

**ENSURING INTERNATIONAL RESPECT FOR THE FUNDAMENTAL  
HUMAN RIGHT OF PEOPLE TO SELF-DETERMINATION**

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*“And in a vision by night, there appeared to Paul a certain man of Macedonia, standing before his face,  
beseeching him and saying: ‘Come over into Macedonia and save us!’”*

*Acts of the Apostles, 16, 9*

Abstract

I would have never imagined that one of the oldest documented people in the world, a people who have a place in the Bible and who persevered through extreme hardship stemming from territorial occupation inflicted by its neighbors and wars throughout documented history – including torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, legal, physical and psychological repression, population exchanges, forced mass exoduses, the forcible transfer of children on a large scale, the disproportionate and unnecessary use of force on the civilian population, psychological warfare, propaganda and indoctrination, and various assimilationist policies, all of which had one common goal – the destruction of the existence of the Macedonian people, Macedonian language and Macedonian history – would be a victim of an arguably unprecedented “cultural genocide” and be denied the right to their identity in the 21st century. The absurdity of the situation is magnified when one realizes that those who are urging Macedonians to give up their name, identity and language are not dictators, but diplomats and politicians representing the very entities that were meant to be the defenders of human rights: the UN and the EU.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine, in a time of peace and an era of the supremacy of human rights to be denied the universal right of self-determination. The right of a people to self-determination is a cardinal principle in modern international law (commonly regarded as a *jus cogens* rule).

Self-determination is not a mere phrase; it is an imperative principle of action. All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. This concept is a principle of international law which allows the people of a state to determine the sovereignty and political status of that state without outside interference.

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<sup>1</sup> Vera Lalchevska, *The Importance of Being Macedonian: Origins and Consequences of the ‘Name Issue’ between Greece and Macedonia* ( Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2016)

This paper will consider the destruction of Macedonian identity and culture by means of political blackmail into a conundrum that is most paradoxical for this era that champions human rights as essential to international peace and security, an era in which the right to self-determination is recognized as one of the basic human rights, which is essential to social and economic well-being.

**Keywords:** human rights, self-determination, United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## INTRODUCTION

The first question we need to ask is where do we come from regarding human rights? Where were we before the United Nations was founded?

Seventy years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights became another gleam of hope for humanity. A milestone document that proclaimed the inalienable rights which everyone is inherently entitled to as a human being- regardless of race, color, religion, sex, language, national origin, birth or other status. In 1946, Eleanor Roosevelt submitted the Declaration to the United Nation General Assembly with these words: “We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This Declaration may well become the international Magna Carta for all men everywhere.”<sup>2</sup> While the promise is yet to be fully realized, the very fact that the Declaration has stood the test of time is a testament to the enduring universality of its perennial values of equality, justice and human dignity.

The Macedonian state participated in the creation of the United Nations. In 1945, Socialist Federal Republics of Yugoslavia was one of the founders of the United Nations. As a constitutive Republic with a right to self-determination through secession, Macedonia was, albeit indirectly, a co-founder of the United Nations. As a state within that federation, we participated in the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the international pacts on civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights that guarantee human dignity, the right to self-determination and the right to sovereign equality of states.<sup>3</sup>

Our constitutional name Republic of Macedonia by itself gives a clear example of the distinction between Macedonia as a wider geographical region and our country as a Republic. (Note: this is the most recent manifestation, under Yugoslavia, but Macedonia as a region / country has existed since ancient times.)

The concept of self-determination is a principle of international law, which allows the people of a state to determine the sovereignty and political status of that state without outside interference. The rights to self-determination originated as far back as the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. In

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis, Jone Johnson, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (ThoughtCo)

<sup>3</sup> Gjorge Ivanov, Speech by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Macedonia, , delivered at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2018

the American Declaration of Independence, a main premise was that the legitimacy of the government derives from the consent of the governed and it is the people who have the right to alter or abolish the government. The creation of many European states was based on this idea that every country should have the right to establish an independent nation.

How do peoples exercise their right to self-determination? This is a question about the act of self-determination and, more specifically, about the creation and expression of the free will of a people. While, in principle, the will of a people could be formed in various ways—through government decision or parliamentary resolution, or through a referendum.

