

**Understanding the Construction of National and Regional Identity:  
Perceptions of One Another along the Bulgarian-Macedonian Border**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Abstract: The identities of people residing in the vicinity of national borders are complex and affected by many factors, especially by narratives imposed by national governments through the national education system. The European Union, as a supranational organization, also provides narratives that expose individuals to globalized, versus national, ideals. This ethnographic case study asks how individuals living along the Macedonian-Bulgarian border, sharing strong ethnic and cultural ties, view their regional, national and European identities. The study finds that individuals have developed a strong attachment to their national identity. Many Bulgarians hold a strong vision based on historic claims to the Bulgarian Kingdom. Many Bulgarians see Macedonian as having been carved out of the ancient territory and therefore refer to the people as Bulgarians, thus denying their right to self-identify. Macedonians, on the other hand, choose not to refer to the "other" as part of their own population, but rather as neighbors. They view their national identity is based on the idea of the country being "attacked" by its neighbors and having to struggle for recognition in the world. The E.U. does not currently offer an alternative, as individuals have little attachment to their European identity related to E.U. membership.*

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Theory.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
2.1 European and National Identity Studies.....	8
2.2 Social Construction of Identities.....	18
2.3 Border Studies.....	20
Chapter 3: Background.....	24
3.1 The Bulgarian Story.....	25
3.2 The Macedonian Story.....	29
3.3 A Tale of Two (Border) Cities.....	37
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	43
4.1 Data Collection Techniques.....	43
4.2 Comparable Interview Sample Results.....	48
4.3 Ethical Considerations.....	52
4.4 Data Analysis.....	54
4.5 Limitations, Biases and Advantages.....	55
4.6 Quality of Research Design: Validity and Reliability.....	55
Chapter 5: Results and Analysis.....	58
5.1 European Affection, National Sentiment or Local Attachment? A Quantitative Comparison of the 2013 interviews with the 2008 Eurobarometer Survey.....	59
5.2 Loyalties, Suspicion and Plain Distrust along the Border: Qualitative Results from the 2013 Study.....	65
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	98
Appendix A: Demographic Information not Provided in Chapter 4.....	102
Appendix B: Interview Questions with Protocol.....	104
References.....	107

## List of Figures, Maps & Tables

Figure 1: The 2008 Eurobarometer Results Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians in Favor of or against Macedonia Becoming an E.U. Member.....	63
Figure 2: The 2013 Study Question Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians in Favor of or against Macedonia Becoming an E.U. Member.....	63
Figure 3: The 2008 Eurobarometer Question Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians Who Believe That if the Western Balkans Joined the E.U. It Would Bring Stability.....	64
Figure 4: The 2013 Study Question Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians Who Believe That If the Western Balkans Joined the E.U. It Would Bring Stability.....	64
Map 1: Bulgaria and Macedonia with the study cities Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka.....	4
Map 2: Schengen Countries. ....	15
Map 3: Territory after the Treaty of San Stefano and the Berlin Treaty.....	27
Map 4: Territory after the Berlin Treaty.....	28
Map 5: The Macedonian Empire.....	30
Map 6: Showing Balkan Aspirations in 1914.....	33
Map 7: Map of Vardar, Pirin, Aegean Macedonia .....	33
Map 8: Yugoslavia with the Republic of Macedonia.....	35
Photo 1: Saint Joakim Osogovski Monastery.....	24
Photo 2: Bakery sign over door with removed letters.....	24
Photo 3: View of Kyustendil, Bulgaria from Hissarluka Park.....	38
Photo 4: View of the City of Kriva Palanka, Macedonia.....	41
Photo 5: Bulgarian children dancing a ring dance to Macedonian Girl song.....	58
Photo 6: Macedonian children playing games.....	59
Table 1: Population of the City of Kriva Palanka Ethnicity.....	40
Table 2: Gender and Language of Interviewees.....	49
Table 3: Professions of Interviewees.....	49-50

Table 4: The Number of Times Interviewees traveled to the Other Country in the Study Area.....	51
Table 5: The Number of Times Interviewees Traveled Abroad outside the Study Area.....	52
Table 6: Comparative Percentage of Ethnic Affinities from the 2008 Eurobarometer Results for Bulgaria.....	61
Table 7: Comparative Percentage of Ethnic Affinities from the 2013 Results for Kyustendil, Bulgaria.....	61
Table 8: Comparative Percentage of Ethnic Affinities from the 2013 Results for Kriva Palanka, Macedonia.....	62
Table 9: Age Range of Interviewees.....	102
Table 10: Income Level of Interviewees.....	102
Table 11: Political Position of Interviewees.....	103

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In March 2014, the region of Crimea broke away from Ukraine to become part of Russia, as many residents within Crimea felt more Russian than Ukrainian. Crimea is not the only European region that has recently questioned its national allegiance: in June the Venetian Regional Council voted to organize a referendum asking for independence from Italy. In September, Scotland narrowly voted against independence from the United Kingdom, and Catalonia will hold its own referendum of independence in November. This desire to formalize regional identities is so strong that these regions are willing to risk European Union (E.U.) and NATO membership, alliances with their neighbors, and the economic benefits of using the Euro (in the case of Catalonia and the Venetian Region) to become autonomous. Montserrat Guibernau claims that Europe will become a “Europe of the Regions” based on areas that either define themselves in economic terms or “have managed to maintain a powerful cultural distinctiveness” (1999, p. 172). These regions have the potential to reshape the way we think about national identity.<sup>1</sup>

“What does it mean to feel and be European?” Anthony Smith asked. “Is ‘Europe’ merely the sum total of its various national identities and communities?” (1992, p. 68). Smith understood that the young European Union presented a challenge to the existing nations and to the feeling people had to belonging to the state. However, Smith maintains that the traditional national identity, based on a “Romantic doctrine [that] view[s] the nation as a seamless, organic cultural unit,” can withstand this challenge and will be more important to individuals than any supranational identity (*ibid*, p. 56). He claims that *unless* Europe can position and define “itself exclusively against other world actors,” the notion of European identity cannot be sustainable and therefore does not pose a threat to well-embedded national identities (*ibid*, p. 55). He gives three reasons: the lack of a common history shared by E.U. members, an

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<sup>1</sup> According to Guibernau, it is unlikely that *all* of these European regions will “obtain the same degree of political autonomy and recognition within the E.U.” (1999, p. 174).

undefined territory, and a population that cannot and will not recognize a common European family of cultures (Smith, 1992, p. 55).

John Agnew counters Smith's point by stating that in an increasingly transnational and globalized world, the traditional national identity may no longer serve its purpose. Agnew supports his argument by examining the role national borders have traditionally played and how they actually operate. Borders have served as a tool to designate who is a part of the state and who is not. Government institutions have an "overwhelming desire [to align the] 'territory' with 'identity,' [to ensure] that each geopolitical unit of the modern *imaginaire* is populated by a singular sense of identity" (Krishna, 2003, p. 303). However, Agnew points out that since borders are arbitrary, in that they are not drawn in a way to overlap with territories dominated by ethnic or religious identities, "they no longer match the emerging spatial ontology of a world increasingly transnational and globalized... [in which] loyalty is increasingly given to religion, social groups, and political communities other than the nation-state" (2008, p. 182). The European Union, for example, has shifted some of the responsibilities national governments used to have over the movement of people and goods and has allowed the free movement within the E.U. borders<sup>2</sup> (Agnew, 2007). Traditionally, national borders have also been places where differences are asserted, where each nation defines itself in opposition to others. However, through daily interactions, the border can be "a place of exchange and enrichment where pluralist identities can flourish," (Agnew, 2008, p. 178).

### *The Question*

If most borders are arbitrary lines drawn on a map that divide populations, as Agnew suggests, how do cross-border regional populations respond to conditions imposed by the state and the E.U.? Do individuals maintain strong attachments to their national identity, as Smith suggests? Or have borders become essentially meaningless, as globalization and supranational entities alter the traditional functions of borders and

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<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) allows for the movement of people within most of the EU (Agnew, 2007, p. 415).



change these individuals' relationships with their nations? What about regional identities? Do the state and the E.U. help to strengthen or break down regional sentiments? Could these individuals form a "European Region," as Guibernau suggests?

### *The Study*

This case study examines individual attitudes along the Bulgarian-Macedonian border to confirm, disprove or refine the polemic attitudes expressed by Smith and Agnew. This border is both an international border separating two sovereign states, and the border of the European Union. Specifically, the study focuses on the region that encompasses the cities of Kyustendil, Bulgaria and Kriva Palanka, Macedonia (see Map 1). The populations in the two cities exhibit similar ethnic, linguistic and cultural traits as part of the Shopluk cultural region. The cities are located along a major thoroughfare linking the capitals of Sofia and Skopje, and the inhabitants regularly interact with one another.

Until the end of the Ottoman Empire, the two cities were governed by the same administrative body. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire marked the beginning of two different national agendas, each developing and encouraging a separate national consciousness as a way to unify the country's population.

More recently, the European Union has played an important part in Balkan-wide debates over identity as each country applies for membership. In 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the E.U. Macedonia continues the process of accession, but it has faced challenges by neighboring countries, including Bulgaria, which objects to the Macedonian government's assertive national identity-making approach. Macedonia insists that it is merely defining its unique national identity.



(Map 1: Bulgaria and Macedonia with the study cities Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka. Reference: Map created by Cynthia Lintz)

On October 31, 2012, the Bulgarian President told the European Union Enlargement Commission that the Republic of Macedonia was not ready to join the E.U. because Macedonian authorities are engaging in “anti-Bulgarian hate language and ... affecting Macedonians with Bulgarian self-consciousness” (Novinite, 2012). Bulgarian and Macedonian officials acknowledge that these countries have a present and future that are inextricably linked; however, a furious debate continues regarding the pasts of both countries. Some Bulgarians claim that Macedonia is a newly created and thus “artificial” state whose citizens fail to appreciate their “true” Bulgarian backgrounds. While Bulgaria was the first country to officially recognize Macedonia after its break from Yugoslavia in 1991, Bulgaria has not recognized Macedonia’s claim to be an autonomous ethnic, historical and cultural entity different from Bulgaria. Macedonian authorities, in turn, often seek to prove their “ancient origins,” often through bold

statements that ignore neighboring countries' vehement assertions of a shared regional history. For example, the city plan *Skopje 2014*, to the great concern of Macedonia's neighbors, has allowed the construction of dozens of large-scale monuments to leaders (such as Alexander of Macedonia, the Emperor Justinian, Tsar Samuil and Mother Teresa) who are also recognized as Greek, Bulgarian and Albanian historical figures.

With both the Bulgarian and Macedonian governments disputing each other's cultural, ethnic and historic heritage, we do not know how individuals living along the border regard their own situation. Do they remain culturally and ethnically attached and affiliated with their neighbors across the border? How do these individuals residing in the vicinity of the borders respond to the influences of their respective nation-states (e.g., the influences of the national educational system and the media)? Is the Bulgarian or Macedonian national identity able to withstand the challenge of the new European identity, as Smith claims? Or do globalization and the influence of the European Union weaken national identities, as Agnew suggests? Can people hold multiple identities, or does a single identity "win," and if so, under what conditions? What does it mean to be Bulgarian or Macedonian along this border?

## **Chapter 2: Theory**

The drive from Bulgaria's capital city of Sofia to the border city of Kyustendil takes an hour and an half by private car. The route passes through two industrial towns (Pernik and Radomir), open agricultural fields, and a mountain pass before entering a wide valley. On a clear day, this valley shows off one of the gems of the Balkan Peninsula: the Rila Mountain range, whose dominant mountain, Musala, is the highest peak in Southeastern Europe. Kyustendil sits at the opposite side of this valley, at the base of the Osogovo Mountains.

From Kyustendil, it is a short trip over the Osogovo Mountains to the city of Kriva Palanka, Macedonia. Kriva Palanka is nestled in the foothills on the Western side of the mountains, straddling a narrow valley and a seasonal river. The trip from Kriva Palanka to Macedonia's capital city of Skopje is a different adventure. There are not as many agricultural fields. Instead, dry Mediterranean valleys and rocky hills punctuate the landscape. This drive also takes an hour and a half, and the route passes through the city of Kumanovo.

In both instances, the drive from the capital to the border city is to a more desolate, rural section of the country: the nearly forgotten borderlands. Geographically, the border cities are closer to each other than to their capitals, as they hug the same mountain. Depending on the attitudes of the border guards and the number of people waiting to cross, it can be faster to drive between the two cities than to go to the capitals or even to neighboring cities.

This micro-region that straddles the border is home to a population with long-standing traditions. There have been well-documented trade relations and cultural exchanges for centuries, if not millennia. However, before we can gain a more intimate understanding of the population and their view regarding their regional identity, national citizenship, and European identity, it is instructive to consider the sentiments of the population from the perspectives of four disciplines: European Identity Studies, National Identity Studies, the Social Construction of Identities, and Border Studies.

## **Definition of Terms**

### *Region and Regional Identity*

The focus populations of this study are the inhabitants of the cross-border cities of Kyustendil, Bulgaria and Kriva Palanka, Macedonia (see Map 1). These two cities lie within a homogeneous cultural entity that I refer to as “the region”. This study area is a micro-region in the larger Balkan Peninsula.

### *Nation, National Identity, Nationalism and Citizenship Defined*

This study uses Anthony Smith’s definition of the nation: “a named human population sharing a historical territory, common memories and myths of origin, a mass, standardized public culture, a common economy and territorial mobility and common legal rights and duties for all members of the collectivity” (1992, p. 60). In this study, “nation” refers to the nation-state of each country: Bulgaria and Macedonia. Smith’s definition is useful because it combines political, social and territorial characteristics, which will be explored further in the National Identity section. National identity, by extension, refers to the sentiments individuals have of belonging to their country. In defining nationalism, this study uses the second definition of the Oxford *Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*: “a feeling of love and pride in your country; a feeling that your country is better than any other” (Hornby, 2000, p. 847). The definition of citizenship comes from the same source: “1. the legal right to belong to a particular country, 2. the state of being a citizen and accepting the responsibilities of it” (*ibid*, p. 211).

### *European Identity*

The terms “European” and possibly “European identities” have been around several millennia. However, in this study, the term “European identity” refers to sentiments individuals have of belonging to the European Union. The European Union, as a supranational organization, is currently composed of twenty-eight member nation-states. “European identity” also can refer to belonging to the territory of Europe, without necessarily being a member of the European Union.

## 2.1 National and European Identity Studies

### National Studies

For just as Europe gave the Balkans the categories with which its peoples define themselves, so it gave them also the ideological weapons— in the shape primarily of modern romantic nationalism—with which to destroy themselves. (Mazower, 2002, p. xliii)

Mazower's quotation describes the power and influence Western European countries have had in bringing new ideologies to the region<sup>3</sup>: in this case, a modern romantic version of nationalism. Today, Western Europe is once again introducing a new ideology of identity to the Balkans, this time one tied to membership in the European Union. Before discussing the challenges this new European identity poses to the nation-state, we first need to understand the scholarly debates surrounding the ideology of national identity.

Smith claims that “the ideology of nationalism that emerged in Western Europe and America in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was premised on the belief in a world of exclusive nations. The basic goals of nationalists everywhere were identical; they sought to unify the nation, to endow it with a distinctive individuality, and to make it free and autonomous” (Smith, 1992, p. 61). For Mazower, nationalism was introduced in a romantic form. But what is “a romantic form” of nationalism, and is there a non-romantic form? According to Smith, the Romantic form views the nation “as a seamless, organic cultural unit” (1992, p. 56).

Smith accepts Kohn's distinctions between “Western” and “Eastern types of national identity. Western is understood to be “a voluntaristic type of nationalism, which regarded the nation as a rational association of common laws in a given territory, [and] was the product of aspirant middle classes. By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, and later in Asia, an organic, mystical, and often authoritarian form of nationalism emerged which, in the absence of a middle class, was forged and led by intellectuals” (Kohn, 1994, p. 160). Todorova describes the arrival of national identity in

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<sup>3</sup> Clearly during the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Russian Empires, people have also introduced new ideologies to the region.

the Balkans along the lines of Eastern-type nationalism: “[Nationalism was] constructed primarily around linguistic and religious identities. Language was perceived by all national and cultural leaders as the mightiest agent of unification” (2009, p. 176).

For Smith, the difference between the two types of national identity is that the “Western” type focuses on the inherent rights of citizens, the rule of law and political community, whereas the “Eastern” type is based on “common language, customs, religions and rituals” (Smith, 1992, p. 61). This Eastern form most closely reflects what Smith calls the romantic national form. If this is the case, then Mazower’s statement should not imply that Western Europeans gave the Balkans modern romantic nationalism; rather, Western Europe introduced the concept of nationalism, but ultimately those in the Balkans understood this ideology in a different way than their Western counterparts. Smith acknowledges that “we find elements of both at various times... in both Eastern and Western Europe” (*ibid*).

The difference between the Eastern and Western models of nationalism also relates to the scholarly debates on the definition of the term “nation.” Joseph Stalin, for example, defines a nation as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994, p. 20). According to Stalin, all of these objective and subjective characteristics must be present for a nation to exist (*ibid*, p. 21). This definition clearly contains Eastern elements, such as the need for a common language.

Max Weber provides an alternative definition. A nation, according to Weber, does not need to have a common language (nor do its citizens need to belong to a single race); therefore, not *all* characteristics listed in Stalin’s definition are required (*ibid*). Instead, Weber defines the nation as a political project: “a nation is a community [of sentiment] which normally tends to produce a state of its own”<sup>4</sup> (*ibid*, p. 25). This

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<sup>4</sup> Weber’s actual words are as follows: “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own” (Weber, 1994, p. 25).

community sentiment, according to Weber, tends to appear in ethnic communities that have a unified myth of a common descent (*ibid*).

Like Weber, Clifford Geertz defines a nation as having two components: ethnic and civic. He describes ethnic ties based on kinship (blood ties), race, language, region, religion, and customs to which individuals remain committed due to 'primordial' loyalties (*ibid*, p. 15). Since individuals within the nation might not have all these characteristics, Geertz believes that the civic component, "a desire for citizenship in a modern state," is the binding factor in forming a nation (*ibid*).

A more functional definition presented by Anthony Giddens defines the nation as existing only "when a state has a unified administrative reach over the territory over which its sovereignty is claimed.... A nation-state is, therefore, a bordered power-container...the pre-eminent power-container of the modern era" (*ibid*, p. 34). This definition does not factor ethnic or cultural characteristics into the meaning of nation.

As mentioned above, the definition used in this study comes from Anthony Smith, who defines the nation as "[1] a named human population sharing a historical territory, [2] common memories and myths of origin, [3] a mass, standardized public culture, [4] a common economy and territorial mobility, and [5] common legal rights and duties for all members of the collectivity" (Smith, 1992, p. 60). "Despite the obvious overlap between the concepts of state and nation in terms of common territory and citizenship, the idea of the nation defines and legitimates politics in cultural terms, because the nation is a political community only in so far as it embodies a common culture and a common social will" (*ibid*, p. 62). Let us further examine the five elements that Smith claims make up a nation as they relate to the traditional nation-state.

### *1. Territory*

The first term in Smith's definition is *territory*, which he characterizes as "the territorial boundedness of separate cultural populations in their own 'homelands'" (1992, p. 60). The population with assumed common cultural traits would be different from neighboring populations with their own separate cultural traits. Territory, as



delineated by its borders, defines the state's existence, its area of control, its resources and its economic base (Smith, 1992). Territory can define who is a member of the nation and who is not. It also exists to control the number and type of interactions individuals have with the other.

Territory is what defines social formations, which are "seen as the root of all identities" (Agnew, 2007, p. 400). The government can promote a singular social formation of "belonging" to a state by encouraging sentiments of solidarity (Agnew, 2008; Guibernau, 1999). National education programs based on an idealized vision of the state's uniqueness enhance this solidarity and distinguish between those who belong and those who do *not* belong to the country. "The 'boundary,' then, becomes the quintessential site for the production and enactment of identity and difference" (Krishna, 2003, p. 303).

"The placement of borders transforms citizens from individuals into foreigners — the other" (Berdahl, 1999, p. 4). The border functions as a way to determine "us" versus "them" and, often, the Schmittian "friend" versus "enemy" (Agnew, 2008; O'Dowd, 2002; Tamminen, 2004). Sahlins points out that "national identities constructed on the basis of such an oppositional structure ("us" versus "them") do not depend on the existence of any objective linguistic or cultural differentiation but on the subjective experience of difference" (Sahlins, 1989, p. 270). The state can use these differences as "tool[s] for shaping abroadness, in terms of 'fascination with or anxieties about "the otherness" that is projected onto the world on the other side of the border'" (Lofgren, 2008, p. 197). Lofgren notes that the "other" can be portrayed either as positive, with curiosity and fascination; as negative, with suspicion; or somewhere in between (Tamminen, 2004).

## 2. *History*

The second term Smith uses is *history*: "the shared nature of myths of origin and historical memories of the community" (1992, p. 60). By focusing on memories of periods, events, and personages that are passed down from generation to generation,

governmental institutions can develop a unified political story (Forest and Johnson, 2002; Smith, 1992). This story can “motivate political action, create a sense of solidarity and promote the myth of an ancient, timeless nation” (Forest and Johnson, 2002, p. 526). This story can also be used as a “battle cry” to “[relate] back to either claims of first occupancy or, during a time of central importance, to a national identity based on sites within the territory” (Agnew, 2007, p. 402).

### 3. *Common Bond*

According to Issacs, the most basic group identity is generally and loosely called an “ethnic group,” which is composed of people holding “primordial affinities and attachments” that they are “born with or acquire[s] at birth” (Issacs, 1981 [1975], pp. 29-30). According to Clifford Geertz, this ethnic group makes a strong “candidate for nationhood” (Issacs, 1981 [1975], pp. 29-30). Since the vast majority of nation-states have more than one ethnic community within their borders, the state’s responsibility is to create a “*seamless, organic cultural unit*,” which it does through repeated assertions of “one” ethnicity, common myths, symbols, and memories of a collective culture (Smith, 1992, p. 56; emphasis added). Smith calls this “the common bond of a mass, standardized culture,” which is the third term in his definition of nation (*ibid*, p. 60).

