

INSTITUTIONS, PROTEST, AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY IN BOSNIA AND  
HERZEGOVINA AND MACEDONIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU ACCESSION  
PROCESS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Amelia Wallace: Institutions, Protest, and Democratic Accountability in Bosnia and Herzegovina  
and Macedonia: Implications for the EU Accession Process  
(Under the direction of Milada Vachudova)

This thesis provides an analysis of the political institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia and the effect that they have on democratic accountability and the European Union (EU) accession process. It utilizes institutionalist theory to argue that post-war agreements created institutions in both countries that incentivized elites to take advantage of ethnic tensions and engage in illiberal practices that have immiserated citizens and stalled the EU accession process. It then compares the causes, methods, and outcomes of the mass protest movements that took place in Bosnia in 2014 and Macedonia in 2015 in response to illiberal behavior and explains why only the Macedonian protests were successful in holding elites accountable. The final section draws from the experiences of each country to discuss the future of each country's relationship with the EU and the potential for each government to enact the liberal reforms necessary to progress in the EU accession process.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CHES	Chapel Hill Expert Survey
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RS	Republika Srpska
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
UN	United Nations
VMRO-DPMNE	The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity

## INTRODUCTION

Since Croatia became the most recent member of the European Union (EU) in 2013, only a few potential member states have made substantial progress in their own accession processes, and it appears that Croatia will be the only new member state to join the union in this decade. This is a striking change from the previous decade, in which two rounds of expansion added thirteen new member states to the Union during the period of rapid democratization that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. Domestic and international actors alike have attempted to understand the reasons for this slowdown, debating whether the enlargement process has been so unsuccessful in recent years for reasons inherent to the accession process itself or if the difficult starting conditions in applicant countries are responsible for the lack of reform. This paper will discuss two particularly problematic cases of stalled EU accession, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia – states that have been unable to overcome their authoritarian legacies and implement the political and economic reforms that would qualify them for EU membership.

Both of these countries have had difficult post-socialist transitions marked by ethnic division and conflict, poor economic performance, and corrupt elites prone to illiberalism. These divided societies have long lagged behind even fellow Balkan countries in democratic progress and the EU accession process because corrupt elites have taken advantage of both preexisting and manufactured societal divisions to ensure an illiberal status quo that served their own interests at the expense of national development. In both countries, the decisions made by elites to engage in illiberal practices were purposeful but not inevitable; they were spurred on by the institutional conditions determined by forces outside their control. In Bosnia, the Dayton

Accords were successful in their attempt to bring peace to the warring nation, but ethnic power-sharing agreements have played into the hands of nationalist elites who prioritize ethnic identity and rent seeking over ideology and good governance. In Macedonia, the spectre of Greece's promise to veto any attempt by Macedonia to join NATO or the EU stunted the ability of reform-minded actors to thrive. Instead, the threat of the Greek veto pushed the government away from international organizations by undermining the credibility of the EU's offer of membership, which took away any incentive elites had to make EU-friendly reforms. Then-Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski responded to the Greek veto of Macedonia's bid to join NATO in 2008 by shifting his focus from any Western-oriented reform and instead setting his country on a path towards nationalism and illiberalism.

Despite each country's abysmal record since independence and the structural constraints that have impeded progress, there seemed to be cause for cautious optimism recently when widespread anti-government protests broke out in Bosnia in 2014 and in Macedonia in 2015. The scale of these protests was unprecedented in each country since the end of violent conflicts in the 1990s and early 2000s. In each country, masses of people from all backgrounds broke the pattern of political passivity and took to the streets to demand change within government and improve upon a status quo that was no longer acceptable. Yet despite the scale and intensity of both protests, only Macedonia experienced any considerable change, as Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's government was forced to resign in 2015, which led to the election of a new reform-minded leader in Zoran Zaev of the Social Democratic Union. Protests in Bosnia, on the other hand, only resulted in isolated achievements at the local level while national level politics remained unaffected.

In this thesis I uncover why these two protests resulted in different outcomes despite the many similar challenges and setbacks in economic reform, good governance and state-building that plagued both countries and precipitated protest action. I argue that institutions in both countries blocked pressure for liberalizing reforms from below, creating incentives and opportunities for elites to continue to ignore EU conditionality and impose an illiberal status quo from above. These same institutions explain why protests against illiberal rule and state capture in both countries had such different outcomes: why ruling Bosnian party leaders were able to avoid responding to the demands of protesters, while ruling incumbents in Macedonia could not.

I use institutionalist theory to understand the unique preferences of political actors given the institutional constraints in which they operate. The benefits of EU accession are more or less static for all potential member states in Central and Eastern Europe, yet the countries of the Western Balkans have differed greatly in their response to the offer of membership in contrast to their counterparts in Central Europe and the Eastern Balkans. It is therefore necessary to examine domestic factors that influence decision making in order to understand why some countries forgo the benefits of accession in favor of an illiberal status quo when presented with the same potential benefits as more reform-oriented countries. Institutional theory explains these differences by revealing how strategic preferences are formed in the context of specific domestic institutions. These institutions have methods of interest aggregation unique to their own system, which determines how the interests of voters, political parties, and civil society organizations are collected and manifested in decision-making.

This thesis uses the lens of institutionalist theory to explain why Bosnia and Macedonia, two countries with quite similar histories and close geographical proximity, have responded differently to calls for reform from above and below as a consequence of their unique



institutions. These institutions were especially relevant during the protest movements that arose in recent years in each country with differing levels of success. In Bosnia, the institutions themselves protect elites and create ample opportunities for politicians in power to use clientelism, nationalism, and fear-mongering, which disillusioned protesters and enabled elites to weaken the protester's message and outlive the movement. In Macedonia, on the other hand, elites had only taken advantage of government institutions to engage in illiberal practices prior to 2015 and were therefore not insulated from a united citizen protest movement once these transgressions became public. When Macedonian protesters from all ethnicities rallied around a non-nationalistic party, corrupt elites did not have the same institutional protections found in Bosnia, and the government was forced to resign as a result.

This thesis provides a qualitative study of existing literature on the governments of Bosnia and Macedonia to lay the groundwork for an analysis of each protest movement and a comparison between the two divergent outcomes of widespread protest. The literature used in this study stems from three main literatures in political science: democratization, EU neighborhood relations, and domestic politics in the Balkans. I utilize these literatures to analyze the underlying mechanics at work in Bosnian and Macedonian politics within the context of institutionalist theory. In addition, I use quantitative data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) to assess the current domestic political situation by giving insight into the policy positions of Bosnian and Macedonian parties and providing a metric for defining a party as authoritarian or nationalist.

The rest of this thesis is divided into three sections. The first section briefly introduces new institutionalist theory and explores the respective post-war institutions that have regulated politics in each country and incentivized elites to ignore calls for reform and good governance

from both citizens and the EU in favor of increasing ethnonationalist sentiment and illiberal. The second section compares the causes and outcomes of the 2014 Bosnia and 2015 Macedonia protests using the institutional differences detailed in the first section to explain why these two protests resulted in divergent outcomes. The third section discusses the EU's relationship with each country and the strategic opportunities and challenges that have arisen in the wake of these protests.

### **I. Institutionalism and Democratic Stagnation in Bosnia and Macedonia**

Membership in the European Union offers a wealth of economic and political benefits in addition to being a mark of legitimacy and progress in post-communist states. Yet rather than working to enact the reforms necessary to reap these economic, political, and diplomatic benefits of membership, the Bosnian and Macedonian governments continued to engage in illiberal practices. The purpose of this section is to explain the reasons behind this lack of progress using institutionalist theory. I contend that the choice of elites to only pay lip service to the EU reform process without taking any real action is a rational one based on a cost-benefit analysis. The particular institutions and methods of interest aggregation in each country have created incentives for elites to eschew reforms in favor of clientelism and political stagnation rather than taking on the costs of reform and fair electoral competition. This section will be divided into three parts. The first part briefly explains institutionalism as a theory. The second part applies institutionalist theory to the Bosnian case to demonstrate why previous attempts to liberalize have failed. The third part discusses Macedonia's post-war political trajectory through the same lens to allow for a comparison to be made between the two cases.