Over the course of the twentieth century, self-determination evolved from a general political principle into a legal right. The United Nations Charter offered the first step in the transformation to legality by proclaiming as one of its purposes, the promotion of "friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples." (UN Charter, Article, 1.2)<sup>4</sup>

UN Charter principles including self-determination deemed fundamental to international law. The preamble places self-determination firmly in the context of international security: the denial of self-determination is described as a threat to peace and security and the exercise of self-determination as the basis of peaceful international relations:

"By virtue of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples enshrined in the Charter, all peoples have the right freely to determine, without external interference, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development, and every State has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter."<sup>5</sup>

On September 8, 1991, making use of our sovereign right to self-determination and secession, Macedonia was the only republic that peacefully, through referendum, left the collapsing federation of Yugoslavia and proclaimed an independent and sovereign Republic of Macedonia. We were recognized by 140 countries by our constitutional name, including China, Russia, UK and USA.

### **Brief History: Does this seem normal?**

Winston Churchill once commented that 'the Balkans produce more history than they consume'. The name dispute between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece has a long historical background due to the problematic relationship between the two nations under the five hundred year Ottoman rule, which culminated during the Balkan Wars in the period between 1912 and 1913. The Balkan Wars of 1912–13,

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Danspeckgruber and Anne-Marie Gardner, *Self-Determination*, (Encyclopedia Princetoniensis)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

particularly the Second Balkan, or Inter-Allied War, led to the first violation of Macedonia's territorial integrity since dynastic states fought each other in the medieval Balkans and the Ottoman empire conquered the region in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In 1913, force of arms partitioned the severely weakened Macedonia between the kingdom of Bulgaria and the allied kingdoms of Greece and Serbia. The partition was carried out by force of arms and sanctioned by the Bucharest Peace Treaty signed on August 10th, 1913 according to which all the Balkan states expanded their territories. Macedonia was not only denied its autonomy which had originally been one of the causes against Turkey, but it was forcefully divided and portioned by its neighboring Balkan states. This arrangement, with minor modifications, survives to this day. Macedonia was divided up according to the following proportion: Greece acquired Aegean Macedonia (*34,603 square kilometers*), *the* largest piece of Macedonian territory *or 51.57%*; Serbia—"Yugoslavia" after the Great War—took Vardar Macedonia (25,714 square kilometers *or 38.32%*); Bulgaria took the smallest part, Pirin Macedonia, with about 6,778 square kilometers *or 10.11%*.<sup>6</sup>The part of Macedonia known as Mala Prespa was given to Albania by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. This treaty finalized the partition of Macedonia between Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Albania and began the era of denationalization and forced assimilation of the Macedonian people.

In the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the Greek army crossed into Macedonia and took possession of 51% of the whole country including its largest city of Salonica. The decree of Georgios I, the King of the Greeks, issued on October 31, 1912, acknowledges by the king himself that the "territories in Macedonia (are) occupied by the Greek army": "Taking into account the developed need for the urgent and temporary organization of the administration of the territories in Macedonia, occupied by the Greek army. At the proposal of the Ministerial Council, we have decided and command the following. The Minister of Justice Mr. K. Raktivan, as representative of the Greek Government, is instructed to organize the affairs concerning the temporary administration of the occupied territories. The president of the Ministerial Council is to announce and carry out this decree." It is clear that Macedonia was not "liberated" from the Ottomans by the Greek army (as the modern Greeks claim today) but occupied by the same; i.e. the Ottomans were on the way out (having lost the war) and Macedonia's neighbors took advantage of its severely weakened position to gain territory

Drawing new borders under the pretense of establishing "balance" and peace on the Balkans was a violent denial of the rights of the Macedonian people to live and develop as a free, unified and independent nation. The aspirations towards the creation of a state of their own as a necessity, a guarantee of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia, were evident in the ideas and actions of the Macedonian

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<sup>6</sup> George Christopoulos and John Bastias, *Macedonia: History and Politics* (Ekdotike Athenon S.A. for the Centre for Macedonians Abroad and the Society for Macedonian Studies, Athens, 1991)

revolutionaries. Despite the conquering and partitioning of their homeland they fought for independence and the establishment of a Macedonian government and national assembly which would decide on the form of government and the internal structure of the Macedonian state. However, the attempts to prevent the compulsory partition of Macedonia were in vain because the Balkan and the European states remained deaf to the demands of the Macedonian people for preserving the integrity of their land and its constitution as a state.

