

UDC 323.215-021.388(497.7),,1991/2008“

Ljupco S. Risteski (Macedonia)**ESAY ON FESTIVITIES: TRANSFORMATION OF THE HOLIDAY
CALENDAR IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA FROM 1991
UNTIL THE PRESENT**

Abstract: The process of the remaking the holiday calendar in the Republic of Macedonia (RM) has started immediately after the state gained its independence. Until present day it has been a dynamic process with few important features. Being a management process, it should have been a comprehensive redefinition of the holiday system, according to the postulates of the democratic, pluralistic, de-secularized societies. The text analyses the dynamics and characteristics of the transformation of the festivity calendar in the Republic of Macedonia starting from 1991, until present day (2008).

Key words: holiday management, holiday calendar, Republic of Macedonia, transformation.

Holidays are probably the finest and most desired thing for everyone. This is so in the case of contemporary, as well as in the case of traditional societies, firstly because those are non-working days, which means that people should concentrate on the festivity, the deities, the ancestors, the state, the heroes, on themselves, on the future generations. Secondly, festivities should enable people to realize a part of their social activities that make them feel as members of a certain community, to be engaged in the celebration of their own tradition, respecting their present and building of their future, while at the same time differing from others, from the rest - the latter should be at least a little bit different from the former.

I know that the previous paragraph sounds populist, patriotic and proletarian, but I wrote it in order to reflect at least a part of the social climate of contemporary Macedonian society in relation to festivities and holiday celebrations.

Just recently a long period full of holidays has ended, Easter and 1st of May. This year Easter, according to the calendar of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, was celebrated on the 27th of April. For the first time, according to the amended Law on holidays in the Republic of Macedonia (Amended Law 18/2007) Good Friday (25th of April) was proclaimed as a state holiday and thus a non-working day for Orthodox Christians. Only few days after there was a celebration of the 1st of May, Labor Day. This year, again according to the new, amended Law on holidays in the Republic of Macedonia, we celebrated this holiday only one day, instead of the former two days, 1st and

2nd of May, which meant that everyone that had their barbecue on the traditional picking on the 2nd of May now had to do it on the 1st.



Celebration of the 1st of May, 2008

The cultural management of the social, political and economical activities in contemporary states is usually organized in frames of the state institutions responsible for different segments of its successful implementation. Besides the state ones, other institutions participate as well, as for example the ones from the field of religion, certain intellectual circles that are supposedly independent, at least in the secularized and democratic states (Klaus 2000: 85-89). In the state institutions the directions are taken based upon the influences of certain centers of political power and of the political elites, depending on their political orientation. Surely, these changes at a 'high level' are reflected upon every-day life in different spheres. Holidays, as much as it sounds banal, are extremely important segment of this holiday calendar management, which includes the promotion of certain specific forms and contents of holiday celebration, according to a certain political orientation (Abeles 2001; Rihtman-Auguštin 2000; Žirarde 2000; Čolovič 2000).

The Republic of Macedonia, since its independence in 1991, entered a new phase of its existence. Besides many other important characteristics it still holds the title of 'a country in transition', although this refers mainly to the last years of the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Macedonia still lives through this long and exhausting process of transition, whose results were visible even at the time of SFRY's dissolution, the creation of new independent states. We still go through this period due to the quantitative and qualitative changes that take place in our cultural, social and economic setting. We are living witnesses of the changes that have happened

to us at the time of late socialism and the change from a one-party system into a democratic society. We survived the time of the dissolution of the mutual state and the creation of new independent states, not only at the Balkans but in the wider South-Eastern context, with all armed conflicts and crisis that took place.

All these changes that concern the cultural, social, political and economic life create a dynamics, which seen in retrospective, as in the case with Macedonia, has an extreme level of intensity. Holidays and celebrations are one of the most important segments of every-day life, but also one of the most important forms of creation and expression of identity, at an individual, at a family, but also at a collective level, that could have a number of different levels itself: a local community level, an ethnic community level, a state community level, as well as the intra-state and intra-national community level.

