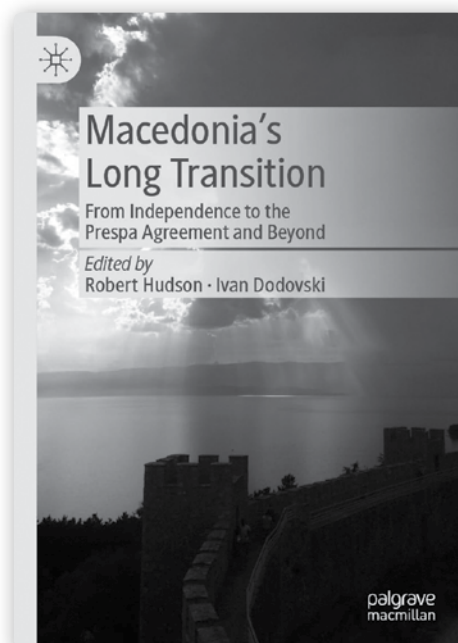


**Robert Hudson, Ivan Dodovski (Eds.)
MACEDONIA'S LONG TRANSITION
FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE PRESPA AGREEMENT AND BEYOND**

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The edited book *Macedonia's Long Transition: From Independence to the Prespa Agreement and Beyond* is a timely, insightful, and meticulously researched examination of North Macedonia's complex statehood journey from gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 to its eventual membership bid in NATO and the European Union, following the historic Prespa Agreement in 2018. This volume, edited by Robert Hudson and Ivan Dodovski, is authored by leading experts in political science, legal studies, international relations, linguisticism and identity studies, economics and other related disciplines. Published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2020, the genre of this book best fits political science and interdisciplinary European studies. Each chapter provides a multi-dimensional understanding of the challenges, reforms, and diplomatic negotiations that have shaped North Macedonia over the past three decades, providing a comparison with the other processes of transition in post-socialist states in



Eastern and Central Europe. Thematic structure of the book includes different topics which range from domestic political reforms to foreign relations and diplomacy, including key issues related to democratization and ethnic relations as well as bilateral disputes and complex geopolitics. These well-organized sections cover different stages from the statehood journey and

explain both internal and external factors but also their linkages and interconnectedness of various political, economic and social issues. Hence, the process of transition is also examined from different angles, taking into consideration its political, security, economic and legal dimensions.

Editors emphasize that the dissolution of Yugoslavia and (then) Macedonia's declaration of independence was not just as a political separation but also as a significant shift in the state building process including identity formation. These remarks set the stage for understanding the lingering ethnic divisions which at some points have escalated into tensions and conflicts, as well as the external conflict environment in the region which significantly influenced the statehood process. Hudson presents an overview of some of the key issues confronting Macedonia in its transition, thus providing a valuable context for understanding the roots of many contemporary issues and arguing that they are intertwined.

The edited volume opens with a contribution by Stevo Pendarovski examining the complex security landscape of the country which was perceived on the outside as an 'oasis of peace' amid the chaos in the region. This chapter outlines the security threats of a nation at a crossroad and the right of self-determination, and how these elements

have created a fragile state structure that is susceptible to internal and external pressures. The author views that Macedonia's internal legitimacy relies on the authentic execution of three key initiatives: the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Euro-Atlantic integration, and, the advancement of liberal democracy, which is fundamentally connected to the first two. The main suggestion is to build a comprehensive strategy that focuses on strengthening the democratic institutions, promoting interethnic dialogue, and enhancing regional cooperation, with a more proactive engagement from the main global actors to support stability in the region.

The subsequent sections of the book delve into the political landscape that emerged in the wake of independence, highlighting the intricate interplay between domestic political realities and the influence of the Euro-Atlantic integration as the main framework for internal reforms. In "Political Parties and the Trials of Democracy," Nenad Markovikj discusses the fragmented nature of the party system in Macedonia, noting how numerous parties, often driven by ethnic identities, can lead to political instability. The chapter identifies how electoral laws and practices may not foster genuine competition and further erode the public trust in institutions, thus outlining the importance of fostering a vibrant civil society. Blerim Reka's contribution titled "Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic

Integration” examines that the integration is not only a political objective but also vital for national identity and regional stability. These strategic aspirations are also connected to the internal process of reforms, hence alignment of national policies with EU and NATO standards ensures the main framework for country’s transition.