*Institutionalism:*

Like other countries in the Western Balkans, Bosnia and Macedonia have had difficulties establishing a liberal consensus and transitioning to a functioning democratic system since the fall of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Each country has struggled with violent ethnic conflicts in the past, though the short-lived conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia pales in comparison to the devastating ethnic war in Bosnia between ethnic Croats, Serbians, and Bosniaks in the mid-1990s. Both countries feature political systems in which illiberal elites were able to thrive by dividing elections and lawmaking along ethnic lines, and have struggled to establish democratic legitimacy and economic growth as a result. However, though ethnicity plays an important role in Bosnian and Macedonian politics, the problems in each system are not the inevitable result of a multiethnic society. Rather, it is the political elites themselves at work in each country who have weaponized ethnicity in order to maintain power and collect rents by avoiding reform. To do so, they take advantage of the unique institutions created by post-conflict agreements to ensure stability through ethnic power sharing.

I argue in this thesis that the decisions made by rent-seeking elites in both countries, however immoral or misguided, are nonetheless the result of a rational cost-benefit analysis, as policy preferences are bounded by the limitations of the institutions and actors that created them. An effective way of conceptualizing this decision-making process is new institutionalist theory, which analyzes the effects of rules and procedures for aggregating individual wishes into collective decision making (Immergut 1998, 25). Even in democratic systems, voting and political decision making do not necessarily reveal the real preferences of the majority of citizens or lawmakers in power. Rather, the rules and procedures of decision-making institutions shape preferences by defining which actions are possible and which are not, regardless of popular support. As a result, decisions made by actors are a combination of their true preferences, which

exist outside of institutions, and their strategic preferences, which seek the preferred action given the options available. Political decisions are therefore defined by systemic features of regimes, not true preferences themselves (Ibid., 22).

The challenge then is to understand how these strategic preferences are determined and which groups are allowed to participate in the political process. To do so, institutionalist theory examines the methods of interest aggregation used by institutions and the specific interest groups recognized within them. The rest of this section will deal with discussing these two questions in the Bosnian and Macedonian context in order to understand the strategic preferences that have arisen as a result of the post-conflict institutional order that has shaped each country's governmental structure. Each country's institutions serve to either block or appropriate the preferences of voters to remove pressure from below, allowing elites to adopt their own strategic preferences for corrupt, illiberal policy-making. Institutions allow elites to do this because without pressure from voters in elections, elites have more incentive to engage in clientelism and partial reform to stay in power than they do to pass EU-friendly reforms. As a result, the EU has lost its leverage in the accession process and the reform process has suffered.

### *Bosnia*

Bosnia has had one of the most difficult transitions to liberal democracy in the Balkans due in large part to the ethnic war that devastated the country in the 1990s. Since international intervention and extensive negotiations were able to bring an end to the war in 1995, domestic and international actors alike have struggled to promote liberalizing reforms in the newly stable country. In this subsection, I first analyze the political institutions created by the Dayton Agreement in order to understand their effect on the democratic trajectory of Bosnia. I then turn to discussing Bosnian civil society and the parties who represent them to show how the

institutions at work in Bosnia prop up illiberal political actors while effectively silencing pro-reform voices.

#### i. Bosnia's Post-Dayton Governmental Structure

The most important factor weakening EU conditionality to the point of ineffectiveness in Bosnia is the complicated, ethnically divided governmental structure first created by the Dayton Agreement in the wake of the Bosnian War. Dayton created a system in which incentives to engage in corruption and only carry out partial reforms during the transition to democracy outweigh the incentives to liberalize and enact EU-friendly reforms that the EU is able to offer.

In order to end the conflict and preserve a stable ethnic balance in the country, the Dayton Agreement ensured that all three major ethnicities would have consistent, regulated representation in government and self-determination in areas where they hold the majority by creating two entities, the majority-Serbian Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is home to mostly Bosniaks and Croats. These entity governments have strong control over their respective regions and, crucially, an entity veto that can halt legislation at the state level. This veto has problematic consequences for EU integration because it gives elites the ability to block state-level institutions from taking action on the basis of “national interest” (Dzihic and Wieser 2011, 1806).

The problems here are twofold, both affecting the preference formation of political actors. The first issue is that the divided structure adds several veto points in the reform process. The EU integration process requires radical reforms that must be implemented at the state, rather than entity, level. The Bosnian state government, however, does not have the power to enact

these reforms without the consent of both entities, even if its true preference would be to reform. Instead, elites work to keep themselves in power rather than pursuing an aggressive pro-EU reform agenda. In fact, Dzihic and Wieser conclude that EU conditionality will only lead to effective changes “when elites seek the rewards of accession and when all key political parties do not consider the EU conditions a threat to their vital interests” (Ibid. 1810). Unfortunately, the institutionalized importance of diverse “national interests” gives elites incentive to act strategically and eschew the possible rewards of accession and to instead treat EU conditionality as an existential threat. Nationalist elites are insulated from public opinion threatening their rule because decisions made by parties in power are framed by all major parties as being either for or against a vague “national interest” of their ethnic entity rather than being the appropriate course of action practically or ideologically. As a result, the rent-seeking elites who would have been ousted by an outraged electorate in other EU accession countries are instead able to maintain their political power without making policy concessions. As long as elites are not held accountable for their decisions, they will not actively try to engage with an EU reform process that threatens their hold on political power.

Refusing to allow EU-friendly reforms and increased state power therefore becomes the defining political issue because the relationship between state and entity powers affects national interests. Entity governments vary in response to the incentives that the entity system creates. The Republika Srpska in particular is quick to use its entity veto to preserve the current relationship between the state and entity governments, blocking the path to EU membership in the process. Since they make up the majority of the total population in Bosnia, Bosniaks in the Federation of BiH are in favor of increased power at the state level. However, Bosniak elites do not push for reform and instead use the power they have within their entity to engage in fear-

mongering and maintain power through clientelistic practices that trade public sector jobs in exchange for party loyalty. As the smallest of the three ethnic groups in Bosnia, Croats are less enthusiastic about state power than their Bosniak counterparts in the Federation and depend more so on smaller Cantons for representation. Serbians in the Republika Srpska, on the other hand, know that as a distinct minority, a stronger state would mean an unacceptable loss of power not only for the entity, but for Serbians in general (Juncos 2012). The government of Bosnia is therefore unable to properly respond to EU conditionality because, regardless of how popular or useful reforms might be, the state simply does not have the power to implement them without the consent of two entities with little incentive to cooperate.

The reason that politicians in each entity have so little incentive to cooperate is that entities entrench separate “national interests” among Bosnians of different ethnicities that heavily influence decision-making, which is the second issue that arises in Bosnian politics as a result of its institutional structure. The lack of state power to enact reforms is certainly an obstacle in Bosnia, but it would not be insurmountable were the government and party competition not divided between ethnic groups. Unfortunately, Dayton institutionalized a system in which society is segregated socially and politically in ethnic entities. In addition to these ethnic divisions in everyday life, politics are defined along ethnic lines and politicians win favor through nationalist rhetoric rather than policy positions. Any policy proposed by a political party in Bosnia must pass an “implicit ‘identity test’” in order to gain traction. Accession criteria that is perceived by elites to touch upon national identity will therefore be treated differently than criteria that does not (Freyburg and Richter 2010, 266). In Bosnia, EU conditionality is especially susceptible to failing this “identity test” because national identity forms the very basis of political legitimacy for Bosnian political elites. Bosnian politicians simply cannot strategically

afford to make compromises in the EU accession process that affect the sense of national identity that got them elected in the first place. National identity tests are not policies themselves; they are shields that elites use to dodge responsibility for democratic stagnation and protect themselves from being held accountable for the failures in the accession process. It pushes the discussion past the utility of certain policy positions and instead presents the decision against reform as a fundamental necessity for the survival of the ethnic group. When all mainstream political parties frame EU reforms in such dramatic terms, it becomes difficult to establish a political movement that ignores calls to identity in favor of potentially compromising reform.

The role of national identity is therefore negative in domestic Bosnian politics and disastrous for the EU integration process, which requires a unified front on both sides working towards mutually accepted goals. The only concept that all three sides can agree on is that issues that touch on national identity cannot be dealt with by the state government, which keeps certain reform issues from ever reaching the agenda (Ibid.). Not only does national identity create new, unproductive incentives in Bosnia, it also nullifies other incentives that would normally be included in a cost-benefit analysis of EU membership, like access to the internal market and the free movement of people within Schengen. Issues of identity are a trump card in Bosnian politics that is more powerful than the incentives that the EU is able to offer. Politicians instead run on nationalist agendas and only attempt to appeal to members of their own ethnic constituency.

