



Citation:

Cvetanova, G. (2022). Reflections on Krste Misirkov's theory: From ethnocultural entity to politically legitimate nation. *Slavia Meridionalis*, 22, Article 2672. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sm.2672>

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Reflections on Krste Misirkov's Theory: From Ethnocultural Entity to Politically Legitimate Nation¹

Introduction

Even though we live in the 21st century – the age of human rights – the *Macedonian question* is a current topic of heated political debates. Namely, the Macedonian people's right to self-determination² is often contested. In other words, the distinctiveness of the Macedonian people, their culture and language, as well

¹ This text is part of a bilateral scientific research project and cooperation between the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Polish Academy of Sciences "The neighbourhood in the context of stereotypes and realities in contemporary Europe", which is financially supported by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

² The right to self-determination is a cardinal principle in modern international law and is commonly regarded as a *jus cogens* rule. The principle of self-determination of peoples is rooted in the liberal-democratic ideas promoted during the French Bourgeois Revolution

This work was supported by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Competing interests: no competing interests have been declared.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences.

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as the political legitimacy of the Macedonian nation are being denied. These contestations by certain political elites³ from Bulgaria and part of their academic community (Кочева & Кочев, 2018; Маринов, 2020; Николов & Кочева, 2020; *Съчиняването на така наречения македонски книжовен език*, n.d.) are usually followed by these arguments: 1. *the Macedonian nation is false as it was invented at the end of World War Two as a political project of Communist International and Yugoslav communists*; 2. *the Macedonian language was invented with a decree by ASNOM*.⁴ However, as stated by Czech historian Miroslav Hroch, nation-building was never a mere project of ambitious or narcissistic intellectuals. Intellectuals can 'invent' national communities only if certain objective preconditions for the formation of a nation already exist (Hroch, 1993, p. 3). Moreover, as Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 5) points out, terminological confusion regarding the concept of nation is mostly caused by the tendency to classify "it" as an ideology. Things would be easier if it were seen as belonging to the same family as "kinship" or "religion". Hence, he proposes a definition of nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 2006, p. 5). According to him, nations are "imagined communities" because members of the same nation, while anonymous to one another, understand themselves as belonging to the same community. However, given that communities should not be distinguished by their falsity/genuine-

(Шикова, 2009), and it has been declared a political principle of contemporary international relations with the 1945 Charter of the United Nations. The right to self-determination involves the rights of all peoples to determine freely their political status (freely to choose and develop their own internal political system, as well as to freely decide on their own destiny in the international system), and to pursue freely their economic, social and cultural development without outside interference.

³ Despite the fact that Macedonia has unresolved or partially resolved identity issues with other neighbouring countries, this paper focuses only on the case of Bulgaria in the context of current political developments. Namely, in November 2020, Bulgaria vetoed the start of Macedonia's accession talks with the EU. For that reason, on September 16, 2020, Bulgaria sent an explanatory memorandum to the EU member states, consisting of six pages with long "historical" explanations of the "Macedonian state-sponsored anti-Bulgarian ideology", thus demanding the ultimate acceptance of the "Bulgarian historical truth" in terms of the Macedonian nation and its political legitimacy. The memorandum argues that Macedonia has conducted "ethnic and linguistic engineering" (*Bulgaria sends a memorandum on "state-sponsored anti-Bulgarian ideology" in North Macedonia*, 2020; Gotev et al., 2020).

⁴ ASNOM (Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia) the supreme legislative and executive body of Democratic Federal Macedonia between August 1944 and April 1945. The resolution to introduce Macedonian as the official language of the Macedonian state was carried at the First Assembly of ASNOM.

ness but by the style in which they are imagined, it is worth emphasizing that “imagining” does not imply falsity (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). In other words, it is the character of the relationship that unites its members.

