Interreligious Distrust and Reconciliation in the Western Balkans: The Republic of Macedonia as a Case Study[1]

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Abstract. In the Western Balkans, particularly in the area that once formed one country, Yugoslavia, processes of peacebuilding and mediation, reconciliation and recovery are still topical when attention is directed to interethnic and interreligious relations. The Republic of Macedonia is an excellent example of multicultural society *à la balkanique*. That is, multiculturalism, multiethnicity and multiconfessionalism remain among the most relevant challenges for the development of the society and they are widely instrumentalized for instance for political purposes. This article discusses the current situation particularly from an interreligious point of view and ponders on how interreligious dialogue initiatives could contribute to transformation of the Macedonian society into a more harmonious and stable entity.

Keywords: The Balkans, Republic of Macedonia, interreligious dialogue, reconciliation, distrust

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1. Introduction

Our world goes currently through a particularly tumultuous period. For some South-Eastern European countries, chaotic times are also part of more recent history. In the Western Balkans, particularly in the area that once formed one country, Yugoslavia, processes of peacebuilding and mediation, reconciliation and recovery are still topical when interethnic and interreligious relations are observed. Peace in the Balkans is inevitably existing, but fragile. And antagonisms, threat images and stereotypes of different varieties still very alive. Facts of which we have seen symptoms for example in 2015, when violent incidents involving interethnic and interreligious dimensions broke out in the city of Kumanovo (the Republic of Macedonia) and in Potočari, in Bosnia and Herzegovina[2] (see Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016; Repo, 2016). These tendencies to provoke antagonisms are visible in the politics and in the ways media voices certain topics in different Balkan states. Thus, even though different ethnic and religious groups would live together in close proximity, they are inclined to maintain their cultural and structural differences and the boundaries dividing the groups. Hence, living together does not necessarily mean "a positive valorization of pluralism", but rather "an antagonistic tolerance" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 40).

Ina Merdjanova defines interreligious dialogue (IRD) narrowly as "human communication between religious leaders for the primary purpose of clarifying theological/philosophical similarities and differences". But while being observed from a wider angle it includes "all forms of human communication both through speech and shared activities that help mutual understanding and cooperation between people who self-identify religiously" (Merdjanova, 2016: 27). This process is much more comprehensive than discussions that have purely theological dimensions and when used for the purpose of peace-building its goal is social change. IRD includes in addition to verbal communication, also "a shared action in the pursuit of

[2] That is, my aim is not to discuss here what precisely happened and why in both cases, but to point out that interethnic and interreligious elements where consciously used in the purpose of increasing antagonisms between groups of people, when these conflicts were discussed, especially in the local media.

common needs, in which people engage across religious and ideological boundaries" and it aims, besides post-conflict mediation and reconstruction, also to inhibit possible conflicts in the future (Merdjanova, 2016: 30).

According to Merdjanova's understanding, peacebuilding comprises of "all social mechanisms a society develops in order to promote greater understanding and cooperation towards peace". When interreligious dialogue is involved in peacebuilding it is fundamentally based on three principles; self-conscious engagement, self-critical attitude and realistic expectations in relation to the long-term dialogue process.[3] Supported by diverse forms of interreligious dialogue initiatives, the peacebuilding proceedings can lead to promotion of "an ethos of tolerance, non-violence, and trust" (Merdjanova, 2016: 28). Merdjanova thinks that this approach can be especially influential if it serves of a variety of tools; a top-down approach to the issue put together with grassroots activities between mid-level clergy and laymen from diverse religious communities (1). These processes should also involve and include a large variety of groups (2), such as majorities, minorities, refugees, women and youth (Merdjanova, 2016; Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 126-127).

Furthermore, one should be aware of the length and laborious nature of the process without being pessimistic (3), but also cautious of being too optimistic and expect quick results (4). Context-sensitive local ways of functioning as for intercommunity interaction should be taken better into account while engaging into interreligious dialogue initiatives (5). There should also be a better understanding of the role of religion in the local context, which is different in each Balkan country (6) and one should avoid interdependency dominated and patronizing relations between foreign NGOs and local NGOs (7). International actors and donors should shun from essentializing local ethnic and religious identities, and local people and organizations should avoid doing the same to the identities of foreigners and international organizations (8) (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 126-128). In order to support the process of interreligious dialogue, international organizations, governmental actors and media should preferably be provided with policy recommendations, and it should

[3] Awareness of own biases and limitations (Merdjanova, 2016: 28).

also involve post-conflict psychological healthcare, as there is a lot of people who have been personally exposed to the recent conflicts and suffer of post-traumatic stress in diverse ways (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 127-128).