After the dissolution of SFRY and the establishment of new democratic states, one of the most important issues of the cultural and political management was the creation of new structures in the social, political and economic system. In the process of cultural and political management, besides the state authorities, an important role was played by some of the intellectual elites in Macedonia. An important place in this process of 1991 is held by the church institutions, which in contrast to the previous, extremely secularized and almost atheistic social systems, started an intensive process of management, which meant a return of the religious institutions to the public scene in the Republic of Macedonia, which has practically started from the moment of their inclusion in the Constitution of the Republic that started the process of denationalization and the return of the properties of the religious institutions. The latest issue is the one of the inclusion of religious education in the educational system of the Republic of Macedonia, whose legal and formal solution is expected by the end of 2008.

The process of holiday management in the Republic of Macedonia started immediately after it gained its independence and until today it is a dynamic process that has few important features. Being a management process, it should have been a comprehensive redefinition of the holiday system, according to the postulates of the democratic, pluralistic, desecularized societies. A first step in this management endeavor was the establishment of a strategy for elimination and forgetting, even deleting of holidays from the collective memory of the citizens, that were in any way related to the past of the previous mutual state, which was a socialistic one, which means left oriented, formally atheistic society, with a political one-party system and an idea for cherishing of the mutual Yugoslav national identity. Surely, this process of elimination did not happen overnight - in the holiday cycle of the Republic of Macedonia one can notice elements of celebration of some of the holidays from the time of socialistic Yugoslavia, as well as elements of socialistic celebration in current conditions. There are still

groups of citizens, some of them organized in citizens' associations that respect the values of socialistic Yugoslavia, that celebrate certain holidays of that time. What is even more important, as we have already mentioned, there are elements of socialistic celebrations in the current holiday cycle of the Republic of Macedonia - citizens, the media and the associations are often blaming each other of practicing "socialistic celebrations". It is difficult to explain in few sentences what this "socialistic celebrations" means to someone who has never experienced it. We will only mention few of its elements: the role of the media in managing the holiday cycle, in a very specific way, that has become during this last year even more intensive - informing, i.e. educating the citizens on the following holiday in a form of a written statement transmitted on TV in a form of a moving text, signed by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, and sometimes even the Prime Minister of RM - Nikola Gruevski. Another important element of the socialistic way of celebration is organizing so called 'events' or happenings, with a specific design, whose symbolism should be analyzed separately for each element, an event that usually starts with a certain speech, or with organizing solemn academia, that includes an opening speech, the state hymn, and hosts representatives of state and religious institutions, political parties etc. These events have a specific rhetoric that in many ways resembles the one of the time of the socialistic celebrations.

The dynamics of deletion or oblivion of the holidays from the previous social system depended also on the character of the holidays. During the process of management of the holiday corpus, immediately after the proclamation of the independence of RM, the state holidays that were related to the previous state were deleted. Thus, the holiday 29th of November - the day of the SFRY, was no longer relevant for the newly created states, especially for the ones that no longer wanted to have 'any kind of historic relation' to the previous state. Contrary to this case, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, that after 1991 comprised of Serbia and Monte Negro, and which proclaimed itself an inheritor of the previous SFRY, did not delete 29th of November so easily. Other holidays, which had a relation with the previous state, but were also related to the people's liberation fight, the anti-fascistic movement, as well as some international holidays, were closely examined if they were relevant or not for the new democratic state of Macedonia. Surely, this has created, and it still creates, fearsome discussions in the Macedonian public concerning their deletion or continuation. Negotiations related to historic meanings of some of these holidays in Macedonia can be understood only in wider social frames, if it is known that in Macedonia, as well as in the states from the wider region, there is a process of re-reading of history. Today the number of the newly introduced events and holidays in the holiday cycle is probably bigger than the number of the deleted ones. They refer to persons and events that according to the new readings of history were unfairly

neglected or even condemned at the time of socialism. Most often those are events or persons that have publicly proclaimed that they are *pro* independent Macedonia, contrary to those who stood for its inclusion in the Yugoslav Federation. Surely, there are such that are still under suspicion if they were 'on the right side' of the ideas for the future of Macedonia.

Although the dynamics of the changes of the holiday cycle in the Republic of Macedonia seems intensive, at a formal level one could say that the authorities were not in a big hurry. It was only in 1998, which means seven years after Macedonia proclaimed its independence, that the new Law on the holidays in the Republic of Macedonia was established (Law on Holidays, 08.05.1998), which means that the old Law on state holidays of the Socialistic Federative Republic of Macedonia (Law on State Holidays No.16/65 and 15/72) from 1965 and 1972, and the Law on holidays of the Socialistic Federative Yugoslavia (Law on Holidays, No. 6/73) ceased to apply. In 2007 the Amended Law on the holidays of the Republic of Macedonia was established, which replaced the one of 1998 (Amended Law on Holidays in RM, No.18/2007).