While the process of nation-building in the Balkans occupied the entire 19th century, the naming of the Macedonians by the mid-19th century was an issue of geographical designation rather than a designation of a distinct people (Mazower, 2000, p. 100; Калоѓера, 2021, p. 451). The process of gradual recognition of Macedonian cultural and linguistic peculiarities, and consequently the distinctiveness of the Macedonian people, began with the work of the intellectual elites of the local Enlightenment movement (the mid-19th century) and the following period of Macedonian Revival (the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century) (Цветањова, 2021, p. 338). In this sense, Macedonian revivalists (mostly graduates from Bulgarian and Russian universities) paved the way for the recognition of the distinctiveness of the Macedonian people, their right to self-determination, and their right to freely define their internal and international political status:

Macedonianism and the Macedonian identity first emerged in the intelligentsia as a self-preserving nationalistic drive to counter those outside manipulative forces that were waiting to carve up Macedonia upon the demise of Balkan Ottoman rule rather than as a conscious self-awareness of who they were. (Damianopoulos, 2012, p. 61)

Indeed, the political elites and governments of neighbouring countries treated the *Macedonian question* as a matter of their countries' internal affairs, and they treated Macedonia as a part of their countries' territory, people, history and culture:

Given that Macedonia's ethnic, religious and cultural composition is a kind of mosaic, it was simpler to 'refer to the historical right' in relation to this territory. For that purpose, statistics were used regarding the ethnic composition of the population, and each of the states constructed these statistics so that its right to rule the territory could be confirmed. (Ставови-Кавка, 2009, p. 92)⁵

In the words of M. Mazower (2000, p. 103), the point of the conflict was the heart of what remained of the Ottoman Empire – Macedonia.

In attempting to create a new nation in the Balkans along the lines of the earlier Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian examples, the Macedonians did have a sense of unity

⁵ Here and in other places, the translations from Macedonian into English are mine if not stated otherwise.

(i.e., Slav-speaker majority) in the revolutionary period from 1896 to 1908. Nonetheless, the issue of ethnic identity had not yet crystallized and was not even felt by them, except for Misirkov (1903). (Damianopoulos, 2012, p. 57)

In order to present some of the aspects that created the preconditions for the Macedonian nation-building process and its political legitimacy, this paper reviews the *Macedonian question* through the works of Krste P. Misirkov and his struggle for the separation and recognition of the Macedonian ethnocultural entity as a distinct one. Misirkov's views will be analysed through the lens of modernist theories of nation and nationalism in order to both strengthen the argument heuristically and emphasize his sense of the situation as far as the notion of identity is concerned, and by this to suggest correspondence between the two theoretical approaches – modernist and Misirkov's. Therefore, special emphasis will be on the following aspects: nation as a historically and socially formed construct, a sense of common belonging, high cultures and standardized languages as a political legitimacy of a nation, the role of cultural elites in the nation-building process, and the relationship between the nation and the modern state.

Modernist theories of nation and nationalism

“Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” is the title of the historical lecture that Ernst Renan gave on 11 March 1882 at Sorbonne, claiming that the nation is a spiritual principle based on two things: 1. *the past*, in the sense of possessing rich common heritage of memories; and 2. *the present*, or the present consent, the will for common life and to keep investing in commonly gained heritage. His views had a strong impact on the development of further theoretical approaches to nation and nationalism; in particular, they deeply affected the modernist theorists who lived and worked in the late 20th century (Renan, 2018).

Modernism emerged as a reaction to primordialism, which claims that nations are biological, innate phenomena, or that they have ancient roots. The modernists regarded nationalism as an essentially modern phenomenon that arose due to modern processes from the end of the 18th century, such as capitalism, industrialism, the emergence of the bureaucratic state, etc.:

Within the framework of great modernization theories, there emerged models and theories which defined nations as historic constructs formed over the last

two centuries. A common denominator of these extremely diverse studies was the fact that they linked nations' genesis to the French Revolution and treated the nation as a by-product of great social processes, such as development capitalism, industrialization and secularization, and the rise of bureaucratic state. (Kurczewska, 2002, p. 27)

In his work *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (2000, pp. 8, 86), Umut Özkirimli divides modernist theories into three categories in terms of the key factors they identify, starting with those that emphasize economic transformations, followed by those that focus on political and social/cultural transformations. In general, however, all these categories regard nations as historically and socially formed constructs. Hence, when Eric Hobsbawm claims that nations and nationalism are products of "social engineering", he refers in fact to "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 1).