Bosnian citizens, for their part, do not subscribe to these ethnic political divisions in the way that their representatives do. A public opinion by the National Democratic Institute in 2017 found that 90% of all Bosnians saw ethnic reconciliation as important for the future of the country across all ages and ethnicities. Their frustration with their representatives' nationalist agendas is apparent, as 85% of citizens believe that politicians use ethnic tension for their own



gain rather than trying to reduce it, with no significant differences between entities (National Democratic Institute 2017, 12). The entities are divided, however, in their opinions on EU membership. Bosnians in the Federation strongly support potential EU membership, with 87% of Bosniaks and 90% of Croats supporting accession. Serbians in the RS are more divided, with 47% expressing support for accession and 46% against it (Ibid., 19). Despite the division in RS, support for the EU remains high, and combined with popular attitudes towards the current use of ethnic tensions in political discourse demonstrate a clear dissatisfaction with the current political environment among the electorate.

## ii. Civil Society and Political Parties

The international costs and benefits of EU membership are therefore not the only consideration ignored by political elites in Bosnia. Methods of interest aggregation are also insufficient in a system in which electoral success is based on nationalist rhetoric rather than programmatic voting in response to voter needs. Bosnian political party competition is divided between ethnic groups, with each ethnicity championing its own set of parties. As a result, Bosnian politics feature three separate party systems. The three members of the Bosnian presidency representing each ethnicity are members of three different parties, and the respective entity governments in the RS and the Federation are ruled by completely different sets of parties. As party competition only takes place within each party's own ethnic bloc, parties campaign exclusively on nationalism and the power to protect the ethnic "nation" rather than other issues on the traditional left-right scale. The Chapel Hill Expert survey confirms this, finding that every party, regardless of ethnic identity, clusters around the center-left in terms of traditional economic issues, but varies greatly on the GAL-TAN scale (Polk et. al 2017). The parties on the TAN side of the scale are among the most powerful in Bosnia, particularly in the RS, because

they are able to use nationalism and calls for ethnic solidarity as a way of legitimizing their rule without engaging with economic policies important to their constituents and the EU accession process.

Terrifyingly absent from Bosnian political discourse is the actual voice of Bosnian citizens with regards to issues like EU accession. Unlike politicians using nationalist rhetoric, only 18% of Bosnians consider EU membership to be a bad thing for the country (Handjiska 2017). This indicates that there is a disconnect between the rhetoric used by elites against the EU and actual public opinion. The interests of Bosnian citizens for issues not directly related to “national identity,” however, are not important when elections and governing are based solely on nationalist rhetoric. In elections, candidates only need to convince voters that they will protect abstract “national interests,” not concrete policy issues. Since there is a mainstream consensus against centralization and EU membership, voters who disagree with the current path of the country have little electoral recourse.

In several post-communist states that developed illiberal regimes after the transition to democracy, reform parties rallied around a pro-EU, pro-democracy agenda to displace the illiberal parties in power. Then, in the next round of elections, previously illiberal parties were forced to liberalize and take up pro-EU positions in order to regain electoral competitiveness. As a result, Europeanization and democratization become ingrained in the platforms of any party wishing to be electorally competitive (Vachudova 2014).

This process, however, has not worked in Bosnia, where party competition is replaced by empty appeals to ethnic posturing, and the state of democracy and citizens alike suffer as a result. Regardless of the official positions of Bosnian parties on EU membership, political competition will not be enough to bring the necessary level of reform to Bosnia because politicians from all

three ethnic groups run using ethnic appeals that forgo strong policy positions, which allows them to simply collude with elites from other ethnic groups to maintain the status quo that brought them into power. As all political parties and ethnic groups can attribute its power to the ethnically divided political and governmental structure that elected them, they perversely incentivized to maintain that structure rather than enact the reforms that would follow the will of their constituencies but threaten their power and legitimacy. Citizen and interest group engagement, in turn, is understandably weak, as those who do try to affect politics are ignored and the rest see the futility of citizen action and are discouraged from attempting to engage themselves (Ibid.). EU conditionality therefore fails in Bosnia because of the weak power of state level governance and the pervasiveness of ethnopolitics based on national identity that gives perverse incentives to political elites and domestic voters alike.

Unfortunately, as stated above, politicians have no incentive to change their policies, even in the face of protests, because they know that voters have no other options. There are no viable parties in Bosnia that transcend ethnicity in favor of strong policy positions, so Bosnians have little choice but to continue to vote with their ethnic bloc (Pickering 2009). In a truly representative democracy, the will of the people manifested in these movements would be appropriated by parties in power to bring at least some civilian input into policy making. In the case of Bosnia, these entrenched ethnic parties are free to outmaneuver grass-roots movements and continue their narrow-minded refusal to accept widespread EU-friendly reform.

Civil society is therefore rendered voiceless no matter how high public discontent with the current system or support for the EU grows. The EU accession process only works if elites are able to be heavily influenced by both EU conditionality and citizen demands in favor of democratization and EU membership. Though these are normally extremely positive influences,

neither is able to carry enough power to affect change in Bosnia because of the EU's torn priorities and Bosnian civil society's inability to meaningfully impact political dialogue at the elite level.

### *Macedonia*

Macedonia has had similar difficulties enacting pro-EU reforms and advancing through the EU accession process, but the reasons for this stagnation are different. The Ohrid Framework is comparable to the Dayton Agreement because both agreements were reached in the aftermath of violent ethnic conflicts with the goal of addressing ethnic tensions and preventing violence from reappearing. However, while the Dayton Agreement redesigned the structure of Bosnia's government to ensure that each ethnicity would be represented by government institutions, Macedonia's Ohrid Framework Agreement only granted certain minority rights to ethnic minorities within the existing institutional structure. Ohrid did not have the immediate effect on domestic politics that Dayton did. Greece's ever-present threat to veto NATO and EU accession, ruined the credibility of the EU's offer of membership, which incentivized elites to take advantage of post-Ohrid ethnic divisions rather than fruitlessly enacting difficult reforms for the EU reform process. The purpose of this section is to analyze Macedonian politics using institutionalist theory to explain why this stagnation occurred and allow for comparisons between the Bosnian and Macedonian governments and paths to accession to be made.

This subsection begins by discussing the landmark 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement and the consequences it had for Macedonia's political institutions. I then discuss how these political institutions affected the ability of political actors to successfully advocate for reform prior to the 2015 protests. First, I introduce Macedonian political parties and the mechanisms that kept ruling parties from pursuing non-nationalist, pro-reform agendas in the years following the

Ohrid Agreement. I then discuss the appeals to identity that plague Macedonian politics internally through party programs and externally as a result of Greece's opposition to Macedonia's name and identity. Finally, I discuss why civil society actors outside of political parties were unable to effectively make their true interests known at the government level before the 2015 protests.

#### i. The Ohrid Framework Agreement and its Consequences

The post-conflict agreement reached in Macedonia after its own ethnic conflict in 2001, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, hereafter referred to simply as "Ohrid," has not had the same far-reaching effects as Dayton, but it did have important implications for the young country politically and socially. To be sure, Ohrid was widely considered a success because of its ability to increase minority rights for Albanians while achieving a stable state free from widespread ethnic conflict. Relations with the EU also seemed to be on the right path, as signing the agreement led to Macedonia being the first Western Balkan country to implement a Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2001. Nevertheless, this progress did not last long, as the standards and institutions mandated by Ohrid were used by elites to create what Crowther (2017) referred to as "ethnic condominiums" in which, much like in Bosnia, political competition took place completely within ethnic blocs while interethnic issues were negotiated by elites. This was made possible through the "parallel societies" that have developed since the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.

Ohrid was a landmark agreement that brought warring parties together to negotiate a settlement that was designed to increase minority rights and representation in government as a means of ending the use violence as a method for political expression. It called for improved funding for minority language rights and increased representation in government, police, and

civil service. In order to do so, it called for key changes to the electoral system, which had been changing regularly since the breakup of Yugoslavia over ten years prior (Aziri and Saliaj 2013). The largest shift was the implementation of a proportional, rather than majority, electoral system, which tends to be more representative of minority parties and interests. Officials also redrew district lines to create more municipalities with ethnic minorities as majorities, and some powers were decentralized to local governments. Finally, certain laws especially sensitive to ethnic Albanian citizens would need to be approved by a majority of both ethnic majority and minority parties, known as a “Badinter majority” (Crowther 2017, 745).