The new masters of the conquered Macedonian regions introduced a violent military and police regime, denied the national individuality of the Macedonian people, deprived them of their rights and tortured and denationalized the Macedonian people.

After the Balkan Wars, Macedonia was completely devastated. Besides the tens of thousands killed in the war, there were several hundreds of thousands of refugees (more than 135,000 Macedonians and a small number of Bulgarians from Thrace who escaped from the Aegean part of Macedonia occupied by the Greek army). There were numerous cases of genocide towards the Macedonian population in the territories occupied by the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies and, according to the Carnegie Commission, several towns like Voden, Negush, Ber, Enidze Vardar, Dojran, etc., more than 200 villages (out of which around 170 villages with 17,000 homesteads in the Aegean part of Macedonia) were completely destroyed. In June 1913 the Greek army burnt to ashes the Macedonian town of Kukush with its 1,846 houses, 612 shops, 6 factories, etc. At the same time 4,000 houses were burned to the ground in the Seres vicinity. The tragic outcome of the Balkan Wars was a real national catastrophe for Macedonia. The unresolved Macedonian question continued to be "an apple of discord" for the Balkan states. It remained in the whirlpool of events which were of fatal importance both for Macedonia and the future of the Balkans. Population changes in Aegean Macedonia had an effect on the status of the languages in common use in those territories. Tens of thousands of Macedonians were forcibly expelled from their homes while over half a million Greeks were shipped in from Turkey and Bulgaria and inhabited Aegean Macedonia. Up until the period of the great population exchanges, the Macedonian tongue was the most commonly used language. *"Out of the total population of 1 052 227 inhabitants ..... 805 000 persons knew and used the Macedonian language in business and the market – place in everyday life."*<sup>7</sup> Greek was a minority language or family language, used daily by some 220 000 speakers. The situation reversed after the population exchanges in 1923 between Greece and Turkey.

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<sup>7</sup> Macedonian P.E.N. Centre, *The Status of the Macedonian Language in the Aegean Part of Macedonia in Greece* (P.E.N. Centre, 1986)

Out of a total of 1 412 477 persons living in Aegean Macedonia after the great population exchanges, more than a million people used or tried to use the Greek tongue. Thus Greek became the common as well as the official language. The Macedonians suddenly found themselves a national minority within their own land. Some have estimated that about 370 000 “Slav Macedonians”<sup>8</sup> were living in northern Greece after the partitioning, many in the Western part of Aegean Macedonia in the Kostur, Lerin, and Voden areas. These latter areas are still predominantly Macedonian – speaking today, though the people are often reluctant to admit this.

After the Greeks occupied Aegean Macedonia, they closed the Macedonian language schools and churches and expelled the priests. The Macedonian language and name were forbidden, and the Macedonians were referred to as Bulgarians, Serbians or natives. By a law promulgated on November 21, 1926, all place – names (toponymia) were Hellenised; that is, the names of cities, villages, rivers and mountains were discarded and Greek names put in their place. At the same time the Macedonians were forced to change their first names and surnames. The requirement to use these Greek names is officially binding to this day. The use of the Macedonian language was strictly forbidden also in personal communication between parents and children, among villagers, at weddings and work parties, and in burial rituals. Despite the general policy, there were times when arms of the Greek government, in the face of international pressure, took quite a different position to the Macedonian language (i.e. recognized it). However, it is now the position of the Greek government that the Macedonian language does not exist and never has existed.

The independent expert on minority issues, Gay McDougallurges visited Greece from 8 to 16 September 2008, inter alia, to promote implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. She travelled to different regions and conducted extensive consultations with senior government representatives and public officials at the national and regional levels. She consulted civil society organizations, religious leaders, academics and community leaders.