Hobsbawm accepts Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism as "a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (Gellner, 1983, p. 1; Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 9). For Hobsbawm, nation is invariably linked to a modern state, thus he defines a nation as a "social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the 'nation-state'" (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 9), for Gellner nations can be defined only in terms of the age of nationalism, rather than the other way round:

Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that* is a reality, and in general an inescapable one. (Gellner, 1983, pp. 48–49)

Gellner (1983, p. 7) offers two *provisional* definitions of nation: cultural and voluntaristic. According to his cultural definition, those who share "the same culture" are members of the same nation. The voluntaristic definition underlines that a mere category of persons (occupants of a given territory or speakers of a given language) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their membership of it. However, although each of these provisional definitions singles out an element which is of real importance in understanding nationalism, Gellner concludes that neither of them is

adequate. This cultural definition presupposes the anthropological rather than the normative sense, thus it is notoriously difficult and unsatisfactory. Hence, instead of attempting to use *culture* in formal definitions, he suggests that one should start looking at what culture *does*, with particular emphasis on *high culture*:

When general social conditions make standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined, educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be natural repositories of political legitimacy. (Gellner, 1983, p. 55)

When Gellner points out the significance of *high cultures* in terms of the historical rise of nationalism, he refers to “shared systems of communications and norms”.

According to Anderson, the origins of *national consciousnesses* could be traced even further back in history i.e., to the age of print – languages and print – capitalism, when commercial book publishing began. This lexicographical revolution was the age when the ancient sacred languages – Latin, Greek and Hebrew – were forced to mingle on equal ontological footing with a motley plebeian crowd of vernacular rivals. In the meantime, vernacular languages – of – state assumed even greater power and status in a process which, at least initially, was largely unplanned (Anderson, 2006, pp. 70–78), thus laying the basis for the national consciousnesses.

Hroch was the first scholar who undertook quantitative social-historical analysis of nationalist movements in a systematic comparative framework (Özirimli, 2000, p. 156), with special reference to Central and Eastern Europe. Like other modernists, he believes that nation is not an eternal category but the product of a long and complicated process of historical development in Europe. He defines the nation as large social group integrated by not one but a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical) (Hroch, 1993, p. 3). As the most important and irreplaceable elements in the process of nation-building, he indicates the following: 1. a “memory” of some common past, treated as a ‘destiny’ of the group or at least of its core constituents; 2. a “density” of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a higher degree of social communication within the group than outside it; 3. a conception of the equality of all members of a group organized as a civil society (Hroch, 1993, p. 3).

Krste P. Misirkov's theory

Krste Petkov Misirkov (1874–1926), often considered to be one of the most important figures in the Macedonian Revival, was a distinguished Slavist, historian, folklorist, and ethnographer. He was the author of the first census statistics in which Macedonians were registered as a separate ethnocultural entity with their historical name.⁶ These statistics were part of his ethnographic research conducted during the Macedonian expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1900, in which Misirkov was invited to participate in the village of Postol, his birth place, by his professor P. A. Lavrov (see, Ристовски, 1996). Misirkov wrote his articles in Macedonian, Russian and Bulgarian, thus publishing them in either Russia or Bulgaria. Most of the articles were signed with his birth name, but some of them were signed with his pseudonym *K. Pelski*.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Misirkov published *On Macedonian Matters* (*За македонските работи*, 1903; Misirkov, 2003). In this book, he deals with the Macedonian question, presenting his political, scientific and theoretical views on the Macedonian identity and its distinctiveness, the Macedonian sense of belonging, the standardization of the Macedonian language, and the establishment of a separate Macedonian political unit. As Ernest N. Damianopoulos (2012, p. 71) claims, it was the first comprehensive statement of “Who the Macedonians Are” and of their legitimacy as a separate ethnic group with aspirations for political autonomy:

Although banned, the book managed to attain one very critical negative review in Sofia and, thus, had little influence in the immediate years after its publication. In time, however, it was recognized as the ideological, if not the historical/political foundation, of the Macedonian identity, and its influence among the intelligentsia has only increased with the passage of time. (Damianopoulos, 2012, p. 71)

