form



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### CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** *“The controversial Antiquisation of the Macedonian identity –genesis, characteristics and acceptance by the local populace of the process”*

Name of Researchers: Stefan Pelev

**Please tick box**

1. I agree to take part in the above study.
2. I confirm that I have understood the information for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
4. I give permission for the research process to be audio recorded. I understand that recordings will not be used in a public form without expressed permission.
5. I give permission for the data that emerges from this research project to be used by the researchers in a fully anonymised form.
6. I understand that data be stored on password protected university or personal computers.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

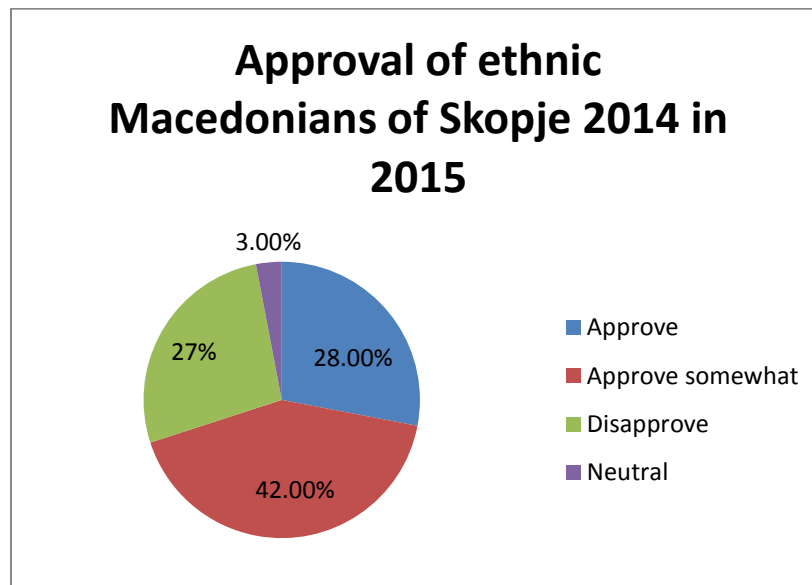
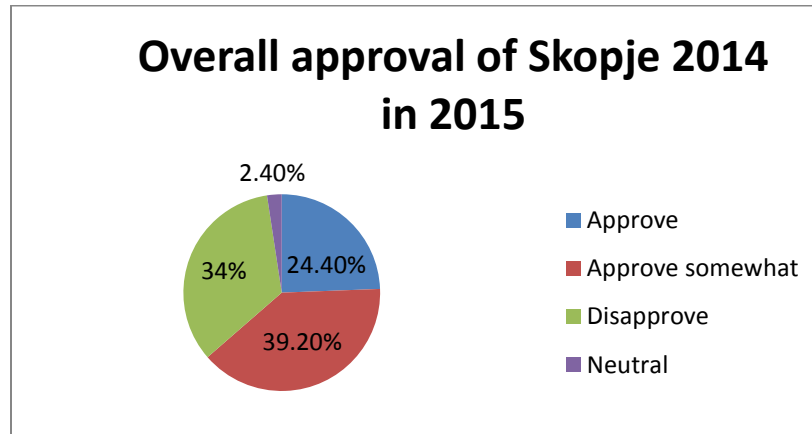
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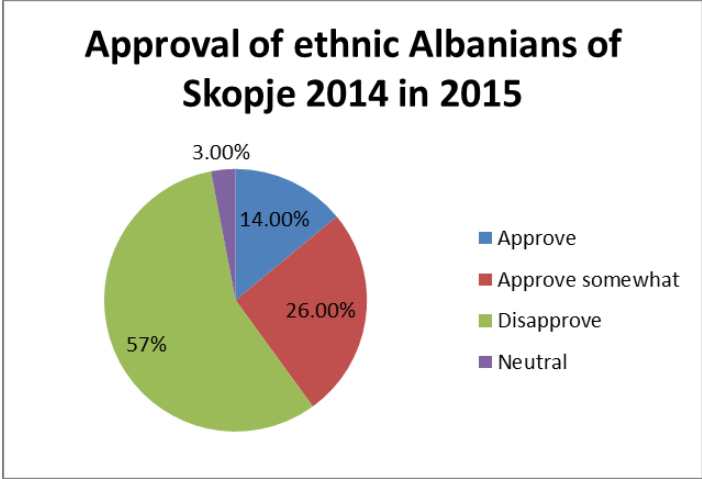
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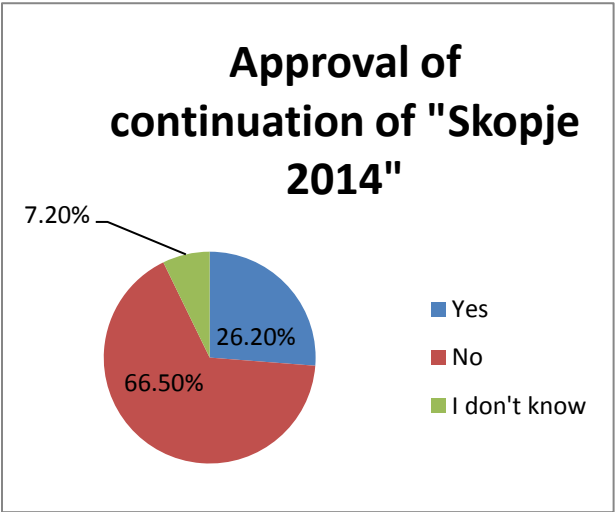
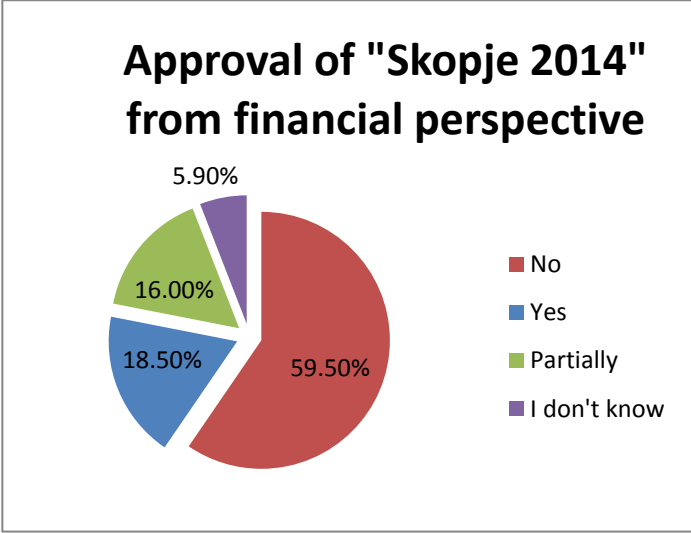
## Appendix D – Additional graphs, part of the survey data

Following three graphs were constructed based on the information from the “Dimitrija Chupovski” Institute:





In addition to the two graphs presented in subsection 4.3 from the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Skopje, there are other graphs that might provide some insight to the reader. This is a survey conducted from 2014 to 2016 amidst the height of the Antiquisation campaign and the cultural project “Skopje 2014” among ethnic Macedonians:



So, we can observe that when the Gruevski government fell in 2016, the almost 50% approval of the Skopje 2014 project and Antiquisation was virtually gone based on the approval from the financial perspective and the continuation of the Project.