The task of developing this standardized culture “involves the creation of ‘imagined communities’<sup>5</sup> where people with nothing in common in their everyday lives believe themselves to be connected through the idea of a nation as place”<sup>6</sup> (Cresswell, 2004, pp. 99-100). These “collective identities ... tend to be pervasive and persistent. They are less subject to rapid changes and tend to be more intense and durable, even when quite large numbers of individuals no longer feel their power” (*ibid*). Collective identities based on religious and ethnic identity, such as those associated with the

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined community also involves a social construction of a community – versus an actual community (1991). Anderson’s definition is not discussed in this study as his study strongly focused on print-language and the political consciousness, rather than individuals’ perception of their self-identity.

<sup>6</sup> Those who do not subscribe to the “imagined community” or do not “fit” the idea of the state’s national identities are at risk of being expelled through ethnic cleansings; the other option is forced assimilations, etc. (Agnew, 2007, p. 400).

romantic definition of national identity, are generally believed to be some of the most robust, as well as the easiest to politicize (Agnew, 2007; Brubaker, 1996; Kohn, 1994; Smith, 1992).

The state uses propaganda in the media and the educational system in order to politicize and project the idea of a consolidated “imagined community” (Guibernau, 1999, Anderson, 1991). The media’s role is often to fuel differences and “otherness” between citizens and those outside the country in order to exacerbate differences via an “us”-versus-“them” opposition (Horstmann, 2007). The educational system is responsible for defining, developing and distributing histories that reinforce selected aspects of the past in textbooks. The state also encourages the mass production of public monuments glorifying select aspects of the past (Hobsbawm, 1994).

#### *4. Labor and Resources, and 5. Common Legal Rights*

The last two elements of Smith’s definition refer to administrative and legal institutional concepts typically used by the nation-state. The fourth characteristic focuses on “a common territorial division of labour, with mobility for all members and ownership of resources by all members in the homeland” (Smith, 1992, p. 60). This includes not only a country’s labor and environmental resources, but also its ability to set internal policies to control its economic resources and military defenses (Guibernau, 1999). Smith’s final element concerns the rule of law: “the possession by all members of a unified system of common legal rights and duties under common laws and institutions” (1992, p. 60).

Traditionally, the nation-state has sole sovereignty over the control of these institutions.

These five principles define a nation-state. In a modern world, though, can the nation-state continue to withstand the pressures of globalization? Smith proposes “the concept of collective cultural identity” as a theory of how national identity will continue to endure despite the introduction of a “new” European identity (Smith, 1992, p. 58). This collective cultural identity, he believes, derives from “a sense of shared continuity on the part of successive generations of a given unit of population, and [for those populations] to share memories of earlier periods, events and personages in the history

of the unit” (*ibid*). Within these two components, a third occurs: “the collective belief in a common destiny of that unit and its culture” (*ibid*). The difficulty in constructing new supranational identities, such as the E.U. identity, is that these identities are not specifically bound to “peoples, places and periods,” which means there is no easily defined shared past (Smith, 1992, p. 66).

## **2.2 Globalization, the European Union, and the European Identity**

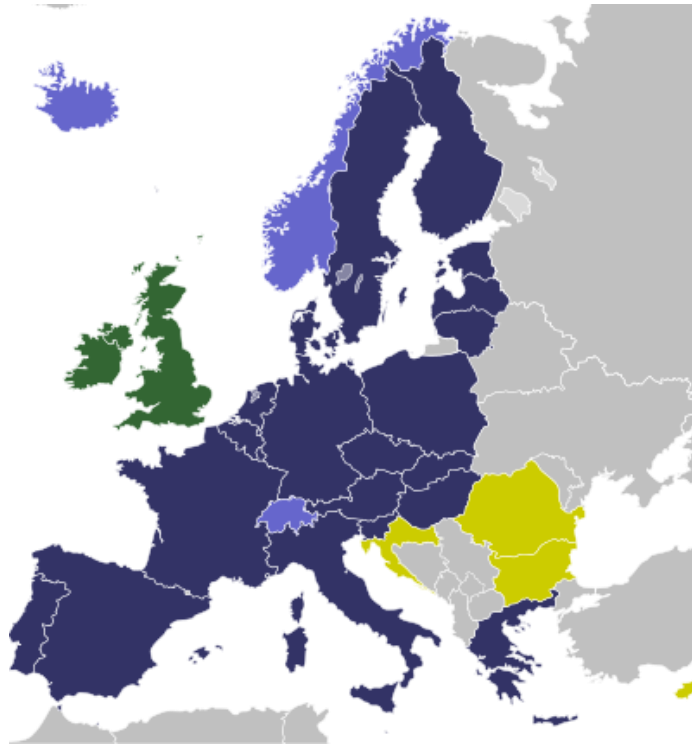
The 1991 Treaty of Maastricht<sup>7</sup>, the document creating the European Union, signaled the death of the nation-state, according to Rodger Brubaker (1996). While this is a rather extreme view, the creation of the E.U. could pose a challenge to traditional ideas of national identity (Smith, 1992). “The nation-state system is now confronted with an unprecedented rise in the number of international and supranational organizations ranging from the United Nations (UN), to the European Union (EU), including also non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International” (Guibernau, 1999, p. 152). These organizations can affect the way nation-states exercise their legislative, executive and judicial powers (*ibid*). Guibernau states that “[t]he creation of supranational institutions such as the E.U. will lessen the relevance of preserving the territorial integrity of current nation-states, since control over key areas such as the economy, social policy, the environment or immigration will be centrally monitored by E.U. institutions” (*ibid*, p. 153). For Agnew, the European Union is only one example of the effects of globalization. He notes three trends: (1) the economic organization that is locally or globally—rather than nationally—focused (“Manuel Castells describes this as a world of ‘flows’ not a world of ‘places’”), (2) international and global regimes focused on human rights rather than a specific nationality, and (3) citizenship not associated with the territory but rather with “religious, social groups and political communities other than the nation-state” (Agnew, 2008). Using Smith’s five characteristics of a nation listed above, I examine how each of these characteristics might reshape, reform or eliminate the functions of the nation-state and the identity of its people.

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<sup>7</sup> The Maastricht Treaty established the Economic and Monetary Union, gave European Parliament extended powers, and introduced a European citizenship.

## 1. Territory

With the formation of new supranational entities such as the European Union, the traditional function of the state border as a barrier distinguishing “us” from “them” diminishes. More lenient regulations and “open” borders can allow individuals on both sides to meet and interact with each other with great frequency and to find common daily experiences that can blur the line between “us” and “them.” Take the E.U. Schengen Agreement as an example.<sup>8</sup> This agreement allows citizens of Schengen member countries (see Map 2) to move with minimal restriction to other countries within the E.U. for work, leisure and living, whereas in the past, members had to abide by each individual country’s regulations, and movement was hindered. Now that individuals within the Schengen countries can move freely between the E.U. member states, they have more opportunities for contact and rich encounters with one another.



(Map 2: Schengen Countries. Dark blue represents Schengen countries that are also members of the European Union. Light blue represents countries that are non-E.U. members that are a part the Schengen area. Yellow represents E.U. countries that are legally bound to join the Schengen Agreement, but have not met the requirements. Green represents the countries that are E.U. members but have chosen not to be a member of Schengen. Source: Wikimedia Commons).

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<sup>8</sup> Other examples are NAFTA and the Internet.

This “borderless” area within the E.U., among other things, has changed the way individuals connect with others across borders, and how they view their national identities. Some scholars believe that trans-boundary organizations will open up new areas of tolerance for the “stranger” (Schlesinger, 1994, p. 317). “The term ‘other’ [would] not presume difference as a bad relation,” but as an opportunity for new insights (Tamminen, 2004, p. 413). One possible consequence of having more open borders, according to Guibernau, is that the “increasing porousness of the nation-state’s borders [could] signal the end of its monopoly over the state’s economy and stands as a distinctive feature of the post-traditional nation-state within which cultural homogeneity is no longer attainable” (1999, p. 157). Individuals might have opportunities to reconnect and develop a strong sense of a shared regional identity with those living on the other side of the international border, or they might feel that they are losing their unique national identity through regional assimilation as they become more aware of their neighbors.

## 2. History

Smith believes that one of the reasons nationalism will not disappear is “the fact that cosmopolitan globalism is deracinated, lacking communal memory, and that consequently people will remain rooted in national forms of life, embedded in historical traditions and cultures” (Bell, 2003, pp. 70-71). According to Smith, people are more strongly tied to their histories than accepting of new global configurations (Smith 1992).

In contrast, other scholars see globalization and the formation of the E. U. as an opportunity for member states to transcend “national antagonisms of the past by harnessing political effort(s) in the present and for the future” (Nancheva, 2013, p. 12). “One direction has been to *not* ask ‘who we are’ and ‘who others are’ but to ask ‘*where we are*’, ‘*where do we want to be*’ and ‘*how do we want to get there*’” as a way of reframing political narratives focused on the now and future (Tamminen, 2004, p. 416; emphasis added). According to Weber, nations should move toward developing

“memories of a common political destiny with other nations” rather than focusing on the past and on individual national agendas (Weber, 1994, p. 21).

### *3. Common Bond*

The “borderless” interior boundaries of the European Union have encouraged large numbers of people to migrate, “searching for a better life” (Agnew, 2008). Even people who do not choose to permanently migrate are now taking advantage of more relaxed travel regulations to explore new destinations. Upon arriving at their destination, people might recognize shared traditions and heritages that transcend boundaries. These common traits can allow individuals an opportunity to break down the idea of the “other” as an enemy and to develop mutual understanding. According to Smith, “[t]here has always been such cultural cross-fertilization in various parts of Europe. What now needs to be established is to what extent those shared traditions and heritages have become part of each of Europe’s national identities, to what degree each national tradition has embraced and assimilated these “‘trans-European’ cultural heritages” (1992, p. 71).

When individuals within a community develop strong relationships within their region, this could (re)awaken sentiments of belonging to a distinctive, regional group, as we saw with Crimea. “We are witnessing how some long dormant identities [such as Catalan, Scottish, etc.] are being awakened, while others are being reinvented” (Guibernau, 1999, p. 164). Guibernau believes that if these European Regions (as she calls them) obtain the same degree of political autonomy and recognition within the E.U., they could have a profound effect on the unified entity of the traditional nation-state structure, as they could demand the creation of their own autonomous states or could act as separate nations within the state (1999).

Guibernau advocates for today’s education “to include some notion of the concept of multiculturalism in an attempt to grasp the increasing cultural plurality pervading most contemporary societies” (1999, p. 158). “Yet, the discourse [among the public and politicians] frequently is more ambiguous in simultaneously always seeming

to worry about the cultural threat that foreign immigrants of whatever legal status pose to the national identity because blood and family ties often count so much (either officially or unofficially) in most definitions of who 'really belongs' within the national territory.... Debates about who does and who does not belong draw attention to both the fluid and the contested character of national identities" (Agnew, 2008).

#### *4. Labor and Resources, and 5. Common Legal Rights*

Guibernau acknowledges that by joining a supranational institution such as the E.U., states give up some of their sovereign rights such as the "capacity to exert administrative control within a limited territory. This involves the power to legislate and to penalize those who break the law. Nation-states are faced by an ongoing process involving the increasing intrusion of external bodies in their legislative as well as their judicial functions" (1999, p. 155). Some of the most far-reaching examples are the labor force's ability to move within E.U. territories, the ability of these foreign residents to vote in local elections, and the power of police to carry out pursuits and make arrests across borders (Linklater, 1998; Guibernau, 1999). It is clear that E.U. nations may be forced to collaborate in new forms of political communities that do not share the same political aspirations and cultural beliefs as those required by the European Union. Guibernau counters this concern as follows: "what is worth bearing in mind [is the fact] that the governments of these nation-states have freely decided to follow the path towards further European integration"<sup>9</sup> (1999, p. 156).<sup>10</sup>

## **2.2 Social Construction of Identities**

Scholars have generally understood that identity is developed in coordination with other humans. "Individuals do not arrive at their 'preferences' independently, but learn about their views in social contexts and through interactions" (Healey, 2006, p. 29). An

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<sup>9</sup> Guibernau says, "what is worth bearing in mind [is the fact] that the governments of these nation-states have freely decided to follow the path towards further European integration as a strategy to guarantee their own survival and strengthen their position within the world economy" (1999, p. 156).

<sup>10</sup> With several E.U. countries now declaring economic hardship, many members question the economic strength of the E.U.



individual's social identity is affected by three factors. First, identity can be fluid; an individual's position may change depending on his or her cognitive awareness of and reaction to a certain situation (Balalovska, 2004; Hristov, 2009). Second, existing social structures can render an individual's identity less flexible (Balalovska, 2004). Finally, an individual's social identity construction may be based on collective identities, or the feeling of belonging to a group (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

Balalovska's first factor recognizes that individuals actively play a role in determining who they are, what interests they have and how to define "the self" related to "the other." This demarcation involves three stages, according to Henri Tajfel: "categorisation, identification (of an individual with the category), and social comparison" (Balalovska, 2004, p. 195).

Social comparison plays an important role in Balalovka's second factor. Social comparisons are multidirectional: the individual compares himself or herself to 'others' while simultaneously being judged by them. "In the complex relational webs in which we live, we are not equal"; therefore, social comparing can define who holds power and who does not (Healey, 2006, p. 112). Charles Taylor explains this power difference in the realm of politics: "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor, 1994, p. 25).

One way that individuals can downplay these power differences is to switch to another identity or to form a new social group. Individuals may become cognizant of their commonality or connectedness and consciously or unconsciously form a group (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Collective identity, as defined by Brubaker and Cooper, occurs when individuals develop an "emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders" (*ibid*, p. 19). This commonality and connectedness depend on the degree of such a feeling, as well as "on other factors such as particular events, their encoding in compelling public

narratives, prevailing discursive frames, and so on” (*ibid*, p. 20). Brubaker and Cooper make a distinction between individual attachment to specific factors, which they say involves a strong connectedness, and those attachments with “minimal or no relational connectedness” (*ibid*). “[F]or large-scale collectivities such as ‘nations’: when a diffuse self-understanding as a member of a particular nation crystallizes into a strongly bounded sense of groupness, this is likely to depend not on relational connectedness, but rather on a powerfully imagined and strongly felt commonality” (*ibid*).

Finally, Smith points out that “individual identity is usually ‘situational’, if not always optional. That is to say, individuals identify themselves and are identified by others in different ways according to the situations in which they find themselves; as when one goes abroad, one tends to classify oneself (and be classified by others) differently from one’s categorization at home” (Smith, 1992, p. 59). According to this perspective, individuals can hold multiple identities and can move between them (Smith 1992).

If individuals can hold multiple identities and move between them, as well as belong to collective identities, how do individuals decide which identity to use? How do nation-states and supranational organizations influence “the perception, the actions, or self-understanding of individuals as they carry about their everyday life” of collective identities in a cross-border region (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p. 27)? This framing of perceptions is the focus of my study.

### **2.3 Border Studies**

The theory of social construction of borders that emphasizes localities and their linkages to other spatial scales began to appear in social, political, economic and ecological literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Morehouse, 2004). “These studies are representative of a movement away from reliance on global, generalizable laws and toward a focus on material conditions in the real world” (*ibid*, p. 28). The theory holds that borders may shape identity by allowing the movement of goods and the flow of people and ideas between two neighboring countries.

Good examples of early work include Daphne Berdahl's (1999) book, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*; Peter Sahlin's (1989) book, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*; and Oskar Martinez's (1994) book, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Berdahl examines how individuals and local communities reacted to the reunification of East and West Germany (1990-1992). Sahlin describes the French and Spanish governments' efforts to institute national identities to break up the Basque regional identity. Despite centuries of being told they belonged to two separate countries, the Basque people largely preferred not to abandon their regional sense of identity but to retain their sense of belonging to the same community, unless there was a clear advantage to accepting an alternative (national) identity (Sahlins, 1989). Finally, Martinez introduced the idea of the borderland milieu, in which individuals on both sides of the border identify themselves as belonging to a common population that is merely separated by an international line (1994). In all three studies, individuals maintain a regional identity despite years, decades and even centuries of separation and different national agendas.

While national identity has been the primary focus of border studies since the early 2000s, the field has expanded to study the effects of globalization, especially E.U. expansion, on borders (Allina-Pisano, 2009; Ehlers et al., 2001; Hristov, 2004; Leontidou, 2004; Leontidou et al., 2005; Lofgren, 2008; O'Dowd, 2002; Tamminen, 2004). Most of these studies address generalizable laws and state policy; few studies take local experiences into account (Agnew, 2007, 2008; Balalovska, 2003; Ehlers et al., 2001; Kosonen et al., 2008; Leontidou, 2004; Leontidou et al., 2005; O'Dowd, 2002; Tamminen, 2004). There is a scarcity of research focusing on how individuals perceive their cross-border regional identity.

One regional study, by Medve-Balint and Svensson, examines the possible reasoning and incentives of local governments in deciding whether or not to join and

participate in a Euroregion<sup>11</sup> (Medve-Balint and Svensson, 2013). The authors could not verify if collective identity (i.e., ethnic, cultural, or historic socio-economic cohesion) is a factor in developing a successful Euroregion. They did, however, find that if the perceived distance to the border is smaller (cognitive distance), the local government is more likely to choose to join a Euroregion (*ibid*).

In regional studies that examined attitudes about the “Other” along the border, two different outcomes occurred: either a breakdown in relationships or continued contact despite imposed border regulations. For example, Berg reported that when individuals along the Russian-Estonian border accepted the official state narrative of the “Other” as an enemy, they felt “threatened by the outsider,” those living on the other side of the border (2000). Such perceived threats reinforce feelings of mistrust and prejudice among the two groups. Orvar Lofgren found similar perceptions among Danish and Swedish regionauts<sup>12</sup> along the Scandinavian border (2008).

In contrast to these two studies, Nick Megoran documents the recent enforcement of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan political boundary. This new enforcement has disrupted familial and daily life along the border, and individuals struggle to maintain relationships despite being physically cut off from their family and friends (Megoran, 2006). Berdahl’s (1999) German study and Sahlin’s (1989) French-Spanish study both found that strong national discourses were working to delineate and separate the local populations, but the national discourses were not strong enough to discourage attachments to the local cross-border identity.

Scholars have stressed “the need to take into account local experiences, as well as recognizing the influence of interactions between the local, regional, and national/international scales, in theorizing boundaries and understanding borderland processes” (Morehouse, 2004, p. 28). David Newman specifically asks for more studies that examine “cultural and narrative perspectives on the way in which borders are

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<sup>11</sup> A Euroregion is defined as “a formalized cooperation between subnational authorities, often including private and non-profit actors, located close to a border in two or more countries” (Medve-Balint and Svensson, 2013, p. 15).

<sup>12</sup> “Regionauts” are people living along an international border who take advantage of their proximity to the border to shop and buy homes in cheaper locales.

perceived by state actors, borderland populations and border-crossers such as migrants” (Schimanski and Wolfe, 2010). While Schimanski’s study addresses the role of state actors in organizing and instituting national discourses (*ibid*), this study focuses on borderland populations and if they perceive a regional identity.

### Chapter 3: Background

Outside of Kriva Palanka, Macedonia, nestled in the mountains, is the picturesque Saint Joakim Osogovski Monastery. The monastery is made up of several buildings: the main church, a small chapel, living quarters, conference and exhibition halls, a restaurant, and a boarded-up building that once served as the monastery's bakery. Over the door of the bakery the Bulgarian word "hlebarница" is etched in stone. The word literally means a place that makes bread; however, two of the letters have been chiseled away (the "h" and the mark that denotes a soft letter) leaving two obvious empty spaces. Locals say that the letters were removed during Serbian rule or Yugoslav times, to reflect the "correct" Macedonian spelling. A Bulgarian told me that Macedonians purposely removed the letters to provide proof of their unique Macedonia identity, which he claims is fake.



(Photo 1: Saint Joakim Osogovski Monastery)



(Photo 2: Bakery sign over door with removed letters)

In order to understand the significance of the results of this study, we need to tell the region's history from the point of view of both Bulgarians and Macedonians. The purpose of this chapter is to provide that historical perspective.

### 3.1 The Bulgarian Story

In 681 A.D., the First Bulgarian Kingdom united three ethnos: the Thracians, the Slavs and the Bulgars. The Bulgars gave the territory its name. Over several centuries, this Kingdom spread throughout the southern Balkans, emerging in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries as one of the largest and most advanced cultural and literary centers in Europe. After a century of Byzantine rule, the Second Bulgarian Kingdom reemerged as a major regional power in 1185 A.D. It lasted until the Ottoman invasion in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Starting in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottomans controlled the region for approximately 500 years. During this time, most members of the Slav population considered themselves to be “Christian” or “non-Muslim”<sup>13</sup> (Detrez, 2013; Todorova, 2009; Jezernik, 2002; Mazower, 2002). Identity was based not on language or ethnicity, but on religious affiliation (Detrez, 2013). Scholars have found evidence that the earliest traces of the Bulgarian modern national identities were safeguarded by monks during the Ottoman Empire. In his book *History of the Slav-Bulgarians*, monk Paisii Hilendarski, wrote:

Pay heed, readers and hearers, O Bulgarian race, who love and hold dear your heritage and your Bulgarian Fatherland and desire to understand and know what has been revealed of your Bulgarian heritage, and of your fathers, forebears and kings, patriarchs and saints, how they lived and how they fared. For you it is necessary and valuable to know what there is to know of the affairs of your fathers, just as all other races and nations know their heritage and language. They have their history, and each who is literate knows, recounts and takes pride in his heritage and language. Thus also did I write down chronologically that which is known of your heritage and language. Read and know so that you may not be mocked or reproached by other races and nations. Copy this history ... and guard that it does not disappear. (Pilbrow, 2001, p. 1)

These monks attempted to record collective memories (stories, customs, language and traditions) that were passed down from generation to generation, reminding Bulgarians of their pre-Ottoman past (Pilbrow, 2001).