In Ms. McDougallurges’s Report on promotion and Protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, she urges the government of Greece to withdraw from the dispute over whether there is a Macedonian or a Turkish minority in Greece and focus on protecting the rights to self-identification, freedom of expression and freedom of association of those communities – that their rights to minority protections must be honoured in accordance with the Declaration on Minorities and the core international human rights treaties. McDougallurges urges Greece to comply fully with the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights, specifically those decisions

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<sup>8</sup> Stojan Ristevski, *The Creation of the Macedonian Literary Language*, (Studentski zbor, Skopje, 1988)

that associations should be allowed to use the words “Macedonian” and “Turkish” in their names and to express their ethnic identities freely.<sup>9</sup>

Because there was a large Macedonian population that Greece acquired with its part of the Macedonian territory it annexed after 1913, which it intended to assimilate, the name “Macedonia” was forbidden from use. Never in its own history has Greece used the name “Macedonia” prior to August 1988. Before August 1988, the name Macedonia had never been used in Greece in any official form. Its northern province was named Northern Greece (Voreia Ellada). Then when it became very clear that Yugoslavia was breaking up, the Greek Prime Minister by decree informally renamed the region to Macedonia and Thrace. In other words, this part of the region was not a part of any administrative-political division of land. In parallel with this three districts were created and named “Western Macedonia”, “Central Macedonia” and “Eastern Macedonia and Thrace”. That means that in Greece there never was nor is a province called “Macedonia”

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Macedonians have been fighting attempts at eradication ever since. Greece, ironically, outlawed the term “Macedonia” and denied its existence until a dramatic propaganda switch in 1988, when it began a campaign of trying to deceive the world into believing that Macedonia was “Greek”. Let’s not forget though, that our other oppressors (erstwhile occupiers) also claim Macedonia. Or, instead of being bogged down in a brutal game of Balkan roulette, we could just use common sense. Macedonia is Macedonian.

### **The legal struggle for the fundamental human right of self-determination**

Republic of Macedonia became a member of the United Nations 25 years ago, on April 8, 1993. And yet, in this community of equals before the law, the Republic of Macedonia was admitted as less equal, with a derogated legal personality and a violated right to self-determination.

This is what the great injustice is all about. We were not allowed to enjoy the privileges of the United Nations and the documents drafted by the UN in whose creation we once participated. The right to self-determination is the source of the right of people to choose their own name and the name of the state they created. The right to choose a name is an inalienable part of the right to self-determination. Only by respecting the right to self-determination will the United Nations be relevant for all peoples. As a people,

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<sup>9</sup> Gay McDougall, *Promotion And Protection Of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social And Cultural Rights, Including The Right To Development Report Of The Independent Expert On Minority Issues Addendum Mission To Greece* (United Nation, Human Rights Council A/HRC/10/11/Add.3 18 February 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Risto Nikovski, *Memorandum to the European Parliament: Facts behind the Greek politics towards Macedonia*, (Dnevnik, April 19,2008)

we have been bearing the name Macedonians for centuries, and as a state for 74 years – even before the existence of the United Nations.<sup>11</sup>

On 7th April 1993, UN Security Council adopted Resolution 817 respective to which, Macedonia became the 181st member of the UN under the provisional reference name “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. The article 4 of the UN Charter clearly states that: “1. Membership in the United Nations is open to all other peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and, in the judgment of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations. 2. The admission of any such state to membership in the United Nations will be effected by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.”

By imposing conditions on Macedonia regarding its name, the Security Council and the General Assembly have essentially denied the right of Macedonia to choose its own name. The inherent right of a state to have a name can be derived from the necessity that a juridical personality must have a legal identity. The denial by the UN political organs of the inherent right of Macedonia to choose its name, implied by the additional conditions imposed for its admission to UN membership, is, therefore, in violation of Article 2 (paragraphs 1 and 7) of the Charter. The respect for the principles embedded in this article are equally applicable to the organisation as to its members (e.g. Article 2(7) explicitly forbids the UN from intervening in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of the states), and their violation by the UN directly involves its legal responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

