



THESIS - Vol. 10, No. 2, Autumn 2021

International Research Journal



Kolegji AAB
CILESI. LIDERSHIP. SUKSESI

ISSN: 1848-4298 (Print)

ISSN: 2623-8381(Online)

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How to cite this article:

Trajkova Strezovska, Z. (2021). Negotiating Identity During the Macedonia's Name Change Period in Media Discourse. *Thesis*, 10(2), 25-49.



Published online: January 15, 2022.



Article received September 10, 2021.
Article accepted December 16, 2021.



Conflict of Interest: Author declares no conflict of interest.

Negotiating Identity During the Macedonia's Name Change Period in Media Discourse

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Abstract

The name is an essential mark of one's identity, and if someone is pressured to change it under any circumstances it would naturally lead to feelings of uncertainty, fear, anxiety and doubt, because it is not only important how people see themselves, but also how they want to be seen by others, as well as how others see them. This paper analyses the discursive processes used by the media sources to negotiate and construct the identity of Macedonians in the period before and after the change of the name of the country from the Republic of Macedonia into the Republic of North Macedonia in 2019. Taking interaction and language as central to the construction, enactment and negotiation of identity, a corpus of 20 articles of both pro- and anti-governmental newspaper outlets, written before, during and after the name change were analysed and parallels were drawn in terms of the language used by both media sources to discuss the identity of Macedonian people. The analysis showed that while the pro-governmental media were attempting to portray a new identity of Macedonians in the EU, the anti-governmental ones presented the name-change as a threat to a complete identity loss (Trajkova, 2020). This situation left the Macedonian citizen confused, scared and in doubt of what was the right or wrong path to take.

Key words: *identity construction, name-change issue, newspaper outlets, discursive processes*

Introduction

This paper was inspired by the change of the name of my country from Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia at the beginning of 2019, after the Government signed an agreement, known as Prespa Agreement (Преспански договор, Συμφωνία των Πρεσπών), with Greece, to end a three-decade-long dispute over the name between the two countries. Although the negotiations between the two involved parties were followed and aided by foreign mediators, they were unsuccessful for a long time, and, consequently, Greece vetoed Macedonia's accession to the EU and NATO.

During this time, especially during the last year of negotiations, people's dissatisfaction and frustration with the whole situation was often expressed on the social media (Trajkova and Neshkovska, 2018, Neshkovska and Trajkova, 2020a; 2020b). According to Neshkovska and Trajkova's findings (2020a, p.48), the social media (SM) users' posts and comments were abundant with negative lexis (swear and curse words, threats) and rhetorical figures (metaphors and irony), as well as expressive and assertive speech acts. The SM users mostly assumed the roles of analysts and judges of the whole political situation. In addition, the media constant reports on the negotiations' progress influenced people's opinions, especially in the final year of negotiations when a change in media reporting as well as in people's attitude could be noticed. Some media sources started promoting the idea that if the name was changed, the country's integration in the EU and NATO was guaranteed, and EU and NATO were associated with a positive change for the better, in a direction of social and financial prosperity. As a result, while most of the Macedonian citizens were still resistant to the idea, some started to accept the "inevitable fact" that if the name was changed, the country will prosper as a new member of the EU and NATO (Trajkova,

2020, p.68). According to Trajkova (2020), both pro- and anti-government oriented media sources created threat frames to portray the name issue from completely opposing perspectives, which contributed to this division among the people. The main issue, however, floating on the surface as an unresolved query for everyone, especially for those against the name change, was whether the country and its citizens will preserve their Macedonian identity or it will maybe be forever changed and lost. The pro- and anti-government oriented media seemed to have a different understanding of the future prospects of the country and its identity and their perspectives were reflected in their articles.

Therefore, this paper aims to investigate how the identity of Macedonian people was discursively constructed and negotiated in both pro- and anti-government oriented media in the last year of negotiations. In line with the research presented in Trajkova (2020), the current analysis also focuses on data gathered from media sources published before, during and after the name change. More precisely, it analyses articles gathered in three different periods: 1) the period right before and after the signing of the so-called Prespa Agreement by the authorities of the two countries, on 12th June 2018; 2) the period right before and after the referendum, which took place on 30th September and at which the Macedonian citizens were supposed to express their opinion for or against the name change, and 3) the period right before and after the Prespa agreement was ratified by the Parliament, and the name was officially changed on 11th February, 2019.