This Law prescribes the following categories of holidays: state holidays of RM, holidays of RM and non-working days that mark religious holidays for the members of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith. State holidays are: 2nd of August - the day of the Republic, 8th of September - Independence Day and 11th of October - Day of People's uprising. Holidays of the Republic of Macedonia are: 1st and 2nd of January - New Year, and 1st and 2nd of May - Labor Day. Religious holidays that are celebrated as non-working days are: first day of Christmas, second day of Easter - for the members of Christian faith, then the first day of Ramazan Bayram and the first day of Kurban Bayram for the members of Islamic faith. For the members of the Jewish faith the first day of Yom Kippur is celebrated (Law on Holidays, No.21/98, 08.05.1998). The Amended Law on Holidays established in 2007 prescribes the following categories of holidays: state holidays of RM, holidays of RM and holidays and non-working days for the members of religious communities and members of other ethnic communities. State holidays are: 24th of May - Sts. Cyril and Methodius day, 2nd of August - Day of the Republic, 8th of September - Independence day, 11th of October - Day of People's Uprising, 23rd of October - Day of Macedonian revolutionary fight and 8th of December St. Kliment Ohridski. Holidays of the Republic of Macedonia are: 1st of January - New Year, Christmas, first day after Christmas (7th of January according to Orthodox calendar), Easter (Second day of Easter according to Orthodox calendar), 1st of May - Labor Day and Ramazan Bayram (first day of Ramazan Bayram).

In the category of holidays which are non-working days for the members of different religious and ethnic communities are:

- For the members of Orthodox Christian faith: Badnik - day before Christmas; 19th of January - Epiphany; Good Friday - day before Easter; 28th of August - Assumption of Virgin Mary and Day of the dead (Duhovden) - Friday before Duhoven.
- For the members of Muslim faith: Kurban Bayram, the first day of Kurban Bayram.
- For the members of Albanian community: 22nd of November - Day of Albanian alphabet.
- For the members of Turkish community: 21st of December - Day of teaching in Turkish language.
- For the members of Jewish community: Yom Kippur - the first day of Yom Kippur.
- For the members of Catholic faith: first day of Christmas, second day of Easter and the Holiday of All Saints according to the Gregorian calendar.
- For the members of Serbian community: 27th of January - St. Sava.
- For the members of Vlah community: 23rd of May - National day of the Vlachs.
- For the members of the Bosniac community: 28th of September - International day of the Bosnians.

The ethnologist - an analyst, an archbishop, a keeper of tradition, the one who demystifies tradition or is a part of the interpretative instrumentarium of cultural management of holidays

If one makes even a superficial, non-systematic analysis of the media coverage in RM in relation to holidays an interesting observation can be made in regards to the role of ethnologists* in this whole complex holiday situation. In the period after 1991 ethnologists take an important part in holiday celebrations, speaking about their features on different occasions. I have no knowledge if up till now ethnologists from Macedonia were members of the state administration bodies and if they influenced the decisions made, i.e. the Laws covering the holidays, or if some of them were consulted on certain issues when a decision was about to be made. Still, I think that ethnologists

* I say 'ethnologists' and not 'anthropologists' since in Macedonia, as in most of Southern Europe, anthropologists, the few of them that were active at the time of socialism, dealt only with bio-physical anthropology. Thus, ethnologists dealt with analysis of holidays and related rituals. The analysis of holidays was mainly focused upon traditional culture and I find that there were almost no researches done on holidays in the period of socialism until its fall. Most analysis of the symbolism and meaning of holidays at the time of socialism were done after 1991. But even more, there are no researches on the place and role of ethnologists in Socialistic Yugoslavia in the frames of cultural holiday management, while there are such in the Soviet Union and Bulgaria (Rot 2000: 92-94).

today play an active role in managing the holiday cycle, if not at the state level or the level of political management, then at least at intellectual level.

