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Nationhood cleavages and ethnic conflict: A comparative analysis of postcommunist Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia

Idlir Lika ⓘD

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Istanbul Gelişim University, Istanbul, Turkey

ABSTRACT
Why do interethnic tensions in some multiethnic countries escalate into violence while in other cases, the tensions exist but they are contained? Most theories focus on the nation-state model's exclusionary logic, different forms of institutional design, and external intervention by third-party actors. My argument centres around political divisions among the ethnic majority elites over conceptions of nationhood. Elites divided by a nationhood cleavage create an opportunity space for violence through a process of double ethnic outbidding. Majority nationhood cohesion, on the other hand, facilitates cooperation on ethnic issues among majority elites, prevents outbidding, and thus preserves interethnic peace. I develop these arguments building on outcome variation among three otherwise similar Southeast European countries and on conducting 33 semi-structured elite interviews. Post-communist Bulgaria and Montenegro built enduringly peaceful interethnic relations despite dark shadows of an assimilationist past in the former and the threat posed by greater Serbian ideology in the latter. Postcommunist North Macedonia, by contrast, has frequently experienced violent conflict despite a multiethnic past and a series of consociational arrangements tried until present.

Introduction: The puzzle of violent ethnic conflict

Why do interethnic tensions in some multiethnic countries escalate into violence while in other cases, the tensions exist but they are contained by formal or informal institutional mechanisms? Why have Macedonian–Albanian relations in postcommunist North Macedonia been marked by frequent violence while the Bulgarian–Turkish relations in Bulgaria have been enduringly peaceful? Why have Albanians in North Macedonia often rebelled whereas their co-ethnics in Montenegro have been remarkably quiescent?

CONTACT Idlir Lika ✉ ilika@gelisim.edu.tr

The variation in the pattern of interethnic relations across three postcommunist Southeast European countries is particularly puzzling if one considers certain developments which would predict different outcomes. Communist Bulgaria's forceful assimilation campaign towards its ethnic Turks from mid-1980s held the potential of causing interethnic violence in the postcommunist period. Likewise, Montenegro was in a federation with Serbia until 2006 and its domestic stability and interethnic peace was directly threatened by Slobodan Milosevic's greater Serbian policies of the 1990s. Yet, both countries managed to escape violence. By contrast, North Macedonia was the only Yugoslav republic that seceded peacefully in early 1990s and thus appeared to many as a 'beacon of hope' in a region ravaged by war (International Crisis Group [ICG], 1998, p. i). However, the country thereafter experienced two small-scale insurgencies (in 2001 and 2015) and several deadly riots that claimed the lives of roughly 200 and displaced up to 140,000 civilians.

Research design

This article is a controlled, qualitative comparison between violent and non-violent cases. The outcome of interest, violent ethnic conflict, is operationalized as any group mobilization along ethnic lines that leads to death,[1] and its measurement covers the time period from 1990 up to 2018. The research combines process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2015) with a 'most similar systems' (MSS) design (George & Bennett, 2005) trying to account for the variation in outcome among otherwise similar cases: Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. Table 1 below lists the countries and makes the case for an MSS design.

Among all background conditions outlined above, the minority size arguably stands out, since by relative size Macedonian Albanians far outnumber both Bulgarian Turks and Montenegrin Albanians. This could give some credence to the argument that Macedonian Albanians have a much greater potential to cause trouble because of their relatively higher numbers. As a counterargument, however, I contend that we should focus more on the political weight a minority has in the political system rather than on its sheer size. In this respect, all three minorities analysed here have a large political clout and have a potential to politically destabilize their respective countries. As a second counterargument, there is well-established empirical evidence from both regionally proximate and more distant countries that minority size is not the driving force behind interethnic violence. Most strikingly, Albanians of southern Serbia (also known as Presevo valley), who constitute less than one per cent of Serbia's population, launched an insurgency in the winter of 2000 that eventually necessitated NATO's involvement to broker a cease fire in March 2001 (Phillips, 2004, pp. 1–7). To provide an example from another former communist country, even though the Russian-speaking minority in

Table 1. Most similar systems (MSS) analysis.

Similar Background Conditions	BULGARIA (1990-present)	MONTENEGRO (1990-present)	NORTH MACEDONIA (1990-present)
Minority Size	588,318/ 8.8 per cent (Bulgaria Census, 2011)	30,439/ 4.9 per cent (Monstat, 2011)	509,083/ 25.17 per cent (Macedonia Census, 2002)
Majority Religion	Orthodoxy	Orthodoxy	Orthodoxy
Minority Religion	Sunni Muslim	75 per cent Sunni Muslim; 25 per cent Catholic	Sunni Muslim
Linguistic majority	Slavic (cyrillic)	Slavic (cyrillic & latin)	Slavic (cyrillic)
Linguistic minority	Non-Slavic	Non-Slavic	Non-Slavic
Geographic region	Southeast Europe	Southeast Europe	Southeast Europe
Former Ottoman land?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Former Communist polity?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minority bordering kin-state?	Yes	Yes	Yes
NATO& EU membership?	Both NATO & EU member	NATO member & EU candidate	NATO member & EU candidate
Polity IV average score (1990–2018)	9	8	8
DV: Pattern of Interethnic Relations	Peaceful (0 dead)	Peaceful (0 dead)	Violent (200 dead)

Estonia makes up about 30% of the population (larger than the size of Macedonian Albanians), interethnic tensions there have not escalated to violence (Laitin, 1998). Finally, to provide a more distant example, Scott Straus (2015, pp. 205–13) shows that the insurgency of Christian Joolas, who are about 5.5 per cent of Muslim-majority Senegal's population (almost the same size as that of Montenegrin Albanians) constitutes the longest insurgency in sub-Saharan Africa.

My key argument centres around conceptions of nationhood among the ethnic majority, and particularly political divisions at the elite level about conceptions of nationhood. I argue that North Macedonian majority elites are nationally divided over the idea and definition of national identity, what I conceptualize here as 'nationhood cleavage', and this has created opportunity space for violence through a process of double ethnic outbidding. Such a cleavage is absent in Bulgaria and Montenegro, where majority nationhood cohesion facilitated cooperation on ethnic issues among majority elites, de-ethnicized political space, prevented outbidding, and thus preserved interethnic peace.

To research the cases, in addition to mining the secondary sources in English and in the local ethnic majority/minority languages, I conducted field research in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Montenegro over a seven-month period from November 2018 until May 2019. I conducted a total of

33 semi-structured elite interviews – 12 in Bulgaria (Sofia and Razgrad), 11 in North Macedonia (Skopje and Gostivar), 10 in Montenegro (Podgorica and Ulcinj)- with former and current prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, party leaders and deputy leaders, presidential advisors and academics.[2] The qualitative method I employ in addressing the puzzle is process tracing, which is considered 'a key technique for capturing causal mechanisms in action' (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 9). Concretely, by focusing on periods of causal significance, I examine the political interactions between elite representatives of majority and minority groups to demonstrate step by step how minority counterelites were supported by majority parties and thus became a destabilizing force only where majority elites were nationally divided among themselves. The focus on elite interactions necessitated interviewing majority and minority elites who either participated in the events themselves or were closely affiliated with the main decision-makers.