Though these changes addressed many legitimate concerns of the ethnic minorities in Macedonia, it did not do enough to bridge the gap between ethnic groups that had caused the 2001 crisis to begin with. In fact, Ohrid drove the two communities even further from each other by creating official separate spaces for each ethnicity, particularly in education, where differences in the language of instruction keep children segregated (Crowther 2017, 746). For purely practical reasons, it seems that there are few links between ethnic communities in everyday life, leaving interethnic cooperation to the elite level. The minority rights included in Ohrid are important, and the division between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia is not a problem in and of itself. A more homogenous society with fewer rights for minorities would not necessarily have ensured more liberal practices. Rather, this division served to effectively change the methods of interest aggregation at the governmental level and to provide elites with the incentive to strategically engage in clientelism and define political issues along ethnic rather than ideological lines. Macedonian political parties, which already had authoritarian tendencies, worked within their own ethnic spheres to consolidate power and benefit their own interests.

## ii. Appeals to Identity

Despite the incentives laid out by the ethnic power sharing agreements after 2001, the illiberal practices and dominance of ethnonationalist parties was not as politically inevitable in Macedonia as it is in Bosnia. It is certainly possible to have two or more ethnic groups with considerable collective rights that work together to promote good governance. Instead, Macedonia's troubles stem from the intersection between domestic and foreign factors. The reason for Macedonia's lack of progress in the accession process is the influence of foreign actors who have changed the strategic preferences of Macedonian political actors. Macedonian elites in government made the decision to engage in illiberal practices rather than embarking on a journey of reform and potential EU or NATO membership because the implications of the so-called "name issue" with Greece have removed their incentive to become closer to international organizations. Greece has made it clear that regardless of its progress in implementing the *acquis communautaire*, it will veto Macedonia's bid to join the EU unless the country agrees to change its name. Though politicians or voters may have the true preference of joining the EU, this is impossible under the current conditions. Instead, politicians form preferences with the knowledge that the costs of EU-friendly reform are high and the offer of EU membership is not credible and make decisions accordingly.

The effect of Greece's veto on Macedonian politics can be directly observed in the aftermath of Macedonia's failed bid to join NATO in 2008. In 2008, Macedonia had made strides in the NATO accession process under then-Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski of the VMRO-DPMNE, who had come to power on a progressive, pro-EU platform only two years prior in 2006. This all changed in 2008 when, despite Macedonia's heavy involvement with the organization and fulfilling the requirements for membership, Greece nonetheless made good on

its promise to veto Macedonia's membership bid (Siegel 2009). In direct response to Greece's veto, Gruevski introduced Skopje 2014, a new antiquisation campaign which sought to enhance the classical feel of Skopje through the building of museums, government buildings, and monuments in the classical style. The goals of this project were transparent, especially given the timing. The initiative was a "constructivist identity project" attempting to assert a monolithic Macedonian identity separate from Greece using contested figures and parts of history, most infamously claiming Alexander the Great as a national hero (Ceka, forthcoming). Skopje 2014's projects made the kind of nationalism used in Macedonian politics part of everyday life by creating physical manifestations of a nationalistic identity that excluded ethnic Albanians and antagonized Greece.

In response to the Greek veto, Gruevski, despite his image as a pro-reform leader, quickly changed his governing style and started using a new strategy that weaponized nationalism and illiberal practices. At once, Macedonian politics become entwined with questions of identity, and liberal democracy suffered as a result. Despite Gruevski and his supporters' claims to the contrary, Skopje 2014 was a clear attempt by the Macedonian government to turn towards nationalism and dubious historical claims as a source of political legitimacy once recognition in international organizations was no longer an option. Ivanovski (2013) describes the government's motivations, noting that:

The people behind antiquisation in the Gruevski government are well aware that a broadly dispersed Ancient Macedonian legacy, which is sometimes even claimed by local Albanians, cannot be anyone's exclusive entitlement. They have only been using the opportunity to simultaneously step up Macedonian archaeology and culture, realize some lucrative capital projects in downtown Skopje, and elevate Macedonian pride--most of which, of course, compromises as much as benefits their own rule. (Ivanovski 2013, n.pag.)



Gruevski's government quickly recognized that given the structure of Macedonia's government and the obstinacy of the Greek side, his party would gain the most strategic benefits from this antiquisation campaign. These lucrative public works projects present ample opportunities for rent-seeking, and the focus on nationalism and identity distracts from the government's inability to move further in the accession process.

### iii. Parties

The shift towards authoritarianism and nationalism after the Greek veto in 2008 was further enabled by the ethnic power-sharing agreement at work after Ohrid. Unlike in Bosnia, where multiethnic coalitions are required at the state level and the balance of power in government remains somewhat constant, Macedonia's tradition of always including an Albanian party as a junior coalition partner is an unwritten rule borne out of strategic considerations. From 2006-2016, Macedonia was consistently ruled by two hegemonic ethnic parties in coalition, Gruevski's Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), an ethnic Macedonian party, with the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which represents ethnic Albanian interests, as its junior partner. Both of these parties ran on nationalist rhetoric that, despite villainizing each other during the election period, returned to a coalition with each other once the votes were counted (Crowther 2017, 751). Andeva (2015) notes that though minority parties have a long history of being included in ruling coalitions, this usually does not result in equal power-sharing. Rather, members of ethnic minority parties are given relatively unimportant cabinet positions that, while holding little lawmaking power, are nonetheless useful for engaging in clientelistic practices and distributing rents to themselves and their supporters. The increasingly powerful VMRO-DPMNE became emboldened over time, engaging in outright election fraud and controlling political narratives by

limiting the freedom of expression and media independence (Crowther 2017, 752). It was this reckless, illiberal behavior that led to the wiretaps that eventually brought an end to Gruevski's rule and VMRO-DPMNE dominance in 2016.

Ethnic segregation was not the only result of the Ohrid Agreement that allowed for illiberal practice. Decentralization, despite increasing opportunities for ethnic Albanians to be represented by members of their own ethnic group, also allowed for more opportunities for corrupt politicians to engage in clientelism and mobilize voters from their ethnic group using local power and resources. At the same time, a strong central government has consolidated power over time by eroding checks and balances in the absence of electoral competition (Crowther 2017, 753). The result was an opening for the VMRO-DPME, a strong party that derived its power from nationalism, not ideology, and maintained that power through clientelistic practices and outright corruption. The politicians working in the ruling coalition were therefore more accountable to party leaders than the electorate. As governmental institutions and political parties have the power to shape interests, this had a damaging effect on Macedonia's young democracy. In the face of a Greek veto, voters never rallied around a liberal democratic consensus because ethnoplitics and clientelism became acceptable forms of political action under Gruevski's increasingly nationalist rule. Until the 2015 protest movement, those who were unsatisfied with this status quo were unable to change it, as other major parties were also using nationalist rhetoric and non-nationalist parties who did not engage in clientelism were largely not electorally viable. This allowed the VMRO-DPMNE to continue to avoid EU-friendly reform and liberal practices, becoming increasingly emboldened until the wiretapping scandal came to light in 2015.

Though non-nationalist parties have always had a stronger presence in Macedonia than they did in Bosnia, this electoral system made it difficult for them to thrive when competing against Gruevski's clientelistic, nationalistic VMRO-DPMNE, and as a result, those who would be inclined to vote for them did not have their interests represented at the governmental level until recently. This was especially problematic because, as Pickering (2009) finds, these non-nationalist voters tend to have different demographic characteristics and ideological views. She finds that the principle motivating force against nationalist voting in Macedonia is dissatisfaction with the current institutional structure and the parties that inhabit it. These people tend to have more positive assessments of the former communist regime, lean left, and are less religious than their nationalist counterparts. However, despite not being ethnic parties themselves, support for these parties is firmly rooted in the majority Macedonian ethnicity, as ethnic Albanians continue to overwhelmingly support ethnic Albanian parties. The effect of these non-nationalist parties was therefore tempered until the non-nationalist Social Democratic Union party was able to dethrone the VMRO-DPMNE as a result of the 2015 wiretapping scandal that will be discussed in the next section.