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<sup>13</sup> The folk song “1762 leto” (The Year 1762), written by Grigor Prlichev at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, depicts the struggle of the Greeks to abolish the Archbishopric of Ohrid, a Slavic Orthodox religion.

Other scholars believe external groups played a key role in the development of the modern Bulgarian national identity. The influence of groups such as American Protestant missionaries, the British Bible Society, and the Russian Bible Society (which translated the New Testament into vernacular Slavic languages instead of Greek) eventually led to the establishment of the first Bulgarian church in 1870 and thus revitalized “Bulgarian” as an ethnic and cultural identity (Mazower, 2002; Brooks, 2005; Kojouharov, 2004).

In April 1876, the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee (BRCC) was formed to fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire. Due to several Ottoman atrocities<sup>14</sup>, the BRCC galvanized West European<sup>15</sup> and Russian media to report the region’s plight and its bid for freedom<sup>16</sup> (Mazower, 2002; Kojouharov, 2004). In 1877, the Russians waged war against the Ottoman Empire to help their “Slavic brothers.” This conflict, known as the Russo-Turkish war, ultimately led to the signing of the San Stefano Treaty, which recognized Bulgaria’s independence from the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty, signed in March, 1878, delineated the territory following the borders of the Bulgarian Exarchate, founded in 1870 (see Map 3). However, within four months, the Great Powers (United Kingdom, France, Germany and Austria-Hungary) reconsidered their support for the large territory of Bulgaria, fearing strong Russian influence in the region. Consequently, they redrew Bulgaria’s borders at the Treaty of Berlin. Under this new treaty, the Bulgarian regions of Thrace and Macedonia were returned to the Ottoman Empire (see Maps 3 and 4). Macedonia was liberated from the Ottoman Empire much later, in 1912 during the Balkan Wars.

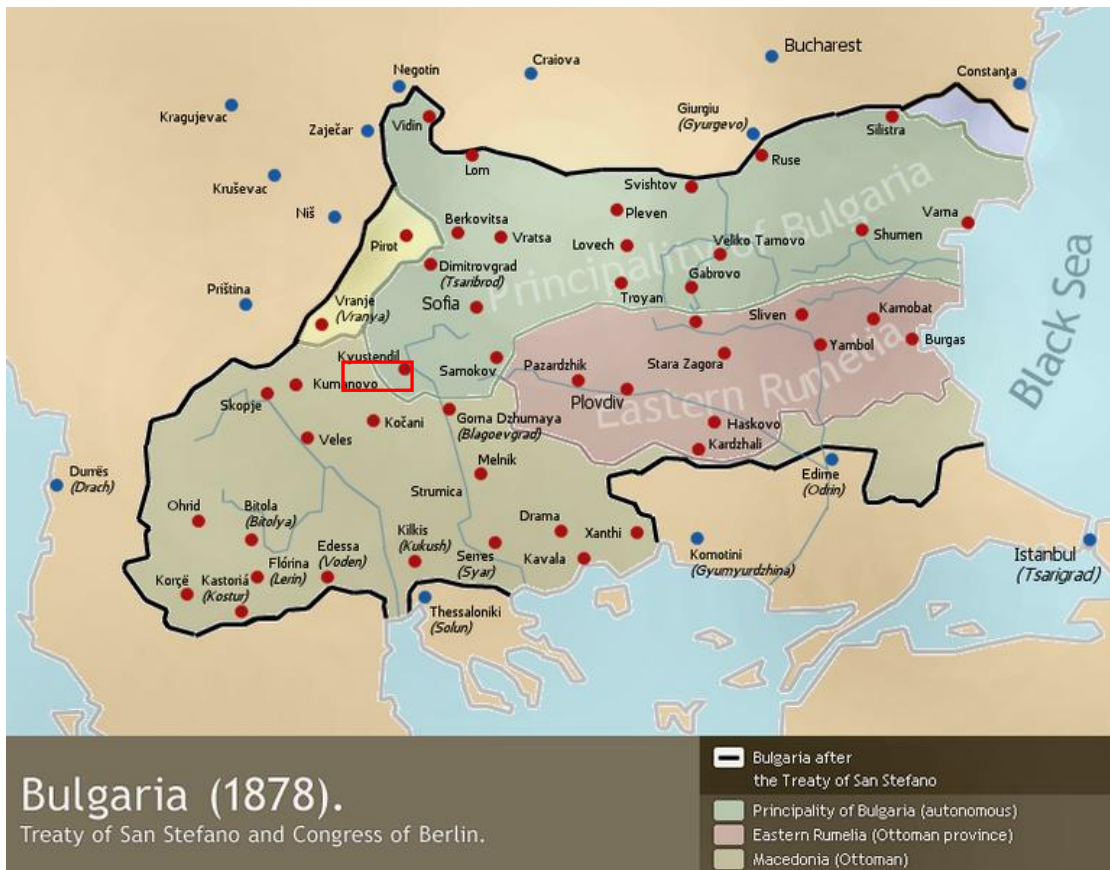
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<sup>14</sup> One of the most famous uprisings and massacre occurred in the town of Batak.

<sup>15</sup> William Gladstone wrote *The Bulgarian Horrors* (1870), which became a bestseller in London. The book stirred so much emotion that England’s Prime Minister Disraeli had to defend his approval of the borders of the new state of Bulgaria at the Berlin Congress; the people felt the Bulgarian territory was far too small (Balkan Insight, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Charles Darwin was one of the best-known literary elites to discuss Bulgarians’ plight.





(Map 3: Territory after the Treaty of San Stefano and the Berlin Treaty. Under the Treaty of San Stefano, Bulgaria controlled the territory outlined in black. After the Berlin Treaty, Bulgaria was reduced to the area “Principality of Bulgaria”. Approximate study area in red. Reference: Drawn by Todor Bozhinov and released under GFDL. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bulgaria-SanStefano\\_-\(1878\)-byTodorBozhinov.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bulgaria-SanStefano_-(1878)-byTodorBozhinov.png))



(Map 4: Territory after the Berlin Treaty. Approximate study area in red. Reference: University of Texas Libraries. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/eastern\\_europe1878.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/eastern_europe1878.jpg))

As an independent state, Bulgaria participated in five wars from 1878 to 1944<sup>17</sup> in an attempt to reunite these lost regions. Many Bulgarians considered Macedonia to be the cradle of Bulgarian civilization (Karadjov, 2007). The loss of the region was a blow to Bulgarian pride, from which, some would argue, the country has never recovered.

During World War I and World War II, Bulgaria stood politically and militarily opposed to Macedonia and attempted to remove Macedonia from Greek and Serbian control. Both times, however, Bulgaria was on the losing side. Bulgaria governed Macedonia from 1941 to 1942 during the war. After World War II, the present-day Republic of Macedonia was handed back to Serbia and became a Republic as a part of Yugoslavia.

At the beginning of the Cold War, Bulgaria recognized the rights of its Macedonian minority and even included the Macedonian language in school curricula in the Pirin region. After all, the first Communist Leader of Bulgaria, Georgi Dimitrov, was born to parents from Macedonia. There were well-documented plans for Bulgaria to

<sup>17</sup> According to Hall (2012), between 1912 and 1913, Bulgaria missed five successive opportunities to gain control of Macedonia at the Treaty of London.

give up its Pirin Macedonian cultural region in exchange for the “so-called Western Outlands (the towns of Tsaribrod (Dimitrovgrad) and Bosilegrad, where the recognized Bulgarian minority in Serbia lives today)” (Novinite, 2013). In 1948, the Tito-Stalin dispute halted these plans and limited relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria for the duration of the Cold War. From that point on, Bulgarian acceptance of an autonomous Macedonian identity waned. “From the mid-1950s, Bulgaria’s communist regime, under its leader Todor Zhivkov, increasingly relied on fostering nationalist sentiments and coercive assimilation of the country’s minorities, culminating in the claim that there were no minorities in Bulgaria” (Rechel, 2008, p. 334). In 1963, the Bulgarian government ended funding for Macedonian language education and Macedonian cultural centers (Minority Rights Group International, 2005). The 1965 census was the last census during the Cold War that allowed respondents to identify themselves as Macedonian (*ibid*).<sup>18</sup>

In 1992, the census reintroduced “Macedonian” as an ethnic identity, and 10,830 respondents selected it (*ibid*). However, in the minds of many Bulgarians, Bulgaria is still made up of three cultural regions: the Dobrudja region, the Thracian region and the Makedonia/Macedonian region. Therefore, they see the inhabitants of these three regions as simply Bulgarian.

### **3.2 The Macedonian Story**

Looking at the newly constructed monuments scattered around the capital of Skopje, one might easily get the impression that the roots of the Republic of Macedonia trace back to Alexander the Great, the legendary ruler who successfully reigned over the “known” world (including the Balkan and Arabian peninsulas) during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. (see Map 5). Certainly, Alexander’s name is imprinted on maps and on statues since that time and the collective memories of his golden age have survived through the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires (Jezernik, 2002). Equally predominant on the

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<sup>18</sup> Although the numbers were not released at the time, 187,789 individuals identified themselves as Macedonian in the 1956 Bulgarian census. By 1965, there were only 8,750 individuals; by 1975, no Bulgarian citizens identified themselves as Macedonian (World Directory of Minorities, 2008). In 1998, Bulgaria recognized 1,850 Macedonians living within the territory (Kojouharov, 2004).

Skopje skyline is the statue commemorating Justinian I, Emperor of the Byzantine Kingdom<sup>19</sup>, who fought to reclaim territory in order to restore the Roman Empire during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. These two periods, the time of Alexander the Great and the Byzantine Empire, are used by some Slavic Macedonians to support their idea that Macedonia is an autonomous nation with a very long history.



(Map 5: The Macedonian Empire 336-323 B.C.E. Reference: University of Texas Libraries: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/shepherd/macedonian\\_empire\\_336\\_323.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/shepherd/macedonian_empire_336_323.jpg))

Many Macedonia scholars trace their history back to Tsar Samuil and the Macedonian state (976 – 1018 A.D.). During Samuil's reign, he controlled most of the Balkans with the exception of Thrace. The state had twin capital cities (Ohrid and Prespa) located in modern-day Macedonia. Bulgarians claim that Tsar Samuil was a part of the Bulgarian lineage and thus a ruler of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Bulgarian scholars claim that Samuil was recognized by Constantinople and the Orthodox Church, which attests to his Bulgarian family roots. However, according to Macedonian scholars, Samuil gained power as part of an anti-Bulgarian uprising and was recognized additionally by the Catholic Roman Curia, which they take to mean that he was not a part of the Bulgarian lineage.

<sup>19</sup> Emperor Justinian was born in Taurisium near today's Skopje.

The first documents of the modern Slavic Macedonian<sup>20</sup> identity date back to the early 1800s<sup>21</sup> (Brooks, 2005; Helsinki Group, n.d.). By 1893, members of a political party called the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO)<sup>22</sup> had organized, although it wasn't until the Balkan Wars did they demand autonomy for a Macedonian state. From the IMRO's formation until 1934<sup>23</sup>, the party was able to (re)claim land in parts of today's western Bulgaria. It formed a "state within a state" in Pirin Macedonia (located in modern-day Bulgaria) and used that territory as a base for further actions in other areas they considered Macedonia. Due to their often-violent attempts to demand recognition and reclaim territory, including the assassination of a Bulgarian Prime Minister, Macedonians were often referred to in the world media as irredentists who threatened the stability of the Balkans (Mazower, 2002). However, the story is not so simple. All surrounding neighbors of the territory of Macedonia had highly politicized views on the issue of Macedonian autonomy, so much so that "The Macedonia Question" became a common phrase and a subject of debate. Nancheva explains:

Macedonia staked its claim for independent statehood in a geopolitical environment that was not entirely benevolent. Surrounded by Bulgaria and Greece, which both had certain ideas of 'Macedonian-ness', Macedonia had always had to defend its identity against external encroachment. The fact that both states had considerable parts of geographical Macedonia under their sovereignty was interpreted by them as evidence supporting their claims and justification for their 'special' positions towards the Macedonian republic. Appealing to past commonality, Bulgaria fluctuated between the paternalistic tone of an older brother protective of an inexperienced youth and the absolute negation of Macedonia's distinctive identity. Both ends of the spectrum denied Macedonia a position of equality in the world of sovereign states and thus

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<sup>20</sup> Today, the Republic of Macedonia has two prominent ethnicities: Macedonian Slavs and Albanians. The Macedonian Slavs are mainly concentrated in the eastern portion of the country, while the Albanians are found in the western portion. The well-documented struggles between Macedonian and Albanian identities within the country include the 2001 Albanian Macedonian insurgency. This study focuses only on Macedonian Slavs. The study city of Kriva Palanka, Macedonia reports that no ethnic Albanians reside in its city, according to the 2011 census (Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> One of the earliest books found is the Konikovo Gospel, which dates from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The book is a manuscript written with Greek letters, but it uses the vernacular language reflecting dialects found in Southern Macedonia.

<sup>22</sup> The name IRMO changed several times during that period, but each political organization had the same goal – political autonomy of Macedonia. Prior to the Balkan Wars it was autonomy from the Ottoman Empire; after the First World War, the focus was on an independent Macedonia.

<sup>23</sup> In 1934, both internal and external conflicts reduced IRMO's political actions and aspirations.

contradicted the very nature of the most crucial political project for Macedonia –independent statehood. (2013, p. 135)

Macedonia's neighbor to the north, the Kingdom of Serbia, also tried its hand at controlling the area in the 1860s, when one of the prominent statesman, Iliya Garashanin, proposed (re)creating the Medieval (14<sup>th</sup>-century) Serbian Empire of Tsar Dushan (Boyadziev, 1998). This territory would have encompassed present-day Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina (*ibid*). By 1886, Serbia switched to a subtler approach in trying to influence the region: the Serbian politician, Stoyan Novakovich, proposed printing schoolbooks in Macedonian vernacular and later revising the books using the Serbian alphabet (Roucek, 1960).

The neighboring countries of Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria were not alone in their desire to divide up the region of Macedonia (see Map 6).<sup>24</sup> Other political entities interested in the region included Russia, Austria and England, which, along with other European powers, cast covetous eyes toward the territory (Jezernik, 2002).

After the Balkan Wars, the victorious Allied forces split the geographic region of Macedonia into three sections. At that time, Serbia controlled<sup>25</sup> approximately 40% of the geographic and historical region known as "Vardar Macedonia," which has become the present-day Republic of Macedonia and part of southern Serbia (Novinite, 2012). Greece still controls about 50% of "Aegean Macedonia,"<sup>26</sup> while Bulgaria controls 10% of "Pirin Macedonia" (*ibid*) (see Map 7). These three regions form the greater Macedonia that some Macedonians hope to reunite.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> During the same period, half of "Vardar" Macedonia (to the west) was viewed as part of Greater Albania, with Skopje as a major city. This helps to explain the complexity of the neighboring countries' positions.

<sup>25</sup> Today, Serbia controls only a small portion of the geographic region of Macedonia.

<sup>26</sup> The Greek Aegean section includes (at least) two ethnicities: Slavic Greeks/individuals who call themselves Macedonian, and those with a Greek ethnicity, but live in the Greek province of Macedonia (Agnew, 2007; Mazower, 2002). The ethnic Greeks were actually transplants from Anatolia Turkey; Turkey expelled them from homelands. The Greek government resettled them in the Aegean Macedonian section of Greece.

<sup>27</sup> The current government of the Republic of Macedonia has abolished efforts to reunite these lands.



(Map 6: Showing Balkan Aspirations in 1914. Reference: University of Texas Libraries. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/balkan\\_aspirations\\_1914.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/balkan_aspirations_1914.jpg))



(Map 7: Map of Vardar, Pirin, Aegean Macedonia. Reference: Wikimedia Commons. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethnicmacedonia.jpg>)

In the 1940s, the Yugoslavian Communist Party Leader and Prime Minister Josip Broz Tito led the formation of the modern country of Yugoslavia. He believed that a federal structure, which would grant greater powers to Yugoslavia's several main ethnicities, would help resolve their long-standing power struggles (especially those between Serbia and Croatia, which engaged in a violent conflict during World War II when Hitler had temporarily granted independence to a Nazi-led Croatia). The consolidation and recognition of six separate republics under the flag of Yugoslavia<sup>28</sup> gave each of the main ethnicities within the new federal country the same rights in a separate Yugoslav republic. One of these republics was Macedonia (see Map 8). By recognizing Macedonia as part of Yugoslavia, Tito also recognized an official Macedonian language and alphabet that were distinct from Serbian and Bulgarian. The plan was to build a stable federal state as a conglomerate of socialist republics.<sup>29</sup>

In the eyes of many Westerners as well as people in the Eastern bloc, the citizens of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were "the freest and most economically advanced of all the communist countries" (Strauss, 2006). Unlike its Eastern neighbor Bulgaria, Yugoslavia allowed its citizens to freely travel and work abroad.<sup>30</sup> Over the course of five decades, many citizens developed a strong sense of pride in belonging to Yugoslavia. Many considered themselves Yugoslavs, not Serbs, Croats or Montenegrins.

The fall of the Eastern bloc and the ensuing economic collapse rocked the foundations of the Yugoslav state. In 1991, Macedonia proclaimed its independence from a disintegrating Yugoslavia. Bulgaria was the first country to recognize it officially. Serbia also recognized Macedonia but has yet to recognize Macedonia's religious autonomy. Meanwhile, Greece opposes its name on the grounds that Macedonia refers

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<sup>28</sup> The six republics were the Socialist Republic (SR) of Bosnia and Herzegovina, SR Croatia, SR Macedonia, SR Montenegro, SR Slovenia and SR Serbia. Serbia had two autonomous provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo.

<sup>29</sup> In the late 1940s and 1950s, there were attempts to revive the IMRO under various names (e.g., VMRO – PRAVDA and VMRO – SDRMA) to enable the Vardar part of Macedonia to secede from Yugoslavia to form an independent state.

<sup>30</sup> Yugoslavia was not entirely free from oppression; many dissidents were taken to Goli Otok (the Bare Island) in the Adriatic Sea. This infamous camp held all "public enemies," including Panko Brashnarov, who opened the first Anti-fascist Assembly for National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM); and Nikola Kljusev, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia. After WWII, there were mass murders in Veles, Kumanovo and Skopje that remain unexplained to this day.



to a historical and territorial region within Greece and has thus halted Macedonia's NATO and E.U. membership talks. According to the Greeks, Macedonia must resolve the name conflict in order to have international recognition.



(Map 8: Yugoslavia with the Republic of Macedonia. Reference: University of Texas Libraries. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas\\_east\\_europe/yugoslavia-map.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas_east_europe/yugoslavia-map.jpg))

Today, the Macedonian government continues to advocate a singular Slavo-Macedonian identity that draws Balkan-wide criticism, including objections from the large ethnic groups within the country. Over the past several years, the capital has implemented a comprehensive plan (*Skopje 2014*), displaying the country's Slavo-Macedonian identity through new public buildings such as the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, as well as through the numerous monuments to people the state considers national heroes.<sup>31</sup> These monuments have drawn much criticism from Bulgaria and Greece, who also claim these historical figures.

Other nationalistic displays that extend beyond Macedonian borders have also caused Bulgarian outcry. In October 2012, the Royal Museum in Brussels, Belgium hosted an exhibit entitled "Macedonian Medieval Manuscript Richness,"<sup>32</sup> which included artifacts from the Bulgarian Kingdom. Bulgarians immediately reacted by pointing out that several of these "Macedonian" artifacts included the word "Bulgaria." For Bulgarians, this was yet another example of how Macedonians distort and appropriate Bulgarian history as their own. It is likely that the Macedonian attempts to develop a singular identity are largely in response to lack of recognition by neighboring countries, specifically Bulgaria and Greece, to which the Macedonian identity constitutes a serious threat (Nancheva, 2013).

Many Macedonians have disregarded the *mélange* idea that their ethnos is part Bulgarian, part Serbian and part Greek. They view people living in eastern Bulgaria as having a different culture and language from those in western Bulgaria along the Macedonian border. In their view, Bulgarians living in Western Bulgaria are of Macedonian origin, descendants of a tribe that occupied the area prior to the Slav invasions, whereas Bulgarians farther east are the only ones of "true" Bulgarian origin. Hence, some Macedonians claim that not only that Macedonians are not Bulgarians, but in fact Bulgarians (or at least some of them) are Macedonians.

Some Macedonians claim that their national identity began at the end of Ottoman occupation. From this perspective, both Bulgaria and Macedonia should be

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<sup>31</sup> Examples include Philip the Great, Alexander the Great, Gotse Delchev, Dame Gruev and Tsar Samuil.

<sup>32</sup> The name of the exhibit was later changed.

considered new states, and history prior to that point is irrelevant. This perspective regards Bulgarians and Macedonians as having two distinct and separate identities.

### **3.3 A Tale of Two (Border) Cities**

As mentioned above, the earliest settlements in the border region date back eight to ten thousand years, which makes them some of the oldest settlements in Europe. By the time of the Roman Empire, Paultalia (now Kyustendil) was a major urban center. The region's most prosperous period occurred in the Middle Ages, right before the Ottoman period, when the region belongs at various times to the Macedonian Kingdom and the Byzantine, Serbian Empire and Bulgarian Kingdoms. Velbazhd (now Kyustendil) became a major religious center during this time.

After five hundred years of Ottoman rule, the signing of the Berlin Treaty (1878) marked the first time in modern history that Kyustendil, Bulgaria and Kriva Palanka, Macedonia belonged to different sides of state borders. The Abroad Committee of Kyustendil assisted Macedonia's ambitions for liberation from the Ottoman Empire by channeling illegal weapons, ammunition and literature to Kriva Palanka and on to the rest of Macedonia.<sup>33</sup> These smuggling channels continued through both World Wars, as both sides were content to receive money and/or materials.