Identity construction: A discourse perspective

Historically, identity has been associated with the concept of the self (De Fina, 2011, p.265), and viewed as an isolated, self-

contained entity. However, in the last few decades, the studies of identity within discourse focus more on the role of interaction in the creation of personal and social worlds and the contribution of language to socio-cultural processes (De Fina, 2011, p. 264). As a result of this shift of focus towards the social nature of self, a new paradigm, known as social constructionist paradigm, has emerged (see De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, 2006). Critical towards the traditional view of identity, it sees individuals as situated in and constituted by the social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves (Wertsch 1997).

Bamberg et al. (2011, p. 180) differentiate between two opposing views within discourse-focused approaches to identity - one, which sees a person as constructed in and through existing discourses, which, following Gee (1999), they call 'capital-D discourses', and the other one in which a person constructs who they are by use of discourse, or in Gee's terms, the 'small-d discourses'. According to Bamberg et al. (2011) these two conceptualizations differ in terms of agency and control and have led to different ways of doing discourse analysis. The theorists whom they associate with capital-D discourses, Habermas, Foucault and Lyotard, view discourse in the form of "discourse ethics" (Habermas 1979), "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1972), or "discourse genres" (Lyotard 1984), as central for the interface of society and individual actions. For Foucault, people have no "real" identity within themselves, and he refers to "technologies of the self" as ways in which individuals, through their engagement in communal practices, produce particular modes of identity. Social practices are imposed on individuals by culture, society and communal norms and thus identities derive from already existing repertoires (Foucault, 1988, p. 11). On the other hand, the theorists associated with the 'small-d discourses' (e.g. Harris, 1952, Levinson, 1983, Schiffrin, 1994) are more interested in the

actual choices made by the speakers as manifestations of how they make sense of the social context, that is in what they call "presentation of the self in everyday interactions" (Kopytowska, 2012, p. vi).

So, the focus shifted from "being" to "doing" (De Fina et al., 2006, Bamberg et al., 2011; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005) i.e. identity is not something that one has but something that one does or performs and recreates through interaction (Butler, 1990, De Fina et al., 2006, Bamberg et al., 2011; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Widdicombe, 1998). Identity is thus discursively created, complex, and dynamic depending on the roles and contexts in which people display themselves (see, for example, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson, 2005; Stets and Burke, 2000; Hogg, Terry, and White, 1995; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). It is a *process*, which is always in a state of *negotiation* (McMillin, 2009; Bauman, 2004) and a state of *being* and *becoming*, it is constantly (re)created and co-constructed in interactive relationships (Wodak, 2012, p. 216).

As interaction and language are central to the construction, enactment and negotiation of identity, language and identity have a dialectic relationship. People define reality through language and language manifests the reality of people's identity. Or, explained through Pennycook's (2000, 2003) concept of "performativity", this means that people do not use language based on their identity but, instead, perform their identity using language. According to De Fina et. al. (2006, p.3), it is the researcher's aim to "look into this dynamic process of interlocutors moving in and out of different identities as they are - performed, enacted and embodied through a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means in discourse".

In today's globalized world, the society and communication are subject to constant change (Kopytowska, 2012). Mediatization has transformed society through the

technological development of communication media, and the “networked public sphere”, which has created as a result, “became a new (virtual) space where identities can be constructed, negotiated and contested” (Kurtes and Kopytowska, 2014, p.5). Often, people’s observation and enactment of their own individual and collective identity is impacted by the way the mass media constructs and presents it.

Types of identities

Identities are contingent, multiple and malleable (Giddens, 1991, Bauman, 2004), they are plural and complex (De Fina, 2011). Tracy (2002), for instance, distinguishes among four types of identities: *master identities*, which are relatively unchanging; *personal identities*, which also unchanging but unique to the individual; *relational identities*, that are enacted with a particular interlocutor in conversation; and *interactional identities*, i.e. related to role distribution in each specific interactional context (in Parini and Granato, 2013). Merchant (2006), on the other hand, distinguishes between *anchored* and *transient* identities: the first ones relate to aspects of people’s lives over which they have little control and are least likely to change like gender, position in family, religion, age, social class and geographical location, while transient identities change over time, being influenced by maturation, changing cultural conditions and peer group affiliations. These identities are defined in relation to media narratives, ideologies, popular culture, iconic objects, social activities and networks.