Alternative explanations

The present argument does a better job than alternative explanations in the literature in accounting for the variation in outcome among the three cases. Indeed, following Mahoney and Goertz (2004) 'possibility principle', all my three cases embodied several empirical conditions that existing explanations tell us should have made violence more likely. However, only North Macedonia experienced violence, whereas Bulgaria and Montenegro were peaceful (See Table 2 below)

Some existing explanations (Gagnon, 2004; Mansfield & Snyder, 2005) cannot properly explain why the socialist governments in Bulgaria during the first half of the 1990s did not resort to ethnonationalism to defuse the massive anti-government protests but instead peacefully stepped down, whereas in North Macedonia protests were almost always ethnicized and often led to violence. My explanation can better account for this variation since I argue that majority nationhood cohesion in Bulgaria led to cooperation among majority elites that de-ethnicized political space. Similarly, for explanations focusing on inequality and grievances as causes of violence (Cederman et al., 2010), North Macedonia should have been the least likely among the three cases to experience violence, since Albanians have been junior partners in *all* postcommunist coalition governments, and after 2001 their language became official at the *national* level. However, the complete opposite has been the case. Petersen's (2011) influential theory also cannot properly explain why emotions of fear and anger generated by the assimilation campaign in late communist Bulgaria were not used as resources by political entrepreneurs in postcommunist Bulgaria. Finally, explanations focusing on the constitutional status change of the minorities (Koinova,

Table 2. Alternative explanations and my argument.

Causally relevant independent variables (IVs) and dependent variable (DV)	BULGARIA (1990-present)	MONTENEGRO (1990-present)	NORTH MACEDONIA (1990-present)
IV1: State Breakdown (Posen, 1993)	No	Yes	Yes
IV2: Double Transition (economic & political) with weak institutions? (Mansfield & Snyder, 2005; Gagnon, 2004)	Yes	Yes	Yes
IV3: Constitutional status of minority after communism? (Koinova, 2013)	No change (Turks not recognized as a minority)	Decreased	Decreased
IV4: Past experiences of ethnic violence, stigma, and prejudice? (Petersen, 2011)	Yes	Low to medium level stigma and prejudice; no violence	Yes
IV5: Minority access to executive power? (Cederman et al., 2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes
IV6: Ethnic incorporation mode (Alptekin, 2017) Consociationalism	Civic	assimilationism	Consociationalism
IV7: Kosovo war as external shock (spillover effect)?(Hislope, 2003; Phillips, 2004)	Not applicable	Yes	Yes
IV8: Nationhood Cleavage?	NO	NO	YES
DV: Pattern of Interethnic Relations	Peaceful (0 dead)	Peaceful (0 dead)	Violent (200 dead)

2013) cannot explain why violence continued in Macedonia even after the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement increased the constitutional status of Albanians.

The argument

I offer two main sets of arguments. First, ethnic groups themselves do not rule. Instead their representatives rule and there often exist salient cleavages among elites of majority ethnic groups in terms of how they vision the ethnolinguistic expression of minority groups – what I conceptualize here as nationhood cleavage. Drawing on a recent study that created a typology of state policies towards ethnic diversity (Aktürk, 2012) and revising it for present purposes, I distinguish between a *multiethnic* vision of nationhood that supports the expression of ethnic diversity of minority groups and a *non-multiethnic* vision that is against the expression of ethnic diversity. This argument challenges the dominant view in the nationalism scholarship that assumes the fundamental logic underlying the modern nation-state is that of a unified majority group seeking to impose homogeneity into an otherwise heterogenous social space by either assimilating or excluding minority groups (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hechter, 2000; Wimmer, 2002) As such, the modern nation-state is said to generate inequality, grievances, and polarized identities, thereby often leading to violence (Cederman et al.,

2010; Marx, 2005). However, once the unified majority group assumption is relaxed, different causal pathways to violence can be uncovered, and this point leads to my second main argument.

I contend that majority nationhood cleavage has important implications for the pattern of interaction among representatives of majority and minority groups. Assuming that the majority group is represented by two main political parties, when these parties are nationally divided, it is more likely that one party *imposes* its vision of nationhood on the other. On its part, the minority group, assuming that it is initially represented by a single party, will typically ally with the majority party that has a multiethnic vision in order to advance its own ethnolinguistic rights. Regardless of which majority party is incumbent, the pattern of imposition generates majority and minority counterelites that are dissatisfied with the status of minority rights.[3] A major observable implication here is that interethnic relations are more likely to turn violent *after* a minority counterelite emerges. This is the case because a minority counterelite generates minority intraethnic competition and because it can ally with the majority counterelite to outbid the incumbent majority party in the struggle for power, a process I conceptualize as double ethnic outbidding. In brief, nationhood cleavages create an opportunity space for violence through the process of double outbidding, as the example of North Macedonia will show. Crucially, violence in such cases should be better characterized as political and not ethnic, since the motive is not rooted in ethnicity issues but rather in the power struggle between political elites within both the majority and minority groups.

On the other hand, when majority elites are nationally united, what I conceptualize here as nationhood cohesion,[4] this does *not* create an opportunity space for violence because minority counterelites in such cases will not have the support of any of the majority parties and this will preclude outbidding. Unlike the pattern of imposition outlined above, nationally united elites are more likely to *cooperate* with each other when instituting ethnic policies. This cooperation in turn facilitates the de-ethnicization of political space and makes less likely the use of ethnically specific grievances as resources in the political arena. As the examples of Bulgaria and Montenegro will illustrate, interethnic peace in such cases is more likely to be preserved. The argument as a whole is summarized in the causal graph presented in Figure 1 below.

Bulgaria

The two main ethnic Bulgarian political blocs, Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and several mainstream centre-right parties formed after 1990, share a firm *non-multiethnic* vision of nationhood that is built upon anti-Turkishness and denial of the existence of minorities in Bulgaria. Güner Tahir, Turkish-descent
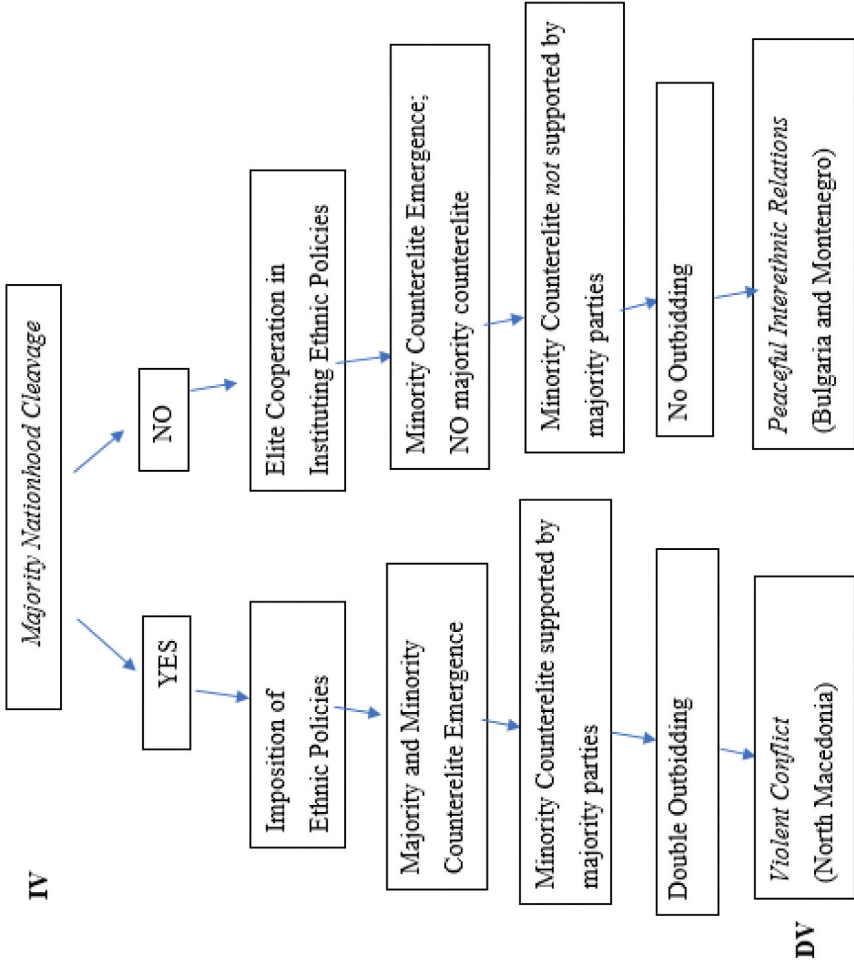
Figure 1. Causal graph.