Media today also play an important role in the implementation of cultural holiday management in Macedonia, and they often open topics and dilemmas that relate to certain open issues. However, the media, especially the ones related to the state, follow the already defined line of cultural management of the authorities. Thus, media presentations on holidays do not have only an informative but also an educational aspect, and they also influence the creation of public opinion and public attitude. During holiday celebrations, especially of the ones from the religious or traditional ritual calendar, the media usually invite ethnologists to speak about them. I have to conclude that, in the Republic of Macedonia, ethnologists are well known in the public sphere, and especially in the media, for their interpretations of holidays. There is no other issue on which the public in Macedonia, especially the media, consult ethnologists, although there are more relevant social and cultural issues that would deserve their comment. I would not like to say that the issue of holidays is less relevant and challenging for ethnologists, but I would like to point towards the attitude of journalists and the media, which puts ethnologists in a position to feel uncomfortable. Many think that ethnologists are the ones that “know everything” about holidays and tradition. They are defined as the biggest protectors and keepers of tradition, even in a situation where tradition is constructed, reinvented and recreated*. I was many times in a position when I was expected only to confirm the answer to the posed question of the journalist himself, on the authenticity, exclusivity of “our tradition and our holidays”. Thus, the ethnologist is often put in a position of a connoisseur of tradition, as some kind of folk connoisseur, ultimate shaman that should clear out things, that should solve the dilemmas on what “true tradition” is and how it should be celebrated. I remember that almost every Christmas, i.e. almost every Badnik (day before Christmas), when it comes to the tradition of making the ritual bread with the coin inside it that brings good fortune to the one who will find it, the usual dilemma of the citizens is: “when the ritual bread would be cut - on Badnik (5.01) or on St. Basil’s day” (14.01 - when New Year is celebrated according to the Julian calendar, the official calendar of the Macedonian Orthodox Church). Surely choosing one of these dates as the ‘right’ one would be problematic, since in different parts of Macedonia it has been done on either of these dates. This example reflects the attempt of ‘codification’ of festivity language through which certain rules applicable to all and to the whole territory would be defined.

On the other hand, ethnologists often are invited to talk on the holidays issue together or even simultaneously with the priests. Very often

* When I say construction, reinvention or recreation I by no means intend to say that this is something false or non-existent.

this is done on the same TV show, at the same place and at the same time, aiming to complement or confront these two ‘expert’ opinions. They are most often asked to talk on traditional forms of holiday celebrations, which usually step out of the canonic form of celebrations, so that a notion is created that ethnologists are apologists of traditional forms, while priests promote canonic rules of celebration, in concordance to the religions to which they belong. Here another very important issue is at stake: if the priests are preaching the religious doctrine of their own faith in this manner, then how should the appearance of ethnologists in these media be understood? Do they preach as well, and do they, or should they defend someone or something?

When ethnologists find themselves in a situation to commence an analysis of the essence of holidays, tradition, and to eventually re-examine some of the “absolute” truths, then they turn into demystifiers of tradition, people that want to question the ‘harmony image’ of the ancient tradition, the ‘rigid and precise’ rules of how people should behave or to do certain things. Often they are accused of destroying tradition.

The issue of interpretation of holidays, as well as other ethnological and anthropological phenomena, could present a good basis for the utilization of the interpretative instruments for the aims of cultural holiday management. The “scientific discourse” of ethnologists could be used for managing everyday life, holidays included. I will only mention that since recently more and more ethnologists involve themselves in different, religious and even political celebrations, through practicing ‘authentic’, traditional forms of celebrations, although in this case it is a matter of organizing social events that had their clearly established structure, organizational boards, expert bodies that should establish and verify the validity of forms and contents. Here, ethnologists like it or not, play an active part in the process of creation, re-examination and social verification of tradition, that quite often, in its background, contains a certain political program*.

Transformation of holidays in the Republic of Macedonia from 1991 until present day

As it can be noted from the previously stated data, the holiday system in the Republic of Macedonia undergoes a dynamic process of transformation that could be followed at a number of different levels. Firstly, the process of transformation took place, and it still goes on at a state level, through a formal legal abolition or introduction of certain holidays that seem to the current state administration as (non)appropriate. Surely, the transformation of the holiday cycle at this level bears a strong background in the governance of a left or

* When I say political I don’t think explicitly of their practical implementation through different campaigns and other activities, but I think of cultural policy and management of cultural goods, holidays included.

right political orientation in Macedonia. Understandable, under such a strong influence of political power centers, the transformation and changes of the holiday cycle happen at a level of content as well, so that some of the holidays that used to exist in the past and are still valid today have changed in the way they are celebrated and have altered their content. Besides the influence of the state organs, i.e. the political influences, a strong role is played by religious institutions (Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Islamic Religious community, representatives of the two biggest religious communities in RM), as well as some intellectual elites led by the idea of confrontation to the political character of the holiday dynamics, or on the contrary, elites that according to their political beliefs support the activities of the state.