De Fina (2011) distinguishes between *individual* and *collective identities*, depending on whether people reflect and negotiate their own identity as individuals or the identity of the group or the community they represent; then between *personal* and *social identities*, depending on whether they refer to the

moral and physical characteristics that distinguish one person from another, or to large categories like race, gender, and political affiliation; and he also identifies *situational identities*, which reflect the roles related to specific roles of interaction.

Discursive processes

Identities are communicated in different ways; they may be openly discussed or indirectly and symbolically conveyed (De Fina, 2011, p. 269). In this paper, the discursive processes defined by Bamberg et al. (2011) and De Fina (2011) are taken to be central to the construction and communication of identity, as they consider identities to be constructed in discourse and negotiated among speaking subjects in social contexts, which is in line with this author's social constructionist understanding of identity as created in relation to other identities.

According to Bamberg et al. (2011, p. 178) the processes of identity construction refer to navigation between different positions or dilemmas. They identify three: 1) *agency and control*, 2) *difference and sameness* between me and others and 3) *constancy and change across time*. They base the discursive process *agency and control* on the idea that speakers are agents in control who have power. The other end is when they lose control and become less accountable. The speaker is powerful to construct the way the world is or the speaker has no power whatsoever and is constructed by the way the world is. The second discursive process distinguishes between interlocutors, by enabling the speaker to identify themselves with others through self-integration or to differ from others through self-differentiation. In that sense, the speakers are positioning in relation to others in terms of proximity and distance, in a sense that they either feel similar and, in that sense, close to other people, or different and distant from others. And finally,

constancy and change across time is based on the idea that speakers position themselves in terms of two ends of the continuum, continuity or discontinuity in the formation of identity, from no change to complete change of identity.

De Fina summarises four discursive processes, identified to be central to the construction of identity within the interactionist paradigm: *indexicality*, *local occasioning*, *positioning and dialogism* and *categorisation* (2011, p. 264). The process of *indexicality* is based on the idea that symbols, linguistic or not, communicated either explicitly or implicitly, index or point to elements of the social context and identify certain social identities. The notion of indexicality captures the use of particular specific language forms and styles, which reflect particular stances which are associated with certain identities (Ochs, 1992, p. 341). The concept of *local occasioning* captures the idea that the way people present their identity or ascribe identity to others, depends on the context in which discourse is taking place but also shapes that context. For instance, we identify ourselves differently in different groups by choosing what we are going to say about ourselves in a specific group. The *positioning and dialogism* discursive process is a concept which enables speakers to position themselves, be positioned by others and position others. It distinguishes people among each other - who they are not and who they are similar to. Positioning has been used by some social theorists to describe the process through which discourse constrains identity (Fairclough, 1992). *Categorization* refers to the inventory of identities available in a situation as well as the kinds of identities more generally in use in a given society and historic moment (Fairclough, 1992).

Research Methodology

This paper aims to investigate how the Macedonian identity was discursively negotiated and constructed by the media in three specific periods vital to the name change. For that purpose, 30 articles were gathered and analysed, 15 from 5 online pro-government media sources (i.e. *Nova*, *Sloboden Pechat*, *CivilMedia*, *Naroden Glas* and *Fokus*) and 15 from 5 anti-governmentally oriented media sources (i.e. *Kurir*, *Ekonomski Lider*, *Večer*, *Republika* and *Nova Makedonija*). So, overall, 29,589 tokens were extracted, and three articles per newspaper outlet were analysed. The articles were collected from May 2018 to February 2019, i.e. during three important periods: 1) first half of 2018, May and June, right before and after the signing of the Prespa agreement on 17 June, 2018; 2) September-October 2018, around the referendum, on 30th September, 2018 and 3) January and February 2019, right before and after the ratification of the agreement by the Parliaments of both countries on 25th January 2019, which went into force on 12th February 2019.

So, the analysis focuses on identification of the discursive processes based on which the journalists of both pro and anti-government oriented media negotiate and construct the Macedonian identity (that of the country and its people) in these three separate periods. A qualitative approach was adopted, because the focus was not on the isolated posts, but on understanding the repetitive use of identity processes which emerged in each separate period in both types of articles. Therefore, in the section which follows, the most typical examples found in both types of articles are presented and analysed.

Findings

In this section, the analysis of the data from the three different periods is presented separately and relevant conclusions are drawn.