#### iv. Civil society

Interest aggregation is also a problem in Macedonian politics, as leaders using nationalistic rhetoric pursue self-interested projects rather than addressing the true preferences of citizens. Minority voters, which make up a considerable part of the population, have trouble effectively realizing their interests in an ethnically defined party system. Though minority parties have a history of being included in coalitions in Macedonia, this is out of strategic necessity rather than an earnest attempt at inclusion or true consensus politics. Though some Albanian minority parties, particularly the DUI, have been able to capitalize on their status as junior partner in the

ruling coalition, they have tended to use this power to engage in clientelistic practices among their own voting base rather than pursuing policy goals in the past. Most minority parties do not have this secure status and are therefore dependent on the strategies of majority parties and do not have the power necessary to pursue their own true preferences (Andeva 2015, 17).

Additionally, public opinion polls show that civil society is much more in favor of reform and EU integration than politicians. At 77% of the population, Macedonian support for integration is exceptionally high for the region, and this number rises to 90% when the implications of the name issue with Greece are removed. Ideology and Euroscepticism were found to be much less important to the public than rational-utilitarian factors that saw the potential material benefits of joining the EU's internal market (Damjanovski 2017, 24). This again differs from nationalist politicians who prioritize ideology and are willing to forgo the potential long-term economic benefits of accession in favor of collecting rents in the short-term.

In the end, a party system defined by ethnicity and leaning on nationalism is inadequate for expressing the true preferences of voters, especially when it comes to the EU accession process. The nationalistic tendencies of parties in power have created a polarized system in which parties only differentiate themselves on the scale of nationalistic, authoritarian issues and most parties do not engage in spirited debate related to economic policy issues. The state of liberal democracy in Macedonia suffered as a result. The rhetoric used by elites domestically and in the public debate has the power to influence public opinion and change preferences. Recent polling finds a clear correlation between the credibility of the EU's membership offer and popular support for accession over time (Damjanovski 2017, 13). When parties like the VMRO-DPMNE ignore certain issues or misinform voters through manipulative nationalist posturing and clientelism, they are able to shape voter preferences. Deliberative polling of Macedonian voters finds that

when exposed to additional debate and information on key issues affecting politics, voters tend to change their opinions. After having the opportunity to debate issues further and ask questions, voters in the study were more supportive of EU integration and more willing to compromise on the name issue (European Policy Institute Skopje 2017). This indicates an openness among the public to progress in liberalization and EU accession that could be harnessed in the hands of capable EU policy and more responsive policy-makers in office.

## **II. Protest in Bosnia and Macedonia**

Though ruling elites had much to gain from gaming the political system and collecting rents, the illiberal practices that developed in each country created poor conditions for the population that led to rising discontent. As nationalism and ethnic divides had replaced policy discussions and reform-oriented rhetoric in electoral campaigns, the traditional means of voicing their pro-reform interests through elections was not available and people instead turned to expressing their voice through protest in an attempt to cause change within an unjust system. In Bosnia, this meant staging protests against the negative effects of a corrupt system. Macedonian protesters, on the other hand, took on the source of their political struggles by advocating for a new government and supporting the non-nationalist Social Democratic Union's bid to take over the government democratically. The purpose of this section is to discuss the causes and results of these protests movements in each country and how the respective institutions and actors in each case played an important role in determining the eventual outcomes. I first detail the causes and ultimate outcome of the unsuccessful protest and plenum movement in Bosnia in 2014 before turning to the successful protests that occurred one year later in Macedonia which lead to the resignation of Nikola Gruevski. I will then explain the diverging outcomes of these two protests using the institutionalist framework laid out in the previous section.

## *Protest in Bosnia*

The political and economic transition to a free market democracy did not go as smoothly in Bosnia as it did in some other post-communist countries like Poland or Hungary. Economic transitions are particularly difficult because there is an incentive for politicians to only partially reform the economy for their own benefit. Since many economic reforms can have painful consequences for voters in the short term, they can be very unpopular. Corrupt elites can use this logic to assure their constituencies that these necessary reforms should not be carried out right away and instead successfully advocate for a program of partial reform. These partial reforms allow elites to use the system to collect rents and benefit themselves and their supporters at the expense of the economy in general while appearing on the surface to protect the population from the potential costs of transition (Hellman 1998). Likely as a result, Balkan countries like Bosnia have weak institutional capacity for enacting projects encouraging economic growth and party elites tend to intervene in personnel management decisions of large industries (Bartlett 2013). Bosnian elites were particularly able to engage in corrupt partial reform because not only could they frame full reform as undesirable, they could also use the ethnic nationalism that defined electoral competition to distract voters from economic issues entirely.

This poorly implemented transition had devastating long term consequences on the economy that eventually led to a level of discontent among workers that could no longer be tolerated and led to violent protests beginning in Tuzla and expanding to other cities in 2014. Tuzla was one of several industrial cities that were bankrupted by corrupt elites who used privatization for the benefit of themselves and their supporters. Control of industry was awarded to political allies of the ruling parties who lacked the expertise necessary to run a company effectively and stole profits for themselves. At the same time, social redistribution was

privatized, politicized, and used by elites for clientelistic purposes. The result of this post-war redistribution of wealth was a small class of wealthy elites, a large unemployed and increasingly desperate population, and an insecure middle class dependent on jobs in the civil service, NGOs and international organizations, and the remaining privatized or semi-privatized businesses, all of which required engaging in clientelistic networks. (Kurtovic 2015, 645). This system was unsustainable, and eventually, economic discontent from mass closures and a crumbling economy led to massive protests in February 2014.

These protests were notable because despite the inherently political nature of anti-government demonstrations, protesters refused to engage with traditional political processes, issues, and actors. During the demonstrations, protesters made it clear that these protests were not politically driven and did not favor one party or agenda over the other. Instead, they focused on fighting for “hungry people,” regardless of ethnicity, and rejected the ethnonationalist rhetoric that prioritized “national interests” over the everyday needs for survival (Kurtovic 2015, 646). In order to circumvent a political sphere that had enabled ethnonationalist concerns and rampant corruption to thrive and destroy the livelihoods of so many, protesters decided to shift from street protests to open plenums put together by average citizens to voice their concerns and ideas in an organized space.

These plenums were unprecedented in Bosnian politics and were a positive step in many ways. Dejaeghere and Vermeersch (2017) describe these plenums as an example of “incident driven democracy” that arose from a perceived need for protesters to find a new way to organize and express themselves politically in Bosnia. Before Tuzla, citizen involvement with political parties was relatively high, but this was a result of clientelistic practices, not democratic enthusiasm. Civil society also seemed consumed by identity politics and too heavily influenced

by foreign aid programs. A sense of “democratic exhaustion” developed as a result in which people continued to favor democracy as an ideal but have grown tired of the fruitless attempts to enact it (Dejaeghere and Vermeersch 2017, 617). Instead, protesters chose to organize a new political body outside of the traditional political process in plenums. These plenums were public gatherings open to all people regardless of ethnicity or status who wanted to express concerns on any topic. Unlike traditional Bosnian politics, these meetings fostered a vision of political participation marked by openness, transparency, and collective action. Together, they drafted demands and proposed reforms that would center social justice and economic reform over ethnic divides and political posturing. Demands focused on social justice and included government resignations, a revised privatization scheme, cuts to executive benefits for politicians, the installation of expert governments, and a thorough investigation of the police response to protests (Murtagh 2016, 154).

The sudden development of an organized democratic mobilization was a positive reaction to protests marked by violence, but despite unprecedented support, they were ultimately unable to create significant change towards liberal democracy and social justice in the long term. As noted, citizen organizers chose to form plenums because they had lost faith in the unjust, ineffective political process dominated by corrupt ethnic parties and international organizations. As a result, though the plenums made demands directly to elected government officials, they refused to engage with them directly in the policy-making process by either forming a political party at the state level or joining forces with existing parties and convincing them to adopt their agenda. In the end, this was the fatal flaw of the plenums that prevented it from solving the very issues that defined the movement.



Murtagh (2016) describes the rationale behind the protest movement's decision to refuse engagement with party politics in an ethnically divided society. He contends that the plenum movement sought a long-term change in civic consciousness rather than a short-term change in politics. The reasons for this are somewhat practical. The plenum movement avoided calls for institutional or constitutional change and instead kept its focus on social justice issues ensuring better economic conditions for citizens regardless of ethnicity. Some protesters believed that social justice and wealth redistribution could be best dealt with at the local or entity level, so a large state-level change was not seen as particularly necessary compared to more pressing issues. The plenum movement decided to work within the divided entity system rather than trying to change it, which worked to the detriment of the democratizing effect of protests and demonstrates the deep-seated effects of the institutional structure on political decision making both in- and outside of government.