From today's perspective, if one analyses the holiday calendar in MR, three important phases and directions of its transformation can be noted.

Firstly, after the dissolution of SFRY and the creation of independent Macedonia, the calendar was 'purged' of all holidays that related to the previous state, as well as of some of the holidays which were explicitly related to the socialistic system. The aim was to draw a line between the past and the current orientation of the state, with a clear message that this past should be forgotten as soon as possible. Surely, this process did not go so fast, since during the first year of independent Macedonia the memories of these holidays were still quite vivid, and few of them are still remembered with nostalgia. I myself remember that many people regretted that 29th of November is no longer celebrated, the day of the state of SFRY, which among other things coincided with activities belonging to traditional culture, such as winter food preparation, pigs' slaughtering etc. In the sense of analyzing the holiday calendar dynamics at a legal level, it is interesting to note that the first Law on holidays in RM, which was as already mentioned established in 1998, which means after more than seven years of independent Macedonia, followed the regulations of the Socialistic Republic of Macedonia and SFRY, i.e. the holiday laws of 1965, 1972 and 1973.

The second phase of transformation of the official holiday calendar is marked by the establishment of new legal regulation through the Law on holidays in RM from 1998. This law prescribes state holidays of RM, 2nd of August - the Day of the Republic; 8th of September - Independence Day and 11th of October - Day of People's Uprising, all clearly marking the state character of Macedonia. 2nd of August, which is also celebrated as a religious holiday, dedicated to St. Iliya, marks the commencement of the uprising of 1903 against the Turkish state in Krushevo, where the first Krushevo Republic was formed and the Krushevo Manifesto was issued, in which all citizens of Macedonia, no matter their nationality and faith, are called upon to join the liberation fight for Autonomous Macedonia. At this day in 1944 the Anti-fascistic Assembly of the People's Liberation Front of Macedonia (in Macedonian - ASNOM) was held, when this body was established as the

ultimate legal and executive body of the Democratic Federal Macedonia in the period of 1944-1945, when it was renamed into People's Assembly of Macedonia and this is why it is celebrated as the day of the state. Here we should mention that the holidays of the Ilinden type, that should have celebrated and promote the Republic, were not desirable in the context of the Yugoslav federation. On the contrary, in the '70-ties holidays of this type were marked as holidays that promote nationalistic ideas of the Republics, in this case the Macedonian nationalism/liberalism (Dimitrov Dimitar, Dnevnik, 01.08.1997).

The celebration of the 2nd of August, that is, the two Ilindens, in the period starting from 1991 had its specific dynamics, content and features, on which we will not focus in details. It is sufficient to say that this holiday differs in the way it is celebrated, the location where it is celebrated and in regards to its content, depending on the political events and changes of authorities. Depending on the orientation of the governing party - left or right (which in our circumstances is interpreted in a number of variants, left oriented parties are generally identified as more progressive, social-democratic while the others are identified as conservative, patriotic and nationalistic) the contents and forms of celebration of the holidays changed. In the case of Ilinden, the right-oriented parties favor Ilinden of 1903, while the others Ilinden of 1994. The features of Ilinden's celebration was influenced also by international relations of RM with one of the neighboring countries - Serbia. Namely, the location of the First Assembly of ASNOM, the Monastery of St. Prohor Pcinjski, after the demarcation of the state borders between Macedonia and Serbia, under circumstances which are still not clear for Macedonian public, felt in the frames of Serbia. Thus, the location, the symbol of Macedonian statehood, remained in the borders of another state, property of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), with whom Macedonian Orthodox Church has a fifty-year long dispute over its declaration of autonomy and separation from SOC. This is why SOC from the middle of the '90ties started to question the celebration of the monastery of St. Prohor Pchinjski, to condition Macedonian state authorities, which resulted with forbidding the entrance for Macedonian delegations into the Monastery. This was an impulse for the Macedonian side to build, only 10 km away from the original site, but on the territory of Macedonia, at a place called Pelince, a new memorial center where people could celebrate 2nd of August in a dignified and free way. This is how Ilinden in the last decade and a half, turned into a holiday of divisions mainly on political grounds, of re-reading and interpretations of the older and recent history of the two Ilindens.