Period 1: May/ June, 2018 (Prespa Agreement)

The first analysed period is the one right before and after the Prespa Agreement was signed, in May and June 2018. After a 30-year-long debate the newly elected Government at the time decided to take a different position from all previous Governments and accept the name change. The prime ministers and ministers for foreign affairs of both countries signed the so-called Prespa Agreement or the Treaty of Prespa, which obliges Macedonia to change its name into the Republic of North Macedonia and Greece to stop obstructing Macedonia's progress in the EU and NATO.

A. Identity construction in anti-government media sources

The analysis of the anti-government oriented newspapers show that journalists use indexicality as a discursive process to point to elements of the social context that would lead to or contribute to self-destruction and a complete loss of the Macedonian identity. In example (1)¹, for instance, the signing of the agreement by the Macedonian government (or as the author says, by ourselves) is associated with a suicide of the nation, or in example (2) a complete erasure of the Macedonian national character and identity. Obviously, the rhetoric journalists use attempts to alarm readers of complete loss of

¹ All examples presented in the paper have been translated by the author who is a certified judicial translator and interpreter

identity after the signing of the Prespa Agreement. In (4), on the other hand, the author uses indexicality to point to government officials who signed the agreement by asking the reader who those people are, what kind of people they are and what their aims or intentions are, questioning their moral and ethical values. Obviously, the information about their identity puts it under a question mark, so the readers, consequently, should not be gullible and trust such people with vague identity.

In addition, constancy and change over time is used as a discursive process by authors to refer to the change of identity over time. For instance, in example (1), the author expresses their fears that the signing of the agreement will lead to alteration of the country, the Constitution and the whole legal system as well as to a complete loss of identity.

(1) ...with this, allegedly reached international agreement, the country and the Constitution and the whole legal system will not only be altered, but will completely lose their identity. We will not be in a position to defend the name, the language and the identity any longer under any circumstance because we signed the agreement ourselves i.e., we ourselves agreed to it. That will be a public, collective identity suicide on stage of a whole nation and a whole country. (Nova Makedonija, 05/04/2018)

[...со ваквиот евентуално постигнат меѓународен договор не само што ќе мора да се променат туку целосно ќе се обезличат и државата и Уставот и правниот поредок. Името, јазикот и идентитетот веќе нема да можеме да ги одбериме по ниедна основа, бидејќи сме потпишале, т.е. сами сме се согласиле. Тоа би било јавно колективно идентитетско самоубиство на отворена сцена, на цел еден народ и цела една држава.]

2) My dear Macedonians, do you know what this is? Literally complete erasure of the Macedonian national

character and identity of the Macedonian nation...(Kurir, 02/06/2018)

[*Мои мили Македонци, знаете ли што е ова? Буквално целосно бришење на македонскиот национален карактер на државата и на идентитетот на македонскиот народ*]

Very often journalists use inclusive pronouns to self-integrate with other Macedonians and point to their same identity, as in (1) and (3), for instance, when the journalist identifies with all the Macedonians who will not be in a position to defend their identity after the agreement is signed, and he/she points out that it is they themselves who signed it. The authors also sometimes position themselves as friends to the readers, the Macedonians, by addressing them as in example (3) with “my dear Macedonians”. However, sometimes a clear difference is made by the author between themselves and “the others” by applying self-differentiation as a discursive strategy. For instance, in (4) the author distances from those who want to sign the agreement, naming them as unbelievers, people with no ethics and moral values. Here, we can see the usage of categorization as a discursive process to distinguish between two different categories of people: us (those who love the country) vs. them (those who do not). This can be considered a very persuasive technique, because by using the inclusive *us* to self-integrate with the readers and true Macedonians, the journalist serves to the readers the obvious conclusion that they should reach – that if they are true Macedonians, they would never accept the position of “the others”. In (3), another categorization is made: Macedonians are biblical people with a biblical name, which is threatened to be drawn to a country with no name and therefore no identity.

(3) The name is not written in the agreement. We all know that it is actually our country Republic of Macedonia, but strangely, following some international

law the name has been omitted. We all know why: Macedonia is the biggest world and biblical name – brand name, and this does not suit the first party in the agreement, Greece, and it is managing to draw this world biblical brand to a NO NAME brand. (Kurir, 02/06/2018)

[Името не е напишано во договорот. Сите заеме дека се работи за нашата држава Република Македонија, ама еве чудно некое меѓународно договорно право, името ни е изоставено. Сите знаеме зошто: МАКЕДОНИЈА е најголемо светско и библиско име – бренд име, што не и одговара на, првата страна во договорот Република Грција, и таа успева овој светски и библиски бренд да го сведе на БЕЗИМЕН-NO NAME бренд.]