Yet beyond these practical considerations, there is also the issue of what it would mean for the movement to work within the Bosnian political establishment itself. Given the legally mandated ethnic divide in Bosnian government, protesters would have been compelled to engage in the very ethnic rhetoric they had created plenums to overcome had they decided to join the chorus pursuing constitutional change. Existing elites would have also been better able to ethnicize the movement's universal goals in a battle fought on their own turf. This was made easier by the fact that the protests were limited to mostly Bosniak activists in the Federation, so politicians in the Republika Srpska and others had already characterized it as a Bosniak movement. Additionally, even if a new, non-nationalist party had been formed, this party would have been unable to create the political alliances necessary to pass legislation and establish long term support in a system dominated by nationalist parties. In short, Bosnian political institutions

in their current iteration had no room for the type of party that would have been inspired by the 2014 Tuzla protests.

However popular and well-intentioned this approach may be, institutional constraints kept these goals from ever being accomplished. A new civic consciousness can be established by citizen action, but it is difficult to maintain long-term when the institutional system works so well at shaping preferences and consciousness itself. The only tangible effects were achieved at the local level, as four cantonal governments resigned and others cut certain benefits to politicians. Yet these responses, much like the protests themselves, were limited to the Federation, as the RS escaped the protests unscathed (Murtagh 2016, 155). RS politicians were then able to use the protests for nefarious purposes by ethnicizing the protests as a Bosniak issue while cracking down on its own people to stifle protests before they began. Eventually, even in the Federation, the protests were condemned for their violence and, without their own voice at the governmental level, were eventually appropriated by nationalist elites, effectively bringing the movement to an end without accomplishing its principle goals (Kurtovic 2015).

### *Protest in Macedonia*

The 2015 Macedonian protests were similar in that they called for resignations and changes in illiberal practices at the governmental level, but they differed somewhat in causes. The two crises in Bosnia and Macedonia can be seen as two sides of the same corrupt transitional government coin. On one side, Bosnia's protests showed the damage that partial reforms in the hands of corrupt elites can have practically on the economic situation their constituencies. On the other, Macedonia's political scandal shows how corrupt governments can take advantage of poor institutions to partake in increasingly illiberal practices without risking electoral viability.

The roots of the 2015 political crisis and resulting protests can be directly traced to the party hegemony of the VMRO-DPMNE discussed in section two. By 2015, Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE had managed to escape real electoral competition for so long that its most egregious illiberal transgressions were able to fly under the radar while the party reaped the benefits. This trend only came to an end when leaked recordings revealed that the party had been buying votes and intimidating voters in the 2011 and 2014 parliamentary elections. Party officials were also heard on the recordings admitting to surveilling journalists and pressuring media outlets to kill stories unfavorable to the party.

After the scandal broke, around 1,000 protestors immediately took to the streets to protest the government and demand that Gruevski resign. Only a few days later, the state-run media, which had largely been silent about the wiretapping scandal, turned its focus to an alleged shoot-out reported to be between Macedonian security forces and ethnic Albanian terrorists in Kumanovo, a city northeast of Skopje. Citizens immediately saw through the government's transparent attempt to use its typical strategy to distract from the scandal with nationalist rhetoric and what was widely believed to be a staged event. Rather than turning attention away from the protests, outrage over the government's behavior grew and more and more people took to the streets to join the calls for Gruevski's resignation (Baumgartner 2016). These street protests proved to be overwhelming, and Gruevski eventually tendered his resignation in January 2016.

The protesters in Macedonia were more successful than their Bosnian counterparts despite not organizing as a group or needing to carry on the movement for a very long time. Though the two protests cannot be compared perfectly, important differences in the way that Bosnian and Macedonian politics operate are useful in explaining the two diverging outcomes. First and foremost, VMRO-DPMNE was not able to lean on ethnonationalist rhetoric during its

scandal in the same way that Bosnian politicians were. In Bosnia, even though protests only happened in the Federation, politicians from all ethnicities had an incentive to keep the status quo and ignored the protesters because the Dayton Agreement ensures that all ethnic parties currently in power benefit more or less equally from the current balance of power, no matter what effect it has on the economy. Macedonian political parties, even those whose voter bases tend to be found in particular ethnic groups, did not have the same incentive to protect the illiberal status quo championed by the VMRO-DPMNE because they are not dependent on institutionalized ethnic stratification as in Bosnia. In fact, Zoran Zaev and his center left, reform-oriented Social Democratic Union were able to take power from the VMRO-DPME with the help of an alliance of ethnic Albanian parties with an agreement that actually turned away from nationalist rhetoric towards improved minority rights and language representation (Crosby 2017).

Furthermore, despite the attempts by the ruling party to create a nationalist panic by planting the shoot-out story in the media, protesters could not be written away as ethnically motivated terrorists or traitors because the protests were so widespread that members of all ethnicities were represented. The only group at stake was the VMRO-DPMNE, not ethnic Macedonians in general. The issue of ethnicity simply could not be used as a weapon because parties had more to gain from changing the status quo than keeping it, and no institutional constraints prohibited them from doing so.

Another reason for the change is the inability of Gruevski and his allies to explain the transgressions that caused the scandal. According to Hellman (1998), rent-seeking elites are so effective in collecting benefits through partial reforms because they can easily rationalize their lack of full reform as being considerate of the negative consequences that a transition can have

on the typical working citizen. Bosnian elites could use a similar strategy to continue advocating for their current policies despite pressure from plenum groups. Elites have also created massive patronage networks that employ a large portion of the population in the public sector, thus tying the fate of their employment to the fate of the political party. As a result, even those who might otherwise be in favor of reform feared that an institutional change would lead to friends and loved ones losing these secure, well-paying jobs (Kurtovic 2015, 145). Gruevski and his party's wiretaps and meddling in the media, however, were widely considered to be inexcusable, and his attempts to ethnicize the issue with the Albanian terrorist story only increased the level of outrage, so resignation became the only option.

#### *Explaining Diverging Outcomes with Institutions*

The difference in outcomes between the Bosnian and Macedonian protests can be explained by institutional differences between the two governments. First and foremost, the ethnically-divided entity structure in Bosnia provides a shelter for Bosnian elites that Macedonian politicians do not have. After Tuzla, Republika Srpska politicians did not have to confront the demands of protestors and used the violence to condemn the protests and advocate for the status quo (Kurtovic 2015). The protests therefore remained limited, unable to crack into the state or entity levels that were capable of making the changes necessary to improve economic governance and liberal reform. In Macedonia, a more centralized state dominated by particular parties is vulnerable to those parties falling out of favor because the variety of ethnic and nonethnic parties on the ballot gives Macedonian voters a chance to hold corrupt politicians accountable in elections. The wiretap outraged all citizens and affected all levels of government represented by the VMRO-DPMNE, so Macedonian politicians were unable to shift the blame to other institutions or levels of government.

There is also a key difference in the conditions in each country that determine the cost-benefit analyses of elites. In Macedonia, a credible offer of EU membership and improved government performance presents incentives for both ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonians. Ethnic views are malleable in Macedonia, and voters and politicians alike are willing to open up to reform if the incentives are high (Vasilev 2011, 52). As such, a call for ethnic solidarity in the face of a wiretapping scandal is not effective. Unlike Bosnia, Macedonia already had non-nationalist, pro-reform parties as alternatives and ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian voters were willing to take advantage of VMRO-DPMNE's hegemony coming to an end and elect a new, reform-minded leader in Zaev rather than attempting to keep the system as is. VMRO-DPMNE must now adapt to the new normal. The capacity for change in Macedonia to stick, however, is contingent upon Macedonia and Greece being able to solve the name issue in the near future because though the protests led to a change in government and a more progressive ruling party, the underlying conditions and divisions that allowed such illiberal behavior still exist. Using the current momentum, decision makers could put Macedonia on a new path towards membership, but a failure to remove the threat of the Greek veto could result in politicians reverting to their old ways.

In Bosnia, elites of all ethnicities reap greater benefits from ignoring calls for reform and continuing politics as usual under the Dayton Agreement. There are no electorally-viable non-ethnic parties, so there is no electoral alternative for Bosnian voters of any ethnicity, a fact that Bosnian politicians are well aware of. These elites are insulated from pressure from both above at the EU level and below and the level of citizen protest, and therefore take on few costs when faced with criticism while continuing to reap the benefits of their secure position in a divided government. Unlike the name issue, which could potentially be solved under Macedonia's new,

more open-minded government, the constitutional issues at the heart of Bosnia's political and economic misfortune are much more difficult to change, even in the face of massive protests and citizen organization into protests and plenums.