Ilinden horse riders - a part of the misenscene of Ilinden celebration in Krushevo*

Only as an illustration we will quote an article published in one of the daily newspapers in Macedonia, “Dnevnik”. Speaking about the celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the Ilinden uprising, at a closed Meeting of the Board for celebrating the jubilee, attended by late President Mr. Boris Trajkovski, “Dnevnik” says: “Opinions were expressed that the holiday should not turn into an event of divisions upon historic, party or political grounds. Thus, all citizens should have a unique attitude of respect towards the 100-year anniversary of Macedonian’s statehood. We expect an input from the political parties, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and mostly of the citizens. Everything that will be marked as our historic foundation will be a part of the path that leads Macedonia towards European integrations - said President Trajkovski” (Trajkovski, Dnevnik No. 2198, 18.03.2006).

* Photo by Velko Nikolski, participant at the Competition for best photography at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, 2008.



Memorial Center “Pelince”, celebration of the 2nd of August, 2005
(www.pressonline.com.mk, 02.08.2005).

In the second phase of transformation of the holiday calendar it can be noted that the category “holidays of RM” includes 1st and 2nd of January - New Year and 1st and 2nd of May - Labor Day, but it does not include religious holidays - although they play an increasingly important role in every-day life they are not a part of the official holiday calendar. Article 4 of the Law on holidays of RM from 1998 reads: Holidays and non-working days in the Republic of Macedonia are: the first day of Christmas and the second day of Easter for the members of Christian faiths, then the first day of Ramazan Bayram and the first day of Kurban Bayram for the members of Muslim faith, as well as the first day of Yom Kippur for the members of Jewish community (Law on Holidays in RM, No.21/98, 08.05.1998).

The third phase of transformation of the holiday calendar of RM started from 2007 onwards, when the Amended Law on holidays of RM (Amended Law on holidays in RM, No.18/2007) was established, which should be further analyzed in the context of the events that took place in Macedonia after the armed conflict of 2001 and the Framework Agreement*, the changes of the Constitution of RM and the issuing of few important, but for the Macedonian public still unknown documents or agreements between

* The Framework Agreement was established and signed 13th of August 2001 under the auspice of the late President of RM, Mr. Boris Trajkovski, which ended the armed conflict in Macedonia. This agreement “promotes the peaceful and harmonic development of civil society, at the same time respecting ethnic identity and interests of all Macedonian citizens”. After its establishment amendment changes of the Constitution of RM as well as other changes of the Legal regulative in Macedonia were made <http://www.lsg-data.org.mk/Laws/Ramkoven%20dogovor.pdf>.

the political subjects (the so called May agreement^{*}) which mainly concern the communities in Macedonia. Through the Amended Law on holidays the list of state holidays in RM is extended, and now besides the state holidays that focus upon the celebration of the statehood of the Republic introduces few more holidays such as: 24th of May - St. Cyril and Methodius, 23rd of October - Day of the Macedonian liberation fight and 8th of December - St. Kliment Ohridski. Through introducing these two religious holidays two important spheres of our tradition is emphasized, the first being related to the diffusion of Slavic literacy as a result of the activity of the brothers Cyril and Methodius, and the second, accenting of the importance of St. Kliment Ohridski as a patron and protector of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and of Macedonia as a state. The holiday 23rd of October - Day of the Macedonian liberation fight marks the day when in Thessaloniki (Solun) in 1893 the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was formed. Members of a number of different political parties in Macedonia that have VMRO as part of their name (for example VMRO-DPMNE^{**}, VMRO-NP, VMRO-Macedonian, VMRO-VMRO and others) claim to be inheritors of this organization. The suggestion of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE created a number of discussions and polemics in Macedonian public, which mainly referred to the polarization of state holidays and misuse of power of the ruling parties.

The category “holidays of RM” underwent the following changes: New Year is celebrated only on the 1st of January, as well as the Labor Day, that is now celebrated only on the 1st of May. This category includes three most important religious holidays: two (Badnik and Christmas) related to Christian faith and one (Ramazan Bayram) related to Islamic faith.