(4) I wonder, who are these people who signed this agreement, what kind of people are they, what kind of character ornaments them and what are their aims and intentions? More precisely, what kind of democracy are they building in the second decade of the 21st century? And most precisely, what kind of law (international law) is this with no justice and reciprocity. This reminds me of Socrates's dilemma: what is law without truth, and what is man without God? I believe that such agreement can be made and signed only by unbelievers, people who know no ethics, and their moral values are light-years away. And now, it is not that Socrates did not warn us about this, but who cared? (Kurir, 02/06/2018)

[Се прашувам кои се луѓето кои го потпишале овој договор, какви се тие како личности, што карактер ги краси и кои и какви им се целите и намерите? Поконкретно, каква демократија спроведуваат во втората декада од 21от век? Најконкретно, какво е ова право (меѓународно јавно) без правда, правдина и реципроцитет. Тука ми текнува на дилемата на Сократ што е закон без вистина, и што е човек без Господ? Чинам дека ваков договор можат да направат и потпишат само луѓе безбожници, луѓе на кои етиката им е непозната, а

*моралот далечен со светлосни години. И сега, не дека
Сократ не не опоменуваше за сето ова, ама кој да слуша?]*

B. Identity construction in the pro-government media sources

As for the pro-government-oriented newspapers, the authors mostly use *indexicality* to create an association between EU and NATO and stability and prosperity. Their arguments, as it can be seen in example (5) were mostly oriented towards persuading the people to accept the name change as it will open the doors to EU and NATO, and that has the ability to cure all their illnesses and secure an eternal life. Along the same line, the author in (5) uses *constancy and change across time* as a discursive strategy to build “a stable and prosperous” identity of Macedonians in the future. By using the inclusive *we*, the journalist attempts to self-integrate with the readers and position themselves as one of many who suffer, and need change: the lack of action will lead to failure and years back in the process.

(5) The integration with the EU and NATO, that modern formula for stability and prosperity, that social panacea—the imaginary remedy which has the potency to cure all illnesses and secure eternal life – is always within reach, but never reached. The moment we reach the light at the tunnel, bum-bum-tras-bum!, and some new social-political cataclysm takes us away from the desired objective and gets us years back in the process. (CIVILMEDIA, 06.06.2018)²

[А интеграцијата во ЕУ и НАТО, таа современа формула за стабилност и просперитет, таа опитествена панацеа

² Upon request from CIVILMEDIA (the online newspaper) we provide the reader with the link to the article: <https://civilmedia.mk/lulashkata-na-koja-se-nishame/> June 6, 2018, Free zone section: Добро утро со Ордановски, author Saso Ordanovski, name of article: Лулашката на која се нишаме.

– имагинарниот лек кој има моќ да ги залечи сите болести и да обезбеди вечен живот – ни е секогаш на дофат, но никогаш достиген. Таман ќе дојдеме до светло на крајот од тунелот – бунете-бапете-трааас-ка-бууум!, и некоја најнова општествено-политичка катаклизма ќе нè оддалечи од посакуваната цел и ќе нè врати со години назад во процесот.]

So, as it can be seen from the examples from both sets of articles, *indexicality* and *constancy and change over time* appear to be central discursive processes in negotiating the identity of future Macedonians – either complete loss of the existing identity or new prosperous identity in the EU and NATO.

Period 2: September/October 2018 (Referendum)

The second set of data consisted of articles published in the period around the referendum, when the citizens were asked to state whether they accept the name change or not. However, it must be mentioned that the referendum question was a trick question as it asked people the following: *Do you want the country to enter the EU and NATO by accepting the Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece?*, which indirectly and falsely led people to believe that if they voted for the change of the country's name, the country will be granted entrance in these two associations. The referendum was unsuccessful because the name change failed to reach the threshold. The next few examples feature how identity was built at the time in both sets of newspapers.

A. Identity construction in the anti-government media sources

The anti-governmental newspaper articles written around the period of the referendum use *categorization* to construct two

different types of identities: the identity of real Macedonians, or those who love their country and the betrayers, or those who want to change the name and therefore do not love their country. For instance, in (6) and (7) the author distinguishes between cosmopolitans, who are already in the EU and NATO and conservatives, who do not accept the name change, and “were taught wrong to love their country”, as in (7). The use of irony and sarcasm contributes to the clear division between “us” and “them”, leaving the reader with a clearly defined option that should obviously be the one chosen – to not accept the name change.