During the Cold War, for approximately forty years, Bulgarians were not allowed to cross the border except on one day annually when splintered families in the region could reunite. Macedonians could cross only under heavy surveillance. Most chose not to take such opportunities. The border opened fully to both Bulgarians and Macedonians in 1991, allowing regional trade to redevelop for the first time after four decades. In 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the E.U. The Bulgarian-Macedonian border was tightened once again, this time for travelers from non-E.U. countries (European Commission, 2010b). A Macedonian traveling to Bulgaria had to acquire a passport and visa permission. In 2005, Macedonia was granted candidate status for accession to the E.U. (European Commission, 2010a). While the future date of accession

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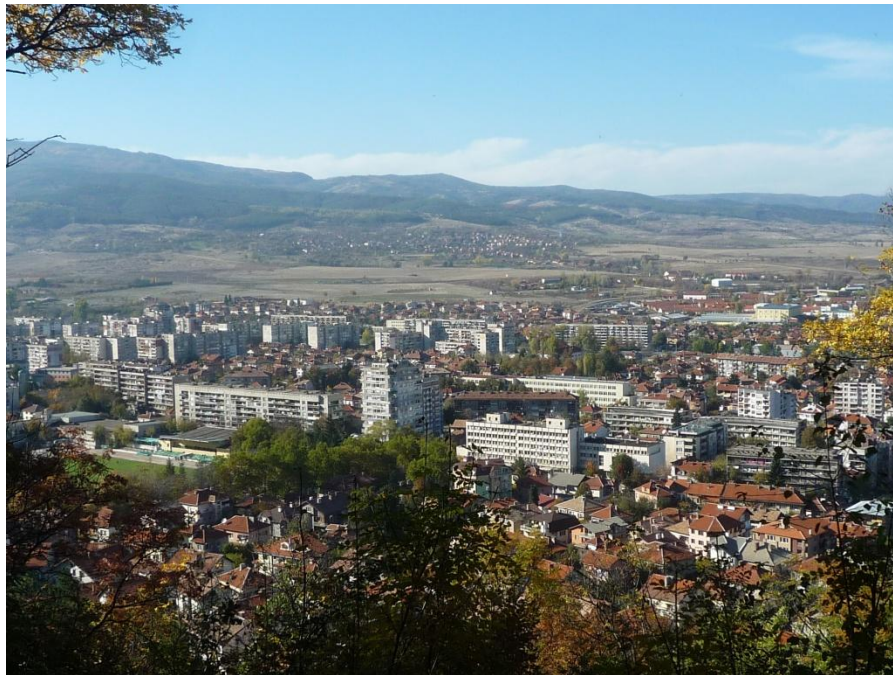
<sup>33</sup> City Museum, Kriva Palanka.

is undetermined, governments at all levels—E.U., national and local—have begun to prepare for the transition. New cooperative ventures include biological, infrastructure, tourist and cultural projects on both sides of the border, as well as joint training for public-sector workers and the easing of visa restrictions (Smallbone, 2008).

The next section provides demographic information to highlight similarities between the two border cities.

### *Kyustendil*

Located along the western border of Bulgaria, Kyustendil is known for its fruit production and for its therapeutic mineral spas. The city was founded by the Romans in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. The present-day center includes a dense shopping quarter and a pedestrian street with restaurants and cafes attracting regional activity. The nearby Osogovo Mountains contain the Roman ruins in Hissarluka Park, a small menagerie, and ski resorts.



(Photo 3: View of Kyustendil, Bulgaria from Hissarluka Park)

Census statistics show that 93% of Kyustendil’s residents identify themselves as Bulgarian, while the rest are Roma, Turkish, or other. The ethnicity “Macedonian” was not given as a choice in the latest census (National Statistical Institute, 2013).

Kyustendil's unemployment rate in 2011 was 14.5%, much higher than the 9.75% national average (*ibid*). Workers in the city received much lower annual wages and salaries at \$4,311 (6219 leva), well below the national average of \$13,800 GDP per capita (CIA 2013; National Statistical Institute, 2013). Over the past decade, the city's population has decreased from 49,919 in 2001 to 44,111 in 2011 (Brinkoff, 2012). This change is mainly due to citizens relocating to other Bulgarian cities in search of better jobs and opportunities (Smallbone, 2008). According to the national statistics, 3,521 Bulgarians from the Kyustendil region reside abroad (National Statistical Institute, 2013).

### *Kriva Palanka*

Founded in 1633 at the confluence of the Kriva and Durachka Rivers in northeastern Macedonia, Kriva Palanka served as a military defense center during the Ottoman Empire (Ministry of Local Self Government, 2009). The city fortress primarily held Ottoman garrisons intent on protecting the trade route to Ottoman Constantinople against the Slavs. Throughout the centuries, however, more and more local Christian-Slav populations came under the protection of the city walls. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Kriva Palanka recorded approximately two-thirds of its population as Christian Orthodox.

The *1921 Definitive Statistics Results* book (Дефинитивни Резултати Пописа Становништва) shows that the city of Kriva Palanka had 2,149 people, 1,491 of whom followed the Orthodox religion (Opšta Državna, 1932).<sup>34</sup> The census also indicated that 1,469 claimed to be ethnic Serb or Croat (*ibid*). This is not surprising, since the city was part of the Serbian Kingdom at that time, and the term "Bulgarian" was not offered as an ethnic or religious option.

Ten years later, the municipal population (not to be confused with the city population) had 40,532 inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> The 1930 Serbian Statistical Records asked

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<sup>34</sup> According to the census, in 1921 there were 1,491 Orthodox, 647 Muslims, 6 Evangelists, and 5 Roman Catholics. As for ethnicity, there were 1,469 Serbs or Croats, 475 Turkish, 173 Other, 30 Vlachs, 1 Russian and 1 Hungarian (Opšta Državna, 1932).

<sup>35</sup> The official record includes residents of nearby villages in the population.

individuals to identify themselves by religion and mother tongue. Of the total population, 40,042 identified themselves having a “Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, or Macedonian” mother language (Republic of Serbia, 1931[1945]). Once again, Bulgarian ethnicity, religion and mother tongue were not included in the census options. This is the first statistical record listing Macedonian as a separate language.<sup>36</sup>

Residents of Kriva Palanka seemed to have changed their opinions, voluntarily or involuntarily, between April 1941 and December 1942, the years during the Second World War when Bulgaria controlled the region. A review of the city’s birth, marriage, and death records reveals that 1,091 of 1,156 official entries listed Bulgarian as the nationality (Kyustendil Archive Record Units 237-243, 1941-1942). This time the term “Serbian” was not offered as an option, but the term “Yugoslav” was (*ibid*).<sup>37</sup>

Starting with the 1953 census, the Macedonian ethnicity comprised over two-thirds of the city’s population, while once again the Bulgarian identity was excluded from the list of options (see Table 1) (Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2014).

	Total	Macedonians	Albanians	Turk	Roma	Vlach	Serb	Bosniak	Other
1948	1,967	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
1953	2,539	2,009	3	81	336	0	70	..	40
1961	2,844	2,360	1	12	..	..	60	..	411
1971	4,955	4,301	6	16	369	..	118	..	145
1981	8,860	8,243	0	9	297	0	120	..	191
1991	11,271	10,517	0	1	479	1	122	..	151
1994	11,166	10,538	0	0	506	2	65	..	55
2002	14,558	13,758	0	2	668	2	88	1	39

(Table 1: Population of the City of Kriva Palanka Ethnicity. Source: Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2014.)

<sup>36</sup> Even though the book wasn’t published until 1945, Serbian officials confirm that the Macedonian language was listed as an option on the 1931 census.

<sup>37</sup> Two people listed their nationality as Yugoslav. Other identities included Croat, Gypsy, Turk, Vlach, Bosnian, Muslim, and Turk (Kyustendil Archive Records 237-243, 1941-1942).

In 2011, the population of the Kriva Palanka municipality was 20,377, of whom 14,558 lived in the city of Kriva Palanka; the rest lived in the surrounding villages (Municipality of Kriva Palanka, 2012; Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2013). In 2011, the northeast region of Macedonia (which includes Kriva Palanka) reported an unemployment rate of 59.6%, much higher than the country's rate of 31.4%. In 2010, the GDP of the northeast region was \$2,308 (108,664 Macedonian Denari), half of the county's average of \$4,486 (211,246 Macedonian Denari) (Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2013). The 2011 census recorded 19 individuals from Kriva Palanka living abroad, while 97 individuals moved to other regions of Macedonia (*ibid*).



(Photo 4: View of the City of Kriva Palanka, Macedonia)

With relatively few businesses, today's city center today is quiet, except on Saturdays when the regional farmers' market attracts people to the town square. Industrial businesses have started to open in Kriva Palanka, as they are drawn to the lower operating costs just outside the E.U. border. There are a wood furniture factory, a new mine (owned by an Indian firm) and a Bulgarian candy waffle factory (owned by

Bulgarians from the town of Veliko Turnovo). Many Bulgarian tourists visit Kriva Palanka as part of a tour to the nearby Bulgarian monastery of Saint Joachim Osogovski.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, the cities of Kyustendil, Bulgaria and Kriva Palanka, Macedonia are similar in that they have had a shared history until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have a population with few minorities, and are poorer compared to the rest of their respective countries.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Macedonian tourist information, the monastery is Bulgarian Orthodox.



## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

This study uses ethnographic methods to study attitudes regarding individuals' regional, national and supranational identities on each side of the Bulgarian-Macedonian border. Fieldwork was conducted in the two cities: Kyustendil, Bulgaria and Kriva Palanka, Macedonia, from August to November, 2013.

### **4.1 Data Collection Techniques**

#### Location Section

There are many places along the E.U. border where inhabitants share cultural and linguistic traits. However, none of these places have been so adamant and volatile in demanding recognition as in the Balkans. In 1999, when I was serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in the city of Kyustendil, my research project comparing the medicinal herbs used by residents of Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka came to an end as NATO forces started bombing Kosovo and nearby points in Serbia. Due to the influx of as many as 60,000 refugees crossing the border and concerns about Macedonia's own stability, Bulgaria closed its administrative borders with Serbia and Macedonia, ending the numerous daily interactions between residents of the region. This event caused me to start questioning the influence nations have on a region's population. In 2007, the acceptance of Bulgaria as a member of the European Union raised still more dynamic questions regarding both national and European influences on the region.

I selected this region and these border cities because individuals on both sides of the border used the same (or a similar) language and displayed similar cultural attributes in their folk costumes, music and religious traditions. In addition to the cultural connections, strong financial connections also exist. The cities are located along European Corridor 8, which connects the Adriatic coast to the Black Sea, and this route is the major thoroughfare linking the capitals of Sofia and Skopje. At the individual level, there is daily trade as many Bulgarians and Macedonians visit the other country's markets to shop. At the regional level, the E.U. cross-border program has invested approximately 2.2 million Euros in regional infrastructure developments (Dochev, 2013).

## Use of Ethnography for Field Research

The purpose of the research was to investigate the construction or deconstruction of regional, national and supranational identities. This meant exploring the complex attitudes and relationships between people and the way they might accept or reject national and E.U. policies or discussions about nationality based on their interactions or lack of interactions with people from the other side of the border. The study used qualitative methods to obtain data, as they are considered one of the best ways to understand complex social phenomena (Emerson, 2001; Yin, 2009). One advantage of using ethnography is that the researcher can examine people as they go about their everyday lives in their natural social settings, and augment these observations with formal and informal interviews (Emerson et al., 1995). This approach enables the researcher to identify contrasts between the “emic” (what people say they are doing or perceiving about “others”), and the “etic” (what people are actually doing or how they are behaving toward “others”) (Emerson, 2001). The research method involved three data-gathering techniques: researching secondary sources, making observations and conducting interviews.

### *Secondary Data*

I conducted a thorough review of secondary data, including online data, archival records and museum displays, which provided necessary background information about current and past political positions of the Bulgarian and Macedonian officials. Secondary data included external interviews with colleagues outside the study area, which helped frame the discussion in a broader perspective. The secondary sources helped ground the research in the literature and allowed it to incorporate current discourses and opinions. The secondary data also helped corroborate the findings of the interviews and observations, providing a contextual perspective and validating what was said in the interviews and observed in social settings (Yin, 2009).

### *Participant as an Observer*

Taking the “participant as an observer” approach, I carefully cultivated an insider-outsider relationship with the members of each community to allow for naturally occurring discourses in daily social interaction (Emerson, 2001). This method allowed the careful tracking of human behavior to understand behavior patterns within the community, as opposed to gathering information solely through direct interviews (*ibid*). Activities included attending public meetings, theater performances, concerts and art events, as well as shopping at the market, visiting cafes, attending book signings and participating in a television interview, all to develop visibility within each community. Several events, such as watching the Bulgarian theater troupe perform in Kriva Palanka, attending the European Union Cross-Border Day of Cooperation with Macedonian schoolchildren in Kyustendil, and attending a private meeting between museum directors from both sides of the border, allowed me to observe firsthand how Bulgarians and Macedonians interacted in the presence of one another. I also presented a paper at the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) Cross-border Programme’s “Cultural Heritage without Borders” Conference, in Kriva Palanka. This conference brought together Bulgarian and Macedonian scholars and practitioners who were interested in regional studies. During the question-answer session, attendees from both countries took part in a lively debate about my presentation. While not everyone participating in the conference resided in the border region, I was able to record and better understand the intensity of feelings on both sides of the border. The conference also provided an excellent opportunity to network with professional researchers and build contacts.

### *Interviews*

#### Structure of the Questions

During the interview, I asked thirteen primary and nine demographic questions to elicit views of people residing on both sides of the border. The questions started off easy and grew more complex as the interview progressed. The primary reason for using

this technique was to engage the interviewees in a conversation and build trust with the easy questions so that they felt they could answer the later, more sensitive questions without being judged right or wrong (Ritchie, 2003; Weiss, 1994). Selected quantitative questions from the 2008 Eurobarometer survey provided a starting point for understanding how individuals viewed their European, national, and regional identities. Each question asked the respondent to expand on why the individual answered as he or she did. The conversion of closed-ended quantitative questions to open-ended questions allowed respondents to clarify the reasons behind the answers given in the Eurobarometer survey. Individuals could elaborate on the questions and themes that they found most important (Emerson, 2001; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Weiss, 1994). The questions then moved through key themes: how people viewed themselves, how they viewed their government, how they viewed the other government, and, finally, how they viewed people living on the other side of the border. The interviews ended with a more neutral series of questions and the gathering of basic demographic information.

By using the same questions as the Eurobarometer study, I could gauge whether the sample regional population in this study had views that were similar to or different from other citizens in the country. Converting them to open-ended questions allowed individuals to describe in detail how they viewed their identity and the “other,” which might not have been possible using a quantitative technique (Weiss, 1994). The study helped to shed light on the multiple perspectives within the community.

### Selection of Interviewees

Two sampling techniques were used in this study: the judgment and snowball techniques. Judgment sampling targeted specific individuals who were thought to have the most knowledge to answer the questions. Most individuals identified through the judgment sampling technique were contacts I established in prior visits to the region: in 1998-2000 as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bulgaria, in 2002 while working for a USAID contractor in Macedonia, and in 2011 while conducting pre-dissertation research. With

the snowball technique, I asked the individuals I interviewed to recommend other people to interview (Weiss, 1994). The snowball sampling technique was used mainly with contacts established during the cross-border conference in Kriva Palanka (2013). Several contacts made during the conference, as well as my hosts during the research, recommended that I interview other people they felt were key actors in the community. Combined, these two techniques provided a wide sample of people from many different social circles throughout each city.

In selecting interviewees, I also tried to match basic demographic variables such as age, gender, profession, income level, and level of mobility across borders. For example, some of the professions targeted were teachers, cross-border program managers, cultural directors, and religious leaders, all of whom are thought to cross the border frequently. I also selected older residents who would remember the border during the Cold War and younger individuals who were born after 1991. Where the individual lived within the city was also important, as the city outskirts have a more rural character than the urban centers and might have different perspectives.

The study did not sample foreign residents who lived in the city, transient individuals (who live outside the two cities but conduct work in the region) or minorities defined as composing less than 25% of the population. The focus was on the Slavic population.

### Conducting the Interview

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form authorizing the interview and the use of a voice recorder and granting (or denying) permission to use their names. I then gave an overview of the project and allowed participants to ask their own questions prior to answering the interview questions. All questions were then asked in the language the interviewee preferred—either the local language or English. For each interview, I solicited responses using the same structured set of open-ended questions. Individuals were provided a set of questions, written out in either Bulgarian or Macedonian. For some questions, I used additional cards to help

guide the interviewees' responses. For example, one of the questions asked, "Would you be in favor of or against Macedonia becoming part of the European Union in the future?" The card for this question gave the following choices: "For," "Against," and "Don't Know." Participants could select one answer from the card before being asked to explain their choice.

The interviews were taped using a USB microphone voice recorder. During the interview, I translated the responses (if necessary) and transcribed them onto a data sheet using a computer<sup>39</sup>. In one interview, the respondent felt uncomfortable until the computer was turned off. In that instance, I jotted notes and used the voice recorder to obtain the information. Most people did not realize, even though I showed them, that the USB key was the microphone voice recorder, since this technology is new to the region. This provided an advantage as the interviews were recorded without the presence of an intrusive device, such as a bulky tape recorder<sup>40</sup>. After each interview, on the same day, I added observational notes about the setting, how the participant expressed feelings, and how each contact was selected to become a participant. To ensure confidentiality, a sequential number was assigned to each respondent; the name was recorded on a separate document and secured with the consent forms in a different location.

#### ***4.2 Comparable Interview Sample Results***

In the field research, I attempted to use a matched pair of responses from interviews solicited from each side of the border. Twenty-five formal interviews were conducted in Kyustendil, and twenty-six formal interviews took place in Kriva Palanka. One of the interviews conducted in Kriva Palanka appeared to be with a transient individual, a Bulgarian visiting Kriva Palanka, so I did not use his response and conducted a substitute interview. In the end, I analyzed twenty-five interviews from the Macedonian sample.

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<sup>39</sup> If the interview was conducted in English, I made some grammatical corrections for the sake of clarity as I transcribed the responses.

<sup>40</sup> One person asked to use his own tape recorder, so that he too could have a record of the interview.

### *Gender and Language*

Nineteen interviews were conducted in Bulgarian, nine interviews were conducted in Macedonian, and twenty-two interviews were conducted in English (one of the twenty-two also included questions in French). There were seventeen interviews with Bulgarian males and eight with Bulgarian females. Of the Macedonian interviews, fourteen were with men and eleven were with women (see Table 2).

	Language of the Interview		Gender of the Respondent	
	Local	English	Male	Female
<b>Bulgarian Interviews</b>	19	6	17	8
<b>Macedonian Interviews</b>	9	16*	14	11

(Table 2: Gender and Language of Interviewees. \*One person chose to be interviewed in both English and French.)

### *Matched Professions*

There were fourteen intentionally matched professions and possibly two unintentionally matched professions (see Table 3). For example, the Bulgarian priest (#6) is also a recognized artist. Two separate interviews were conducted in Macedonia with a priest (#6) and an artist (#15); therefore, this one Bulgarian interviewee could be considered as matching two separate Macedonian participants. Since a religious professional had been pre-selected as an important match, that profession was considered the match pair, while the match involving artists occurred by happenstance and was an unintentional match.

	Bulgarian	Macedonian	Match Pair
1	Shop owner	Bar owner	Match
2	Mine worker	Mine worker	Match
3	Stay-at-home mom	Stay-at-home mom	Match
4	Teacher	Teacher	Match
5	Retired	Retired	Match
6	Priest/Artist (same as MK #15)*	Priest	Match
7	Cross-border administrator	Cross-border program officer	Match
8	Public relations administrator	Public relations administrator	Match

9	Journalist	Journalist	Match
10	Cultural director	Cultural director	Match
11	Director of tourism	Director of tourism	Match
12	Unemployed	Unemployed	Match
13	Museum director	Museum director	Match
14	Historian - archivist	Historian - philosopher	Match
15	Freelance publisher/town activist	Teacher/town activist	Possible match
16	Public administrator - purchaser	Artist*	Possible match
17	Construction engineer	Worker in orphanage	
18	Construction engineer	Kindergarten teacher	
19	Auto mechanic	Social worker	
20	Doctor	French teacher	
21	Border custom agent	Archeologist	
22	Financial manager	Student	
23	Massage therapist	Teacher	
24	Purchaser for US firm	Journalist	
25	Business owner/translator	Administrative assistant	

(Table 3: Professions of Interviewees. \*Bulgarian #6 and Macedonian #16 are matched professions - artists)

### *Knowledge of Other Countries*

Although not asked, people in general seemed very aware of current events around Europe and the world. Television and newspapers were easily available and accessible in both countries. All Bulgarians interviewed had internet connections in their houses or at work. Twenty-three of the twenty-five Macedonians had internet access; only two older respondents did not have access to the internet.

Most Bulgarians chose not to travel to Macedonia regularly (see Table 4). Only eight Bulgarian respondents said they crossed the border into Macedonia on a monthly basis. Several indicated they went only to eat at the restaurants or that they travelled directly to the capital, Skopje, or to vacation destinations such as Lake Ohrid. Macedonians, on the other hand, tended to travel more frequently to Bulgaria or had



traveled to Bulgaria in the recent past. Their destination was usually the border city, Kyustendil, not the capital or resort destinations. These differences could be due to the economic conditions along the border. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Kyustendil offered more favorable trading conditions, as the economy was weaker in Bulgaria, there were more convenient transportation linking the two cities, and few passport regulations, which made crossing the border easy. Today, fewer buses and taxis cross the border, so most individuals cross by private car. Macedonia offers cheaper prices on food, gas, cigarettes and alcohol, but those crossing the border are limited to the meager selections of stores in Kriva Palanka unless they drive farther into the country to larger cities. Kyustendil, on the other hand, offers a larger and better selection of stores, with several Western European brand-name stores located within the city. Visitors find it unnecessary to travel farther into the country to have a wide selection of goods.