2. A State with many identities

"Freedom from fear could be said to sum up the whole philosophy of human rights"

Dag Hammarskjöld

Muslim populations often seem to be in a particularly central position when the conflicts that have occurred during the last two centuries on the Balkan Peninsula are examined closer (Elbasani, 2015: 6). In the Republic of Macedonia, the last larger armed conflict dates from 2001 and it culminated around antagonisms between the two biggest ethnic groups of the country; Macedonians and Albanians. These groups represent respectively mainly two different religions, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, but questions of belonging are much more complex than that. In the Republic of Macedonia, one third of the population confesses Islamic faith. Of a population of 2 022 547 (census 2002)[4] this means around 607 000 persons. Muslims speak diverse mother tongues (Albanian 70%, Bosnian 2.5%, Macedonian[5] 10%, Romani 8% and Turkish 12%)[6] (see Bougarel & Clayer, 2001), but Albanian-speaking population forms a clear majority and 25% of the entire population in the country.

Most of the Macedonian citizens are Macedonian-speakers (64.18%) and Orthodox Christians (64.78%). Among Orthodox Christians can

[4] There are opinions according to which the statistics used in this census could be more accurate.

[5] When referring to this group also the notion Torbeši can be used, but it can have a negative connotation.

[6] Percentages are approximate and there are diverse opinions on how accurate they are.

however also be counted representatives of other ethnic groups (e.g. Albanians, Serbs and Vlachs). Additionally, there are smaller religious communities such as Roman Catholics (7008), Protestants (520) and Jews (approximately 250–300 persons). Furthermore, other religious bodies, which have often been rather recently established, exist. In 2015, the Republic of Macedonia had 30 registered religious organisations, which all in all consisted of 15 churches, 7 religious communities and 8 religious groups (U.S. Department of State, 2015). Of these the two biggest ones are the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community, and members of other groups represent approximately 2–3% of the population. These two largest communities and three others; the Catholic Church, Methodist Evangelical Church and Jewish Community, possess a recognized status mentioned separately in the constitution. This status is usually justified by the historically long presence of these particular communities in the country.

The Republic of Macedonia is a very good example of multiculturalism *à la balkanique*. That is, multiculturalism, multiethnicity and multiconfessionalism remain among the most relevant challenges for the development of the society and they are widely instrumentalized for example for the political purposes. That is, authoritarian measures, some speak of *Soft-Putinism* ("a populist rule with a democratic facade which serves to give it legitimacy for its authoritarian policies") (see Krstić, 2016), used in governance have purposefully enlarged cleavages between different societal groups and many times served of infected relations between them. Political elites are using ethnic tensions in order to turn the attention away from other issues, such as corruption and abuse of positions of power (Clapp, 2016). Furthermore, societal criticism is silenced, the state structures have not been properly separated from the ruling political party and state's resources are served for ideological purposes (Musai, 2016).

As the political situation has lately taken turns into more chaotic, also the European Union's inert attitude towards the problems of the country has been criticized. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was forced to resign in 2015, but the European Union has often considered that the Macedonian citizens should themselves stabilize

the situation in the country, and fix its fragile democratic system (Clapp, 2016). However, the current circumstances in the Republic of Macedonia are a result of a much longer development in course of which the European Union has tended to show rather laissez-faire stance. Thus, "[i]n preferring stability over democracy in the Republic of Macedonia, the EU today has neither", as Alexander Clapp (2016) states.

Both ethnic and religious identities of the largest Slavic population inhabiting today the Republic of Macedonia (also known geographically as Vardar Macedonia) have experienced repressive measures in the course of history. Macedonians find themselves in the crossroads of particularly three actors, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, which all have claimed their rights over certain cultural issues or territories of the contemporary state. Macedonians became officially recognized as a nation in the early years of the socialist Yugoslavia, but still struggle politically as for the recognition to the language they speak (cf. Bulgaria), religion they confess (cf. Serbia), and certain place names, interpretation of history and cultural features (cf. Greece, but also Bulgaria and Serbia). Albanians were among the largest officially recognized nationalities in the socialist Yugoslavia, but have often experienced, even in the independent Republic of Macedonia, that their cultural and other rights have not been executed to the full extent. Additionally, other minorities have struggled in order to be recognized and taken into account in the legislation and administrative bodies of the country. The socialist system was repressive against religious identities, but generally tended to support the cultural identities of different groups.