(6) We will have a referendum and a voting-election battle on 30th September. According to the plan brought from abroad, the battle will be between the cosmopolitans, who are already part of the EU and NATO, and the conservative Macedonians, who do not want to change the name and taste the world pleasures right after. (Nova Makedonija, 21/09/2018)

[На 30 септември ќе имаме референдум и гласачко-избирачка битка. Според планот увезен од странство, бој ќе бијат космополитите, кои се веќе дел од ЕУ и од НАТО, против конзервативните Македонци, кои не сакаат да си го променат името и веднаш да ги вкушат белосветските благодати.]

(7) The conservatives do not have echelons. They are everywhere and nowhere, and they are mainly Macedonians whose parents educated them wrongly, to love their country... They should be careful what they speak, because if they do not speak holy and right, they will be arrested for hate speech. They do not have a leader.... And not only do they not have a leader but conservative Macedonians still surprised at how a serious country and serious people can work for their own misery. (Nova Makedonija)

[Конзервативците немаат ешалони. Распрскани се секаде и никаде и главно се Македонци чии родители им дале лошо воспитание, да си ја сакаат татковината. ... Треба да внимаваат што зборуваат, зашто ако зборуваат небожно и наопаку ќе бидат апсени за говор на омраза. Немаат водач... Ај што немаат водач, конзервативните Македонци уште се чудат како може сериозна држава и сериозен народ, сами да си работат во полза на сопствената штета.]

In addition, some newspaper articles were summoning people for boycott by using the concept of *agency and control* as a discursive process. For instance, in (8) the author appears as an agent in control, who, by the usage of the inclusive “we” self-integrates with the other citizens: *Macedonia boycotts, we all boycott*. By positioning the readers and himself/herself as agents in control, the author summons people to boycott the referendum and protect themselves and future generations.

(8) The Macedonian citizen must stop working in favour of their own misery, the referendum should be boycotted, because with the big ‘yes’ and big ‘no’ the country that we considered older than the sun will stop existing... Macedonia boycotts, we all boycott in order to protect ourselves as Macedonians, to protect our future generations and to justify ourselves before our ancestors. (Nova Makedonija, 21/09/2018)

[Македонецот мора да престане да работи во полза на сопствената штета, референдумот треба да се бојкотира, затоа што со големото „да“ и со големото „не“ ќе престане да постои државата за која со гордост велевме дека е постара од сонцето. ...Македонија бојкотира, бојкотираме сите за да си се заштитиме себеси како Македонци, да го заштитиме нашето поколение, а да се оправдаме пред нашите предци.]

B. Identity construction in the pro- government media sources

The pro-government-oriented newspaper articles were using similar discursive processes to construct the identity of what they consider “true Macedonians”. Journalists, here, used the concept of *agency and control* to construct an identity of fighters, people who will take their future in their hands and vote for the name change as true Macedonians, using this unique opportunity to open the door of the EU (9) and have their own country (10). In addition, through observing the discursive process *constancy and change across time*, the authors imply that the future will be bright if Macedonian citizens use this historic opportunity.

(9) In his interview for MIA, the European commissioner says that if the opportunity for acceptance of the agreement with Greece fails at the referendum on 30th September, the door of the EU will be closed ‘for decades’ (Lider, 14/09/2018)

[Еврокомесарот за проширување во интервју за МИА вели дека доколку се пропушти можноста за прифаќање на Договорот со Грција на референдумот на 30 септември, вратата за ЕУ ќе се затвори „за децении“]

(10) Few last generations of ethical Macedonians have that historical opportunity to have (together with their numerous co-citizens from other ethnic communities) THEIR OWN country. Let me repeat, a sovereign country with only 193 other members of the UN.(CIVILMEDIA, 03/09/2018)³

[Неколку последни генерации етнички Македонци ја имаат таа историска среќа да имаат (заедно со своите бројни сограѓани од другите етнички групи) СВОЈА

³ Upon request from CIVILMEDIA (the online newspaper) we provide the reader with the link to the article: <https://civilmedia.mk/kon-vinozhitoto-ili-do-zalezot-na-sontseto/> September 3, 2018, Free zone section: Добро утро со Ордановски, author Saso Ordanovski, name of article: *Кон виножитото или до залезот на сонцето.*

*држава. Да повторам, современа суверена држава меѓу
само 193 други членки на ООН.]*

So, the analysis of the data from this second period shows that journalists make clear division between the identity of those people who accept the name change and those who do not by categorizing them in two separate groups. Furthermore, the concept of agency and control is used to construct an identity of fighters – either for or against the name change.