Unlike the most of his contemporaries, Misirkov advocated the peaceful achievement of the political autonomy of Macedonia, i.e., through evolutionary rather than revolutionary methods. Therefore, in his book Misirkov elaborates his critical views on the Ilinden Uprising (1903), referring to the devastating

⁶ On this topic, Misirkov published an article “List of villages from Southern Macedonia (Pazartzko, Soluncko, Gevgelicko and Kukushko)” in the journal *Vardar* in 1905 (Мисирков, 1905, p. 17).

consequences for both Macedonians and the Ottoman Empire. According to his deep conviction, the best way for Macedonia to gain autonomy was implementation of the Ottoman Empire's reforms that were stipulated by the Great Powers' treaties from that period. Therefore, the Ilinden Uprising did not give the Ottoman Empire a chance to carry out these reforms and damaged the trust between these two parties (Миронска-Христовска, 2007, pp. 164–165). Depending on historical and political circumstances, Misirkov also advocated for Macedonian autonomy as a part of Bulgaria or, after the end of the First World War, as a part of a Balkan or South Slavic federation.

Before and during the First World War, while residing in Russia (Moscow, Odesa, St. Petersburg, etc.) as a distinguished scholar and socio-political activist, Misirkov wrote numerous memoranda, letters and analysis addressed to the highest representatives in the Russian diplomacy, seeking and begging for a solution to the Macedonian question:

Misirkov's standpoints, as presented in these documents, are undoubtedly an amplification and a confirmation of what Misirkov, as is already widely known, stood for. In these documents, however, we also encounter certain contents which clearly do not accord with and stand out from what might have been expected. Certain standpoints on the Macedonian question are expressed which formally (if not expressly) appear to differ from what Misirkov was continually championing. (Терзиоски, 2005, p. 283)

In 2006, a handwritten diary by Misirkov, written during his stay in Russia in 1913, was discovered. It was declared authentic by Bulgarian and Macedonian experts and was published in 2008 (see, Мисирков, 2008b). The content of this diary shows that Misirkov signed himself as a Macedonian Bulgarian at that time. In terms of his inconsistent affiliation, these stances of Misirkov become a matter of different interpretations by Bulgarian and Macedonian historians. While Misirkov's legacy remains highly controversial and disputed, there have been attempts among international scholars to reconcile his self-contradictory statements. Thus, according to Croatian-American scholar Ivo Banac (1988, p. 327), Misirkov viewed both himself and the Slavs of Macedonia as Bulgarians and espoused pan-Bulgarian patriotism in a larger Balkan context, especially with regard to Serbian and Greek hegemonism in Macedonia. However, in the context of the larger Bulgarian unit/nation, Misirkov sought both cultural and national differentiation from the Bulgarians and referred to both himself and the Slavs of Macedonia as Macedonians.

His inconsistent affiliation, which particularly came to light during the years of the First and Second Balkan Wars (Мисирков, 2008b), might be considered through the prism of the identity conceptions which call upon the importance of the relationship towards the other, the historical and variable nature of identity, as well as its relativity in relation to context (Цветаева, 2007, p. 31). According to Ross Pool (1999, p. 45), all identities (both individual and collective) are constituted in and through particular forms of social life that originate their variable nature or their ability to react and change depending on the historical, social, political and economic circumstances, thus becoming relative in relation to the context.

The matter of Misirkov's affiliation can also be addressed in the light of his views on national identity, as his struggle for the distinction of the Macedonian ethnocultural entity is indeed irrefutable. According to Misirkov, the preconditions for the Macedonian nation-building process are based on four main concepts: 1) nation as a historical and social construct; 2) High Culture as a source of political legitimacy; 3) cultural elites as a key factor in nation-building; 4) a separate political unit as a further necessity. These will be discussed mainly with regard to his most important book, the aforementioned *On Macedonian matters*.

