

THE BORDERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Macedonia occupies an area which, due to its geo-strategic position, natural, historical and development features, is considered to be very complex. This complexity is evident in the social, ethnic and demographic heterogeneity of the country and, from an historical viewpoint a polarised territorial system. Since ancient times this area has been the scene of many confrontations and territorial claims. There have also been periods of significant historical, anthropological, political and geographical change. As a result, constant integration and disintegration processes have taken place in the Republic of Macedonia, which underline the need for thorough study of the area, naturally including a study of its borders and border areas.

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Three of the present borders of the republic were established at the end of World War I, while the fourth was determined at the end of World War II. On 2 August 1944, the Vardar valley part of Macedonia was proclaimed a republic, becoming an equal republic within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Macedonia's borders with the Republics of Albania, Greece and Bulgaria were thus also the international borders of SFRY with these countries. After Macedonia gained its independence its former internal administrative border with federal Yugoslavia was established as an international border.

Different historical and geographical events have influenced the present borders of the Republic of Macedonia. Much has been written and said about this, but it should be noted that the present international borders of Macedonia do not encompass all ethnic Macedonians (see previous article). Although the present borderline appears, for much of its length, to be a 'natural' border, its establishment was influenced mostly by military and strategic considerations. As such, the border may cause political as well as ethnic and geographical problems in the future.

The Republic of Macedonia, as a newly established independent state, has already experienced a number of problems with its neighbours. One of the current issues is that of its international borders. Although these state borders were established after World War II, there are still unsettled questions concerning certain sections of them. In particular there have been a number of disputes associated with the border between Macedonia and Yugoslavia.

THE BORDER WITH THE REPUBLIC OF GREECE

Most of the present border between Macedonia and Greece is identical to the border established between Serbia and Greece after the Balkan Wars by the *Bucharest Peace Agreement* of 28 July 1913. The only location which was changed after World War I, as a result of the *Neian Peace Agreement* in 1919, was the tripartite point between Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria on Belasica Mountain. With this change, the length of the border was increased by 12km eastwards.

The border was marked for the first time in the period between 1928 and 1930 when 177 main border markers, 503 subordinate markers and 596 border signals were placed along the border. A topographic measurement from the borderline of up to 2km was carried out, and a border map on the scale of 1:250,000 was printed. These documents were used until 1984 when they were replaced by new ones. Border markers were checked and replaced during 1952, 1961/62, 1969/70, 1975 and 1980. Because of insufficient and inaccurate information in the documents mentioned,

there were cases when the representatives of the two sides disagreed on specific locations on the borderline. Thus, in 1978, the Joint Commission decided to undertake a new marking and measurement of the international border. Work started in 1981 and finished in 1983. The border markers and the coordinates for 507 unmarked minor deviations from the borderline were determined.

The border with the Republic of Greece is mostly a latitudinal. It goes over mountains, plains and water. The length of the border along lakes is 19.5km, along rivers it is 5.5km and on land its length is 236.6km. The distance between the tripoints at either end of Macedonia's southern border, measured in a straight line, is 172km and the coefficient of the deviation from the straight line is $C = 1.52$.¹

Rectangle coordinates were determined in two different systems of coordinates (the Yugoslav and the Greek system). Both systems used elements from Besel's earth ellipsoid, and the coordinates of the points were measured according to the Gauss-Kruger conformed projection. The middle meridian of the zone of both systems was the meridian with longitude of 22 degrees ($\lambda = 22^\circ$) east of Greenwich. The rectangle coordinates and the altitudes of the points are shown in border documentation. This documentation also contains 90 pages of topographic maps at a scale of 1:5,000 which show the width of the borderland of up to 500m. The border documentation was adopted during a session of the two states' Joint Commission in Skopje on 22-25 May 1984.

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In total there are 2,577 border markers along the border between Macedonia and Greece. On land, there are 177 major and about 2,366 subordinate border markers, three light signals and 30 buoys. The deviation at the railroad Bitola-Lerin (Florina) is marked with border signs. Two light signals are positioned on Lake Dojran where the borderline proceeds from land to water. One light signal is positioned on Lake Prespa. There are four types of border markers: border stones 110-180cm high; stones 50cm high; and, border markers in the form of cylinders made of asbestos, 70-80cm high. There are 18 buoys in the shape of a double cone (1.5m high) on Lake Dojran and 12 on Lake Prespa, spaced 600m apart.