Travel to the Other Country	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Rarely/Never	Total Interviews
Bulgarian Interviews	0	8	6	11	25
Macedonian Interviews	1	11	10	3	25

(Table 4: The Number of Times Interviewees Traveled to the Other Country in the Study Area)

As for traveling abroad, Bulgarians can more easily travel to other parts of Europe than their Macedonian neighbors because they are members of the E.U. (see Table 5). Among Bulgarians, the most popular destinations in Europe were Italy, Germany, England and Spain. Several Bulgarians also indicated that they traveled to Greece or Turkey, as these destinations offer a more exotic or “foreign” experience than Macedonia. Macedonians tended to travel to the neighboring countries of Serbia, Montenegro (or other ex-Yugoslav countries) and Greece, since it is more difficult and more expensive for non-European Union members to enter and visit other parts of the E.U. A couple of Macedonians indicated they had traveled to Germany, the UK and even the United States with special invitations from E.U. organizations (to attend E.U. transition training or, in the case of the United States, to receive an award from an educational foundation). Many Macedonians felt nostalgia for the Yugoslav period when

they had more freedom and opportunity to travel abroad; they felt they no longer had that advantage. Overall, with Bulgaria being in the European Union, people from Kyustendil had more one-on-one exposure to people living abroad, often family and friends who currently live abroad, than did Macedonians living in Kriva Palanka. (See Appendix A for further demographic information.)

Travel Abroad	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Rarely/Never	Total Interviews
Bulgarian interviews	0	2	13	10	25
Macedonian interviews	0	3	14	8	25

(Table 5: The Number of Times Interviewees Traveled Abroad outside the Study Area).

### 4.3 Ethical Considerations

#### *Consent*

Before the interviews began, participants were advised of the potential consequences of using their name, since in such a small region people might know one another. Even though forty-three individuals gave permission to use their names, I have since reconsidered and decided against the use of *all* names in order to prevent possible repercussions over the delicate subject matter of this study.

#### *Power Relations*

Throughout the fieldwork process, I was constantly aware of my outsider relationship, as a foreigner, with the participants. This relationship proved to be a positive factor in some cases, in that people did not perceive that I had any personal bias towards one country over the other (Hristov, 2009). However, as an American researcher, I was aware I might have elicited different responses than if I were from the region, or even from Russia, Europe, or a country outside Europe. One individual who refused to be interviewed openly commented to his colleagues that I was an American spy working along the border. In all cases, I reassured possible interviewees and stressed that I was a student trying to learn as an unbiased person. I emphasized that they, not I, held the answers.

With four people, the ones most willing to talk, I was able to delve more deeply into the topic of national identity and asked additional questions after the formal interview. In these informal interviews, I presented the views of those on the other side of the border (playing the devil's advocate) to discover how individuals would respond to the way those on other side presented themselves. There was not much change in the answers, as the respondents maintained their strong opinions.

### *Trust Building*

One of the most challenging aspects of this research was developing and maintaining a sympathetic partnership with each respondent (Weiss, 1994). This required shifting positions on each side of the border to reassure the interviewees and support their ideas and beliefs through my reactions. If they were strongly pro-Macedonian or pro-Bulgarian, my reaction needed to mimic their answers to make them feel at ease. This may have encouraged the interviewees to speak more freely than they normally would have. As the interviewer, I found it emotionally challenging and exhausting to switch positions. Then, when analyzing the results, I had to reframe my position to that of the neutral outsider.

During the interviews, it was also important to mimic people's body language and attitude. If it appeared that the participant was divulging an important fact or feeling, I would lean in, as if listening to a secret. If they smiled or tried to make a joke, I laughed, even if I disagreed with the content of their comments. The aim was to make people feel at ease and keep the conversation as natural as possible.

One of the main goals of the site visits, which lasted between four days and two weeks, was to create and expand networks. This required being seen in public, conducting daily routines and participating in social events. It was important to maintain a presence in the lives of community members so that they would perceive me as a regular, responsible individual.

An unexpected question from both Bulgarians and Macedonians also helped with trust building. In both communities, people asked where I was from, noting that

they had observed some Slavic physical features and wanted to know the origins of my family roots. After I disclosed that my father's side of the family arrived in the United States from either Lithuania or Ukraine, most participants felt an automatic connection and often said I was "one of them," meaning their Slavic sister. This greatly improved trust and communication.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

Shortly after the fieldwork was completed, I played each interview voice recording and corrected any mis-transcriptions. After this review, I determined that four Macedonian interviews and three Bulgarian interviews needed to be professionally transcribed and translated, as those responses appeared to contain information that was difficult to translate. Certified translators were selected from regions outside the case study area, from each country's capital. The voice-recording files sent to the translators were identified only by numbers, not names, in order to ensure that none of informants' information would be compromised<sup>41</sup>. After receiving the professionally transcribed translations, I replayed each interview voice recording to double-check accuracy and, in part, to learn from the translators.

After all the interviews were transcribed and translated, I highlighted important phrases in each interview. With several interviews, it became apparent that the responses were repetitive and patterns could quickly be drawn, meaning that I had reached a point of data saturation. The quantitative results and the demographic information were also tabulated and placed in a separate document.

As part of the consolidation and coding phase, the answers were moved into broad categories under each question. Each question was then tabulated and summarized. Significant quotations remained intact and important observations were highlighted. In the last step, I compared the answers on the two countries' response sheets question by question in order to understand the similarities and differences between the answers.

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<sup>41</sup> I also enlisted the help of a language instructor to understand certain phrases, which often turned out to be slang.

#### **4.5 Limitations, Biases and Advantages**

During the study, I was conscious of several limitations and potential biases. First, I was aware that being raised in the United States might introduce bias, since I had a different cultural background than my respondents. I asked many questions when I did not understand or wanted to interpret a situation that seemed foreign to me. This helped me to avoid some potential misunderstandings.

Second, because I had been a Peace Corps Volunteer to Kyustendil in the 1990s and was an American Research Center Fellow based in Sofia during the time of the study, I was conscious that I might be more attached to the Bulgarian perspective. At the same time, I also felt I might hold a stronger attachment to the Macedonian perspective, since Macedonians are not in the European Union; therefore, they are in an economically weaker position and I could consider them “underdogs.” My training as a conflict mediator taught me that part of my responsibility as a facilitator is to level power differences between the parties. I realized that this background might lead me to “support” the “underdog” as a way to level the differences in the region. Fully recognizing these biases, I tried to maintain a neutral stance and to listen to the conversations from both sides as an outside participant.

One significant challenge was the process of translating and transcribing the information during the interview, while mentally noting expressions and other information such as the setting and the interviewee’s attitude. This limited opportunities for the interviewees to expand on their responses or for me to ask follow-up questions. On the other hand, this limitation also proved to be an advantage as it did help to ensure that all interviews were conducted uniformly.

#### **4.6 Quality of Research Design: Validity and Reliability**

Throughout the research design, data collection and analysis, the goal was to obtain authentic results that accurately represent individuals’ viewpoints—results that would be accepted by the scientific community.

Validity refers to whether the research “truly measures that which it was intended to measure” (Joppe, 2000, p. 1, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 599). There are two main types of validity. External validity refers to whether or not the study’s findings can be generalized (Yin, 2009). The cross-case analysis technique, in which the results from Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka were analyzed separately before being compared to each other, allowed some generalizations to develop. Internal validity refers to whether the conclusions that have been drawn are correct, or whether there are other possibilities that the researcher should have considered (Yin, 2009). Since the study was conducted over a three-month period, I became familiar with the individuals’ perspectives and could corroborate their responses during the interviews with those observed outside of the interview.

“External reliability addresses the issue of whether independent researchers would discover the same phenomena or generate the same constructs in the same or similar settings. Internal reliability refers to the degree to which other researchers, given a set of previously generated constructs, would match them with data in the same way as did the original researcher” (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, p. 32). Realizing that no two researchers would approach a study in exactly the same manner, and that individuals are not static and therefore no study can be truly replicated regardless of any efforts to control the experiment, I nevertheless attempted to avoid any ambiguity or randomness in the outcomes by controlling the interview and analysis process (*ibid*). The interview set contained 22 questions, which I asked each individual in a structured manner using an interview protocol (see Appendix B for the interview questions in the protocol). Some of the questions seemed repetitive, but they were intended to reveal different aspects of the way individuals viewed the European Union, their nationalities, and their regional identities. Analysis involved coding the responses, determining the spatial level (regional, national, or supranational), and noting whether the comment was about an individual or the entire population in general. During the coding, some responses could be considered outliers; I specifically determined if the comment was an outlier or if the individual was an outlier. Throughout the entire process, from creating the questions to

analyzing the results, I engaged in constant reflection to make sure that the methods were aimed at answering the research question.

## Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

One Saturday morning in late September, a group of schoolchildren and a handful of adult escorts took a chartered bus from Kriva Palanka over the border. Waiting on the other side in Kyustendil were Bulgarian schoolchildren who had been chosen to participate in European Cooperation Day. European Cooperation Day is an annual event bringing together people from E.U. member-states and neighboring countries for cultural exchanges.<sup>42</sup> For most of the morning and into the early afternoon, the children took turns demonstrating games that their grandparents had taught them, wearing the clothes that had been passed on to them by their parents and grandparents. Some of the games were universal: hopscotch, cat’s cradle, four square, crack-the-whip, and tug-of-war, while other games seemed local or regional, such as the ring dance to the song “Makedonsko Devojce” (“Macedonian Girl”), a popular song on both sides of the border.



(Photo 5: Bulgarian children dancing a ring dance to Macedonian Girl song)

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<sup>42</sup> INTERACT, a European program dedicated to organizing and promoting cooperation between E.U. members and neighboring countries, introduced and financed this European Cooperation Day event, but the national and local governments organized the day’s activities (INTERACT, n.d.).





(Photo 6: Macedonian children playing games)

After the games, the students changed back into their daily street clothes and connected with each other more informally. For many Macedonian students, it was the first time they had crossed the border and interacted with their regional peers. What did they learn about their peers on the other side of the border? They saw children wearing similar clothes, using similar words, and learning similar traditional games.

This chapter presents and analyzes the views of the participants in this study, to see how they view the other side of the border, what it means to live in this region, and how the European Union and national narratives change this perception. First, I present the quantitative results of questions asked during the interview. These questions were taken from the 2008 Eurobarometer survey, and the results from both surveys will be compared to show whether or not people in the region have similar opinions as their counterparts across the border.

### **5.1 European Affection, National Sentiment or Local Attachment? A Quantitative Comparison of the 2013 Interviews with the 2008 Eurobarometer Survey**

Several surveys have been conducted in Bulgaria and Macedonia to study the sentiments of individuals from one country regarding people from the other. In a 1999 survey, Bulgarians were asked about the origins of Macedonians: “some three quarters of the respondents considered Macedonians to be of Bulgarian ethnic origin, and the Macedonian language – a mere dialect of Bulgarian” (Karadjov, 2007, p. 29). A more

recent survey, from December 2013, found that half of the 1,050 Bulgarians surveyed think Macedonians are actually Bulgarian (Focus Information Agency, 2014). The researchers found that “66.5% of the respondents think that the biggest arguments between the two countries are about the historical heritage” (*ibid*).

In January 2014, the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation and the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” conducted a survey to determine whether Macedonians thought Bulgarians supported their views. The researchers found that “87.5% of respondents expect Bulgaria to support Macedonia’s integration to the European Union. ... Thirty percent of the respondents think that history is the biggest hindrance for a more enhanced cooperation between the two countries, 21% say [the interpretation of history] is the problem, while 12% say party interests of politicians are to blame” (Independent.mk, 2014). In a separate survey conducted by the same institutes, “[o]ver 70 percent of the respondents said they were against any kind of additional definition of Macedonia's identity and language” (Balkan Insight, 2013).

These surveys show that Bulgarians appear to oppose recognizing Macedonians as a separate ethnos, while Macedonians refuse to compromise or redefine their identity. These views are similar to the positions in official state discourses. Both Bulgarians and Macedonians appear to believe that history is one of the reasons for the ongoing tensions between the two countries.

In 2008, the European Union conducted a survey (Eurobarometer survey<sup>43</sup>) to evaluate economic and living standards within the union and neighboring countries (Papacosta, 2011). Of the 177 questions posed, three questions asked individuals to reflect on their feelings about nationality, their country’s membership in the E.U. and their identities. The results from the three questions are presented below, along with findings from my 2013 research.

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<sup>43</sup> The Bulgarian 2008 Eurobarometer survey had 1,000 respondents (548 women, 452 men), with an age range of 15-86 years. The Macedonian survey had 1,006 respondents (542 women, 464 men), with an age range of 15-87 years (Papacosta, 2011).

Eurobarometer question QB1 was directed only to Bulgarians, since their country is a member of the European Union in 2008 and Macedonian is not:

Eurobarometer Question QB1 (Bulgaria only): “I would like you to think about the idea of geographical identity. Different people think of this in different ways. People might think of themselves as being European, (NATIONALITY) or from a specific region to different extents. Some people say that with globalisation, people are becoming closer to each other as ‘citizens of the world’. Thinking about this, to what extent do you personally feel you are...European, Bulgarian, inhabitant of your region, inhabitant of the world”

For each of these four spatial levels (European, national, regional, or global), the respondent was given five possible answer choices: *to a great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all* or *I don’t know*. To keep this research question focused only on nationality and the perception of the neighboring country, the 2013 study dropped the question relating to the extent one feels about being “an inhabitant of the world.” As a non-E.U. member, Macedonia was excluded from this question in the Eurobarometer survey. The 2013 interviews included an additional question: Bulgarians were asked to what extent they felt “Macedonian.” Tables 6-8 present the results from the 2008 Eurobarometer survey and the 2013 interviews.

<b>Percent Feeling of Belonging</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not Really</b>	<b>Not at All</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
European	0.24	0.37	0.22	0.16	0.01
Bulgarian	0.83	0.13	0.03	0.01	0
Regional Inhabitant	0.87	0.11	0.01	0.01	0.01

(Table 6: Comparative Percentage of Ethnic Affinities from the 2008 Eurobarometer Results for Bulgaria.)

<b>Percent Feeling of Belonging</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Not Really</b>	<b>Not at All</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
European	0.52	0.32	0.16	0	0
Bulgarian	0.96	0.04	0	0	0
Macedonian	0	0.04	0.12	0.68	0.12
Regional Inhabitant	0.80	0.12	0.04	0	0.04

(Table 7: Comparative Percentage of Ethnic Affinities from the 2013 Results for Kyustendil, Bulgaria.)

Percent Feeling of Belonging	Great Extent	Somewhat	Not Really	Not at All	Don't Know
European	0.56	0.40	0.04	0	0
Bulgarian	0	0.04	0.12	0.80	0.04
Macedonian	0.92	0.08	0	0	0
Regional Inhabitant	0.72	0.16	0.08	0	0.04

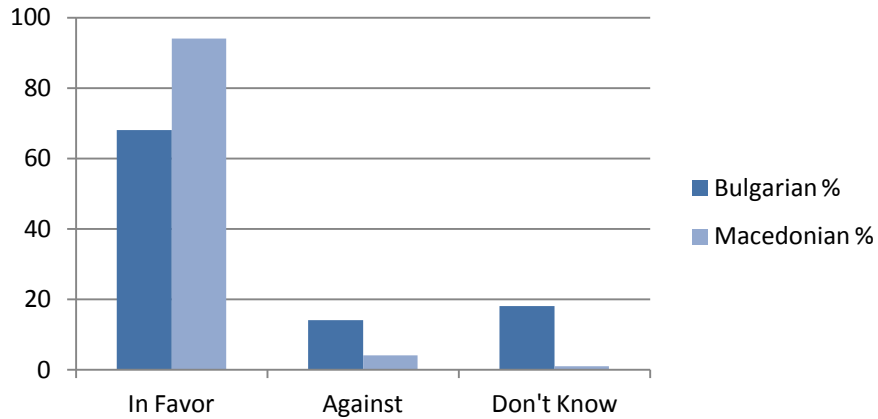
(Table 8: Comparative Percentage of Ethnic Affinities from the 2013 Results for Kriva Palanka, Macedonia.)

The 2008 and 2013 survey results show that Bulgarians maintain their strong feelings of belonging to their nationality and of being inhabitants of their region. The 2008 survey was vague on what regions the respondents were referring to: the respondent's part of Bulgaria, the ethnic region, or the entire Balkan Peninsula. The 2013 survey shows that the feeling of being a regional inhabitant was stronger in Kyustendil than in Kriva Palanka. Overall, the feeling of being European does not appear to be as strong as the feelings of being Bulgarian or of being an inhabitant of the region. Bulgaria's relatively brief tenure as a member of the E.U. (it joined in 2007) could affect Bulgarians' sense of affiliation with the other Europeans, as they might feel they have not yet gained the full benefits of being in the European Union. Since Macedonians were not asked this question during the 2008 Eurobarometer survey, the results from the 2013 interviews cannot be compared with the 2008 Macedonian sentiments. The 2013 results show that individuals in these two border cities differ only in their strong attachment to their own national identity and their inverse feeling of attachment to the other nationality.

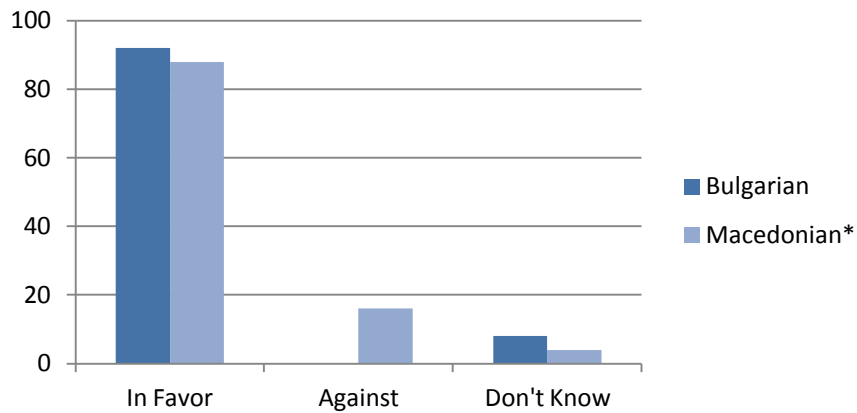
Eurobarometer question QA44 asked:

For each of the following countries and territories, would you be in favor or against it becoming part of the European Union in the future?

For each country or territory, the respondent had three answer options: *in favor*, *against* or *I don't know*. Twelve countries were listed, including other Balkan countries and E.U. candidate countries; Macedonia was number five on the list. At least 68% of the Bulgarian responses were in favor of Macedonia becoming a part of the European Union, compared to 94% in favor by Macedonians (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1: The 2008 Eurobarometer Results Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians in Favor of or against Macedonia Becoming an E.U. Member.)



(Figure 2: The 2013 Study Question Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians in Favor of or against Macedonia Becoming an E.U. Member. Two Macedonian respondents chose to answer “both for and against becoming members”.)

In the 2013 survey, Bulgarians were more in favor (92%) of their neighboring states becoming a part of the European Union than were Macedonians (88%; see Figure 2). Both the 2008 Eurobarometer study and the 2013 survey interviews indicate strong desire on both sides of the border for Macedonia to become a part of the European Union.

Finally, Eurobarometer question QA46 asked whether the stability of the region would change if the Western Balkans joined the European Union:

“Would you agree or disagree with the following statement: If the countries and territories of the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia and Albania) join the European Union, this will help to stabilize that part of Europe.”

Individuals could respond by choosing one of five answers: *strongly agree*, *tend to agree*, *tend to disagree*, *strongly disagree* or *I don't know*. The results are presented in Figures 3 and 4.



(Figure 3: The 2008 Eurobarometer Question Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians Who Believe That If the Western Balkans Joined the E.U. It Would Bring Stability.)



(Figure 4: The 2013 Study Question Showing the Percentage of Bulgarians and Macedonians Who Believe That If the Western Balkans Joined the E.U. It Would Bring Stability.)

In 2013, the responses of participants in the two case study cities were similar to the 2008 Eurobarometer results. Of the interviewees from Kyustendil, 60% agreed, to a certain extent, that E.U. membership would stabilize the region. More (88%) of the

respondents in Kriva Palanka agreed, possibly due to Macedonians having a stronger attachment to people in other former Yugoslav republics (now known as the Western Balkans).

In comparing these three Eurobarometer question results to those obtained in the 2013 study, we find that individuals living along the border were more likely to agree with the citizens from their respective countries, rather than with individuals living on the other side of the border. The 2013 interviews also indicate that individuals did not feel an attachment to the identity on the other side of the border, but they did feel attachment to their own respective national identities. The regional identity was more strongly felt in Kyustendil than in Kriva Palanka. The European identity, while positively accepted, was not as strongly accepted as the national identity. These quantitative responses indicate that the nation-state has a stronger influence than the European Union on an individual's identity.

## **5.2 Loyalties, Suspicion and Plain Distrust along the Border: Qualitative Results from the 2013 Study**

The peoples of Europe, in creating an ever closer union among them, are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values.... The Union contributes to the preservation and to the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional and local levels; it seeks to promote balanced and sustainable development and ensures free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, and the freedom of establishment.

(The Preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>44</sup>)

The E.U. member states recognize The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union as the main document that lays out the framework of rights and values for individuals who reside within the European Union. These rights secure the diversity of national identities within the union and at the same time coalesce members around

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<sup>44</sup> The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission (2000). Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Preamble, p. 8.

shared values of “human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law” (The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, 2000, p. 8). Therefore, each member country has an interest in promoting the values of being a European Union member and protecting their own national identities. The question remains: how do individuals living along the border who are exposed to the European narrative as well as their national narrative consider their identity? This section will present the results using the Smith’s themes (territory, history, common bond, administrative and legal rights) presented in the theory section.

### **1. Territory**

Territory, the first term in Smith’s definition of nation, is one of a nation’s most basic features (1992). Eli of Kriva Palanka vividly described her first time crossing the border as a little girl:

The first time I crossed the border, I was very scared. I was very young, and the border at the time was closed. My family was going to visit [extended] family in Serbia, and due to the geography, it was easier to cross into Bulgaria and then into Serbia rather than going over the mountain pass. I remember sitting in the back of the car, and my parents informed me that the BORDER was coming and to be quiet and sit still. All my life I’d heard adults talk about the border with fear and dread. I sat so nervous and squeezed my knuckles until they were turning white. After crossing onto the other side, I looked out the window and I saw white houses with chushki [red peppers] drying and I thought these are the same houses as in Kriva Palanka and the people are doing the same thing, drying peppers – on both sides of the border.