Nation as a historical and social construct. In the spirit of Renan's historical definition of nation as a spiritual principle based on common past and present will, Misirkov gives his interpretation as follows:

It is this universal happiness and sorrow, together with the traditions and customs we share, that makes us one people, one whole. [...] It is only through the recognition of these peculiar features in the character, nature, customs, life, traditions and language of our people that we can give tangible reason for our opposition to partition our country and for our desire for its autonomy; for partition will uproot all that is dear to us and inflict upon us something that runs directly counter to our national spirit. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, pp. 207, 287)

This definition of Misirkov indicates his understanding of the importance of objective relationships that unite the group and provide a sense of common belonging. As Dominique Schnapper (Шнаппер, 2003, p. 73) points out, each feeling of belonging, each collective idea, might be the result of a long common history. Nation is not born out of a single decision, no matter how desirable or reasonable it may be, which would imply that a collective identity might be built out of a tabula rasa. In the same manner as Hobsbawm concludes that nations are dual phenomena, "constructed essentially from

above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist” (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 10).

Aware of the fact that nations do not appear naturally but as a result of social engineering within a long and complicated process of historical development (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Hroch, 1993), Misirkov was convinced that all the necessary historical and political preconditions for the separation of the Macedonians as a distinct ethnocultural entity were met:

The separation of the Macedonians as a distinct Slav people is a perfectly normal historical process which is quite in keeping with the process of the separation of Bulgarian, Croatian and Serbian peoples from the former South Slav group. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 223)

Misirkov cites Vatroslav Jagić's⁷ theory, according to which the South Slavic languages are a dialect continuum and all the South Slavic language speakers called themselves Slavs up until the formation of the Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian states:

If the formation of the South Slav peoples was a mechanical and political process, it would not be impossible that it might recur at the present time. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 232)

In response to his opponents' claims that there had never existed a Macedonian nationality before, therefore the separation of the Macedonians as a distinct nationality was impossible, Misirkov, who firmly believed that nations do not exist at all times and in all circumstances or, in the words of Gellner, are not God-given (Gellner, 1983, pp. 6, 48–49), argues:

The first objection – that a Macedonian Slav nationality has never existed – may be very simply answered as follows: what has not existed in the past may still be brought into existence later, provided that the appropriate historical circumstances arise [...] it may not have existed in the past, but it exists today and will exist in the future. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, pp. 221, 235)

Misirkov's claim was confirmed 82 years later by Hroch's analysis (Hroch, 1985, 1993) of national movements in Central and Eastern Europe, according to which national consciousness develops unevenly among social

⁷ Vatroslav Jagić was one of the most famous Slavists of the 19th and 20th centuries.

groupings and regions of a country⁸; this regional diversity and its reasons have been notably neglected in the past (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 12).

High culture as a source of political legitimacy. Despite the fact that modernist theorists underline the cultural origins of the modern nation (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1983; Hroch, 1993), Gellner believes that this concept is insufficient as it refers exclusively to the anthropological interpretation of the nation but neglects the normative aspect. Therefore, he emphasizes the role of *high culture* in the process of nation building:

Nationalism uses pre-existing, historically inherited proliferations of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism itself, as opposed to the avatars it happens to pick up for its incarnations, is itself in the least contingent and accidental. (Gellner, 1983, p. 56)

In the same manner, Misirkov believed that the distinctives of the Macedonian culture was the main source of political legitimacy of the Macedonian people and their right to self-determination and to freely determine their political status. Thus, when Misirkov was politicizing cultural nationalism, he would go on to write:

Fortunately, I say, there is Macedonian national culture and history, as this fact is an invincible weapon for the Macedonian people in their fight for human rights and a free national life as an equal member among other cultures. (*Македонска култура* (1924); Мисирков, 2008с, p. 285)

However, Misirkov himself was convinced that the political aspirations of the Macedonian people should be taken a step further, thus transforming culture into a higher and standardized one in terms of “shared systems of communications and norms”.