Period 3: January/February 2019 (change of name)

Finally, the third period encompasses the one around the official name change. Besides the failed referendum, the Parliament ratified the agreement in January 2019 and finally on 11th February, 2019, the name was officially changed. The following examples feature the general disposition of journalists in both pro- and anti-government media outlets.

A. Identity construction in the anti-government media sources

During this period, January and February 2019, the tone in anti-governmental media outlets becomes very pessimistic. The journalists use indexicality to associate the official ratification of the Prespa agreement as a final act of the dark and shameful scenario of the Government (see example (11)). They point to the authorities (the prime minister Zoran Zaev and his party SDSM) as being most guilty for the change of the identity of the country. They also distance from the act by using the discursive process of self-differentiation.

(11) The Republic of Macedonia finds itself faced with the final act of the dark and shameful scenario of Zoran Zaev and SDSM to change the name of the country, the identity, the language, culture and history. Zoran Zaev

and SDSM sold the national and state interests and trampled on the Constitution, the laws and the will of the Macedonian citizens. (Kurir, 10/01/2019)

[Република Македонија се наоѓа пред финалниот акт на црното и срамно сценарио на Зоран Заев и СДСМ за промена на името на државата, идентитетот, јазикот, културата и историјата. Зоран Заев и СДСМ ги продадоа националните и државни интереси и ги погазија Уставот, законите и волјата на македонските граѓани.]

B. Identity construction in the pro-government media sources

In comparison, the tone in the articles of the pro-government media outlets becomes rather optimistic. The rhetoric from the previous periods is preserved. The concepts of *indexicality* and *constancy and change over time* is preserved in identity construction: NATO and EU are associated with security and balance the country will find now (12).

(12) The entrance in NATO will solve the country's security, the nationalists believe that the economy needs to be solved first, and then the security, but it is the other way round. The Prespa Agreement is exceptionally good, the agreement is an absolute balance. (CIVILMEDIA, 07/02/2019)⁴

[Влезот во НАТО ќе ни ја реши безбедноста во државата, националистите сметаат дека прво економијата треба да се реши, а потоа безбедноста сама ќе си дојде, но не е така туку обратно. Преспанскиот договор е исклучително добар, договорот е отиден до максимален баланс.]

⁴ <https://civilmedia.mk/od-kleknj-stani-kila-dobivme/> June 7, 2018, Free zone section: Добро утро со Ордановски, author Saso Ordanovski, name of article: Од клекни-стани, кила добивме!

Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate how pro- and anti-government oriented media sources negotiated and constructed the identity of Macedonians during the last year of negotiations between Macedonia and Greece and the official change of the name of the country in February 2019. Taking into consideration the great impact that media in general has on building people's opinions on important issues, it played the main role in influencing the people's opinion in this concrete situation. The results showed that the two sets of media sources used more or less the same discursive processes to construct a different identity for Macedonians.

In the first and third analysed period, the one around the signing of the Prespa agreement and the one around its ratification, the central discursive processes they used to construct people's and country's identity were *indexicality* and *constancy and change over time*. By pointing to different elements of the social context, associating the Prespa agreement (Period 1) and the change of name (Period 3) with self-destruction and loss of identity in the anti-government oriented articles, and stability and prosperity in the EU and NATO in the pro-government-oriented ones, both media sources constructed a different identity of the country and its people in the future. Similarly, during the time of the referendum (Period 3), both media outlets built a different identity for people who support the name change and those who not through the discursive process *categorization*, thus making a clear difference between "us" and "them". In addition, they summoned people to either vote at or boycott the referendum by applying the *agency and control* discursive process.

So overall, the analysis showed that the media did impact the atmosphere in the country and the people's opinion in this specific situation, especially during the last year of the process

and the official name change. Although a great number of people were against it and the referendum failed, some people did begin to accept the idea as something inevitable. The identity built in the EU and NATO is still something Macedonian citizens strive for, two years from then.

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