parliamentarian of a centre-right Bulgarian party, contends that 'no other ethnic identity in the Balkans is as extreme as the Bulgarian one in its extent of anti-Turkishness'.[5] Likewise, Ibrahim Yalımov, Turkish-descent parliamentarian of BSP, posits that 'in Bulgaria, there are Muslims. Islam can be tolerated, but not Turkishness', underlining that this has been the unchanging policy of every regime in the country since 1878.[6]

I argue that it is this firm nationhood cohesion that made possible the cooperation on ethnic issues between the two blocs when Bulgaria transitioned to democracy in the 1990s. The importance of this inter-party cooperation for the eventual peaceful transition cannot be overstated since Bulgaria was facing an explosive ethnic problem in 1989 due to the forceful assimilation campaign towards its own Turks. Facing international condemnation and keen on preserving power after the regime change, two reformist circles within the communist party centred around Alexander Lilov and Andrei Lukanov removed Todor Zhivkov in an intra-party coup on 10 November 1989. On 29 December 1989, they ended the assimilation campaign by allowing Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks to reclaim their names. This decision triggered a wave of nationalist Bulgarian protests (led by the local communist elites who had been largely responsible for executing the assimilationist policies) and Turkish counter-mobilization in minority regions from 30 December 1989 until 12 January 1990 (Stamatov, 2000, pp. 556–9).

Former presidential advisor Mihail Ivanov argues that the prospect of interethnic clashes led the BSP and the then newly formed anti-communist opposition party, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), to come together to contain the crisis. On 12 January 1990, both parties drafted a joint declaration that affirmed both the end of the assimilation process and the territorial integrity of the state, thus countering the allegations of the Bulgarian nationalists that Turks might try to secede.[7] This joint declaration was the precursor to the Round Table Talks (RTT) between BSP and UDF that took place between late January and May 1990. The RTT constitute the single most important instance of cooperation between the two mainstream Bulgarian parties seeking to contain the ethnicization and polarization of political space. As aptly pointed out by Yalımov: 'The Talks played the role of a parliament. The main aim was how to transition peacefully from the totalitarian regime to democracy, without going to a civil war, without spilling blood'.[8] Likewise, former UDF Prime Minister Filip Dimitrov pointed out to the author that the RTT established a norm of upkeeping non-violent forms of elite rivalry in Bulgaria.[9] Still, it is crucial to emphasize that it was the nationhood cohesion between BSP and UDF which made possible this cooperation in the first place and eventually led to the RTT.[10]

A look at the three main ethnic decisions during the Talks proves beyond doubt the non-multiethnic vision that united the two parties. Specifically, it was agreed upon that Bulgarian shall be the only official language at both

the national and local levels and that ethnic parties shall be explicitly banned (Kolarova & Dimitrov, 1996, p. 191). Thirdly and most controversially, it was unofficially agreed that the then newly formed minority party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), that was *not* even invited to the RTT, shall be the only political representative of Turks/Muslims in Bulgaria. This was a tacit agreement negotiated 'behind closed doors' and the subsequent registration of the DPS, despite the explicit ban on ethnic parties, was revealing of the double-standard at play in the negotiations between BSP and UDF (Kolarova & Dimitrov, 1996, p. 193). It is also worth noting that many of the founding members of DPS were later found to have been secret police informers and closely affiliated with the business-oriented circle of Andrei Lukanov within BSP.[11] Taken together, the RTT decisions sought to prevent any *intra*ethnic minority competition and provided a clear evidence since the very beginning that minority counterelites among Turks/Muslims would not be supported by any of the mainstream Bulgarian parties.[12]

The ethnic decisions agreed upon during the RTT were eventually incorporated into the July 1991 constitution. RTT's provision for Bulgarian as the only official language became Article 3 of the constitution, the ethnic party ban became Article 11(4), while Bulgarian Turks were granted neither ethnic nor national minority status (Bulgaria Constitution, 1991). Yalımov (BSP), Hüseyin Ömer and Adem Kenan (DPS) were among the very few deputies who opposed these constitutional provisions by deeming them to be assimilationist. However, given that the overwhelming majority supported the provisions, Yalımov and Ömer resigned from their respective parties, whereas Kenan was later expelled from the DPS.[13] All in all, by the time of the October 1991 general election, the RTT and the July 1991 constitution had already established the political and ethnic modus vivendi in Bulgaria, an order that is still largely intact nowadays.

The October 1991 general elections were the first to mark the rise of DPS as a kingmaker in Bulgarian politics. UDF came first with a razor-thin margin over BSP (110 to 106 seats), while DPS held the balance with 24 seats. DPS could potentially swing the executive into whichever camp it chose by bartering parliamentary support for securing ethnolinguistic rights for its constituency. However, in line with the present argument, facing nationhood cohesion between BSP and UDF, DPS did not prioritize either party, and merely supported the one promising more material benefits. As such, DPS' mercurial leader Ahmed Doğan initially supported a UDF minority government. Then, within less than a year, he withdrew his support and together with the former communists (BSP) sponsored a 'government of experts', an administration which became infamous with its links to the organized Bulgarian mafia (Ganev, 2003, p. 326).

Taking advantage of the support of both mainstream Bulgarian parties and of the ethnic party ban, DPS unprecedentedly has been able to preserve its monopoly of Turkish/Muslim representation in Bulgaria until present. Minority counterelites have either been denied registration on the ground that they are an ethnic party (like Adem Kenan's Turkish Democratic Party in 1993 and 2005), or they have quickly disappeared from the political scene after one or two electoral cycles, like Tahir's National DPS and Lyutvi Mestan's DOST (Alptekin et al., 2020, pp. 86–7). While this electoral strength has enabled DPS to play the kingmaker role in several other instances after 1991, the consensus among mainstream Bulgarian parties on a de-ethnicized political space and on a monoethnic/monolingual vision of the nation is still intact. This consensus has also been fully embraced by the other two centre-right parties that replaced UDF during the 2000s, National Movement Simeon II (2001–2009) and former premier Boyko Borisov's GERB (Aktürk & Lika, 2020, pp. 14–5).