Therefore, as a proficient philologist and an expert in historical and political processes, Misirkov was aware that *standardized* language is the basis of the high culture with which men willingly and ardently identify (Gellner, 1983, p. 64), thus providing political legitimacy to the nationhood. In the same manner, he believed that a standardized and codified Macedonian language

⁸ According to Hroch's analysis (Hroch, 1993, pp. 7–8) some national agitations started earlier than others: for example, in Croatia it started in the 1830s, in Slovenia in the 1840s, in Latvia in the late 1850s, and in Lithuania not before the 1870s.

was one of the main preconditions for the recognition of the Macedonian people's peculiarity and its political establishment as a distinct *Macedonian nationality* which is neither Serbian nor Bulgarian (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 243). For Misirkov, codification of the Macedonian language was an investment in national education, whose aim would be to produce a literate population as the only possible way for Macedonians to create their own literary, cultural and educational centre that is independent of Belgrade (Serbia) and Sofia (Bulgaria), thus becoming free from any foreign propaganda. It was Misirkov's firm conviction that the Macedonian language was one of the most important matters for the resolution of the *Macedonian question* (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 105), thus he insisted on the rapid development of the Macedonian literary language. In the preface to his book *On Macedonian Matters*, he says:

As a further mark of my support for the idea of completely separating our interests from those of the other Balkan peoples and of independently continuing our own cultural and national development, I have written this book in the central Macedonian dialect, which from now on I shall always consider the Macedonian literary language. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 19)

In the above-mentioned book, Misirkov published his theoretical and scientifically substantiated attempt to standardise the Macedonian language; this was the first scientific study on Macedonian literary language and orthography as such, and it was based on the following three principles: 1. to take the central Macedonian dialects as the basis of the literary language; 2. to introduce a phonetic orthography; and 3. to enrich the dictionary with words from all Macedonian dialects.⁹ Entirely on this basis, the standardization of the contemporary Macedonian language was carried out in 1945, regrettably without explicit reference to his work (Friedman, 2000, p. 187; Грueвска-Маџоска, 2020, p. 242).¹⁰

Although his scientific attempt to standardise the Macedonian language was not an official codification as there were no official Macedonian state

⁹ It should be noted that his contribution to this topic is a summary and continuation of the efforts of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Gjorgjija Pulevski (1817–1893), Spiro Gulapchev (1856–1918), Eftim Sprostranov (1868–1939), Kosta Shahov (1862–1917), Marko Cepenkov (1829–1920) and others.

¹⁰ The codification of the Macedonian language was finalized in May 1945, after the creation of the necessary legislative and institutional basis within the Macedonian state, then part of the Yugoslav federation.

institutions to confirm it at that time, Misirkov laid out the foundations of the contemporary Macedonian language.¹¹ His attempts to standardise the Macedonian language can be considered an integral part of the prehistory of the codification of the contemporary Macedonian literary language. This is an acknowledgement of the pivotal role in the establishment of the continuity of the historical and grammatical development of the Macedonian language (Ќулавкова, 2020, p. 38).

Cultural elites as a key factor in nation-building. Hobsbawm claims that one of the key criteria which allowed a people to be firmly classed as a nation was the existence of a long-established cultural elite that possessed a written national literary and administrative vernacular. This was the basis of the Italian and German claims to nationhood, although the respective “peoples” had no single state with which they could identify (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 37).

Misirkov's evolutionary principle (*Патот на помиривањето* (1925); Мисирков, 2008f, p. 337) is reflected not only in the rejection of violence as a means of achieving political aims, but also in his firm belief that only through independent Macedonian scientific thought, together with economic recovery, could Macedonians achieve their full national self-awareness and spiritual liberation, thus defining their place among other nations in the Balkans and Europe and preserving their cultural and historical distinctiveness. Therefore, Misirkov is very precise in his realization of the importance of a Macedonian intelligentsia and cultural elites in the overall development of the Macedonian people, thus he highlights science and literature as the most important factors in this process:

The level of culture is determined by the extent to which the people are advanced in science and literature. Hence, a division is made between cultured and uncultured peoples. Cultured people rule, uncultured people are subjugated. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 99)

He insisted that only culturally and intellectually superior peoples, namely those with already established high culture and standardized language, can take responsibility for the welfare of their own people. For this reason, as cultural and intellectual elites are the only ones that can clarify the most

¹¹ According to Einar Haugen's model (Haugen, 2012), the codification of a language is the second step in the process of linguistic planning. The first is selection (which actually Misirkov did), the third is implementation of the changes in society, and the fourth is building a vocabulary (especially for technical terms).

important issues related to national self-awareness, Misirkov addressed them with the following words:

We need an intelligentsia that will aspire towards moral and mental perfection. Our intelligentsia today should devote all their efforts and all their moral and mental training to the people and the creation of an ideal Macedonian intelligentsia. (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 105).