Eli’s description of the border during the 1980s recalls Lofgren’s observation that borders have the ability to cause anxiety and fear when the “other” is unknown. In this case, the two governments were successful in separating the citizens and controlling their perceptions of the “other.” Only when Eli crossed the border did she realize that individuals in the region have similar daily routines, in this case drying peppers.

Twenty-five years later, the border regulations have become more lenient; they allow individuals to cross, if they wish, for a morning shopping spree. I traveled with a Macedonian family on one such outing. As we approached the border, their pre-teen



daughter slouched down in the back seat. She pulled out a compact mirror, opened it and casually started inspecting her face, “How long are we going to be here?” she asked her father. “Not long,” he replied, giving her his cell phone, which was loaded with games, in an attempt to entertain her. The process took less than twenty minutes that morning as we passed through the Macedonian checkpoint, then on to the Bulgarian side. This young girl’s main concern was that the guards might take too much of her time, not a fear of the unknown on the other side. The mystery of the “other” was not apparent in this girl’s expression. When I asked her thoughts about Bulgarians, she said that they “spoke funny” (i.e., used a different dialect).

Other than Eli’s story and my own observation of a pre-teen crossing the border, people rarely spoke of territory in terms of physical locales. However, territory, according to Smith, also helps to define who is a member of the nation and who is a foreigner. This section presents the findings according to how individuals view the other as a foreigner.

Both Bulgarians and Macedonians felt a strong connection to their national identity (over 90% felt to a great extent a connection with their national identity). Many Bulgarians had no problem saying that they were ethnically Macedonian, and strongly indicated that they felt they belonged to the Bulgarian nation. To be Macedonian, in their view, meant to be citizens of the Bulgarian geographic region of Macedonia. One man explained the relationship as follows: “Bulgaria is divided into several smaller ethnic groups, like Shoppi, like Balkanji, Dubrajontsi, but these are smaller ethnic communities. As a whole, I ethnically belong to Bulgaria. As a region we are not especially [identified]. We are close to Shoppi, but not exactly.” I asked, “Is this region considered Macedonia?” He replied, “Macedonia is a geographical name to the region, [here] is considered some part of North Macedonia. But it is a geographic region, like Thrace and Dobradja.” For an outsider, trying to understand these groupings can be quite confusing. In the past, Bulgaria was composed of three geographic cultural areas. These cultural areas were part of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Just as their national government has

taught them, Bulgarians choose to recognize the Bulgar ethnic roots over their cultural (Slavic, Macedonian or Thracian<sup>45</sup>) roots.

Asked whether he felt Macedonian, another Bulgarian responded with a rhetorical question: “Why wouldn’t I be Macedonian given the fact that the border runs through here? I think that Macedonia is a geographical area, not a country, not a nationality. This is why I think of myself as Macedonian to a certain extent. I don’t see a difference when I go to Macedonia, when I go to Kriva Palanka, I don’t see a difference.” From his perspective, to be Macedonian is to belong to the regional group of Bulgaria. He chooses to recognize his Bulgarian nationality over the local Macedonian identity of the region. Since his Bulgarian identity is more important to him, he does not accept the idea that Macedonians in the territory of Macedonia could choose a Macedonian identity over a Bulgarian one. In this sense, the Bulgarian government has successfully created a “seamless, organic cultural unit” through the reiteration of “one” ethnicity (Smith, 1992). The idea of being Macedonian is in reference to the Bulgarian government’s historical claims of occupancy and lost territory.

On the other side of the border, in Kriva Palanka, I received responses from Macedonians who also identified themselves as Macedonian, but most did not recognize a Bulgarian identity within themselves. One man told me, “I can never feel Bulgarian. I don’t know why. I cannot explain it completely. To someone who’s watching from a third perspective it might sound funny [for] us to be so stubborn on certain issues. We are similar, but we are different too. I do not see or have anything Bulgarian in me. On the contrary, I see a lot of Macedonians just like the people on the other side of the border, but long years have passed and they had to accept the feeling of being Bulgarian. We are talking decades and decades here. That is why we have similarities. However, if you compare us with other people from Eastern Bulgaria or the ones living by the Turkish border, we most certainly will not have so many similarities. To summarize, we are Bulgarians to the same extent that they are Macedonians in Pirinska Macedonia.” For this man, to be Macedonian is to recognize his constructed

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<sup>45</sup>At other points in recent history, the Slavic and Thracian roots have been popularized, but not as strongly as the Bulgar identity.

Macedonian national identity, believe in a Macedonian ethnicity, and disregard any possible Bulgar ethnic roots.

In general, both Bulgarians and Macedonians recognize that they belong to a similar cross-border population. However, there are two perspectives. Bulgarians see Macedonia as a geographic, cultural and ethnic region which is a part of Bulgaria. Macedonians, on the other hand, do not see it that way. They see Macedonia as being an ethnic region as well as their nationality. Where did this difference in perception originate? Is it solely national governments that projected their ideals on the regional population in a concerted effort to standardize their populations?

One Bulgarian who works on cross-border projects told me that “[t]he border between Bulgaria and Macedonia divides a region that is very close. We are only 25-30 km so it is normal for us to feel very close. The mountain Ossogovo stands between the two countries, on one side live Bulgarians and on the other Macedonians. For several years we have been a part of the same territory and for that reason we feel very close to each other.” For this Bulgarian, the day-to-day experience in which he sees similarities, not differences, reinforces the government narrative of the two sides having the same population.

On the other side of the border, a Macedonian who also works on cross-border projects gave a slightly different perspective: “We have lots of trans-border projects from the two municipalities. They are so close; they are near to us in proximity. We have many similarities with people on the other side, because of the fusion of cultures. But there are only some similarities; we are not the same. We are different from the others.... We were Ottoman slaves for five centuries, which gave us similar food and words, but we have our own unique characteristics – language, church and everything.” For this individual, Macedonians and Bulgarians prior to the Ottoman Empire were two different ethnic groups. The common characteristics that they share today are due to influences of the Ottoman Empire that were assimilated into everyday life over the course of five centuries. Bulgarians and Macedonians say they are close due to proximity, but the point of contention is how they, or the government narrative, frames

history—whether they have a continuous shared history despite the current political situation, or share only a portion of history.

As a supranational institution, the European Union has provided narratives that have allowed some individuals to start thinking about ways to get out of the current dilemmas of viewing one versus two ethnic national identities. This requires individuals not to think of the past but to see what is happening today and imagine what will happen in the future. One Bulgarian said, “Macedonians, yes, they can have that feeling [of a Macedonian identity].... Officially, they now need to feel that they are Macedonian. It is not good for people to think in the past, it is important to learn to be tolerant, and think of others.... Who is Bulgarian? Who is Macedonian? We need to look ahead.” One Macedonian said she looks forward to Macedonia’s acceptance into the European Union: “I have nothing against Bulgarians. I cannot identify myself as Bulgarian unless we both feel European. If one day we are a member of Europe, then I can accept that we feel the same, as Europeans.” These few individuals accept that currently Macedonia has a separate national identity from Bulgaria’s, and that someday those on both sides of the border may feel more European than either Bulgarian or Macedonian. Individuals who choose to recognize today’s situation often did not talk about a regional identity, unless it was to imagine one that would be created in the future.

### **Discussion**

Territory is a key component of Smith’s definition of nation. Both Bulgarians and Macedonians are strongly shaped by their political narratives. Of course, the political narratives today have not created the “mysterious other” on the other side of the border as when the child Eli crossed in the 1980s. When discussing a regional identity, individuals on both sides of the border recognize a Macedonian identity. However, this regional identity is defined differently on the two sides of the border.

Bulgarians living along the border tend to see the Macedonian identity as geographic, cultural, and regional, but they tend to consider themselves ethnically Bulgarian. They also tend to perceive the country of Macedonia as a historic part of Bulgaria's geographic cultural region. Therefore, they disagree with Macedonians who want to claim a unique Macedonian identity. Bulgarians, most likely due to Bulgarian governmental narratives aimed at developing an imagined Bulgarian community, tend to ignore their local/regional Macedonian identity and prefer to focus on their Bulgarian nationality.

The placement of national borders has, for many Macedonians, transformed the regional population into foreigners (Berdahl, 1999). For these Macedonians, national identity is constructed on the subjective experience of difference created by the differing national agendas of the two countries over the past century and a half. Macedonians living along the border tend to recognize their Macedonian identity not a Bulgarian identity. The national government encourages its citizens to recognize these Macedonian traits over the other ones as its own way of creating an imagined Macedonian community.

The influence of the European Union, which could conceivably shift the focus from a national identity to a more European one, is not very strong at this time. There was very little acceptance of a multi-cultural region. Individuals said they would continue to maintain their national identity. If and when Macedonia becomes a member of the European Union, Macedonians and Bulgarians might consider accepting both a national and a European identity.

## **2. History**

One evening, I met with two college students at a top-floor café overlooking the Sofia skyline. The first student was a Bulgarian history major, born and raised in Sofia. He had been out of the country only once to vacation in Turkey. The second Bulgarian student had spent two years abroad in the United States and England and hoped to return to England soon to continue his studies in technology. I was curious whether traveling

abroad affected their perspectives on their country and the debates about Macedonia. My first question was whether or not they felt European.

Man 1 – “To a great extent [I feel European], because Bulgaria is a part of Europe, not only geographically, but also historically.... The Thracian civilization was one of the first civilizations here in Europe.”

Man 2 – “I feel a member of the world. Everyone has the right to travel wherever he or she wants. I don’t really accept setting up borders and making separate areas.”

Next, I asked to what extent Bulgarians are Bulgarian, and then to what extent Macedonians are Macedonian. They responded as follows:

Man 1 – “All Bulgarians share a common history and spent all the decades together. That is why they are Bulgarian.... [Macedonians are not Macedonian because] until 1944 they were part of Bulgaria. After 1944, they started to create something new, the so-called Macedonian nation. It was built entirely by the regime in Belgrade to abolish the Bulgarian self-consciousness. The authorities in Skopje strongly disagree with this ... [and want to] prove that they are strongly related to the Macedonians who lived there 2,000 years ago. It is highly unlikely, because so many years have passed and it is hard to have anything in common with the ancient Macedonians.”

Man 2 - “Considering the history [of Bulgaria], it is a bit hard to say. A long time ago, 1,000 years ago, we were a great powerful kingdom. Then there was the Ottoman Empire. So, we mixed our cultures with Bulgarians and Turk[s]. For sure, it changed something [i.e., Bulgarians are not very Bulgarian].... I know many Macedonians. In their opinion, Macedonia is a great country and they accept themselves as being Macedonian. They are the ones who love their country the most in the world. For them, it is the best country, even if it might not be true. They love Macedonia. Therefore, they are Macedonian.”

The experience of travelling the world or staying at home may be one of many factors influencing the two students' perceptions of their historic identities. In this external interview,<sup>46</sup> the first man who chose to stay in Bulgaria and study Bulgarian history clearly agrees with the Bulgarian government's propaganda on ethnic lineage. For this interviewee, Bulgaria's history, starting during the First Bulgarian Kingdom, is proof of his identity, and he does not believe that Macedonians are entitled to make an equal claim to nationhood. The second man, who has had greater exposure overseas, has perhaps contextualized the dispute in more global terms. In this view, the choice of identity is a personal decision, and Macedonians are free to self-proclaim based on how they feel today. Even though he might not agree with their claims, he recognizes Macedonians as they self-identify.

Most individuals along the economically depressed border do not have the same opportunity to travel to Western Europe as these two students. However, many E.U.-sponsored projects such as the European Cooperation Day are specifically targeted to these border cities to encourage cultural exchanges and interaction between the two countries. How do individuals in the study region view their identity based on current and historic claims? This section explores history, the second component of Smith's definition of nation. According to Smith, history is the shared myths of origin that unify a political story (1992). This section will present responses that specifically focus on myths of origin.

I interviewed one Bulgarian man in his living room while his girlfriend prepared a traditional dinner. A Turkish melodrama that was dubbed into Bulgarian played on the television in the background. During the commercial break, he switched to a music channel that played traditional music. In addition to the television and a black leather couch, the living room contained many bookshelves filled with trinkets. On one shelf sat a Bible surrounded by Orthodox icons. Here was a family that surrounded itself with cultural and historic artifacts representing Bulgarian identity. When asked about his

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<sup>46</sup> These interviews are considered external since neither of the men were from the Kyustendil-Kriva Palanka region.

Bulgarian identity, he said, “I was born as a Bulgarian, in [the] land of Bulgaria that has been so for 1300 years and I [am a] proud successor of my ancestors, of my tsars, kings and Huns in the beginning. I am a Bulgarian and my predecessors have been Bulgarian. Given the history and the lands, my origins are Bulgarian. I am proud to be one. Our history, our temper, our folklore, our culture, our cuisine, everything is unique for us as a nation, as our ethnicity.” This young man echoed the sentiments expressed by many in Kyustendil about why they felt Bulgarian: a common memory of proud leaders, as well as a unique culture well embedded in history.

For other Bulgarians, it is not *only* the long Bulgarian history that makes them feel connected to their nationality; it is the fact that the feeling of being Bulgarian has withstood five hundred years of Ottoman rule. “According to me, we have such a long history. Bulgarians have survived on the Balkan Peninsula for more than thirteen centuries. We have been occupied by the Byzantine Empire, and the Ottomans for five hundred years, and still [the Bulgarian identity] survives. We still have our national history, identity, culture. We speak Bulgarian and we have our specific Bulgarian customs rituals, and traditions.” The Bulgarian identity has repeated the national narrative, historic ties and to the belief that this identity has withstood a long period of occupation.

Across the border, many Macedonians shared similar sentiments about their own history and culture, which they see as deeply embedded within the population and many centuries old. I sat at a table in an exhibition hall in the City Museum of Kriva Palanka. During the interview with one of the museum workers, I kept looking at artifacts from the Ottoman Empire and the “struggle” for independence. In one case, a gun and dagger formed a cross that lay over an open Bible. Purportedly, the freedom fighters swore allegiance on the Bible as part of the initiation into the fight for Macedonian independence. If they failed, they would kill themselves using either the gun or the dagger. Like the Bulgarian living room, this room also contained artifacts that were significant to the national identity; in this case, the artifacts evoked the Macedonian struggle for identity. I asked why this man felt Macedonian. He responded,



“When I first woke up as a political being, I woke up as a Macedonian. I didn’t even know that the Bulgarians existed, even though I was here on the border. It was during the time of Yugoslavia.... As a child, I didn’t get very much information about the Bulgarians. Only during the history and geography lessons, but in the mass media they were not very present. Later on when I started to learn things, especially with the internet and the disputes between Bulgarians and Macedonians, I was interested and so I tried to understand the other side and so I read about history. I now can consider Bulgarians as close. But nevertheless, my country is Macedonian, my family is Macedonian, so, I am Macedonian.” For this man, as well as many Macedonians whom I interviewed, the national education systems taught them their history and helped conceptualize a Macedonian identity.

One man described why he felt Macedonian as follows: “[This Macedonian identity] is connected with the revolutionary past with my ancestors and the feeling is [reinforced by] the education that I have received in Macedonia.” Unlike the Bulgarians, who claim the First Bulgarian Kingdom (681 A.D.) as the birth of their nation, most Macedonians were reluctant to pinpoint a specific date. Only a couple of interviewees mentioned a connection with Alexander of Macedonia. Most Macedonians were more likely either to mention that their roots were a part of the indigenous Macedonian population present in the region prior to the Bulgar invasion, or to tie their identity to more recent events that took place during the 19th-century fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The Bulgarians I interviewed had a hard time understanding how Macedonians could claim to have a separate history, different from their own. “In my opinion, Macedonian’s nationality is a little bit confused, because we have a common history with those people who now call themselves Macedonian and try to be different than Bulgarians and try to prove they are a different nation. It is a political problem because their origin is connected with Bulgarians. They try to steal our history, because our history is a common one. [Macedonians now] want to present our history as their history. They can call themselves Macedonians, because they have such a country, but

to me there is no such nationality as Macedonian – like a different identity.” The problem with creating a unified political story with the myth of a common origin, as Smith claims nations do, is that here in the Balkans, there is a shared regional history that extends beyond current borders, and it is difficult for one country to make specific claims to the past. This is how Bulgarians can claim that Macedonians have Bulgarian roots, and vice versa.

Many Macedonians explained why their government was actively trying to redefine its history. “[The Macedonian government has] some campaigns to increase the feelings for Macedonians, you know, *Skopje 2014*. [The government] work[s] on the campaign. They work on historical facts, archeological, ethnicity, trying to find the history of Macedonia. [They are] reasserting our history. When I learned the history twenty-five years ago, we [were told we were] Slavs; now we are learning that we are not. [Today, we are taught] the history before the 7<sup>th</sup> century, before the Slav kings came here. [We are taught about] the territory of the Balkans, about Alexander the Great and the kings before. [The government reinterprets the history] to make a new Macedonian history to [gain recognition of what we believe and know our history to be]. This is the base of the problem we have with Greece. Greece thinks we stole their history, but our government is working to change the history.... Other people gave us the wrong history; we are trying to correct it.”

Another Macedonian explained how he felt the Bulgarian government was responsible for reinterpreting Macedonia’s history: “I think [the Bulgarian government is] building nationalism by financing books, songs and singers and by financing many parts and spheres of everyday life of the [Macedonian] people. They are copying parts of the Macedonian culture and they have ambitions in the region [i.e., to claim it as Bulgarian]. They have had [these ambitions] for many years throughout history, not just now. During World War I and II, [the Bulgarians] occupied this region. They spread their schools and [introduced their] history. They have ambitions and they are not hiding.” In citing Bulgarian ambitions, the interviewee was specifically referring to the beliefs many Macedonians hold that the Bulgarian government is increasingly incorporating uniquely

Macedonian characteristics into the Bulgarian identity in an effort to strengthen its claims that the Macedonian Slavs are really Bulgarians. According to these two Macedonians, both the Bulgarian and Macedonian governments are trying to unify their population through their respective political stories, whether by correcting what others have told them, or by claiming historical events as their own.

One Bulgarian defended the way his government claims that the Macedonian identity is really a regional Bulgarian identity. "A great part of the Macedonian population honestly doesn't understand the Bulgarian position. All of this is a question of the way information is presented because it is information that shapes people's conscience." A Macedonian confirmed the two nations' different views of history: "We and the Bulgarians have gone through different educational systems. Our educational system has given us our beliefs, and likewise in Bulgaria. When a Bulgarian and a Macedonian meet each other, they have that as the starting point. From then on it is up to them to try to [re]solve the conflict, if there is a conflict at all. The Bulgarian government would not have much difficulty making them believe in something they already believe [in]. There are two current [themes]: one that believes the government should help the Macedonian government to become a part of the E.U. without any problems, and then the official policy that the government requires Macedonia to fulfill some steps, blackmail, to enter into the E.U. This doesn't lead us into a good friendship."

With the Macedonian and Bulgarian governments giving their citizens different messages, there is a certain level of distrust when two individuals from the opposite side of the border do meet. One Macedonian offered a solution: to each his own. "As for the [Bulgarian] people, not to generalize or make stereotypes, but I think in their small brain, they always think of us as one of theirs. [They say] 'You don't know [it], but you are ours.' They attack." He pauses. "I might be living in denial. I might be lying to myself all my life. But let me be. Everyone thinks we are a part of them. The Serbs think this territory is theirs; don't get me started on the Greeks; the Bulgarians want us to be one of them. Think what you think. I want them to let me live my life."

Tamminen suggests that one way to redirect disputes of the past is for governments to focus on the present and the future (2004). Indeed, a focus on the future is asserted in the very first line of the Preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000). While the European Union does not suggest giving up national identity, it does ask its members to “*share a peaceful future based on common values*” (*ibid*, emphasis added). How do individuals living along the border feel about the European Union as it relates to their individual history?

On both sides of the border, most people felt that the European Union could not resolve the long disputes between the two countries regarding their history. One Macedonian described the two countries and their differences during the Cold War. “I have an opinion about the border identity, because the history in the past in the region makes us different. You cannot unify everything.... East and West Germany are different than here. Maybe the people [in East and West Germany] can live together and want to live together; maybe here it is different.” This Macedonian and several others did not believe that Macedonian membership in the European Union would help resolve regional differences. In fact, many Macedonians did not see any benefits of belonging to the European Union.

Asked whether or not she wanted Macedonia to join the European Union, one Macedonian woman responded as follows: “I am not against [being a member], but I want it to be asked, what we have to give. If it is our identity, the name, I don’t see the E.U. as a stable body.... The E.U. and its identity are based on someone’s desire for financial stability. *They have no history*. I don’t see a bright future for the E.U. It won’t collapse. The [governments] in the E.U. ... consider themselves to be European. [The people] first consider themselves as French or Spanish (their nationality), then European” (emphasis added). This woman wants Macedonia to develop and strengthen its own national identity, rather than pursuing membership in an institution that she thinks is not viable. This response supports Smith’s claim that national identity will maintain their importance even with a newly constructed E.U. identity.

On the other side of the border within the European Union, individuals were more willing to accept that membership in the European Union also meant feeling European. One young woman expressed a sense of energy and excitement when talking about the European Union. She had a job at the local branch of a French bank, and she has seen many opportunities open up for herself and the region since Bulgaria's entrance into the E.U. "The borders are falling, we have a new history, and for that reason I am European," she exclaimed. The E.U. represents a new outlook and direction that this woman was happy to embrace.

### **Discussion**

History is the second term in Smith's definition of the nation. On both sides of the border, individuals were deeply tied to their histories as presented by their governments. For most Bulgarians, the First Bulgarian Kingdom is when the Bulgarian identity was established. From that time onward, they believe, the Bulgarian identity has continued to survive within the consciousness of the Bulgarian population. In developing a national identity, the Bulgarian government has used this time period to coalesce its population around a specific date (681 A.D.).