Interestingly, the level of citizen interaction and organization does not appear to be a determining factor in these diverging outcomes. Bosnian protesters were considerably more organized and just as visible in the media. Macedonian protesters were large in number but did not seek to create a new organized group working against the regime or making demands. Yet they were still able to accomplish their goals. The difference was in the demands and methods themselves. Macedonian protesters were successful because they supported an existing party and helped it win elections. Macedonian voters had the power to influence politics through elections, so they demanded Gruevski's resignation and supported his non-nationalist opponent, Zoran Zaev of the Social Democratic Union. Protests and plenums in Bosnia, despite their roots in political issues and the illiberal nature of a divided entity government, did not have this same voting power and chose to remain outside of the political sphere and instead advocate for economic issues that political elites had little reason to implement because the tripartite government system had rendered citizen preferences for policy irrelevant. Without the direct threat of electoral challenges to their power, elites had no reason to significantly change their behavior and instead condemned the violence of protesters and powerful unions that were also defined by ethnicity appropriated certain talking points for their own purposes (Kurtovic 2015, 54).

### **III. Implications for Relations with the EU**

The institutions at work in Bosnian and Macedonian politics have created incentives for elites to avoid liberalizing reform in exchange for nationalism for years. The result has been

alienation from the EU and stalled accession processes. The lack of progress in both countries is damaging because the EU accession process presents a crucial opportunity for existing Member States and applicant countries alike. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the accession process has been widely regarded as the EU's most effective foreign policy tool and guided several countries in Central and Eastern Europe through their transition to democracy. It did this by exercising its leverage over potential member states through its strong conditionality. Guided by the Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis communautaire*, the EU sets clear expectations for applicant countries' progress, rewarding those who comply while punishing those who do not by withholding the political and economic benefits of a closer relationship with the EU and membership in the internal market. These strong incentives motivate voters to support pro-EU candidates in elections, encouraging moderate reformers and forcing illiberal parties to either change their platform or lose elections. In the past, this effect has incentivized parties in applicant countries to adopt a pro-EU consensus and enact the necessary reforms to achieve EU membership (Vachudova 2005).

The accession process has not been as effective in Bosnia and Macedonia since the breakup of Yugoslavia because the institutional structures and outside influence discussed in the previous sections have shielded incumbent parties from the pressure to reform. In Bosnia, political actors who are not held accountable at the ballot box pay lip service to EU demands without needing to actually enact reforms to remain electorally viable. Macedonian politicians are more accountable to their electorates, but the Greek veto delegitimizes the EU's offer of membership, which lessens the government's incentives to enact reform in the long term and creates potential for backsliding in the future. Despite these considerable obstacles that prevent the accession process from aiding liberalization in Bosnia and Macedonia, the EU has not



adequately adapted its strategy in the region to address these realities, and relations with each country have stagnated or worsened as a result.

The protests in 2014 and 2015 in each country represented potential watershed moments in the relationship between these countries and the EU. It is therefore important to reassess the relationship between Bosnia and Macedonia and the EU in the wake of these protest movements. In Bosnia, the inability of large-scale action to further progress in the accession process gives important insight into the structural issues at play in Bosnia’s democratic transition. Macedonia, on the other hand, has made enormous strides since 2015, and the EU must take advantage of this new political landscape to reassert itself in the country and ensure that reforms continue by encouraging a solution to the name issue. The purpose of this section is to take a critical look at the EU’s strategy in the Western Balkans and how it has developed since these protest movements took hold. To do so, I first detail the strengths and weaknesses of the EU’s strategy in the Western Balkans. I then investigate how this strategy has operated in Bosnia and Macedonia, respectively, and discuss what the implications of these protest movements mean for the EU’s strategy in the future.

*Figure 1: Key Milestones in the EU Accession Process*

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Bosnia</b>	<b>Macedonia</b>
Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) Negotiations begin	25 November 2005	5 April 2000
SAA and Interim Trade Agreement signed	16 June 2008	9 April 2001
SAA enters into force after being ratified by Member States	1 June 2015	1 April 2004
European Council approved candidate status	n/a	16 December 2005

Resolution of the Name Issue added as requirement for membership	n/a	23 June 2008
Visa free travel to the Schengen area granted to citizens	15 December 2010	19 December 2009
Greece and Macedonia open UN-moderated talks to resolve Name Issue	n/a	30 January 2018

Source: European Commission <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/>

*EU Strategy in the Western Balkans*

The European Union’s strategy in the Western Balkans is full of contradictions concerning the nature of the EU accession process that have hindered progress in Bosnia and Macedonia in the past two decades. The first, most basic contradiction is the EU’s willingness to prioritize stability over democratic progress (Giandomenico 2009). Both the Dayton and Ohrid Framework Agreements were designed to ensure stability, not functioning democracy, and the international community continues to regard these power-sharing agreements as important methods of preventing new violence from breaking out. Unfortunately, this level of stability has created opportunities for elites to become entrenched in ethnonationalist positions without the threat of electoral loss.

The tension between security and democracy promotion in EU policy also points towards problems with its position as a normative power. EU conditionality is a notable foreign policy tool in that it is able to promote political changes in government without military intervention. This is an especially important concept in the Western Balkans, where young nations are attempting to overcome violent pasts. Noutcheva (2009) finds that the normative values promoted by the EU do not pass a necessary universal legitimacy test, which compromises their efficacy in candidate states that do not have a preexisting liberal democratic consensus. This

leaves a window for domestic actors to question the EU's legitimacy and be more defiant in the face of conditionality. Instead, rational incentives are more effective, but only result in partial reforms that are strategically beneficial to domestic actors but prone to backsliding. Without a strong normative appeal, anti-reform actors are more able to mobilize voters using nationalism or ethnicity.

The lack of normative legitimacy is especially problematic in the Western Balkans, where nationalism and debates over minority rights present a major obstacle to reform and liberal democracy. Not only do actors in the Western Balkans not have the same standards for minority rights as the EU Member States, they also recognize that the EU's history with handling minority rights issues within its ranks is inconsistent at best. The Copenhagen Criteria, which guide the integration process, include protecting minority rights as a requirement for EU membership, but the language used is too vague and not uniformly enforced in applicant states (Grizo et. al 2015, 884). The EU's requirements regulating the treatment of minorities have changed since the recent rounds of enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. In previous rounds, the focus was on ensuring rights for minorities like education and representation. In Bosnia and Macedonia, minority rights are already ensured by the Dayton and Ohrid Framework Agreements, but this serves to weaken democracy in practice rather than promote it. As a result, the EU is now promoting inclusion and consensus politics as a requirement for membership in only the Western Balkans (Vasilev 2011, 54). This new policy is implemented ad-hoc and easily ignored by nationalist elites that question its validity and fairness, especially in Bosnia, where consensus politics are particularly difficult to achieve institutionally.

The EU accession process is elite driven, and in its current iteration, elites in Bosnia have more to gain from continuing an illiberal status quo than moving towards democratic reforms

that would be costly for them and their patronage networks. Making matters worse, the EU's conflicting messages and inconsistent standards have been used as fodder by anti-reform elites to sell a nationalistic agenda in the place of reform by questioning EU legitimacy and painting reforms as threatening to a stable nation. In the wake of change and protests, the EU must work to address the causes of resentment and mistrust by national elites by pointing out the tangible benefits of membership and creating concrete policies that make the necessary steps clear as possible in order to minimize costs (Fouéré 2018).

#### *The EU-Bosnia Relationship After 2014*

Now I turn to some of the policy prescriptions that flow from my findings about political contestation in Bosnia and Macedonia and how that affects each country's relationship with the EU. Given the lessons learned from the protest movement in 2014, the EU should reassess its use of conditionality in the Western Balkans. In the aftermath of Tuzla, the EU did in fact make changes to its policy, but these changes were marked by the same flaws that had hampered the effectiveness of the plenum movement. Namely, the EU chose to also shift its focus towards an economic-based program called the Compact for Growth and Development rather than one that sought to address liberalizing reform directly through constitutional change (Majstorovic 2015, 668). On its face, this decision was not entirely misguided, as the EU was listening to the voices of the protest movement and wanted to improve the economic conditions that had caused such widespread misery and the need for protest. Additionally, better economic governance and opportunity could be used as a tool to spur development and eventually lead to democratic reforms. The 2014 protests had reinvigorated accession talks that had previously stalled, and Bosnia was finally able to implement its Stabilization and Association Agreement, an important step in the accession process, after seven years of stalemate in 2015.