^{*} This agreement dates from May 2007, although it is not clear if it exists in written form. It was concluded between the current Prime Minister of RM Mr. Nikola Gruevski and the President of the Democratic Party for Integration and leader of the Liberation Army of Albanians in the conflict in Macedonia 2001, which should regulate certain issues related to the Albanian community in Macedonia.

^{**} VMRO-DPMNE, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, VMRO-NP - Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - People's Party.



Celebration of Easter, Main Orthodox Christian Temple “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Skopje, 2008 (volanskopje.blog.com.mk/node/152630)

Aiming to reflect the multicultural and multi-religious character of Macedonia, this Law prescribes as holidays and non-working days a number of dates related to Christian and Islamic faiths, while including holidays which are of great importance for the communities in Macedonia and have an ethnic character, such as the Day of Albanian alphabet, the Day of Teaching in Turkish Language, the Day of the Jewish Community, Day of the Serbian Community, International Day of Roma Community, National Day of the Vlah Community and the International Day of the Bosnian community (Amended Law on the Law for Holidays in RM, No.18/2007). All of these holidays are non-working days for the members of the communities.

In this phase, this last year (2008), as a form of civil activism, but under a strong influence of the Government of RM (under its sponsorship and complete support), one day, 12th of March 2008, under the motto “Day of the tree - plant your future”, has become almost a state, national holiday, with trans-national features (many Macedonians in other states, for example New Zealand, Britain, have planted trees taking part in the action of their native country). Through a decision of the Government of RM this date was proclaimed a non-working day. It was dedicated to “raising of the level of civil engagement” in regards to the environment and the citizen’s own future, and the citizens had to work the next non-working day (Saturday, 15th of March). According to the initiative of the Initiative Board and with the complete support of the Government of RM, as well as many other Governmental institutions and other institutions that are under direct or indirect control of the Government, the number of planted trees equaled the number of citizens in Macedonia. More than 150,000 people took part at more than 57 locations.



Highest representatives of religious institutions in Macedonia (Macedonian Orthodox Church and Islamic Religious Community) planting trees
(Utrinski vesnik, No. 2635, 13.03.2008)

Here is how the famous opera singer Boris Trajanov, member of the Initiative Board, interpreted the symbolic nature of this action:

“The action has sent a powerful message”, says Trajanov, “that people in Macedonia are not divided and in dispute as it seems from outside, on the contrary, we are unified if a good idea brings us together. One of them is to clean up Macedonia, which will most probably be implemented in the future.” (Gragjanski svet, No.80, 2008).

Besides the powerful media campaign, with the logo of the Government being present at all times, an important place in the ‘ritualization’ of this new holiday, which should become ‘traditional’, is played by the speeches of famous media and political persons, especially in regards to the planting of the first tree, a cherry tree, at the grave of singer Toshe Proeski in Krushevo, who recently died in a car crash. This event was treated as an inauguration part of this new holiday, and it is also incorporated in the process of memorization and paying respect of the Macedonian pop star that slowly becomes a part of contemporary Macedonian identity - Toshe Proeski.



Planted cherry-tree at the grave of Toshe Proeski



Macedonia has planted its future - Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski planted a tree
(www.premportal.com.mk, 12.03.2008)

Sources:

Gragjanski svet, n. 80, 2008.

Law on State Holidays of the Socialistic Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazette of SRM, n. 16/65 and 15/72.

Law on Holidays of the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Official Gazette of SFRY, n. 6/73.

Law on Holidays in the Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazette n. 21/98, from 08.05.1998.

Amended Law on Holidays in RM, Official Gazette n. 18/2007.

Premin Portal, 12th of March 2008, www.premportal.com.mk.

Utrinski vesnik, n. 2635, 13th of March 2008 (Thursday).

References:

Abeles Mark, Antropologija države, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd 2001.

Čolović Ivan, Politika simbola, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd 2000.

Dimitrov Dimitar, The spirit of Ilinden, daily newspaper Dnevnik, 1st of August 1997.

Klaus Rot, Slike u glavama: Ogledi o narodnoj kulturi u jugoistočnoj Evropi, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd 2000, 85-89.

Rihtman-Auguštin Dunja, Ulice moga grada: Antropologija domaćeg terena, Bibliteka XX vek, Beograd 2000.

Trajkovski: Ilinden is not a holiday for party or political biddings, Dnevnik n. 2198, Saturday/Sunday, 18th of March 2006.

Žirarde Paul, Politički mitove i mitologije, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd 2000.