The Macedonians I interviewed did not mention a specific unifying date such as 681 A.D. Many Macedonians connected their historic identity to the ancient tribes of the region (prior to the Bulgar invasions), or to the fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire. Because Macedonia has large minority populations, the government might be more leery of claiming a specific date, as doing so would alienate other ethnic groups within the territory.

Despite adamant opposition from neighboring countries (including Bulgaria) that say Macedonia is stealing their history—and, by extension, their identity—many Macedonians accept that the duty of the Macedonian government is to correct the history that was wrongfully given to them. Macedonians do not want other people to define who they are; rather, they want a national government to develop their historic identity for them.

Once again, the European Union has had little effect in resolving disputes between the two nations about their history. Many Macedonians are leery of joining the European Union as they see it is a young institution, does not have history, and might not survive. Bulgarians, as members, are more aware of the potential of the European Union, and believe that the E.U. holds many opportunities for the present and the future of each nation.

### **3. Common Bond**

Smith's third term, common bond, relates to individuals' sentiments about belonging to a group, in this case the region, the nation, and the European Union. The goal of each government is to create an emotionally laden sense of belonging to an "imagined community," the nation (Smith, 1992; Cresswell, 2004). This national solidarity often forms when one recognizes how one differs from the "other." However, some individuals feel a stronger attachment to a regional community than to their national identity.

While living in Sofia, I had the opportunity to interview two women whose parents were from the Macedonian region of Bulgaria. Both women were scholars. The first was a doctoral student studying cultural customs between Bulgaria and Macedonia near the Greek border. Her family is from Petrich, in the South of Bulgaria along the Bulgarian-Greek border; she also has extended family in Strumitsa, Macedonia. I asked whether she considered herself Bulgarian or Macedonian. She said she was Bulgarian, but clarified her assertion as follows: "The local identity, I can call Macedonian. Therefore I can call myself Macedonian; not as a nationality, but as a cultural group. For me, my regional identity is more important than a national identity." She sees advantages in both her national and regional identities.

I wanted to know how this woman viewed Bulgarian and Macedonian identities. She said, "The [Bulgarian] people understand patriotism only as being proud of your 'heroic' history. [Bulgarians] say they are proud to be Bulgarian, but they don't have any communal feelings. Everyone looks after his own interests. That is why there is not a

real society in Bulgaria, at least not one that is self-conscious.... To some degree [Macedonians] really feel themselves as Macedonian, but I am not sure if they know what a 'Macedonian' means. This is something that they are taught to be. They have to identify themselves as Macedonian. Either way, the other countries, Serbia and Bulgaria, will make them who they are." This statement follows Balalovka's second factor of identity, social comparisons, in which individuals are judged by others. This woman describes a relationship in which Macedonians are not equal in power to Serbia and Bulgaria, and therefore will be "shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others" (Taylor, 1994, p. 25).

The second interview was with a professor who has family in Blagoevgrad (in the region of Pirin Macedonia in Southwestern Bulgaria) but was raised in Sofia. She told me she feels one hundred percent Bulgarian and not at all Macedonian. Although she has Macedonian roots, she does not claim a Macedonian identity. In fact, she sees the Macedonian identity as being separate from hers: "For many years, during communism, Macedonia was considered a region [in Bulgaria], Pirin Macedonia, and as a regional identity it has stereotypes, characteristics of being stubborn and hard-headed.... There is a mixture of what is ethnic and what is regional.... Macedonia was considered as a regional identity, but in fact it is a different ethnicity." This was the first time I heard a Bulgarian acknowledge a different Macedonian ethnicity that has become a Bulgarian regional identity.

I asked her to what extent she thought Bulgarians were Bulgarian, and to what extent she thought Macedonians were Macedonian. She replied, "You know Bulgaria has a very long history: 1300 years. There has been a lot of forced and volunteer socializing into that identity and twisting of history. With the fall of communism, I have witnessed history. I see how history has changed. I learned the facts about Bulgaria when I went to the United States and started reading [the history of] Bulgaria by non-Bulgarians. Over here, no one was teaching that the Bulgarians occupied Macedonia [during the world wars], that [Macedonians] didn't like [Bulgarians being] there. Culturally there has been an exploitation of the national identity, of Bulgaria and what it

means to be Bulgarian, a lot of marketing, using this strategy. I wouldn't call Bulgarians chauvinists.... [Bulgarians] don't have a schizophrenic identity. It is coherent."

As for the Macedonians, she definitely thought they had their own identity. "Do I think that there is a Macedonian identity?" she asked rhetorically. "Absolutely, yes. I think that being a modern person, [a] cosmopolitan [person], is to acknowledge the right of the other person to their self-identity. If they want to call themselves Macedonian, they have this right, and if they want to look into history and find the roots of their Macedonian-ness, you have no right to challenge them. In that regard, anything that the Bulgarian government is doing to challenge this Macedonian identity is wrong."

I asked what the Bulgarian government was doing that was wrong. She replied, "[Macedonians] don't look at [the Bulgarian government] favorably. I know there is a lot of propaganda against the Bulgarian government in Macedonia. I know that the insulting things that they write in their newspapers are not unfounded, what they write in their paper is not all lies. I think [Macedonians] have a right to have a negative attitude towards a government that is willing to give passports to anyone who claims they are Bulgarian. So what Bulgaria is doing is stealing the Macedonian population, and it is doing it blatantly and is not apologizing for doing this. And they are not doing anything to help regionally.... Bulgaria is trying to work toward regional (Balkan-wide) security, but it does not help to secure [it] like this [i.e., by giving passports to Macedonians who claim Bulgarian ethnic identity]. It is very contradictory. At least the Macedonian government is not contradictory; it hates us."

Both of these women describe the Macedonian identity as a cultural unit, one similar to that identified by Smith. The first woman finds that her regional/local Macedonian identity within Bulgaria is more important than any feelings she might have toward the Bulgarian national identity. According to her, the Macedonia has developed regionally a strong collective identity. The second woman recognizes the existence of a unique Macedonian identity, which is not in line with the national narrative. How, then, do individuals in the study area view their collective identity?



A large majority of the Bulgarians I interviewed saw Macedonians as being ethnic Bulgarians. They described a familial relationship with individuals on the other side of the border. One man described how he believed Macedonians developed this identity and how he views the connection: “I follow what is being written in the media, about how Macedonians are writing their history, how they are trying to obtain self-confidence and national identity. But this history is written by a small circle of people. They are the people who, I think, are brainwashing the rest.... I have communicated with the regular people...who I think are well-meaning towards Bulgarians. We think of one another as brothers, not even cousins, brothers. I am sure that there is struggle there [in Macedonia] between those who try to make up history, and the ones who don't want to accept it in this way.” For this man, Macedonians are family, part of the Bulgarian family.

Macedonians, on the other hand, did not describe their relationship with Bulgarians in familial terms. “We are not brothers like they say. We are neighbors; we share a border.” This same person later added that the Bulgarians were neighbors from the bad part of town. This negative sentiment towards Bulgarians stemmed largely from the lack of trust he felt when dealing with people in Kyustendil. He told me that the Bulgarian police asked for bribes and storekeepers charged him more for products. He felt that some of his Bulgarian colleagues did not recognize his Macedonian identity, although they would not say so to his face.

Many Bulgarians can accept that there is now a different country called Macedonia; however, they are not as accepting of the idea that Macedonians can choose to recognize a “new” Macedonian identity, unique and different from their own. One Bulgarian man told me, “This identity is very interesting; a newly coined creation from the recent past which has regional varieties and which, thanks to the political circumstances, got a chance to develop as a sustainable identity.... It makes sense for me not to hold such beliefs.”

Most Bulgarians thought of Macedonians as part of their ethnic population – meaning that there was no “them.” “It is not different to be Macedonian, but they are

trying to be different. Nothing against them, but in this region we are all common, but they say they are Macedonian.... I don't think it is right." Another Bulgarian woman described Macedonians in a tone of disappointment and disbelief: "[Macedonians] try to be something different from the others living in the same region. It is not true. It is not normal [to make these claims]. You live with someone, your houses are next to each other, and you do the same things every day, then one day they say they are something different." To this individual, the Macedonian identity seemed to materialize almost overnight, and she does not approve of that.

Several Bulgarians strongly expressed their resentment of this Macedonian identity. "There is no nation like Macedonia. They are Bulgarian people with the wrong ideas. They feel Macedonian because of political words. They are brainwashed." Another Bulgarian has a request: "I would like to ask them to think more to the future of globalization, and not be stuck on our individual Bulgarian identity. They are more categorically thinking about how to prove their national identity." These Bulgarians felt a connection with the residents on the other side of the border; they just could not accept the Macedonian nation-state developing a unique Macedonian identity.

Many Macedonians were aware that some Bulgarians view them as being coerced into accepting a "new" Macedonian identity. "Most of the Bulgarians think of us, Macedonians, as brainwashed Bulgarians. This is not a politically correct view. The Bulgarians are not savages, so they would not say this to your face." These Macedonians developed many doubts and felt much mistrust about how Bulgarians viewed them.

Several Bulgarians gave examples of what they would do when they interacted with Macedonians, which also contributes to an understanding of the lack of trust Macedonians experience. One man described a situation that took place in the mountains above Kriva Palanka. He was working on a project to bring electrical towers to Macedonia and had to meet the general manager from the Macedonian company at a restaurant. "When I worked in Macedonia, the general manager [and I went to the restaurant] to sit and chat. At that time, Dimitar Berbatov (a well-known Bulgarian soccer player) was playing for Manchester United. The [Macedonian] manager was a

very big fan of Manchester United, and I asked him, 'Who was the best soccer player?' and he said Dimitar Berbatov. The manager said [Berbatov's] village is close to the Macedonian border near Strumica; he is [therefore] Macedonian. I just laughed and asked why Bulgaria's capital was in Ohrid. And then he shut up. I stopped arguing. I didn't want a fight or anything. I was very happy inside. I think my capital of Bulgaria [Ohrid] was a much stronger example than his soccer example. Mine is historically black and white." If the Bulgarians in Kyustendil and the Macedonians in Kriva Palanka are brothers and sisters as the Bulgarians believe, then they interact as if they were an older brother/sister and a younger sibling. They tease and provoke, but stop just short of an all-out fight or hurt feelings. One Bulgarian man told me, "Macedonians are like children. Until they grow up, I will treat them like children." The Bulgarians might feel this type of brotherly relationship, but the Macedonians I met would certainly disagree.

Some Macedonians considered these minor acts as provocation against their nationality, an attack on their identity. "Macedonians are a very [unique<sup>47</sup>] population. They do not want to express their feeling about their nationality unless you provoke them. They have a separate feeling that they are different than the others. In their nature their first position is not to say to the others that they are Macedonian and that we are something different from the others. Only in the case when they are attacked [do they say they are different]. So in this period of history when we have problems with our neighbors, the big percentage of Macedonians feel that they are Macedonian.... When you compare the situation during Yugoslavia to that after Yugoslavia you will see a difference in their feelings of being Macedonian." I asked if he felt Macedonians were being attacked now and by whom. "Absolutely.... By Bulgarians and Greeks in the first place, and Serbians and Kosovars." I press further, "What kind of attack?" "This kind of attack is about stealing history, about the name issue, about problems of the church. It is creating a situation. Macedonians feel that Bulgarians are stealing their history; Bulgarians also feel that we are stealing their history, so we are in a confrontation with them."

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<sup>47</sup> The actual word used was "specific."

One woman explains this feeling of being attacked. “When you mention Greece [asking Macedonia to change its name], they [the Greeks] make us connect and feel as one. We are all one, ready to fight for everything to be what you are. That’s the way I see it.” The feeling of not being recognized as having a Macedonian ethnicity and of Macedonia not being treated as an equal is creating a defensive reaction, which Brubaker and Cooper might describe as part of strengthening the collective identity. For their part, many Bulgarians perceive the imagined community that the Macedonians have collectively created as chauvinistic and offensive.

The word “attack” and the phrase “the feeling of being attacked” came up over and over during the interviews with Macedonians, so I asked how this feeling of being attacked developed. “[T]his whole region is Macedonia, Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka. This is Pirinska, Macedonia,” said one woman. “This is what they taught me in school. My history teacher said that we are so small and beautiful and our neighbors like Greece, Albania, and Bulgaria want to grab a piece of us. I learned this for twelve years and it’s scary when you think about it (referring to the neighbors wanting to take over Macedonia).” It is well known that education systems throughout the world spread propaganda to instill national pride. For this Macedonian, as well as others, the education system breeds mistrust of their neighbors.

One Bulgarian shared his ideas on why the Macedonian government would encourage its citizens to believe that they are being attacked: “I’ve noticed that new countries, the ones with new governments [such as Macedonia], act more aggressively. They are pressured to provide arguments supporting their existence. [For Macedonia] this lies at the heart of the problem with Greece. How is Greece supposed to recognize Macedonia with their claim [to the name]? The Greek civilization is connected with Mount Olympus. Philip of Macedon and Alexander of Macedon lived next to Olympus. How is Greece supposed to resign [its] history? If Greece acknowledges Macedonia in the way [Macedonia is asking Greece to do today], it would mean sharing [Greek] culture with Macedonia.” For this Bulgarian, he supports each governments narrative to

create a unique identity based on history, and at the same time denies Macedonians from being able to do the same.

In general, Macedonians were very leery of the neighboring countries, especially their neighbor Bulgaria (and Greece). This, once again, stems from their neighbors' refusal to recognize the Macedonian country and identity. One Macedonian expressed frustration on this point: "We have our own identity, but no one wants to admit it. It is because they do not have much information about us. They don't know our culture and our history. There are so many historical events where we were occupied by the others, and we were in a situation to accept the other languages and assimilate. That's why the others do not accept us."

In the past, Macedonians had genuine feelings of being Yugoslav, which, according to some, conferred a respect in the world that is not given today. One Macedonian compared the feelings he had when Macedonia was a part of Yugoslavia and the feelings he has now. "For 39 years I have recognized myself as a Macedonian. I will say I have mixed feelings about identity. For 23 years, I was a part of Yugoslavia. I still have a feeling for that country, because at the time we were a part of a bigger state. We were recognized as people from Yugoslavia. Now when you travel to foreign countries, people will ask where you from are and you say Macedonia. 'Where is that?' They do not know where it is. Then you have to explain, the Balkan Peninsula near Greece [and] Bulgaria. Then you say you are a part of the old Yugoslavia, everyone knows us, especially older people. We were recognized as a state as a part of Yugoslavia. We had better recognition as a state as a part of Yugoslavia. People respected us more."

Another Macedonian woman also described the difference between now and when Macedonia was a part of Yugoslavia. "I think that now everyone is conscious that we are Macedonian. Maybe in the past, while we were part of the Yugoslavian Republic, maybe then our identity was suppressed, but now we have our own state and I think the government makes an effort to emancipate us in the world. We always felt Macedonian, but now the feeling is stronger. We were scared to show our identity before, because

we are small and other states are stronger than us, so we didn't feel like it was worth it, but now it is different." For this woman, even as part of Yugoslavia, her Macedonian identity was denied.

If this attachment to another community, such as Yugoslavia, is possible, can the European Union provide a similar group identity? On both sides of the border, individuals described their experiences traveling to Western countries and how it made them aware of their European or lack of European identity. A Bulgarian man described how he felt after one such visit: "There is nothing really European in our country. We are in the European Union, but for me to be a part of the European Union is different. We are not at the same mentality as the rest of Europe." One Macedonian described his disappointment that Western European countries failed to recognize Macedonia: "Europe does not like to take members into their big [union]. Many countries in Europe do not recognize our country, such as Britain or France, who decide our destiny. Because of that, I don't feel European."

Still, many Bulgarians' comments about their membership in the European Union related to Bulgaria's history and a feeling that Bulgaria had certain rights, *jus sanguis*, to its membership. "I feel one hundred percent European because geographically Bulgaria belongs to the European Union. It has belonged to Europe politically for several years now, but it has been so culturally and religiously for more than one thousand years. Bulgaria has [always] moved in the direction of European values, such as Christianity. The European values are intertwined on the Balkans in a very interesting way because here we have very tangible Eastern influences stemming from both Russia and Islam, which doesn't make us any less European. I think that when it comes to values, as a collective unit we are closer to the West than to the East.... The Balkans are situated in a transitory zone which mixes Eastern and Western influences to this day."

Several Macedonians also made similar claims. "The Balkans belong to Europe. The European culture is from the Balkans regardless of whether you say it was Macedonia, Greece or ancient Macedonia, or the Roman Empire. We are the cradle of

European culture. Only during the Ottoman Empire were we cut off from Europe; it doesn't mean that we are not European." Individuals who rely on *jus sanguis* arguments to make historic claims to their European identity accept their European identity independent of their national identity. This European identity is not the same civic identity that Agnew envisioned would challenge the national identity.

The possible future acceptance of Macedonia into the European Union allowed some individuals to imagine a Balkan-wide regional identity. One Bulgarian said, "Opposition on the Balkans stems from our governments to a great extent. It hinders people's ability to have a culture of regional identity. Having a regional identity is great, but the layers of meaning and the artificially created problems stand in the way of this kind of identity. The feeling of having a regional identity would be very effective to develop on the Balkans. It would serve as an alternative to ethnic conflict which is not always evident and clearly expressed but is felt to a certain extent."

Several Macedonians also mentioned the possibility of creating a region-wide identity, similar to what they felt when they were part of Yugoslavia. "I feel they [Western Balkan countries] are our former brothers and sisters. We have the same thinking. If they think [the European Union] is good, then it is good for me." However, Macedonians did not include Bulgaria and Romania in their descriptions of a Balkan-wide regional identity. This suggests that while the European Union can help ease tensions in the region between Western Balkan states, it does nothing to help congeal regional cross-border relationships.

I asked a Bulgarian who works on several cross-border projects his thoughts about creating a Balkan-wide identity. He responded, "In order to have regional identity, you have to be educated about the issue. I think that problems arise because of the inferiority complexes of the Balkan countries. The countries are young not in a historical sense but as governments, one hundred years or less.... I mean that Bulgaria wants to be 'Bulgaria the Great'; Serbia wants to be 'Serbia the Great'; Albania, Macedonia.... I am excluding Turkey because, after all, Turkey is a country considerable in size by our European standards. We all want to be 'the Great.' I don't understand why. Perhaps this

is one way to divert people's attention from problems. You wave a flag and there is a problem. Bulgarians say: 'Macedonians are Bulgarian.' Such an action serves all governments involved." According to this Bulgarian, the creation of a regional identity would benefit all countries involved, but it would not be possible because all of the nations act to protect their own interests.

The European Union might be influencing perceptions in the region by allowing some individuals to accept a multicultural region based on the idea of self-recognition and mutual recognition. For instance, one Bulgarian said, "For the past several years [Bulgaria has been] a part of the European Union. The moral mentality, the different ethnic groups that make up the European Union, is part of this group. We now make a part of the group of different countries that think as one." Several Bulgarians were willing to accept Macedonians and their desire for self-identification. One said, "I cannot assign existences. After all, the Macedonian nation exists and they are as Macedonian as they consider themselves to be. Respectively, Bulgarians are as Bulgarian as they think themselves to be." While a few respondents expressed their recognition and tolerance of the other's ability to self-define, this sentiment is not commonly expressed in the two countries or in the Balkans as a whole.

## **Discussion**

Smith's third term relates to the common bonds that individuals feel by virtue of belonging to a group or the nation. Many Bulgarians feel that Macedonia was carved out from part of Bulgaria; therefore, they feel a strong familial attachment to the Macedonians on the other side of the border. Many Bulgarians describe a feeling that they are brothers, that while the younger Macedonian brother is exerting his independence and trying to find his own identity, he will always be part of the family.

Many Macedonians reject a strong attachment with their Bulgarian neighbors, and a couple of them indicated that they have stronger attachment to citizens in ex-Yugoslav countries than to those in Bulgaria. Most Macedonians just want to be recognized as independent. However, Bulgarians' failure to recognize a separate



Macedonian identity infuriates some Macedonians and provokes them to more strongly display their national identity, which in turn deepens the misunderstanding between the two. For many Macedonians, the lack of recognition by other countries and the feeling of being attacked provide a sense of solidarity as they come together as a nation to “struggle” for a unique, recognized identity.

The presence of a European or regional identity based on common bonds was not present in the interviewee responses, unless the European identity was based on certain historic blood rights. Individuals on both sides of the border did express interest in having a regional, more Balkan-wide identity, but they felt that their strong national identities would trump this feeling. No one expressed a belief that the European Union could strengthen the cross-border Macedonian identity; they thought the E.U. could only provide recognition of Macedonia as a separate nation.

#### **4. Administrative and Legal Rights**

This section focuses on Smith’s fourth and fifth term of nation: the legal and administrative rights individuals have in their country and in the European Union. In this section, I examine how the construction of legal and administrative systems (including economic systems) effects the borderland population.

I joined three Bulgarians from Kyustendil on a trip to Skopje to see an art exhibit one mid-week evening. After several hours visiting the museum, touring the city, and talking with Macedonian friends, we returned to Kyustendil. In crossing the Macedonian-Bulgarian border there is a time zone change, so by the time we arrived in Bulgaria, it was well past midnight. We were met at the first village by border police. They asked to search our car, which is customary even though the car is also thoroughly searched at the actual border. The driver popped the trunk. Several minutes later the police asked for our passports and asked us to step out of the car. They demanded to know where our cigarettes and alcohol were hidden. None of us smoked and on that occasion we had not bought any alcohol; it was not the purpose of the trip. For over half

an hour, we were held by the police on the side of the road, waiting to move on. They either believed we were smuggling something into the country or were waiting for a bribe, but we were just trying to get home as we were quite tired. One of the Bulgarians finally asked the police to return our passports so we could go home, and he went so far as to threaten them with a personal call to his friend, the police chief, if they did not let us through. They finally backed down and let us continue home. According to the Bulgarian, if the police suspect cigarette or alcohol smuggling, they do have the right to check the car and hold us for five to ten minutes. In this case, the police were clearly hoping for a bribe.