The effects of the migration crises are also examined in Marina Andeva’s “Migration Movements and Their Implications for Macedonia”, changing the narrative towards Macedonia’s position as both a transit and a destination country, while also taking into consideration the extent to which country’s regulatory framework is in compliance with EU measures in specific areas. Book’s contributions provide critical insights into the economic transformation of the country, focusing on the dual aspects of economic transition and privatization. “The Economic Transition of Macedonia” by Marjan Petreski’s analysis highlights the structural reforms necessary for a successful transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, also in the light of the accession criteria on the road to the EU. It tackles upon specific macroeconomic policies such as the introducing denar as a national currency and its stabilization, while also discussing the issue of the Macedonian brain-drain - a problem rooted in the early transition years which continues until the present day and

undermines growth and development potentials. Additionally, Hyrije Abazi-Alili’s work “Privatisation in Macedonia and Communities in Transition” emphasizes the social consequences of these reforms, particularly in the context of privatisation through the transformation of enterprises with social capital and the evolution of ownership structure after privatisation.

The central issue of identity is examined in its internal manifestation within the chapter „The Identity Shift: Claims on Antiquity in Macedonian Fiction and Drama“ by Ivan Dodovski, and „The Dissonant Narratives of the Skopje 2014 Project“ by Loreta Georgievska-Jakovleva, and in its external reflection - „The Impossible Reconciliation of Historical Narratives: The Macedonian Name Dispute and Prospects for the Future“ by Zhidas Daskalovski, and „An Analysis of Bulgaria’s Rejection of the Macedonian Ethno-Linguistic Identity and Its Implications“ by Ognen Vangelov. First two chapters explore how historical narratives are used to forge identity in a multicultural society and the challenges of navigating a diverse society during a long period of political and social transition, often struggling with conflicting interpretations on the inside. Other two chapters represent the implications on the outside - within the regional disputes as conflicts rooted in differing historical narratives and national identities and the broader implications that hinder regional stability

and hamper the Euro-Atlantic integration. Hence, these contributions highlight the intersection of history, nationalism, and politics, showing the complexity of identity formation in the Balkans that is not only shaped by internal dynamics but also by external perceptions and historical narratives.

Overall, the editors and contributors discuss the challenges faced by fledgling institutions with regard to the democratic governance, corruption, and the rule of law, together with the economic effects of the transition. The Prespa Agreement is the focal point of the book as one of the main historic milestones which completed the process of NATO membership, thus providing multifaceted analysis of the agreement's implications, the potential benefits and drawbacks of the deal. Undoubtedly, the EU and NATO play prominent roles in this process given that the aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration have influenced domestic policies and political behaviour. However, this volume also critically assesses the EU's conditionality approach in the Enlargement policy, which lacks credibility due to the dominant role of the bilateral disputes rooted in the complex historic landscape of the region.

As a final remark, this edited volume by Hudson and Dodovski is a well-researched and accessible examination of a nation's transition from different perspectives, mak-

ing it suitable for both academic audience and general readers interested in contemporary Balkan affairs. It chronicles the intricate Macedonia's statehood journey from its declaration of independence in 1991 through the significant diplomatic milestone of the Prespa Agreement in 2018 and into its ongoing durability and current challenges. Hence, the book offers critical reflections on the lessons learned and predictions about the road ahead. By reflecting on the complexities of nation-building in a post-conflict context, the book emphasizes the external factors and the broader implications for the regional peace and stability.

One of the book's main strengths is its portrayal of the ethnic dynamics within the country and complex identity issues that have played a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and decisions, including the foreign policy. Its all-encompassing approach toward the process truly provides an insight into the profound complexity of this phenomenon and specific characteristics of the country and the region as a whole. Nevertheless, it stands as a testament of the power of resilience and negotiation seeking peace and stability. After thirty years of transition, Macedonia's future is essential to the future European security architecture, especially in the Western Balkans. Its contribution but also its issues are unique and quite different to those of the other transition states.