Finally, the cooperation among nationally united Bulgarian parties, although it produced several illiberal decisions, has been successful in preserving peace. This is why, for more than three decades now, mainstream Bulgarian parties and DPS itself have been propagating the discourse of a 'Bulgarian ethnic model' that can be 'exported' to other countries (Zhelyazkova, 2001). However, according to Bulgarian Turks critical of DPS, the 'Bulgarian ethnic model' is a 'myth' purposefully projected to conceal an essentially assimilationist conception of the nation.[14] As Yalımov also puts it:

> On the one hand, DPS does not voice our demands. On the other hand, they create the false impression that the ethnic problem in Bulgaria is solved ... They say there is a model, but it is nowhere officially stated that minorities, or a Turkish minority, exist in Bulgaria. The constitution does not allow it.[15]

Montenegro

It is somewhat difficult to define Montenegrin identity accurately. However, a good case can be made that the two main ethnic Montenegrin political blocs, the former communist Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the anti-communist opposition parties Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG)/ Social Democratic Party (SDP), share a nationhood vision that is *multiethnic*, dualistic, and opposed to greater Serbian ideology. First, both blocs cling to the view that ethnic Montenegrins are a distinct south Slavic people that are culturally the closest to the Serbs. As such, Montenegrin and Serb are perceived as rather mutually inclusive ethnic categories. Dzemal Perovic, former leader and deputy of the most pro-independence Montenegrin party LSCG, points out that his party's core vision has been that: 'peace and harmony in Montenegro can only be built by acknowledging the dualism inherent in

Montenegrin identity'.[16] In line with this, both political blocs are opposed to greater Serbian ideology (and to the Serbian parties in Montenegro espousing this ideology) that denies the existence of a distinct Montenegrin nation and suppresses the dualism inherent in it. Stated differently, Montenegrin identity is anti-greater Serbian, but *not* anti-Serbian.[17] Lastly, apart from being anti-greater Serbian, Montenegrin identity is not defined in opposition to anything else. The absence of 'the other' in defining Montenegrin nationhood makes it multiethnic towards the non-Orthodox minorities (Catholic and Muslim) living in Montenegro. Hence, as DPS deputy Luigj Shkreli points out, Montenegro is the only country in the Balkans where *all* majority parties define themselves as citizen parties, not as ethnic ones.[18]

I argue that this nationhood cohesion made possible the cooperation on ethnic issues between the two blocs when Montenegro transitioned to democracy in the 1990s. The importance of this inter-party cooperation for preserving domestic peace cannot be overstated since Montenegro was in a federation with Serbia until 2006 and its domestic stability was directly threatened by Slobodan Milosevic's greater Serbian policies of the 1990s.

Serbia's interference in Montenegro began with the so-called 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' of January 1989 when Milosevic's secret services engineered the toppling of the old leadership of the Montenegrin Communist Party (SKCG) and installed a new ruling cadre led by the troika Momir Bulatovic, Milo Djukanovic, and Svetozar Marovic (Morrison, 2009, pp. 83–90). What is glossed over in the literature, however, is that even after the 'revolution', SKCG still had many liberal-minded voices within it that opposed Milosevic. Indeed, according to Ljubisa Stankovic, a SKCG member at the time and later leader of the first opposition party, important political positions during 1989[19] were run by 'democratically-oriented people'.[20] Most importantly perhaps, starting from 11 January 1990, SKCG organized a Democratic Forum (DF) to set out the institutional rules for organizing the first multiparty elections, and invited the then newly founded LSCG and Albanian/Bosniak minority representatives.[21] DF represents the Montenegrin variant of the Round Table Talks that also took place in Bulgaria at roughly the same time, and is causally significant for my argument because it denotes an instance of cooperation among majority elites.

The break within SKCG came only after the 14th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (20–22 January 1990), which was also its last, when the Montenegrin delegation sided with Milosevic against Croatia/Slovenia. As a result, the liberal faction collectively resigned from SKCG and formed an umbrella opposition party with LSCG.[22] This was the beginning of a dark period for Montenegro as Milosevic took over the whole administrative, media, and security apparatus by purging all dissident voices.[23] There is wide agreement among representatives of different Montenegrin parties, though, that SKCG's support for Milosevic was largely forced upon. In other

words, Bulatovic and Djukanovic had neither domestic power nor interna-
tional support to oppose Milosevic during those years.[24] With the Serbian
strongman being tacitly supported by the West and with a large army and
Serb paramilitary presence in Montenegro, Bulatovic and Djukanovic well
understood that the only way to stay in power in that period was to ally
with Milosevic.[25] This also explains why the relations between SKCG (later
rebranded as DPS) and Milosevic during the seven years of their unholy
alliance (1990–97) were uneasy and strained.

DPS had hegemonic power during these seven years[26] but still cooperated
with the opposition Montenegrin parties to preserve domestic stability and to
protect Montenegrin Albanians from the excesses of greater Serbian ideol-
ogy. Specifically, when the Orthodox population in the Albanian-majority city
of Ulcinj was distributed arms in the summer of 1991 by Milosevic's secret
services, DPS, in tandem with LSCG and SDP, subsequently calmed down the
situation.[27] Around the same time, likewise, following massive protests by the
Albanian population in Ulcinj and Bar, DPS allowed the release of around
1,000 Albanian youth who had been forcibly conscripted by the Yugoslav
Army (YNA) at the mount valley of Sutorman, waiting to be deployed in
Bosnia and Croatia.[28] After the establishment of a rump Yugoslav federation
in April 1992, DPS pressed ahead with the adoption of a liberal republican
constitution to reflect its growing estrangement from Belgrade, granting
Albanians (and other minorities) minority status and their language official
status at the local level (Roberts, 2007, p. 445). More significantly perhaps,
even though it won an outright majority in the December 1992 election, DPS
invited LSCG and SDP to form a grand coalition government. The explicit aim,
according to then LSCG deputy Dzemal Perovic,[29] was to 'soften and lessen
the nationalist tensions in the country'.[30] Lastly, even during these seven
years, DPS always had Albanian (and Bosniak) deputies elected among its
ranks,[31] and despite the fact that it opposed LSCG and SDP's calls for inde-
pendence, DPS always promoted titular Montenegrin identification through-
out the country (Jenne & Bieber, 2014, p. 450). All in all, the aforementioned
evidence attests to how inter-party cooperation enabled by shared nation-
hood visions can act as a factor of de-escalation and can preserve interethnic
peace even against all odds.

A combination of intraelite conflict over economic resources, Western
pressure, and a significant shift in public opinion against Belgrade triggered
a split within DPS in the aftermath of the Dayton Accords. As a result,
a Djukanovic-led wing come out openly against Milosevic in February 1997,
whereas a Bulatovic-led wing continued to stay loyal to Belgrade (Morrison,
2009, pp. 143–56). Now that Bulatovic, had become a greater Serbian nation-
alist and left DPS to found a new *Serbian* party, Djukanovic had to instru-
mentalize Montenegrin nationhood cohesion and the quest for
independence to win the electoral support of LSCG, SDP and the minority

parties. To this end, on 1 September 1997, DPS, LSCG, SDP, the two ethnic Albanian parties,[32] and the Bosniak/Muslim party collectively drafted and signed the 'Agreement on Minimum Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro'. The agreement had the goals of building an anti-Serbian electoral coalition in Montenegro and of guaranteeing free and fair elections in the future (Morrison, 2009, pp. 157–58). Former Montenegrin Foreign Minister Srdjan Darmanovic (2003, p. 149) described it as a 'set of roundtable negotiations', and this indeed constitutes another evidence of how multiethnic nationhood cohesion brought mainstream Montenegrin parties (and the minorities) together.