Major border markers are marked with numbers from 1 to 177. They start at the tripoint point between Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece. The smaller border markers are marked with numbers from 1 to n, for example 143/2. The numerator denotes the number of the main border marker from where the marking starts, and the denominator denotes the number of the second marker going in the direction from border marker 143 to border marker 144. Unmarked deviations of the borderline are marked in the border documentation with numbers from 1 to n, between two neighbouring border markers, for example, 143/2.3. Number three (3) denotes the third unmarked deviation from the borderline in the direction from the border marker 143/2 to the border marker 143/3.

THE BORDER WITH THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Macedonia's border with Albania was in large part demarcated in 1913, but there are a few locations which are still open to dispute. After World War I, the Assembly of the People's Society proposed a Resolution on determining the borders of Albania which was under the responsibility of the Conference of Ambassadors. The Conference of Ambassadors made a decision on 9 November 1921 to form an international commission which was to determine and mark the borders of Albania with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Work on the ground started in 1922, and finished in October 1925. The international commission divided the borderline into six sections.

Macedonia's western border with the Republic of Albania predominantly parallels the Adriatic coast and is 192km long. On land, the border extends for 145.545km,

and on water surfaces its length totals 46.505km. The border traverses lakes for 27.13km of its length (23.275km across Lake Ohrid and 3.855km across Lake Prespa). The length of the border along rivers is 19.375km (12.1km along Crni Drim, 2.975km along Resanski Potok and 4.3km along Miresnica). The distance between the tripoints at the northern and southern ends of the western border measured in a straight line is 117.9km, and the deviation coefficient of the border from the straight line is $C = 1.63$.

The first control and renewal of the border markers was undertaken in 1954 and 1955. On 26 August 1956, a new Convention on keeping, maintaining and renewing border pyramids, between-pyramids and other border markers was signed. The previous division of the border was used in this Convention. A joint Yugoslav-Albanian commission was formed for renewal and maintenance of border markers along the borderline. The border markers were renewed in 1962, 1967, 1972, 1977 and 1982. New additional border markers were placed during these controls. This has improved the demarcation of the borderline, although the border has not been defined mathematically as yet. The border markers have not been determined by survey according to position and height. The border documentation contains only the following documents: the description of the borderline from one border stone to another and 11 pages of border maps at a scale of 1:50,000. The border documents are in French.

Due to the imprecise description of the borderline in the past, there was confusion about the location of some border markers and the borderline between them. The Albanian side was not ready to organise and realise survey work to mathematically define the description of the borderline.

The state border between Macedonia and Albania is identical to the border that was determined after the World War I. This border starts from border marker D24 at the peak of Serupa (2,092m), that is the tripoint between Macedonia, Albania and Yugoslavia and ends at the tripoint between Macedonia, Albania and Greece at Lake Prespa. On land, the border stretches to the shore of Lake Prespa, at border marker F20. The borderline is marked with two major border markers in section D (D24 and D25), and with seven subordinate border markers, with 49 major and 367 subordinate border markers in section E, and with 20 major and 95 subordinate border markers in section F.

According to research conducted on the ground, a great number of border markers on the border between Macedonia and Albania have been destroyed. The reasons for this lie in the geopolitically unstable nature of the border area (see previous article). This situation only occurs on this border. In contrast, on Macedonia's other borders there are only minor cases of border marker destruction caused by natural storms and bad weather.

THE BORDER WITH THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

At the time of writing the border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has still not been established in compliance with international standards and regulations, that is, it has not yet been reviewed by an international board (however, an agreement has recently been concluded see previous article). It has neither been marked with appropriate border signs, nor mathematically defined. The detailed description of this border provided here is provisional in nature as it is based on Macedonian internal statistical information. In particular the limits of Macedonia's smallest administrative units (village level) were used to define the limits of the international border as the limits of these border administrative units should coincide with the state border. Research was also conducted on the ground in the northern border region.

Macedonia's northern border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is aligned mainly in an east-west direction. Its length from Serupa in the west to Gradiste in the east is 263.8km, of which 212.9km traverses land and 50.9km water.² The distance between the terminal points – the tripoints on Macedonia's northern border – measured in a straight line is 153.3km and the coefficient of deviation from the straight line is $C = 1.72$.