The most important relational tensions are those between the Macedonian and Albanian populations. Ethnic antagonisms find support additionally in the religious differences between the groups. Ulf Brunnbauer considers that this ethnic and religious divide can be observed in a historical continuum and one can see that the Macedonian-speaking population tended to urbanize more quickly than the Albanians, and this development has had social, economic and cultural consequences later on. Rural lifestyles have had an impact on marginalization of the Albanians on the labour market, retention of patriarchal values and as there has been a lack of trust in institutions, family relations gained more importance (Brunnbauer,

2002: 14-15). However, one can detect similar developments also among Macedonians, and other Balkan populations. Many claim that ethnic Macedonians should acknowledge that there is and has been structural discrimination against Albanians. Improvements have occurred with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement after the armed conflict in 2001, but its reforms might have also served for institutionalisation of ethnic divisions (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016).

Since the independency in 1991, Macedonian political life has been marked by clientelism and community-based politics (Ragaru , 2008: 48), and this has influenced the trust structures in the country. In recent years, the Macedonian ruling political elite has also in an accentuated manner instrumentalized identity politics in order to maintain power. One example of this is the policy of *antikvizacija*, or antiquization, which makes a reference to a Greek imperial past of the Macedonian population instead of the antifascist mythology of Yugoslav Macedonia or a Slavic Orthodox identity (Clapp, 2016). Diverse developments have led into a situation in which Macedonians and Albanians have a limited interaction and keep to themselves, live in different parts of the country and even in the different blocks within cities (see Brunnbauer, 2002; Clapp, 2016).

As examples that demonstrate the current situation, one can observe that these two populations frequent different schools and universities, follow different media and support different (ethnically oriented) political parties. Furthermore, friendships and marriages between people belonging to different groups are modest in number and suffer of important social pressure. Also, the interpretations of historical events differ from the chosen national or ethnic angle. It seems that the line between national or ethnic and religious hate grows thinner and thinner, and it becomes more and more challenging to distinguish politically and ideologically motivated, national(ist/ic) and religious identities from one another. All these issues disadvantage the casual interaction between the groups, and as Taleski and Pollozhani point out: "Separate public spaces, and separate virtual and media spaces, are the greatest threat to equal participation in public life" (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016).

3. Interreligious tumult

"The truth was a mirror in the hands of God. It fell, and broke into pieces.

Everybody took a piece of it, and they looked at it and thought they had the truth"

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

The link between nation and religion became more emphasized in the course of nation-building projects of the new independent Balkan states that emerged from the Ottoman Empire. Since 1918, ethnic and religious associations induced more divisions in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and turned out to be an unparalleled origin of rivalry and antagonisms especially in the course of the Second World War. In Tito's socialist Yugoslavia, one managed to suppress interethnic tensions and conflicts, but they were not fundamentally resolved (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 41). Religion has become progressively politicized in the Western Balkans since the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed it in the early 1990s. It also occurred that religious officials tended to condemn the brutalities and war crimes committed by the representatives of other group(s), but did not publicly judge those committed by the members of their own group (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 46-47). Furthermore, "the victimization paradigm [of each national and/or religious group] occupied a central place. All sides resorted to commemorating selected past events that held great symbolic value and would reverberate in the mass consciousness. Shrines, pilgrimages, relics and martyrs were effectively used" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 70).

The conflict between Albanians and Macedonians that ended 2001 harmed severely the interreligious relations and increased religious intolerance in the Republic of Macedonia. After the conflict a willingness to build an interreligious structure became more

accentuated, and led into establishment of the new body known as the Council of Interreligious Cooperation (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 69-70). Furthermore, the religious leadership of the country showed interest in promoting interreligious dialogue on all levels. Priority was put on the grassroots-top approach. The cooperation comprised of issues related to religious education, property restitution, drafting the law on religion and inclusion of the faculties, Islamic and Orthodox, into the state university system. The most important activities were yearly public meetings of religious leaders with rotation of the hosting community, and theological conferences (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 70).