Yet despite these positive developments, the EU's decision to turn from the political to the economic represents a troubling shift in policy strategy. Majstorovic (2016) describes the two principle schools of thought critiquing the Compact: the domestic leftist critique that was concerned with the austerity measures included in the plan and the international liberal critique that criticized the new Compact for allowing the Bosnian state to remain weak with too few consequences for inaction and too little international intervention and oversight. A more unsettling critique, however, is that the EU's new strategy remains at the elite level and does not address the base demands of Bosnian citizens made clear by this and other protests.

Representatives of the citizen movement have criticized the EU's compact for focusing on austerity measures and vague suggestions for lowering government spending in the economy rather than tackling citizen demands for addressing economic underdevelopment and worker protection. This is a dangerous proposition for the EU, as workers are now increasingly alienated and frustrated with both the state level government and the international organizations that promise to listen to them when the state does not. It seems that despite extensive organization attempting to increase citizen representation in the Bosnian political process, the EU is still willing to continue operating with an elite-driven process, even if those elites do not represent the true preferences of their constituencies. I attempt to make this argument in this thesis, but further work is needed to understand these preferences using public opinion polls, ethnographic research, and local election research.

A second troubling policy shift manifested in the Compact that is especially relevant for this thesis is the decision by the EU to not only shift towards an economic focus but also directly shift away from its political strategy by no longer including the implementation of Sejdić-Finci court decision as a requirement for accession. The Sejdić-Finci court ruling found that Bosnia's

tripartite structure was discriminatory against those who were neither Bosniak, Croat, nor Serbian and required a fundamental change in the Bosnian political structure to allow for increased minority representation. The decision was considered a non-starter and membership negotiations stalled as a result. The SAA was only able to be signed because the EU agreed to look beyond this requirement, even if that meant Bosnia had made no new progress in the area. The EU's willingness to overlook this decision is problematic given the havoc that Bosnia's ethnically divided institutions have had on the country's nascent democracy.

#### *New Opportunities in Macedonia Post-2015*

In Macedonia, the post-protest political landscape presents an opportunity for the European Union to capitalize on the newly reform-minded Macedonian government and work with Greece to resolve the last major issue standing in the way of Macedonia's progress in the accession process: the name issue. This represents a crucial opportunity for the EU to use its unique bargaining position to resolve an issue that has crippled its ability to exercise its leverage over Macedonia in the past. With Gruevski and his antiquisation campaign gone, Macedonia has not been this willing and able to compromise and reach a solution through UN brokered talks in a decade. Greece, however, continues to show resistance. Though center-left Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras considers not finding a solution "stupidity," 90,000 Greek protesters opposing him from the far-right, the Greek Diaspora, and the clergy demonstrated against a compromise on the name issue on January 21, 2018, showing that the issue continues to inspire strong emotions in Greece (Ioannou 2018). Negotiations have continued despite these protests, but the continued outcry demonstrates the precarity of the issue and the continued unwillingness of voices within Greece to reach a compromise.

A somewhat small but comfortable majority of Macedonians also support the UN's efforts, with 61% of the population supporting the compromise if it speeds up EU or NATO accession (Marusic 2018a). As one would expect, support differs among ethnic groups, with a full 82% of ethnic Albanians supporting a change versus only 50% of ethnic Macedonians. Political factors also have an influence, as only 33% of VMRO-DPMNE supporters are in favor compared to 76% of supporters of Zaev's Social Democratic Party. These differences show that though the old divides caused by nationalist politics continue to define attitudes for many, potential for change exists with the new Social Democratic government and its supporters' willingness to compromise. The key will be finding an acceptable name while maintaining Macedonian identity, which even reform-minded Macedonians find nonnegotiable. UN negotiator Matthew Nimetz promises that the name of the Macedonian language and identity, which Greece asserts it does not wish to challenge, are not on the table (Marusic 2018b).

Greece and the EU have a responsibility to take advantage of this moment in Macedonian politics and restore the credibility of EU conditionality and the offer of membership by resolving the name issue. This is an opportunity for the EU to shift the cost-benefit analysis for Macedonian elites that provided the incentives for politicians to lean on nationalist rhetoric after 2008. Without the Greek veto on the table, the potential benefits of EU membership are once again on the table, allowing politicians to justify taking on the costs of reform. The protest movement in 2015 created an opportunity for Macedonian politics and the newly elected Social Democratic party to take on a new, non-nationalist reform program, but the failure of the EU and Greece to make the offer of membership credible again could lead to frustration and retrenchment. With a new, fragile government still attempting to establish itself in the post-Gruevski era, these efforts are more important than ever.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have argued that the respective political institutions at work in Bosnia and Macedonia in the past two decades have enabled illiberal elites to thrive on a nationalistic platform that divides the population along ethnic lines. These elites are incentivized by the rules and institutions that give them power to continue the status quo, creating an electoral system that prioritizes ethnic nationalism over positions on how to improve the economy and the provision of state services like education, health, and infrastructure. This has had disastrous implications for each country economically, politically, and socially as society becomes increasingly divided in terms of income, language, and ethnicity. Outside attempts to encourage reform in the region have also failed, as the EU has failed to provide enough credible incentives for elites to stray from their nationalistic rhetoric and anti-democratic practices.

Unable to express this discontent through traditional electoral channels, protesters took to the streets in 2014 and 2015 in an attempt to bring change from below. In Bosnia, the protester's unwillingness to engage in electoral politics and the divided nature of government allowed elites to insulate themselves from criticism and remain in power with only small concessions. Still, the potential for citizen action is there, and involvement in politics increased in Bosnia. Macedonian politicians, however, worked within a different institutional structure that left them exposed to popular protest and electoral competition once their most illiberal transgressions were made known to the public. A new non-nationalist, center-left government has been elected that plans to find a solution to the name issue and increase minority rights.

These positive developments create a new opportunity for the European Union to reassess and revitalize its relations with these countries, especially in Macedonia. The EU has attempted to address the causes and results of citizen unrest in its strategy, with mixed success. The



question now is whether the EU, non-nationalist political actors, and civil society will be able to take advantage of these recent developments to overcome institutional constraints to usher in a new era of liberalization in the Western Balkans. In Macedonia, this means a swift resolution to the name issue that makes the EU offer of membership credible again. A solution is not as readily apparent in Bosnia, where both EU intervention and citizen outcry struggle to force entrenched elites to change their ways and centrist parties that are created tend to be short-lived. That said, a new strategy aimed at improving domestic political institutions is key for encouraging economic, political, and social development in the Western Balkans.

Further research is necessary to understand domestic politics in Bosnia and Macedonia at the citizen level. Past research has focused on elite behavior within the accession process. Future efforts should investigate civil society and voters from all ethnic groups using public opinion surveys and ethnographic research to understand the true preferences of the electorate on a wide range of issues locally and at the supranational level. This would facilitate a complete discussion of elite behavior in response to citizen demands. Additionally, further research should pay close attention to future developments in the region in the wake of these protest movements as the EU has reaffirmed its commitment to the region with a new strategy in 2018. Macedonia's new ruling coalition has promised to put the country on a path towards reform, and scholars should monitor developments to ensure that these verbal commitments translate to positive long-term reforms.

The events in Bosnia and Macedonia give important insight into potential developments in other European countries experiencing democratic backsliding in recent years, particularly Poland and Hungary where illiberal regimes have taken power and begun to systematically dismantle liberal democratic institutions. Though Poland and Hungary are already members of

the European Union and therefore cannot be influenced by the accession process, the nature of European Union membership still presents a standard for citizen movements to rally behind. The case of Macedonia presents the opportunity for cautious optimism by demonstrating how citizen movements with clear standards and a united vision can bring about change in even the most illiberal regimes. At the same time, however, the Bosnian case also presents an important lesson on the importance of domestic institutions for liberal democratic politics. The European Union and domestic actors must act quickly before the ruling parties are successful in consolidating their power by removing the democratic checks and balances from their domestic government institutions. Without institutions that hold elites accountable, neither the EU nor citizen movements will be able to advocate for liberal democratic principles with any success. Effective institutions are therefore crucial for the future of democracy in the European Union and its periphery.

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