The September 1997 Agreement, like the RTT in Bulgaria, established a political and ethnic modus vivendi that is still largely intact nowadays. Albanians and Bosniaks more than ever became indispensable political allies for Djukanovic, indispensable for building electoral majorities[33] against the Serbian bloc in Montenegro, and in return they got concessions in terms of more minority rights and material benefits (Ahrens, 2007, pp. 272–3). This indeed is the main reason why Albanian–Montenegrin relations have been so peaceful and cordial in the post-1997 period.[34] Even Slaven Radunovic, deputy leader of the main Serbian party in Montenegro NOVA, argues that the main reason behind the peaceful relations is: 'Djukanovic, and we can say thank you Djukanovic for that . . . Because a lot of Albanians, Djukanovic bought them, not by money, but ideologically bought them by becoming an enemy of Serbia'.[35]

With the support of other Montenegrin parties and minority votes, Djukanovic firstly won a razor-thin majority over Bulatovic in the critical October 1997 presidential elections (Bieber, 2003, p. 31), and then secured many other such victories in parliamentary and presidential elections up to 2020. Unquestionably, the most consequential win was that of the independence referendum from Serbia held on 21 May 2006, where the pro-independence bloc (DPS, LSCG, SDP, and the minority parties) surpassed the (unprecedented) 55% threshold set by the EU by merely 0.53% (Morrison, 2009, pp. 218–9). It is difficult to think of another postcommunist country where minorities have had such a crucial impact on the country's political trajectory.

Finally, given that DPS' ability to win Montenegrin and minority support domestically, and Western backing externally, is contingent on the potential existence of a greater Serbian threat, Djukanovic has lost no opportunity in provoking the Serbian parties in Montenegro and in triggering their mobilization. Such was the case when Djukanovic opposed Milosevic during the 1998–99 Kosovo War, when Montenegro recognized the independence of Kosovo in October 2008 and when Montenegro received invitation to join NATO in December 2015 (Morrison, 2018, p. 158). However, Djukanovic's time-tested strategy backfired most recently. The new Religion Law that the DPS and its allies passed in parliament in December 2019, allowing the state to take over the property of any religious community that cannot prove

ownership of its assets before 1918 (the year when Montenegro was annexed by Serbia), triggered a mass mobilization led by the powerful Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. DPS (with its traditional allies) suffered the consequences at the most recent parliamentary election in August 2020, when for the first time in 30 years it lost majority in parliament[36] (Lika, 2020a). Hence, the only uninterrupted former communist incumbency in Southeast Europe finally collapsed; however, the basic dynamics of Montenegrin party politics are still largely intact.

North Macedonia

Unlike the Bulgarian and Montenegrin cases, the two main ethnic Macedonian parties are deeply divided by a nationhood cleavage. The communist successor party Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) has a distinctly Slavic and multiethnic nationhood vision. It credits communist Yugoslavia for building the modern Macedonian nation, since the communist regime was the first to standardize the modern Macedonian language and to create in 1967 an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church (Danforth, 1995, pp. 51–2; Poulton, 1995, pp. 97–110). Concerning national minorities, SDSM's leading discourse has always been creating a 'grazdanski drzava', literally a citizen state.[37] By contrast, the centre-right Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity VMRO-DPMNE (henceforth VMRO) holds a staunch anti-Yugoslav, non-Slavic and monoethnic nationhood vision. From its founding in 1990 until present, VMRO has endorsed two main nationhood discourses, both strictly monoethnic (i.e., non-multiethnic). During the leadership of Ljupco Georgievski (1990–2003), VMRO adopted the discourse of the early twentieth century paramilitary group from which it took its name, Macedonia for the *ethnic* Macedonians (Ackermann, 2000, p. 57). Second, during the leadership of Nikola Gruevski (2003–2016), VMRO spearheaded the so-called antiquization policy that holds that contemporary Macedonians are the direct descendants of ancient Macedonians (Vangeli, 2011). It bears emphasis that VMRO's antiquization discourse is exclusionary not only towards national minorities but also towards those ethnic Macedonians self-identifying as Slav.

The most recent evidence for this nationhood cleavage is VMRO's opposition to the June 2018 *Prespa Agreement* that the SDSM government signed with Greece, and VMRO's refusal to recognize the new constitutional name of the country, North Macedonia. As VMRO's former vice-president, Trajko Slaveski, pointed out to the author:

> Prespa Agreement, it is unilateral. It is almost like capitulation ... the price that you pay is extremely high. Not only change of the name, change of the identity, change of history, of culture ... *They (SDSM) erased the history of these people. They claimed that history until 1945 belongs only to the Greeks.*[38] (my emphasis)

I argue that it is this cleavage that has prevented SDSM-VMRO cooperation on ethnic policies in almost every instance since 1990 until present. The consistent pattern instead has been one majority party allied with a minority counterpart seeking to impose its vision of nationhood and outbid the other, and this has frequently led to violence.

The first instance showing the lack of cooperation between SDSM and VMRO is that, unlike Bulgaria and Montenegro, there were no interparty negotiations or round table on designing the new democratic institutions in Macedonia. In the first elections (11–25 November 1990), SDSM campaigned on the time-tested Titoist slogan of *brotherhood and unity*, whereas VMRO resorted to openly fascist rhetoric calling for 'gas chambers' for the Albanians.[39] VMRO captured 38 seats, SDSM won 31, while the Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PPD) held the balance with 23 seats. This result offered a strategic opportunity to PPD which potentially could swing the executive into whichever camp it chose. Theoretically, however, I would expect PPD to ally with the majority party that holds a multiethnic vision (i.e., SDSM). Indeed, after VMRO and PPD refused even to consider cooperating with each other, the newly elected President Kiro Gligorov (SDSM) engineered the formation of a 'government of experts', composed mostly of former nomenklatura officials and including three Albanian ministers, that ruled the country from March 1991 until July 1992 (Ackermann, 2000, p. 58). This was a time period during which Gligorov jointly with Alija Izetbegovic tried to mediate between Serbia and Slovenia/Croatia at the federal level to prevent Yugoslavia from disintegrating (Rossos, 2008, p. 265). After the mediation efforts failed and Slovenia and Croatia unilaterally declared independence, Gligorov pushed forward with an independence referendum on 8 September 1991 where 68 per cent of Macedonian citizens voted in favour (Bugajski, 1994, p. 124). The next crucial step for the newly independent state was enacting a constitution, and here too, Gligorov assumed the leading role by forming an expert group to draft the new constitution, a group consisting almost entirely of SDSM members (Vankovska, 2013, p. 91).