Both of the largest religious communities in the country, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community, struggle with intrareligious tensions. The Macedonian Orthodox Church remains isolated from the Orthodox world, as the Serbian Orthodox Church has not recognized its autocephaly declared in 1967. Additionally, there have been heavy disagreements about the right of the Serbian Orthodox Church to establish a parish in the country. The Islamic Religious Community is challenged by dissatisfaction of its minority groups (both linguistic and dogmatic), infiltration attempts of the radical Islamist groups, but also by growing islamophobia that finds support for example in the concept of global war on terror. The territory of the Republic of Macedonia has an old presence of Sufi brotherhoods (e.g. Bektashi, Halveti, Rufai and Sadi), and ever since liberation of religious life more radical interpretations of Islam have also become more visible in the country. Additionally, Roma population has established their own Sufi community. These problems of cohesion seem to have brought the Islamic Religious Community and the Macedonian Orthodox Church closer to one another in order to find support in their common projects as for religious education and property restitution, for instance. They also both remain rather open to the ideas of interreligious dialogue (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009: 58 and 71; Nora, 2012).

The use and the visibility of religious premises, and even religious symbols, are ways in which one tends to aim to mark territory to be the possession or under the influence of certain group. Ever since the collapse of socialism, one can witness reintroduction in use of

religious premises in the Western Balkans. In the Republic of Macedonia this has meant that one has started to use the old premises, but also that there are tensions between the state and religious groups concerning the restitution of the property that was earlier nationalized by the state. Also, completely new premises are being built with finances from different, also foreign, sources, and there are ongoing disagreements, for instance within the Muslim community, regarding that who is entitled to use certain Islamic premises.

These aims to mark territory seem also to be a part of the project *Skopje 2014*, which during the past years has filled the centre of Macedonian capital with statues, monuments, bridges and buildings (see Clapp, 2016; Krstić, 2016). These types of historical monuments and constructions, which make a clear and direct reference to the past of certain group of people and not so much to the others, tend to ethnicize and religionize public space, which should be shared by all citizens. In sum, one should of course not feel culturally limited as for expressing one's ethnic or religious identity, but it would be wise to draw lines between constructively rebuilding dilapidated and desperately needed infrastructure, facilitation of casual religious practice, and provocation.

In the Republic of Macedonia, the common civic identity of the citizens remains very weak and each and every group seems to struggle in order to obtain a fully recognized status within society. Maintaining the relations between the groups infected or instable frequently serves political aims (*divide et impera*) and is orchestrated for example by irresponsible mediatisation and a lack of freedom of speech. Problems are created, and interethnic and interreligious antagonisms provoked often very intentionally. Nadège Ragaru estimates that interethnic relations are "held hostage" (Ragaru, 2008) by the local politics, and similar to what Nebojša Šavija-Valha and Elvir Šahić point out in Bosnia and Herzegovina: "maintaining status quo is a vital interest of ethno-politics" (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 41).

That is, gaps of communication and distrust between different societal groups are results of diverse factors fuelled for example by recent conflicts, local politics, by differing interpretations of history and a lack of freedom of speech, but in the Republic of Macedonia,

similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it "is also permanently reproduced by internal group pressure against interethnic communication and cooperation" (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 40). Thus, these antagonisms are also maintained by ordinary people. Language and religion are often such signs of belonging that they are very emotionally-tied and that is why they can be without greater difficulties efficiently instrumentalized, if one wishes to provoke antagonisms. Fertile ground for provocation offer also difficult financial and political conditions, in which different groups may even end up in mutual competition positions regionally or locally. These tensions can furthermore be facilitated by inaccurate and sensational political and historical "facts" offered to people frequently by local media.

Lately religion seems also to have gained visibility in certain political contexts, and there have even been claims that the religious communities are involved in politics. That is, the situation is getting more and more complex, and it becomes harder to distinguish, what is the motivation behind certain action. On one hand, there is also an ongoing process of secularization, but on the other it seems that people's ideological minds may be easily changed, if it represents itself profitable. That is, what might seem religious, might actually not be that. In all religious groups, more extreme interpretations of doctrine tend to increase, which for their part add on the intern dispersion within the groups, but also on the cleavages between them.

Probably the most worrying symptoms of all these issues, are the opinions of youth, which often have a tendency to become less open-minded and rigid as for the perceptions the youth has of the representatives of other groups. Lack of thorough education in one's own religion may also leave the tie to one's religious tradition rather superficial and therefore fragile, and exposed to manipulative distortions. One example how divisions in the society are maintained are ethnically rather divided schools and universities. It is of course of utmost necessity that pupils and students get to study in their own mother tongue, however concrete contacts with members of other groups should be assured. If young people are prohibited from casual contacts with people from other ethnic and religious communities, they very likely are to repeat communitarian behaviour, which does

not aim at natural openness and cooperation with other societal groups.