The border with Yugoslavia can be considered to be mainly 'natural' because it extends along the high parts of the mountains. It consists of different relief features: mountains, canyons, and plains. The mountain part of the border extends across the mountains: German, Kozjak, Ruen, Skopska Crna Gora and Sar Planina. The border passes along the Pcinja and the Kacanik Canyons and across a plain to the Kumanovo-Presevo saddle.

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The Republic of Macedonia became independent in 1991. An agreement with Yugoslavia was signed in April 1996. A Macedonian-Yugoslav joint diplomatic-expert level commission is undertaking the delimitation of the border, with due respect to the former internal administrative border with the former SFRY. At the time of writing, nine meetings had been held, but the two sides appeared to be no closer to a solution than when they started (however, see previous article). The Macedonians want to maintain the existing border, while the Serbs want a detailed review of the entire border.

In the meantime, the Kosovo crisis complicates the situation and inevitably affects negotiations (see previous article).

THE BORDER WITH THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Macedonia's eastern border is, for most of its length, the former border which existed between the Kingdoms of Serbia and Bulgaria, which was defined by the *Bucharest Peace Agreement* in 1913.

The only change made was in the Strumica Plain area which, under the 1913 agreement was part of Bulgaria. Later, however, the *Neian Agreement* of 1919 returned this area to Yugoslavia (Macedonia), thus effectively moving the border eastwards. No other alterations to the alignment of the boundary were subsequently made.

The border was demarcated between 1920 and 1922 with corrections being made in 1956. A Convention was also signed in 1956 between the governments of the Former Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of Bulgaria for keeping, maintaining and renewing the borderline including the main and the subordinate border markers. From that period until the present no changes have been made.

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The border between Macedonia and Bulgaria is marked with 106 major border markers which have Arabic numbers from 1 to 106 beginning from the tripoint between Macedonia, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

Between the major border markers there are different subordinate markers, and certain parts of the borderline are marked with shallow grooves. The main and the subordinate border markers are not determined in position and height by using modern surveying methods, and therefore the boundary is not defined by the coordinates of the line's turning points.

The technical documents concerning the border between Macedonia and Bulgaria consist of topographical drawings of the border markers at a scale of 1:10,000, a

description of the borderline and 29 sheets of topographic maps of the borderland at a scale of 1:25,000.

Macedonia's eastern border with Bulgaria has a latitudinal direction with a slightly curved form. Its length from Belasica to Gradiste is 177.7km. The distance between the final points, the tripartite points of the eastern border measured in a straight line is 117.8km, and the coefficient of the deviation from the straight line is $C = 1.51$.

The border between Macedonia and Bulgaria can be regarded as 'natural' for most of its length. However, it does not encompass all ethnic Macedonians because there are many in the Pirin region of Bulgaria.

CONCLUSIONS

In terms of territory, the Republic of Macedonia is not a very big country, covering an area of only 25,713km². However, its location in the Balkan peninsula gives Macedonia an advantageous geographical position with important lines of communication between land and sea. These geo-strategic factors are important elements affecting the economy and development of the Republic.

Except for the northern border, the present borders of the Republic of Macedonia were established in 1913. A change was made to the western border, through protocol signed in Florence in 1926. By this agreement the disputed Monastery of Naum was transferred to Yugoslavia which in turn gave up the area of Golo Brdo, which encompassed 27 villages with a predominantly Macedonian population. A change was also made on the eastern border in the Strumica Plain, which had belonged to Bulgaria. By the *Neian Agreement* in 1919 this area was transferred to Yugoslavia and the border was moved further east. The northern border of the Republic of Macedonia was drawn at the end of the Second World War. This border mostly followed ethnic divisions but did not coincide with the previous border of Serbia.

Of the four borders only the southern one is mathematically defined by coordinates. The eastern and western borders are marked only on the ground and on the northern border there are no border markers. The destruction of a large number of border markers is a particular characteristic of the border with Albania. On Macedonia's other borders there are no such occurrences. On the three marked borders many of the old numbered markers still exist. However, a new numeration is needed and on the western border the destroyed border markers should be replaced.

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Notes

- 1 The shape coefficient of the borderline, i.e. the deviation coefficient of the borderline from a straight line, is a quotient between the length of the border measured along the borderline and the length of the border measured in a straight line from one tripoint to another, and is marked with the letter C. The bigger the quotient, the bigger the deviation of the borderline from a straight line.
- 2 Taking into consideration the fact that the border between Macedonia and Yugoslavia has not been yet mathematically defined, there are no precise data about its length.