The passing of the constitution on 17 November 1991 denotes the first instance in which ethnic policies were imposed by one majority party over the other. Although the preamble defined Macedonia as the 'national state of the Macedonian people', it also guaranteed 'full equality as citizens' to Albanians and other minorities, their languages were granted official status at the local level (Art. 7), and they had the right to instruction in their mother tongue in primary and secondary education (Art. 48) (Macedonia Constitution, 1991). VMRO opposed the constitutional recognition of Albanians in the preamble, proposing to refer to them simply as citizens, and it opposed the official status of Albanian language in local units,[40] however its vision was sidelined by Gligorov. On their part, although Albanians were demanding a status higher than that of a minority, and also

higher education in their mother tongue, they had to accept the constitution for the sake of domestic and regional stability. As a former PPD minister explained to the author:

> In principle, we accepted the constitution. We had no other choice, we had to be part of the government. War was raging in the region, Milosevic had his eyes on Macedonia. International actors persistently pleaded with us to keep quiet until the Kosovo problem was solved.[41]

As a result, once the 'government of experts' was dissolved, on 5 September 1992 PPD joined SDSM in forming the first postcommunist coalition government, ruling the country up to November 1998 (SDSM-PPD alliance won also the November 1994 parliamentary elections).

With this constellation of forces, VMRO was already a majority counterelite in opposition. Yet, in February 1994 a faction within PPD led by Arben Xhaferi split from the party and formed the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH), accusing PPD of doing nothing to advance the status of Albanians in Macedonia. Contending that multiethnic states cannot function in a unitary way unless substantial power is devolved to minority regions,[42] Xhaferi's PDSH is causally important for my argument because it represents a minority counterelite and a potential ally for VMRO in the power struggle against the incumbent SDSM-PPD. Crucially for my causal narrative, instances of violence in Macedonia started *after* the emergence of PDSH.

The two main cases of violence before the 2001 insurgency are the February 1995 deadly riot in Tetovo (over the controversial opening of a university in Albanian) and the July 1997 deadly riot in Gostivar (in both cases Albanian demonstrators violently clashed with police forces). I contend that both cases were the product of joint VMRO-PDSH efforts to ethnicize political space and outbid the incumbent SDSM-PPD coalition. The strongest evidence for this is the fact that the SDSM-PPD government, after winning the November 1994 elections, was already taking concrete steps to address the question of higher education in Albanian. It was working to create an Albanian-language track in all disciplines taught at Skopje State University (Ackermann, 2000, p. 92), while VMRO and the university administration even organized hunger strikes to oppose this initiative. The architect of this initiative, then Minister of Education Emilija Simoska, explained to the author that:

> I, as minister, had the biggest clashes with the university where I used to work. We, as government, won at the end . . . But the people who caused the violent clashes (in Tetovo) . . . they wanted overnight to establish that university and promote their political ideas . . . When you have parties competing over which is greater Albanian and greater Macedonian, it is always like that. Ethnic outbidding is the worst thing that can happen.[43]

Despite the uproar caused by the Tetovo and Gostivar riots, what mostly ethnicized political space before the October–November 1998 parliamentary elections was the sudden emergence of an Albanian rebel group called National Liberation Army (UÇK), which carried out several bomb attacks against courts and police stations from December 1997 to July 1998 (Iseni, 2013, pp. 122–7). Setting aside the controversies over the origins and goals of UÇK, the timing of its emergence and subsequent attacks was perfect. Eventually, VMRO won the 1998 elections and, quite tellingly in terms of my causal narrative, it invited PDSH in the coalition government, even though the highest vote getter from the Albanian camp was PPD and not PDSH.

The ethnic policies of the VMRO-PDSH coalition government in turn paved the way to the 2001 insurgency. Specifically, the two coalition partners informally divided the country into spheres of influence, with VMRO taking control of eastern Macedonia and PDSH assuming responsibility of the western part of the country where Albanians predominantly reside (Barany, 2005, p. 92). This policy constitutes another instance of imposition of nationhood visions and as such was bound once more to generate the double outbidding mechanism and lead to violence.

This time it was the rebel UÇK which, taking advantage of the then largely unpatrolled borders and of the free flow of arms in the aftermath of the Kosovo war, launched in February 2001 a low-scale insurgency against Macedonian security forces, allegedly to improve the rights of Albanians (Hislope, 2003). It would be inaccurate, however, to see this conflict as a spillover from the Kosovo war or as an ethnic conflict. Instability in neighbouring Albania and Kosovo facilitated the staging of the insurgency, but it was not its root cause. I argue that UÇK's main goal was to ethnicize political space and unseat the VMRO-PDSH coalition from power. This was confirmed to the author in several interviews by both high-level VMRO-PDSH officials[44] and, more importantly, by SDSM. In Simoska's words:

> The 2001 conflict was not built on anger that culminated, although problems existed . . . It was a group of people that simply wanted to push Arben Xhaferi and the PPD away and say, "until now you controlled the borders, the businesses and everything. From now on, we are going to do it" . . . Absolutely, Ali Ahmeti (UÇK leader) did not strike for the rights of the minorities, but to get rid of Arben Xhaferi and to have his place, and Ahmeti succeeded in that.[45]

After six months of low-intensity warfare that left about 150 dead and displaced up to 140,000 people (Phillips, 2004, p. 161), the EU and U.S.' mix of carrot and sticks produced the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) that officially ended the insurgency on 13 August 2001. OFA mandated substantial constitutional amendments by upgrading the status of Albanians from minority to that of a constituent nation (Amendment IV), by making Albanian language official at the *national* level (Amendment V), and by enacting

significant decentralization measures. For scholars who argue that the decreased constitutional status of Albanians in the 1991 constitution was the real generator of violence in the pre-2001 period (Koinova, 2013), then violence should have been less likely in the post-2001 period after all these substantial reforms. However, this was not the case mainly because OFA failed to diagnose the real source of interethnic tensions in Macedonia: the lack of elite cooperation in designing ethnic policies. OFA essentially was a package of reforms *imposed* (by the EU and the U.S.) on reluctant domestic actors instead of being willingly embraced by them. SDSM, PPD, and the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI)[46] fully embraced OFA because they were the political winners after the 2001 turmoil, whereas VMRO and PDSH quickly denounced OFA (after reluctantly signing it) because they lost power as result of the 2001 crisis (ICG, 2003, p. 29). Further substantiating my argument, a new wave of bombings and deadly attacks on police stations rocked Macedonia between December 2002 and August 2003, and these were carried out by armed groups affiliated with PDSH.[47] These developments importantly attest also to the limits of Western pressure/engineering in nationally divided polities like Macedonia.

In the post-OFA period, BDI replaced PPD as the main rival of PDSH in the Albanian camp, however nothing significant changed in terms of interethnic and intraethnic political competition. After a period of SDSM-BDI (2002–2006) and VMRO-PDSH (2006–2008) coalition governments, a rebranded VMRO under the leadership of Nikola Gruevski ruled the country for eight consecutive years in coalition with BDI (2008–2016). This is the period when VMRO shifted its nationhood discourse to antiquization and a full gamut of projects[48] was implemented to propagate the idea that contemporary Macedonians are direct descendants of ancient ones (Vangeli, 2011). In terms of the present argument, VMRO's antiquization policy represents another instance of imposition of nationhood visions and as such was bound to generate once more the double outbidding mechanism and lead to violence.