One factor is also the important diaspora of Balkan populations. Living in diaspora may render one's attitude towards one's ethnic or religious belonging more nostalgic, and one may idealize it without valid grounds, as one is factually living outside the borders of the country. Also, if one is lacking proper in-depth education in one's own language or religion, while living abroad, or even in the country itself, these identities, ethnic and religious, might remain relatively superficial, and be more emphasized as being about belonging to certain group than anything else. Once returning to visit the country, the ideas of what one's ethnic or religious belonging really stands for may be relatively detached from the reality, and even more extreme than the thoughts of those actually constantly living there.

The general atmosphere in the society challenges interreligious relations. As there is an important lack of trust in governmental and administrational structures for instance due to corruption, abuse of power and decreasing freedom of speech, it reflects also to relations between people, which can have tendency of becoming distrustful. If there is no togetherness felt or a slight mutual trust on fellow citizens, it is rather impossible to try to change anything fundamental in the society.

4. Interreligious initiatives and peacebuilding; from antagonisms to dialogue

"Remembrance is a form of meeting.Forgetfulness is a form of freedom"

Khalil Gibran

While observing the interethnic and interreligious relations in the Republic of Macedonia, the dilemmas of remembering and forgetting, and the balance between them, occupy a central position. As David Rieff brilliantly formulates; forgetting can do injustice to the past, but

remembering may do so to the present. He suggests that instead "[o]n such occasions, when collective memory condemns communities to feel the pain of their historical wounds and the bitterness of their historical grievances it is not the duty to remember but a duty to forget that should be honoured." Situation is, nonetheless, not as simple and categorical as this, and neither are the answers. Rieff considers however that even though remembrance may insure that justice happens, it does not necessarily mean that this action will maintain peace. Forgetting on the other hand might support peace processes better. Rieff's idea is not to be completely without memory, but to avoid excess in both; remembering and forgetting. As, "[c]ollective historical memory is no respecter of the past and it usually aims at promoting national unity regardless of the geographical context". (Rieff, 2016)

When one aims at resolving a conflict, one can basically choose of six methods; (1) escaping from the situation, (2) fighting, (3) giving up, (4) avoiding responsibility, (5) aiming at compromise and (6) reaching for consensus. Each of these methods will lead to different results. Escaping from the situation will lead to the loss of both parties, as the conflict remains unsolved (lose/lose). Fighting leads to victory of one, and loss of the other, and a similar is the situation if one party decides to give up (win/lose). If one avoids taking responsibility over the situation, all parties lose (lose/lose). If one compromises, each party must give up something, but they will also benefit of the situation (win-lose/win-lose). Finally, if a consensus is reached, everybody wins (win/win). Three first options are mainly motivated by emotional reactions, while three latter are more rational (Krogerus & Tschäppler, 2011: 36-39).

While observing the situation in the Western Balkans, it is frequently flagrant that of these methods of conflict resolution, one tends to serve the most of avoiding the responsibility. And the consequences can often be perceived without difficulties, a stagnant conflict, which can be flamed up easily. As all parties are avoiding taking responsibility, they also all lose. Similar to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the tense relations are especially the interethnic ones in the Republic of Macedonia, reinforced by the interreligious elements. That is why, as Šavija-Valha and Šahić point out, the task of peacebuilding should aim actually to two goals: reconciliation and

transition. Thus, "it is a process of reconciliation understood as redefinition –transformation of antagonistic ethnic relations at all levels into productive, democratic and political relationships". (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 19)

Even though there have been many initiatives that have aimed, and aim, at transforming ethnic and interreligious relations in the Balkans, their motivations have often been more oriented to fulfilling the requirements of the donors, emphasizing the need of immediate action without deeper analyses and not serving of research already conducted. Thus, they are not fully and mainly serving for transforming the living circumstances of those benefitting from the project or program (see Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 21 and 23). As Šavija-Valha and Šahić conclude: "[I]t is rather oriented towards predefined terms of references from donors' agendas, searching for appropriate findings in the field, then otherwise, which would be transferring the findings into meaningful action not prescribed by donors. So, regardless of available data and knowledge, most of the actions take place in certain *anthropological ignorance*". (Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 23)

Thus, as Merdjanova and Brodeur also mentioned, being well informed about the local context and local society and all its complexity are vital elements for successful interreligious dialogue in the purpose of peacebuilding in the Republic of Macedonia. Important would be also to acknowledge that one speaks about a long-term process that should involve the whole society in a multi-layered manner. Furthermore, the actions taken should first and foremost serve the local populations and groups, not the purposes of creating some kinds of matrix for projects financially or/and politically beneficial for those executing them.