In the same year, on 18th June, UN Security Council adopted Resolution 845 according to which it “urges both parties [Macedonia and Greece] to continue their efforts under the auspices of the Secretary-General to arrive at a speedy settlement of the remaining issues between them”. According to these two Resolutions, on 13th September 1995 the Interim accord between Macedonia and Greece was signed, as a most important agreement by which the relations between the two countries were clearly defined and finally normalized.<sup>13</sup> After a period of relative status quo on the name issues, Greece took another unpopular measure by vetoing Macedonia on the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, violating with that the Article 11 of the Interim Accord stating that “the Party of the First Part-Greece agrees not to object to the application by or the membership of the Party of the Second Part-Macedonia in international, multilateral and regional organizations and institutions of which the Party of the First Part is a member”. Taking this as an actual

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<sup>11</sup> Gjorge Ivanov, Speech by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Macedonia, , delivered at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Igor Janev, *On The Un's Legal Responsibility For The Irregular Admission Of Macedonia To Un*, <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Igor-Janev.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Christos Nikas, *The Effects of the Interim Accord on the Economic Relations Between Greece and FYROM*. Athens-Skopje: An Uneasy Symbiosis, (ELIAMEP Working Papers, 2005)



accord violation, the Republic of Macedonia filed a case against Greece in front of the International Court of Justice of UN in Hague on 17th November 2008. The Court decision - in favor of the Republic of Macedonia - was passed on 5th December 2011 undoubtedly becoming a turning point in the further relations and development of the name dispute.<sup>14</sup> However, the Court rejected the Macedonian request to order Greece to refrain from any future conduct that violates its obligation under Article 11, paragraph 1, of the Interim Accord. As the Court explained, “[a]s a general rule, there is no reason to suppose that a State whose act or conduct has been declared wrongful by the Court will repeat that act of conduct in the future, since its good faith must be presumed.” However, as unprecedented in international relations, the decision was not taken as sufficient justification for the admission efforts of the Republic of Macedonia towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union, both agreeing that that membership and the start of the negotiation process would begin as soon as Macedonia found a solution for the name dispute with Greece.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of being rewarded, we have been punished for our peace-loving nature. It seems to be forgotten that the United Nations were created by visionaries who wanted an order in which even the smallest and the weakest of peoples would be protected because the respect of the rights of small peoples and states is a barometer for the observance of the international charter on human rights. UN with the two Resolutions for Macedonia violated Article 7 of the UDHR that states that: “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.”

So far, in the dispute over the international name of the Republic of Macedonia, both NATO and EU member states have taken a solidary stance with Greece. This is mainly due to the fact that they considered the Greek offer of a compromise to rename R. Macedonia into “Republic of Northern Macedonia” to be fair, notwithstanding the damage that it would entail to the Macedonian national identity.<sup>16</sup> In the village of Psarades (Nivitsi) on the Greek side of the Prespa Lake, Foreign Ministers of Macedonia and Greece, Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias, signed the “Final Agreement in resolving the differences described in resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993) by the United Nations Security Council, for the termination of the validity of the Interim Accord of 1995 and establishing a strategic partnership between the parties.”

This agreement binds Macedonia to obey clearly unjust pacts, such as the eradication, re-writing of the history of Macedonia (with oversight authority granted to Greece) and the obliteration of any reference, relinquishment of any connection to the Macedonians living in Greece. European Free Alliance

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<sup>14</sup> International Court of Justice. Press Release No. 2011/37, 2011

<sup>15</sup> European Commission: Republic of Macedonia Progress Report Brussels, Belgium, 2013. (pp. 1–63)

<sup>16</sup> Toni Deskoski and Julija Brsakoska Bazerkoska, *What's in a Name? The Republic of Macedonia at the Crossroads*, 2017

(“EFA”)President, François Alfonsi, stated that “the end of the Greek blockage to the Republic of Macedonia on NATO and EU integration has a price that might be just too high to be acceptable. EFA is highly concerned about the consequences of the deal, certainly on what we fear will happen to the Macedonian minority in Greece (and Bulgaria). EFA fears that the lack of respect for the Macedonian minorities in the mentioned member states will further deteriorate. This pact undermines the Macedonian identity in general and, in particular, relegates the Macedonian minorities in the neighboring countries to eradication.” Greece (and Bulgaria) have never acknowledged the existence of any Macedonian minority within their territories. Now, following this agreement, the situation of the Macedonian minorities in the neighboring countries will considerably worsen. Lorena Lopez de Lacalle, Vice president of EFA, who visited the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria earlier this year, underlines that “if the Macedonian history is to be interpreted and written by Greece, if the Macedonian identity is to be determined by Greece, there will be even less margin for the Macedonian minority in Greece and Bulgaria to state and defend their case. The Republic of Macedonia will have to bare its share of culpability for the injustices that emanate from the Prespa agreement. The end of a blockage to EU and NATO accession should never undermine the right of a nation to its own existence.”<sup>17</sup>