The low-level corruption described above is common between Kyustendil and Kriva Palanka (and is not unique to this border). Individuals around borders, such as these police men, can take advantage of and benefit from the lack of information people from the other side of the border have about legal administration and procedures in the other country. Several Macedonians told me that they are often stopped when traveling to Kyustendil. One clearly frustrated Macedonian said, “Even though [Bulgarians] all are for the European Union, their police officers at the border take bribes, ten Euros each...the customs officers, as well as the police officers. The Macedonians don’t take bribes. The Bulgarians still do. I hate dishonest people.... An honest man would never do that.” This man later explains, “Generally, I feel OK about those people [from Kyustendil]. Previously, you asked me and I said that I felt bad about them and that was mainly due to these few incidents I had with them, like with the one I mentioned about the bribing on the border, and they do lie and steal. I am firmly convinced so. I do not feel safe parking my car in Kyustendil. I feel insecure with those people. I have friends that I trust but I just do not believe [in] their system.” Clearly, this sort of corruption damages relationships between individuals in Kriva Palanka and Kyustendil.<sup>48</sup> One Macedonian described the relationship with people from Kyustendil: “There is a certain non-friendly suspicion between the two countries.”

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<sup>48</sup> None of the interviewees gave accounts of Bulgarians having to pay Macedonian police bribes.

Individuals on both sides of the border are aware of this problem. One Bulgarian, when asked whether or not Macedonia should be in the European Union, begged, “Take down the borders, [so as] not to have corruption around the borders.” Bulgarians also experience the corruption problem when they are in Macedonia. When I asked one Bulgarian what he thought about people living in Kriva Palanka, he said, “I think of them as normal people.... I see many similarities [between us], if you are not speaking to some politician, policeman, judge, or attorney. If you talk with someone normal, they are absolutely OK.” Corruption clearly has a damaging effect on relationships between residents of the two border cities.

Corruption around the borders is not the only negative phenomenon individuals described during the interviews. They were keenly aware of economic standards on the other side of the border and often made comparisons. One such comparison was from a Macedonian who was not sure if becoming a member of the European Union would improve economic conditions in the region. She noticed that many Bulgarians had to resort to alternative means to survive. “They are in the European Union [but] ... lots of Bulgarians are coming [to Kriva Palanka] to buy groceries. It is so expensive there [in Kyustendil]. They have the same salary, but the products are more expensive. For example, if you go to the grocery market [here] they are buying everything – especially Saturday, market day in Kriva Palanka. They come and buy everything.... When you see a lot of people in an open spot [in town], you know they are Bulgarians. I characterize them like this – bags on streets with clothes and detergents and hygienic products, selling them from house-to-house.” Another Macedonian, when asked if he felt European, said he did not, “because we [Macedonians] do not enjoy all the benefits from the European Union.... We’re close to Europe but still far away...with the advantage of being able to cross the border to Bulgaria, we see the benefits and the downsides of being a part of the greater European family.” Living at the border offered, for this Macedonian, a preview of what to expect if and when Macedonia joined the European Union. The economic differences and corruption also shaped how individuals viewed each other.

One Bulgarian believes that the E.U.-international border imposed boundaries within the region that halted economic opportunities. “With regard to the region, I am of the opinion that the border that separates Bulgaria and Macedonia, and not only it but also the border between Bulgaria and Serbia, is redundant. It diminishes the functioning of the economy, agriculture and cultural relations. It has led to the decomposition of the whole border area covering a distance of 40-50 kilometers in both directions. It has had a negative impact and the only thing to be done is getting rid of the border so that there will be opportunities for prosperity. This border has limited the infrastructure and at the moment we are communicating via insufficient road connections. To put an image to it, we are using dirt roads and there are no railroads.”

Many people expressed the desire for Macedonia to join the European Union, in hopes that it would bring better economic opportunities to the region. One Macedonian man who was recently laid off from his job looked forward to the day Macedonia became a member: “This region will be without borders. People will be able to work or travel in other countries.... Now we do not have the possibility to work in this way. This is a problem, especially when you work in the mines.” There was often a misconception on the part of both Bulgarians and Macedonians that once Macedonia joined the E.U. the region would automatically be “borderless”, and that everyone could have the same rights.

Not everyone agreed that the region would be a better place if Macedonia joined the European Union. Several people expressed concerns. “I see the attitude [Western European countries have] towards us [Bulgarians] and I don’t want [Macedonians] to be treated in the same way. Macedonians are still farming their land there, while the E.U. enforces economic norms which I don’t like. They create G.M.O.s [genetically modified food], while [Macedonians] have a traditional way of working, of communicating. There will be a great intervention. And because I see it, I can’t do this to my brother.” For this woman, the negative impacts of European regulations on traditional Bulgarian farmers were sufficient to make her reconsider the advantages that the E.U. brought to the region. A Macedonian woman shared this concern over E.U.

regulations. She did not see a future in the European Union because it requires its members to give up too much of their own identities. “The European Union does not mean anything to me. I think the E.U. will separate...because it is artificial. It is an experiment. That is my view. The E.U. is like a first-grade lesson: Need to get up early, brush your teeth, wash, go to school, go home, take lunch, play and go to sleep. They teach us how we need to live, and everything will be good if we listen to them and spend their money. If you smoke at a restaurant, you will need to clean your own ash tray.” Clearly, the E.U. would impose regulations and standards this woman is not willing to accept. Neither of these two women expressed a possibility that the E.U. could help bridge regional misunderstandings.

Most of the positive remarks about membership in the European Union came from Bulgarians. “We have been a part of European Union since 2007 and we have infrastructure.... Farmers have a chance to get money from the E.U. funds. And it helps us to realize that we are European. It has helped to stimulate and help finance our projects.” However, these sentiments were shared by only a few.

Currently, the E.U. is strengthening economic relationships within the region by financing projects across the borders. One Macedonian explained, “There is a lot of money from the E.U. fund for this region. We have to be close to one another to use that money. We have to collaborate so we can realize some projects. That being said, I feel [people in] this region [are] close.” For another Macedonian, these E.U.-funded projects facilitated friendships with Bulgarians living in Kyustendil. “Considering the fact that I am participating in cross-border projects with my neighbors, also citizens from this region, [I feel a strong connection with the region]. I have many friends from the other side of the border. We have good cooperation. We are citizens of this region. Through our projects we are acting as a region. I am talking about my partners.” This man did go on to say that he was suspicious of Bulgarians outside the project, as he did not trust them.

Part of the reason for this mistrust, which has been reiterated throughout this study, is that individuals feel the two governments have had different agendas and

different goals, and this is at the heart of what divides the population. “[Bulgarians] have a long feeling of thinking that they are Bulgarian. They are a bit different than Serbian and Yugoslavs for more than 120 years. [Our governments have had] two separate programs.” The Macedonian government provides a national identity that tries to differentiate itself from the others. For its part, the Bulgarian government is offering citizenship to Macedonians who claim to have Bulgarian self-consciousness as a way to demonstrate a common identity.

One Bulgarian describes the opportunities Bulgaria offers Macedonians: “There are many Macedonian students in Bulgaria nowadays who study for free [in Bulgaria]. Many Macedonians are adopting features of the Bulgarian nationality. Their motives are mostly economic. After five or ten years, when [the graduate] is more mature and starts to work, he or she will say, ‘I graduated from Sofia University’ with a sense of pride.” What the speaker fails to realize is that many Macedonians obtain Bulgarian passports only for the economic advantages, not for the Bulgarian consciousness that they purportedly proclaim when swearing allegiance to Bulgaria.

One Macedonian school teacher explained why her husband obtained a Bulgarian passport: “My husband took the Bulgarian citizenship. It is not because he doesn’t feel Macedonian. He feels Macedonian just like me. It is because he needs it to work abroad in the European Union. Economic reasons. That’s all.” In this case, the practical and economic reasons for obtaining a Bulgarian-European Union passport outweigh the national identity. The Bulgarian government might feel that it is confirming historic claims that Macedonians are Bulgarian, but in the end it provokes much resentment on the part of both Bulgarians and Macedonians.

One Bulgarian described his reaction to Macedonians taking Bulgarian citizenship: “Many Macedonians, they come here [and] want us to live together. They have our passport and go to Europe. How can we know who is Bulgarian or who is Macedonia?” He later went on to describe how Western Europe has a negative image of Bulgarians in part because of the bad behavior of Macedonians who use their Bulgarian passports abroad.

## **Discussion**

The fourth and fifth terms in Smith's definition of the nation, once again, relates to the administrative and legal units within a country. According to Smith, the administrative term is the ability of governments to set internal policies to control economic resources among other duties, while the legal term relates to a system of common rights and duties under the nation's laws. Many people in Bulgaria and Macedonia believe that the national borders are damaging relationships within the region. The borders function as a barrier to trade and communication, and they encourage illegal activities. The administrative and legal borders as they function today also create mistrust and suspicion between individuals in the region.

One solution could be a supranational entity that can facilitate a common set of administrative/legislative or legal rights, as Guibernau points out (1999). On both sides, people expressed concern about Macedonia joining the European Union. None of these concerns were due to the ability of Macedonians to fulfill E.U. membership standards; rather, the concern was about the negative impacts and regulations the European Union would impose on Macedonians. Very few Bulgarians felt they had enjoyed economic benefits from the European Union that they would like to share with their Macedonian counterparts.

One clear advantage to Macedonian membership in the E.U. is that it would resolve the conflict over citizenship. More specifically, it would end the Bulgarian government's controversial practice of offering citizenship to Macedonians who claim Bulgarian consciousness.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In “National Identity and the Idea of European Unity,” Smith argued that a genuine European identity could not exist unless it “defines itself exclusively against other world actors” (1992, p. 55). Instead, he contends that traditional national identities based on “territorial boundedness of separate cultural populations,” populations that share “myths of origin and historical memories of the community” and a “common bond of a mass, standardized culture,” would remain stronger than a European identity could ever be (*ibid*, p. 60).

As a supranational organization, the European Union challenges the traditional function of the nation-state by “turning the nation-state into a permeable unit unable to control external cultural and economic flows” (Guibernau, 1999, p. 177). Nation-states, therefore, no longer have the ability to achieve a “seamless, organic cultural unit” within their borders. This can challenge and change how the “other” is perceived: as an ally who shares similar traits, as one who brings diversity and new ideas, or as one who threatens locally based distinctions. According to Guibernau, these supranational organizations are also encouraging new collective forms of identity to be (re-)created in micro-regions, as individuals within a society find new common consciousness that may trump their national identity.

Given these two competing interpretations, this study asked how the nation-state and E.U. influenced the construction of identity within the regional population living along the Bulgarian-Macedonian border. After conducting an ethnographic study in the border cities of Kyustendil, Bulgaria and Kriva Palanka, Macedonia, I found that in general individuals maintain strong attachment to their national identity. The national identity in both cases is based on different “imagined communities.” For Bulgarians, this “imagined community” is tied to accomplishments of the historic Bulgar ethnic group: the establishment of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (681 A.D.) and the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, when the territory spread into present-day Macedonia<sup>49</sup>. The history of the

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<sup>49</sup> Anderson contends that “Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural. Because there is no Originator, the nation’s biography cannot be written evangelically, ‘sown time,’ through a long procreative chains of begetting.” (1991, p 205). I found that the



Treaty of San Stefano, which for four months returned the Bulgarian territory back to the historic grandeur of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom and followed the lines of the Bulgarian Exarchate, helps maintain a notion of a unified population focused on this idea of an imagined historic community. Bulgaria has developed a strong collective identity based on an idea that Macedonia is part of the Bulgarian “historic lands.” Therefore many Bulgarians do not recognize Macedonian claims for self-identification.

Macedonians cannot claim a specific date on which their historic population was established. Instead, they create an imagined community based on “struggle.” The collective Macedonian identity is tied to an imaginary ongoing struggle for independence and recognition and is reinforced by a common concern: that the Macedonians are being attacked by their neighbors in the surrounding countries.

In some sense, individuals in Kriva Palanka, Macedonia have the right to feel mistrust in their Bulgarian neighbors. Certainly the low-level corruption found along the border creates a lack of trust between the two communities in the region. However, the more damaging “attacks” they discuss occur in the way some Bulgarians from Kyustendil refuse to recognize the Macedonian identity, and in the way these views are expressed “behind the other’s back.” These Bulgarians claim that the Macedonian identity refers to the geographic cultural region, not to a separate ethnos, and they are frustrated that their Macedonian counterparts refuse to recognize a common history. They see this lack of recognition of commonality as a Macedonian immaturity regarding their identity. This continues the vicious circle of mistrust within the region.

In the future, the E.U. might be able to mitigate the resentment and mistrust between the different imagined communities and downplay strong national feelings. However, the European identity is currently very weak among the population on both sides. Individuals in the region found few economic advantages to European membership and complained of the heavy burden of E.U. regulations. Many on both sides of the border felt that through imposed rules, the E.U. had changed the character of their national identity, which they did not appreciate. This dissuaded many

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‘imagined community’ can have a birth date – 681 A.D. in the case of the Bulgaria, July 4, 1776 in the birth of America, July 14,1789 for the Republic of France, etc.

Macedonians from wishing to become members of the E.U. However, a handful of individuals realized if Macedonia were a member of the E.U., there might be fewer border regulations within the region, which could encourage a closer relationship with individuals on the other side of the border.

Governments vary greatly in their ability to create an imagined community (consider, for example, the current Ukraine government as compared to the government of neighboring Russia). Some regional identities have developed because governments have tolerated the influence of supranational institutions (as seen in Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom). This case study along the Bulgarian-Macedonian border has demonstrated how strong government narratives help to maintain a nationwide sense of identity. Bulgaria's narrative is strongly based on a sense of continuity on the part of successive generations, as well as shared memories of a single ethnicity that existed in earlier periods. Macedonia's narrative is focused on maintaining the "us"-versus-"them" distinction, and many Macedonians feel threatened by outsiders. These well-established national narratives will continue to encourage mistrust and suspicion between the two populations, especially at the border.

The next step is to conduct this study over a period of time, to determine whether or not a regional or European identity develops. If and when Macedonia becomes a member of the European Union, this membership might cause some individuals to feel more attachment to a regional or a continent-wide identity, as both sides could then share an imagined community belonging to the European Union.

Another option is to examine cities farther south along the Bulgarian-Macedonian border, in the "heart" of Pirinska, Macedonia. In the external interview, the Bulgarian student indicated that her idea of regional identity sometimes trumped the national due to her sense of belonging culturally to that region. I would like to document whether this interview was an anomaly, and how Bulgarians in this region farther from the border conceive of their collective culture (as compared to their national identity) as an "imagined" community.

Another logical step would be to replicate this study along other borders within the Balkans or along the E.U. internal-external border. A study along the E.U. internal borders between member countries, say France and Germany in the Alsace region, could also help understand how individuals perceive themselves in relation to their region, nation and the E.U. while living in a region located in two countries that have long been members of the E.U. One way or another, as this study showed, the project of building regional and national identities is ongoing and the E.U. is only trying to write the latest chapter.

## Appendix A: Demographic Information not Provided in Chapter 4

### *Age*

Individuals selected the age range to which he or she belonged (see Table 9). These age ranges were established by the Eurobarometer survey. Approximately half the respondents in each community were between the ages of 25 and 29. Macedonia had more of the respondents in the 15-24 age category, while more Bulgaria had more respondents older than 55 years. One reason for Bulgaria having older respondents might reflect a trend of younger Bulgarians leaving the region to find work in other areas, while Macedonians do not have the same opportunity to find work abroad or in larger cities. During the three month study, two of the Bulgarian participants in the 25-39 age category moved out of the region for better economic opportunities; one moved to the capital, the other emigrated to another E.U. country. Several Macedonians, during this same period, considered applying for Bulgarian passports in order to search for jobs in the European Union, none that I am aware of applied.

<b>Age</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-39</b>	<b>40-54</b>	<b>55+</b>	<b>Total Interviews</b>
<b>Bulgarian interviews</b>	0	12	8	5	25
<b>Macedonian interviews</b>	3	15	6	1	25

(Table 9: Age Range of Interviewees).

### *Income*

Most individuals identified themselves as belonging to the middle class (see Table 10). In Macedonia eight individuals said they were below the middle class, which might reflect Macedonia's weaker economy. Five people chose not to disclose their income level. In four of those cases, it was because the person was listed as unemployed or as a student.

<b>Income Levels</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Undisclosed</b>	<b>Total Interviews</b>
<b>Bulgarian interviews</b>	3	17	3	2	25
<b>Macedonian interviews</b>	8	11	2	3	25

(Table 10: Income Level of Interviewees).

### *Political Views*

Individuals were asked their political positions (see Table 11). The question was modeled and phrased as it appeared in the 2008 Eurobarometer survey: “In political matters people talk of ‘the left’ (meaning liberal) and ‘the right’ (conservative). How would you place your views on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means you are to the left and 10 means you are to the right?” (Papacosta, 2011). Thirteen individuals in Macedonia considered their views to be on the left compared to five individuals in Bulgaria. While in Bulgaria, fourteen individuals placed themselves more to the right compared to only five individuals in Macedonia.

Many Macedonians were nervous to disclose their more liberal position as their views ran counter to the Mayor’s political party, the right wing VMRO-DPMNE. Several interviewees confided that they were not able to obtain jobs in Kriva Palanka due to their known political affiliation being opposite of the ruling party, while one person said he was not sure he would have his job if the opposition party was ousted.

<b>Political Self-identification</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Center</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Undisclosed</b>	<b>Total Interviews</b>
<b>Bulgarian interviews</b>	5	5	14	1	25
<b>Macedonian interviews</b>	13	7	5	0	25

(Table 11: Political Position of Interviewees).

## Appendix B: Interview Questions with Protocol

Hello, I'm a student at Virginia Tech, in America. I am conducting an interview of 50 residents living along the Bulgarian-Macedonian border: 25 from Bulgaria and 25 from Macedonia. This information will be very useful in helping me understand how individuals view their national identity and how they view the other side of the border. The results of this research will be used for my dissertation and might be published in international journals and/or possibly a book.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. If at any time during the interview you do not want to answer a question, you have the right to refuse to answer the question and may leave the interview at any point. There are no right or wrong answers, and you have the option of being identified in the report. Some of the questions might seem repetitive, but the questions are intended to understand different approaches to the way individuals view their nationality. Would you be interested in participating in this interview? (wait for response) Could I use your name or a pseudonym in the report? (wait for response – sign form) Can I record this information for my purposes only, in order to help with the translation of the material? (wait for response – sign form).

(If the person appears to be under 20 years old, then the age will be requested and parental consent will be obtained before the interview can continue – sign form).

(Introduction): Over the past century, the border between present day Bulgaria and Macedonia has changed repeatedly in response to: the end of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Wars, World War I and II, during the Cold War, and now with the European Union. It is difficult to know and understand people's perception of their identity, especially living so close to this shifting international border. My questions will relate to how YOU perceive your national identity and how YOU perceive individuals on the other side of the present day border. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. In terms of your own identity, what do you consider yourself? (Give prompt only if needed -Bulgarian, Macedonia, Serbian, Roma, etc.)
2. Why? What symbols or feelings make you feel that way?
3. What is your ethnicity? Why?
4. I would like you to think about the idea of geographical identity. Different people think of this in different ways. People might think of themselves as being European, (Bulgarian/Macedonian) or from a specific region to different extents. Some people say that with globalization, people are becoming closer to each other as 'citizens of the world'. Thinking about this, to what extent do you personally feel you are (Show card with the words great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all)

- European identity. Do you feel to a great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all European? why?
- Bulgarian identity. Do you feel to a great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all Bulgarian? why?
- Macedonian identity. Do you feel to a great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all Macedonian? why?
- Inhabitant of your region. Do you feel to a great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all an inhabitant of your region? why?

5. To what extent do you feel Bulgarians are Bulgarian? (Continue showing the card with the words great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all) Why?

To what extent do you feel Macedonians are Macedonian? (Continue showing the card with the words great extent, somewhat, not really, not at all) Why?

6. Would you be in favor or against Macedonia becoming part of the European Union in the future? Why? (Show card with for or against written)

7. Would you agree or disagree with the following statement: If the countries and territories of the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania) join the European Union, this will help to stabilize that part of Europe? Why? (Show card with Strongly Agree, Tend to Agree, Tend to Disagree, and Strongly Disagree)

8. How do you think of people on the other side of the border? What factors/criteria/symbols do you use to identify the people on the other side of the border?

9. When you are with people from the other side of the border in (Kriva Palanka, Kyustendil), what do you consider yourself?

10. Since the 1990s, some people believe that globalization has made the world more tolerant of other people, ideas, etc. This has had an effect on identities. For example, the European Union tries to have a multicultural approach toward its members. However, some people believe that countries should continue to promote their own individuality.

Thinking about your government, what message do you think your government (Bulgarian/Macedonian) gives you? Can you give examples of this?

11. Thinking about the (Bulgarian/Macedonian – the opposite from where the interview takes place) national government, what do you think they tell people on the other side of the border? Can you give examples of this?

12. What do you think about the people on the other side of the border, do you feel they believe their government's story?

13. How do you think they (Bulgarians/Macedonians – the opposite from where the interview takes place) think of you and your government?

Demographic Information (the same as the Eurobarometer survey)

Now I will be collecting information on your background. This will take a couple of minutes.

14. In political matters people talk of "the left" (meaning liberal) and "the right" (conservative). How would you place your views on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means you are to the left and 10 means you are to the right? (Show card with scales)

15. How old were you when you stopped your education?

16. How old are you? (Show card with: 15-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55 +)

17. What is your current occupation?

18. Would you say you live in a rural area or village, small or middle size town, or a large town?

19. What is your current annual income? (Show card with: (a) low leva/denar (b) middle leva/ denar (c) upper leva /denar) –numbers based on respective national data

20. Do you have internet at home? What do you use the internet for: games, information, and/or communication?

21. How often do you travel to (Bulgaria/Macedonia- other side of the border)? How often do you travel to other countries? (Show card 1-3x per week, 1-3x per month, 1-3x per year, never)

22. Do you have any other comments or things you want to add?

23. Are there any key members of the community who you think should be included in the study that I could interview?

Note -Record: Gender 1=Male, 2=Female

Thank you for your time!



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