Another model that offers a perspective to the interreligious relations in the Republic of Macedonia could be Karpman Drama Triangle that has been developed to structure different roles taken by actors in a transactional conflict situation. Steven B. Karpman suggests that people alternately adapt to three roles of *persecutor*, *rescuer* and *victim* in this interplay, and if this triangle is not escaped from, one escalates the conflict instead of trying to resolve it (Karpman, 2015). Usually this model is implemented in the circumstances, which

involve two or more persons. However, I would suggest that in the context of the Western Balkans, and that of the Republic of Macedonia, this triangle becomes visible also in the collective behaviour and/or memory of nations. The role of *victim* is usually visible when one speaks about the recent conflicts or historical events, and victimization of one nation often is represented in relation to closest neighbouring nations. Nation turns into a *rescuer* for instance when it has defended some territory, helped others or when it compares its actions *vis-à-vis* those conducted by other nations, and considers to have been more successful or better than others. *Persecutor* is the role when the blame is directed totally to the others and in this sense the responsibility in certain situation is avoided (see Karpman, 2015). These roles depend on one another and different actors taking part in this "role-playing" change their positions in the course of it. However, the conflict cannot be resolved before one is able to step outside the Drama Triangle.

Even though one cannot deny that there obviously are differences between ethnic groups in the Republic of Macedonia, such as mother tongues spoken and religions practiced, one should also be aware that the divisions are often instrumentalized for ethno-national(ist/ic) purposes for instance by political players, media and internal group pressure (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016). While aiming to find solutions to the tense relations between different groups, the complexity of the situation and the context and the interdependence of diverse factors it consists of should be taken into account (see Šavija-Valha & Šahić, 2015: 44). Merdjanova thinks that transformation towards a positive social change through interreligious dialogue processes can become possible only when methods used for exclusion and subordination are revealed and fought back. That is, "IRDPB [interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding] needs to articulate and act upon visions of peace and politics that critique unequal and unjust structures of power, address social grievances, oppose gender inequalities, and advance inclusive and active citizenship beyond religious, ethno-nationalist and other identitarian boundaries". (Merdjanova, 2016: 33)

This would also mean that how memories of the past are dealt with should be transformed in such a manner that the old wounds would not be served of as weapons against the neighbours. For ethnic and religious groups in the Republic of Macedonia this represents a real

challenge, as there are clear indications that most of them have an experience of living under acute existential threat of some kind. However, sometimes the ability to try to forget and let the life go on can be more precious and constructive than remain clinging in the processes of mourning, how necessary and important they might be (Rieff, 2006).

Other summons for the process represent impunity and irresponsibility, as the general atmosphere and ways of functioning of the Macedonian society are strongly influenced by these. When one is not necessarily punished for one's actions when needed, or is punished too severely, general willingness of not being responsible, if possible, prevails. This is strengthened by the general distrust in the governmental and administrative structures, which often enjoy impunity no matter what they do. Irresponsibility and subjectivity are also implemented in the processes of interpreting history usually to the benefit of one's own group of reference. Thus, the collective behaviour and collective memory frequently tend to remain within Karpman Drama Triangle, and in the roles of victim, persecutor and rescuer, and, hence, maintain conflict as finding solutions to the situation are not anymore in the focus, but emotional drama is. Additionally, one should promote other means of conflict resolution than avoiding responsibility, as it does not serve any of the parties involved (lose/lose).

5. Conclusions

In sum, in order to be efficient, interreligious dialogue initiatives for peacebuilding in the Republic of Macedonia would need to be multi-layered and involve the whole society in the process, as in the end they serve the interests of all while aiming to peacebuilding and stability. In order to be successful, beneficiaries would need to frequent members of other groups, to be provided with accurate information about both regional historical events and other communities, and they should aim at detaching their own personal memories from collective memories, and, if possible, not to let the general frustrations and emotional interpretations influence the interreligious dialogue processes. Precondition for dialogue is also

sufficient knowledge concerning one's own cultural background, so that differences and similarities between the communities could become more easily structured. Also, it would be recommendable that the dialogue process takes regional dimensions in order to achieve better and more stable results in the Balkans (ver Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009). That is, we speak about a complex process, which endures in time, but there are many things that could be done in order to transform the prevailing circumstances. Hence, there is hope, so one only would need to add will.

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