From a legal point of view, all the international documents on which the Prespa Agreement is based, the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Acts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (“OSCE”) and are guided by the values and principles of the Council of Europe, have been violated, especially Article 4 of the UN Charter, which states that no country can be required to meet additional criteria for UN membership. With the Prespa Agreement, Greece is imposing a new name, “Republic of North Macedonia” and is asking for an erga omnes implementation - both for international and domestic use. It is foreseen that we change our Constitution, whereby Greece would become the ultimate authority that would approve constitutional amendments. Through this settlement, Greece would be given a permanent monitoring over how we name ourselves, but also over how you, Member States of the United Nations, will address us. Greece will be authorized to rename our institutions, to censor the contents of schoolbooks for our children, to prevent citizens from expressing their Macedonian identity. This also regulates the appellation of our Macedonian language. A very important part of our way of life will depend on Greek will. It is a censorship of the world and an auto-censorship of the collective conscience of Macedonian people. It is violence against our historical memory. There are hundreds of thousands of pages of documents and testimonies in the UN archives, detailing what the Greek state used to do to Macedonians in Greece. Now, with the Prespa Agreement, the Greek state wants to do the same to

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<sup>17</sup> Prespa: A dangerous agreement, Great concerns with the so called “Prespa agreement” between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia. European Free Alliance, 2018

the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia. The aim is to limit the use of the name Macedonians to the smallest possible space - and that is the space between our two ears, all while keeping our mouth closed. It is a flagrant violation of the right to self-determination.<sup>18</sup>

A referendum was held in the Republic of Macedonia on 30 September 2018, with voters asked whether they support EU and NATO membership by accepting the agreement struck between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece in June 2018. A referendum to change the name of Macedonia failed to secure the 50 percent turnout required to make the vote valid, with registered voter turnout of 36.8%.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country”, and that “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.” The citizens of Macedonia did not give authority to the Macedonian Government to change their country’s name and identity. Notwithstanding the will of the people expressed in the failed referendum still, the international community and our government are pushing for implementation of the Prespa Agreement, with a promise of a better future, and without regard to the enormous expense to the nation of creating a new, semi-sovereign country, with a new name and a new internal and international legal identity. We will be a nation-state only by name, but not in substance, because others will regulate our way of life.

## **Conclusion**

Which is the most essential thread of a person’s identity? Is it the Name, the Language, the Blood, the Genes, the Faith, the Land? Certainly it is the blend of all of these. Macedonians identify with and are very possessive of our republic. It is the only homeland we have or could have. Our survival as a people and nation, and that of our Macedonian language and Macedonian culture, depends on the continuing existence of our Macedonian nation-state.

The chosen name of a state is an inherent element of the right to self-determination, and the right to self-determination is a foundation of the United Nations and the European Union. Identity issues cannot be and have never been a subject of negotiations and international agreements. It is the right of every nation to decide their own identity issues. The adjective before the new name of Macedonia means denying Macedonian identity and making a new nation, new country with new history.

This year is not only the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is also the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Today we are

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<sup>18</sup> Gjorge Ivanov, Speech by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Macedonia,, delivered at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2018

witnessing a “cultural genocide” in the making. An attempt to commit another genocide on the Macedonian people – to erase them, their country, their language and their history from the books and maps of the world.

As a legal scholar, I call on the international community to support and affirm the inviolable rights of the Macedonian people to their own distinct language, culture, and identity. Self-determination is a foundation of international, democratic society and these rights must be respected. The way forward for both Macedonia and Greece must depend on mutual respect, recognition and dignity for all parties. The challenge before us is enormous, but the struggle begins with words.

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