The inter- and intraethnic tensions triggered by antiquization came to a head after February 2015, when SDSM leader Zoran Zaev began publishing leaked wiretaps, the so-called 'Zaev's bombs', revealing a wide range of criminal activities VMRO and its associates had engaged in during their incumbency (ICG, 2015). 'Zaev's bombs' triggered large-scale protests against the VMRO-BDI government, and it was precisely in the midst of these protests that on 9 May 2015 news of major armed clashes between Macedonian security forces and more than 40 Albanian fighters in the town of Kumanovo rocked the country. Two days of heavy fighting resulted in the death of eight security forces and fourteen rebels, 'the region's worst loss of life in a decade' (ICG, 2015, p. 1). Although evidence remains inconclusive as to what really occurred in Kumanovo, it is widely believed among opposition

circles and public intellectuals that VMRO staged the armed clashes 'to defuse the bombs'.[49] Enes Ibrahim, leader of a Turkish party in Macedonia, put it succinctly: 'Political crises in Macedonia are always artificial. Whenever Gruevski and VMRO faced problems, always an "ethnic" fight would come out'.[50]

After the tragic events in Kumanovo, SDSM succeeded in winning the December 2016 and the most recent July 2020 elections, albeit only with massive support from the ethnic Albanian electorate (Lika, 2020b). However, the division between the two main ethnic Macedonian parties deepened after the SDSM-led government signed the June 2018 Prespa Agreement that ended the three-decade old name dispute with Greece and changed the constitutional name of the country to North Macedonia. Even the 'carrot' of NATO membership has proved unable thus far to win the support of a majority of the ethnic Macedonian electorate for Prespa. Indeed, the 'consultative' referendum on Prespa held on 30 September 2018 technically failed due to the very low turnout.[51] (The Guardian, 1 October 2018) It actually failed because both VMRO and the main Albanian opposition party (the newly-formed Alliance for Albanians ASH) boycotted the vote. This once more constitutes a clear example of the dynamic of double outbidding in Macedonian politics. Finally, the ethnic Macedonian electorate is more polarized than ever over identity issues, and the very recent Bulgarian veto over the opening of EU accession talks with North Macedonia has added fuel to the fire (Lika, 2020c). SDSM cannot withstand another round of identity change after Prespa, whereas opposition VMRO's discourse 'no identity change for joining EU and NATO' is gaining credibility.

External validity of the argument

How generalizable is the explanation put forward in this article? There exists empirical evidence from non-former communist countries in other regions where different kinds of divisions among majority elites have been associated with interethnic conflict; however, the presence of a double outbidding mechanism is yet to be established. For instance, Murat Somer (2016, pp. -155–158) argues that the Kurdish conflict in Turkey emerged as a 'by-product' of both intra-Turkish divisions over the definition of the nation, and divisions over issues unrelated to nationhood, such as modernization visions, secularism, and leadership. However, it is yet to be established whether the insurgent PKK, as the primary Kurdish minority counterelite, has been used by Turkish majority elites as an 'ally' to ethnically outbid each other in the struggle for power. If proved, the Turkish case would strongly establish the generalizability of my argument.

Finally, are nationhood cleavages static or dynamic? Can the national divide between SDSM and VMRO in North Macedonia somehow be overcome? Is double outbidding possible in Bulgaria and Montenegro? Firstly, evidence from the three cases shows the persistence in the salience of nationhood visions. Nationhood cohesion in Bulgaria and Montenegro is a result of pre-communist nation-building policies since 1878, while the cleavage in Macedonia is rooted in the Yugoslav socialist regime's nation-building policies. The fact that in each case cohesion and cleavage is still politically salient today, more than three decades after the fall of communism, shows that nationhood visions are hard to change. Hence, with nationhood cohesion intact double outbidding does not seem possible in Bulgaria and Montenegro.

Concerning North Macedonia likewise, prospects for overcoming the cleavage do not appear promising. However, empirical evidence from elsewhere shows that nationally divided elites can sometimes be brought closer. For instance, in a recent comparative democratization analysis of Tunisia and Turkey, Somer (2017, pp. 1031–1035) points out the role of influential civil society organizations in facilitating cooperation among the otherwise divided Tunisian religious and secular elites during and after the 2011 Arab Uprisings. However, in Turkey such elite cooperation is still largely absent. Hence, it is hard to make generalizations on this point. Cleavages in some countries are deeper than in others, but the Macedonian elite divisions seem to be rather deep.

Conclusion

This article's key argument centres around conceptions of nationhood among the ethnic majority, and particularly political divisions at the elite level about conceptions of nationhood. Empirically, I argued that North Macedonian majority elites are nationally divided over the idea and definition of national identity and this cleavage created opportunity space for violence through a process of double ethnic outbidding. Such a cleavage is absent in Bulgaria and Montenegro, where majority nationhood cohesion facilitated cooperation on ethnic issues among majority elites, de-ethnicized political space, prevented outbidding, and thus preserved interethnic peace.

My argument has several theoretical implications for the comparative study of nationalism and ethnic conflict. First, it challenges the dominant view in the nationalism scholarship that assumes nation-states have a built-in homogenizing drive and that they establish the dominance of a unified majority ethnic group. Second, by relaxing this dominant assumption, my argument uncovers new causal mechanisms that may lead to or contain violence. Third, by attesting to the limits of Western pressure in preventing violent conflict even in weak states like North Macedonia (as developments in

the post-OFA period showed), my argument points to the importance of local agency over structural constraints in explaining domestic outcomes. This challenges a growing body of literature that singles out external/geopolitical factors as the primary causal force (Jenne, 2015; Mylonas, 2013) and more specifically in the case of the Balkans, argues that developments in the region are path dependent (Janos, 2000).

For instance, in his seminal work on Western intervention in the Balkans, Roger Petersen (2011, p. 240) argues that in terms of preventing interethnic violence after 2001 and pushing Macedonians and Albanians to politically cooperate, Western intervention succeeded in Macedonia. Although Petersen (2011, pp. 235–238) recognizes that the absence of 'intense ethnic stigma' between the two major ethnic groups facilitated the success of Western intervention, he argues that structurally 'The EU's conditionality card provides the ultimate leverage … Ethnic Macedonians could not hope to survive outside of the EU' (240). Yet, VMRO's extreme antiquization policies, the resulting violence in Kumanovo in 2015, and VMRO's rejection of the *Prespa Agreement* cast doubt on the above argument and show that local elites with certain nationhood visions can resist external imposition. Likewise, political elites of both the left and right in Bulgaria, EU's poorest member state, still persist in their non-multiethnic policies towards the Turks: they don't recognize the existence of a Turkish minority, ethnic parties are banned, Turkish-language schools are not allowed and election campaigning in any language other than Bulgarian is banned. In brief, my argument shows that developments in even a region filled with small and weak states – where all states have long histories of external domination/influence/occupation by the Ottomans, Tsarist Russia, Nazi Germany, Soviet Union, and now the West – are not always path dependent. What I often observe in my cases is local agency over structural constraints and local elites with nationhood visions resisting external imposition.