Separate political unit as a further necessity. Misirkov, who declared himself to be a Macedonian separatist (*Македонски национализам* (1925); Мисирков, 2008d, p. 339), advocated for an autonomous Macedonian political unit, so the Macedonian people would be able to establish their own political, cultural and educational institutions, preserve their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, and experience general prosperity. He believed that a separate political unit would be the only way for the Macedonian nation to be embodied, introduced and placed in the international world order, and, in time, in the historical continuum:

Without autonomy, one cannot even imagine the progress and culture in Macedonia. (*Масакрот и интелигенцијата во Македонија* (1912); Мисирков, 2008e, p. 179)

Having an extraordinary knowledge of the historical and political developments at that time, Misirkov was aware of the fact that without the support of the great powers and the consent of neighbouring countries, the autonomy of Macedonia could not be possible. Therefore, he addressed the Balkan states (Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece) to support the Macedonian struggle for a separate political unit in the same manner that the great powers, such as Russia, have supported their independent states in the past.¹² Misirkov also made an appeal to the great powers:

We hope that great nations, without bloodshed, can create Macedonian autonomy, which in terms of culture stands much higher than the neighbouring countries did a hundred years ago, when they gained their independence. (*Борба за автономија* (1914); Мисирков, 2008a, p. 207)

¹² The Principality of Bulgaria, with Sofia as the capital, was formed in 1878, together with the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia, with Plovdiv as the capital. In 1885, both regions were united in a single state called the Principality of Bulgaria, under the sovereignty of the Sultan. Bulgaria declared independence in 1908. The Greek War of Independence, the Greek Mutiny, began in 1821. Greece was internationally recognized as an independent state in 1832. Albania gained independence in 1912 as a consequence of the First Balkan War and with the support of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Misirkov's vision of Macedonia as a separate political unit in which solidarity and fundamental rights – such as the right to self-determination regardless of any nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class or other affiliation (*On Macedonian Matters*; Misirkov, 2003, p. 63) – would prevail was regrettably not realized in his lifetime.

On August 2, 1944, in a completely different historical and political situation, i.e., as one of the six constituent republics of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia became separate political unit, which certainly had an impact on the formation of the political identity of the Macedonian people. However, through the codification of the Macedonian language and the establishment of Macedonian national and political institutions, as well as the establishment of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, ASNOM embodied the Macedonian people's political need for national identification. At the same time, it was an expression of Macedonian readiness and willingness for such a declaration, just as Misirkov predicted. On September 8, 1991, the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence by a vote of its citizens.

Krste P. Misirkov's legacy

According to Damianopoulos (2012, p. 71), Misirkov's book *On Macedonian matters* (1903) is the first public expression of cognitive self-descriptor evidence regarding a core set of beliefs concerning the Macedonian identity, and this book represents an obvious manifestation of this identity. It is worth emphasising that, in 1903, Misirkov (as cited in Rossos, 1995) conceptually characterized the nature of Macedonian ethnicity as a Slav-Macedonian identity distinct from the neighbouring Serbian and Bulgarian ethnic identities (Damianopoulos, 2012, p. 107).

For Georgi Stardelov (Старделов, 1999, p. 62), Misirkov was a national ideologue guided by the evolutionary method as opposed to the revolutionary one, based on Fichte's principle "Kultur zur Freiheit" (Culture of Freedom), i.e., when the material and spiritual culture becomes a pillar of the nation and an expression of its historical aspirations. Misirkov explicitly advocates for the separation and recognition of the Macedonian ethnocultural entity as a distinct one and for the legitimate right of the Macedonian people to their political

and cultural autonomy. His struggle for cultural and political autonomy was in line with the Central European nationalists, i.e., the right of nations to decide for themselves, a principle born in Western Europe, justifying their demands with ethnic and linguistic evidence (Шнапер, 2003, p. 159). However, in his understanding of the importance of culture and language in this long-term political project, Misirkov goes one step further, advocating for the creation and establishment of standardized/high culture as an investment in a national education system whose aim is to produce a literate population which shares a common language (Sabra, 2007, p. 84).

The inconsistency of Misirkov's affiliation is undoubtable, as is his contribution to singling out the distinctiveness of the Macedonian ethno-cultural entity, which created the preconditions for the development of the Macedonian national consciousness.

There is no doubt that, in the words of Pool (1999, p. 22), each nation is its own world, and each national language provides its own specific and unique mode of access to that world. Hence, Misirkov's contribution to the history and codification of the Macedonian literary language must be pointed out. His approach to the standardization and identity of the Macedonian language is inseparable from the Macedonian people's aspiration for national revival and independence. It has the features of an interdisciplinary approach: philological, historiographical, cultural and political (Кулавкова, 2020, p. 36). Thus, the book *On Macedonian matters* is important both from the aspect of the history of the Macedonian language and as a basis for creating the Macedonian national identity, but also as a source of social thought of its time. Regrettably, its dated thinking and conceptual limitation, even after more than a century, are hardly understood or noticed by Macedonian intelligentsia (Damianopoulos, 2012, p. 71).

Hence, analysed through the lens of modernist conceptions of nation and nationalism, those aspects which Misirkov indicated as important and addressed in detail – such as a sense of common belonging, high culture, standardized language, the role of cultural elites and separate political units so the political need for national identification of the Macedonian people could be fully embodied – are basically the principles on which modern nations are built. From today's perspective, the creative opus of Misirkov is synonymous to an avatar-like undertaking to define the Slavic-Macedonian ethnocultural identity, which is, in turn, a constitutive foundation of the contemporary Macedonian nation that was, during the second half of

the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, in the process of theoretical articulation, international promotion and gradual political and institutional construction. Misirkov, with his multidisciplinary profile of a scientist, could be considered one of the founders of the theoretical discourse on the Macedonian nation. The cult of the Macedonian identity, independent of all his expressive variations, is an explicit dominant and an implicit constant in his entire activity.

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Refleksje nad teorią Krste Misirkova. Od jednostki etnokulturowej do narodu politycznie uprawomocnionego

W niniejszym artykule kwestia macedońska została pokazana przez pryzmat prac Krste Misirkova i jego walki o wyodrębnienie i uznanie macedońskiego bytu etnokulturowego. Celem jest przedstawienie wybranych czynników, które stworzyły warunki wstępne do procesu budowania narodu macedońskiego i jego politycznej legitymizacji. Koncepcje Misirkova analizowane są w świetle modernistycznych teorii narodu i nacjonalizmu, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem następujących aspektów: naród jako historycznie i społecznie ukształtowany konstrukt, poczucie wspólnej przynależności, kultura wysoka i ustandaryzowane języki jako polityczna legitymizacja narodu, rola elit kulturalnych w procesie tworzenia narodu oraz relacje między narodem a nowoczesnym państwem.

Słowa kluczowe: Krste Misirkov, modernizm, teoria narodu, kwestia macedońska, jednostka etnokulturowa, język, kultura, naród

Reflections on Krste Misirkov's theory: From ethnocultural entity to politically legitimate nation

In order to present some of the aspects that created the preconditions for the Macedonian nation-building process and its political legitimacy, this paper reviews the *Macedonian question* through the works of Krste Misirkov and his struggle for the separation and recognition of Macedonian ethnocultural entity as a distinct one. His conceptions are analysed through the lens of modernist theories of nation and nationalism, with special emphasis on the following aspects: nation as a historically and socially formed construct, a sense of common belonging, high cultures and standardized languages as the political legitimacy of a nation, the role of cultural elites in the nation-building process, and the relationship between the nation and the modern state.

Keywords: Krste Misirkov, modernism, theory of nation, Macedonian question, ethnocultural entity, language, culture, nation

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