Finally, the argument I propose here is also related to the elite theory scholarship in political sociology. More specifically, in an influential re-conceptualization of different patterns of elite behaviour and their causal link to different types of political regimes, Higley and Burton (2006, pp. 14–19) convincingly show that a 'consensually united elite', elites who tacitly agree to abide by norms of political behaviour in their power competition and who thereby trust each other significantly, is a prerequisite for the establishment of a stable democratic regime. On the other hand, unstable democratic (and authoritarian) regimes manifest the dynamics of 'disunited elites'. My argument that centres around *nationally* divided and united majority elites resembles Higley and Burton (2006) conceptualization and in fact supports their basic causal logic. The three cases analysed here

showed that nationally united majority elites are key to the stability of interethnic relations, while divided elites can generate political instability and often lead to violence.

Notes

1. This matches the mainstream operationalization of violence in the literature (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 20).
2. A complete chronological list of the interviews used for this article is given in the Appendix. Henceforth, in-text data from the interviews will be referenced via footnotes in which the appropriate chronological number of the interview listed in the Appendix is given.
3. *Majority* counterelites refer here to the majority party in opposition that has a different vision of nationhood from the incumbent majority party. Similarly, concerning *minority* counterelite, it refers to the minority party in opposition. Theoretically, *minority* counterelites can emerge as a splinter faction within the minority party in power, as an independently new formed party, or in some cases, even as an extra-parliamentary actor that actually uses or threatens to use violence.
4. Majority nationhood cohesion can be either multiethnic, as the case of Montenegro will show, or non-multiethnic, as the case of Bulgaria will show.
5. Interview # 1
6. Interview # 23
7. Interview # 5
8. Interview # 23
9. Interview # 2
10. Interview # 1
11. Interview # 4, # 5, and # 6
12. Interview # 1 and # 3
13. Interview # 6 and # 23
14. Interview # 1
15. Interview # 23
16. Interview # 19
17. Interview # 17
18. Interview # 21
19. Such as president and vice-president of the parliament; leading editors of the then only newspaper *Pobjeda* and State Television
20. Interview # 14
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Interview # 16
24. Interview # 21 and # 22
25. Interview # 14 and # 17
26. Specifically, it won overwhelming majorities in the December 1990, December 1992, and November 1996 parliamentary elections and controlled the presidency throughout (Bieber, 2003)
27. Interview # 18 and # 21
28. Interview # 20 and # 21

29. Significantly, Perovic, who is a Muslim ethnic Albanian, was appointed vice-president of the parliament.
30. Interview # 19
31. Interview # 16
32. Democratic Alliance of Montenegro (LDMZ) was the first ethnic Albanian party in Montenegro founded in September 1990 and led by Mehmet Bardhi. Democratic Union of Albanians (UDSH), the second Albanian party, was founded in November 1993 by Ferhat Dinosha and Bajram Rexha.
33. Combined, Albanians, Bosniaks, and Croats make up 18 % of Montenegro's population (Monstat, 2011).
34. Interview # 16, # 19, # 20, and # 22.
35. Interview # 15
36. Critical was the decision of the small Montenegrin party, United Reformist Action URA, to support the coalition of Serbian parties led by a non-partisan figure, Zdravko Krivokapic (Lika, 2020a).
37. Interview # 8
38. Interview # 7
39. Interview # 9 and # 10
40. Interview # 8 and # 10
41. Interview # 11
42. Interview # 10
43. Interview # 8
44. Interview # 7 and # 10
45. Interview # 8
46. BDI is the political party the insurgent UÇK formed after OFA.
47. Interview # 11
48. The crowning achievement of antiquization policies was 'Skopje 2014', a €250-300 m worth urban renewal scheme, that refashioned the capital Skopje 'with a triumphal arch, two new bridges, hundreds of new statues, 15 new buildings reflecting architectural styles drawn from classical antiquity, and gigantic statues of Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great' (Hislope, 2013, p. 622).
49. Interview # 13
50. Interview # 12
51. The referendum asked the citizens whether they are in favour of EU and NATO membership by accepting the Prespa Agreement between Macedonia and Greece. An overwhelming majority of the 34.7 % who turned out voted in favour, but the turnout fell short of clearing the 50 % required threshold.

Acknowledgments

Funding

ORCID

Idlir Lika 🔾 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5431-6962

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Appendix List of interviews

#	Interviewee	Position	Date	Location
1.	Güner Tahir	Former DPS (1994–97) and UDF (1997–2001) member of parliament in Bulgaria	7 November 2018	Sofia
2.	Filip Dimitrov	Former Bulgarian Prime Minister from UDF (1991–1992)	7 November 2018	Sofia
3.	Hayri Emin	Foreign relations expert at the Bulgarian Office of Grand Mufti	8 November 2018	Sofia
4.	Kasım Dal	Former DPS deputy leader and member of parliament in Bulgaria (1997–2011)	11 November 2018	Sofia
5.	Mihail Ivanov	Former advisor on ethnic issues to Bulgarian President Zheliu Zhelev (1990–1992)	12 November 2018	Sofia
6.	Hüseyin Ömer	Former DPS member of parliament in Bulgaria (1990–1991)	13 November 2018	Razgrad
7.	Trajko Slaveski	VMRO's former vice-president (2005–2007)	13 February 2019	Skopje
8.	Emilija Simoska	Former Minister of Education in North Macedonia from SDSM (1994–1996)	14 February 2019	Skopje
9.	Erdoğan Saraç	Leader of Turkish National Unity Movement, an ethnic Turkish party in North Macedonia; former member of parliament (2011–2014)	17 February 2019	Gostivar
10.	Bekim Fazliu	Former PDSH member of parliament in North Macedonia (2008–2014)	18 February 2019	Skopje
11.	Xhevdet Hajredini	Former Minister of Finance in North Macedonia from the ethnic Albanian PPD (1992–1994)	20 February 2019	Skopje
12.	Enes Ibrahim	Leader of Turkish Movement Party in North Macedonia and current member of parliament	20 February 2019	Skopje
13.	Muhamed Zeqiri	SDSM current deputy leader and member of parliament (Albanian-descent)	21 February 2019	Skopje
14.	Ljubisa Stankovic	Leader of the first opposition party in Montenegro and former presidential candidate (1990–1992)	1 April 2019	Podgorica
15.	Slaven Radunovic	Deputy leader of NOVA, the main ethnic Serbian party in Montenegro	2 April 2019	Podgorica
16.	Mirko Stanic	SDP current official spokesperson in Montenegro	3 April 2019	Podgorica
17.	Milan Popovic	Distinguished Montenegrin academic and anti-war activist during the 1990s	3 April 2019	Podgorica
18.	Ranko Krivokapic	SDP leader in Montenegro (1992–2020) and former Speaker of Parliament	4 April 2019	Podgorica

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#	Interviewee	Position	Date	Location
19.	Dzemal Perovic	Former LSCG deputy leader and member of parliament in Montenegro (1992–1996; 2002–2006)	8 April 2019	Ulcinj
20.	Mehmet Bardhi	Leader of the main ethnic Albanian party in Montenegro LDMZ	8 April 2019	Ulcinj
21.	Luigj Shkreli	DPS member of parliament in Montenegro (2011 – present)	10 April 2019	Podgorica
22.	Mehmet Zenka	Minister for Human and Minority Rights in Montenegro (2016–2020)	10 April 2019	Podgorica
23.	Ibrahim Yalimov	Former BSP member of parliament in Bulgaria (1990–1991)	2 May 2019	Sofia