

UDC 366.1(497.7):338.124.4(100)

Ali Pajaziti, PhD<sup>49</sup>

**FRYMA E RE KONSUMATORE, KRIZA GLOBALE DHE  
DISTANCA ETNIKE NË MAQEDONI**

**НОВИОТ ПОТРОШУВАЧКИ ДУХ, ГЛОБАЛНАТА КРИЗА И  
ЕТНИЧКАТА ДИСТАНЦА ВО МАКЕДОНИЈА**

**NEW COMSUMERIST SPIRIT, GLOBAL CRISIS AND  
ETHNICAL DISTANCE IN MACEDONIA<sup>50\*</sup>**

---

**Abstract**

This paper deals with the consumption practices in a multi-cultural society, Macedonia, in a lifespace that is coping with the economic crisis, massive poverty, extreme state consumerism (Skopje 2014), individual globalization of lifestyle and ethnicization of consumption practices that is in contradiction with the spirit of economy itself. Its objective is to show the correlation between neoliberal economic approach, globalization and nationalism, using the data gathered through content analysis and interviews.

Keywords: transition, global crisis, consumerism, new modus vivendi, ethnic gap, Macedonia

---

<sup>49</sup> Ordinar professor, South-East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia. (alipajaziti.net)

<sup>50</sup> Paper presented at 13th European Association of Social Anthropologists' Biennial Conference "Collaboration, Intimacy & Revolution - innovation and continuity in an interconnected world", Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Estonian Institute of Humanities, Tallinn University, 31st July - 3rd August, 2014, Estonia.

## 1. Introduction

Republic of Macedonia is one of a transitional societies that faces same problems of the Balkan *lebenswelt*. It is a multicultural society that entered in new millenium with serious turbulencies, from economic (non-apropriate modus of privatization, high rate of unemployment), to political (2001 conflict, permanent ethnical tensions) ones.

The number people living below the national poverty line increased from 4% of the population in 1991 to 20% in 1996. According to State Statistical Office data, in 2008 percentage of poor people in the Republic of Macedonia was 28.7%, wich si more than a fourth of whole population. The survey findings of research done in 2010 (UNDP) show that 40 % of respodents said that their financial situation is worse than average.

Even though there are specific difficulties in the quality of life area, the new *modus vivendi* is appeared, consumerist culture is omnipresent at different strata of this society, new generation, new malls, new way of spendings even in the global crisis era. Coke, Timberalnd, Iphone, as elsewhere, are dominant icons of our new reality. But there is also a tendence of *frustration gap* on ethnical lines: 29 % of respondents choose to shop in shops that are owned by people from their ethnic group, 50.5% choose only restaurants/coffee bars and 68.0% don't have business with persons from different ethnic group, owned by persons from a own ethnic group (PCA, 2010:75-76) There is different approach even in the sphere of dichotomy education-corruption: ethnic Macedonian students perceived to use more relations and gifts, while Albanian students bribing with cash or payment in kind (Pajaziti, 2013).

This research aims to show the correlation between neoliberal economic approach, globalisation and nationalism, using the data gathered through content analysis and interviews.

This paper deals with the consumption practices in a multicultural society, Macedonia, in a lifespace that is coping with the

economic crisis, massive poverty, extreme state consumerism (Skopje 2014), individual globalization of lifestyle and ethnicization of consumption practices that is in contradiction with the spirit of economy itself.

## 2. Long-lasting Social Transition as Challenge

As a word transition means a passage from a condition into another, while as a term it defines the process of democratization or the practice of nondemocratic regimes turning into democratic ones. This process has firstly been witnessed in Latin America and then in southern Europe, to be followed by central, eastern and southeastern Europe and the so-called West Balkan. A characteristic of the transition of ex-socialist countries of Europe is the passage from the state-directed economy into the market economy and modern civilization values like free enterprise, competition, private property, pluralism, open society etc. The social transition that occurs within the state boundaries in countries that once were behind the Iron Curtain, has gone ahead in a curving line, with rises and falls, contradictory and unexpected curves, often through dramatic and painful occurrences. A more complex meaning of transition shows itself in the context of deep, structural changes in all subsystems. The post-communist transition towards “market democracy” is characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of three processes. In the political sphere there is a revolution towards the system of constitutional democracy, liberalism, pluralism, peaceful competition for power, division of powers, supremacy of law, parliamentarism, guarantee of unalterable human rights and freedoms, the transformation of state apparatus to the service of citizens, decentralization of power, the civil autonomous society, independent media, protection of minorities etc. The economic subsystem includes reforms for liberalization, macroeconomic stabilization and privatization. The main components of social transition are exaggeration of importance of national

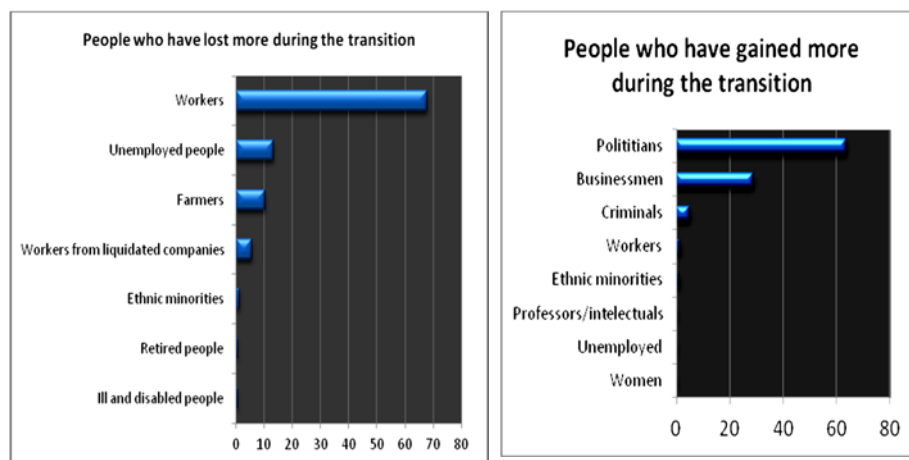
identity, xenophobia, “the immature state”, pseudodemocracy, abuses in privatization, profound changes in social strata, the birth of a new rich class (the case of Croatia: the thesis about 200 rich families in the Croatian society) etc. The democratic transition ends when a government elected through free general elections comes to power and it can make new policies and when the three powers are in full service to citizens. (Milardović, 2004: 13; Pajaziti, 2003: 23-32)

The Republic of Macedonia is a small Balkan country that is passing through a long period of transition, during which the majority of population got poorer (middle class transformed into poor or lower class), when unemployment, vulnerability and social exclusion are social graves while the life satisfaction is a dream. The instability of the region as result of the “balkanization process” and the situation that creates an improper climate for investment contributed to the rise of social instability.

Corruption is another serious problem that obstructs the natural development and the approach of the country towards Euro-Atlantic structures. Some have called the transition of Macedonia (Vajdenfeld, 1999: 257-258) as a transition with “factory defect”.

Macedonia faces high unemployment (35%) (Pajaziti, 2010: 48), disagreements with neighbours (Cowan, 2000: 122-139), anti-quisation, the church issue with Serbia, that of language with Bulgaria, broken interethnic relations (between Macedonians and Albanians), a chapter that was thought to be over with the interethnic conflict of 2001 and the Framework Agreement which implied constitutional changes in favor of non-Macedonian ethnic groups and communities that however failed to bring *conclusive peace*. From 2006 and on the country has been living under the turbulences of permanent provocations by Macedonian state nationalism which showed itself in the most refulgent way in the case of the Macedonian Encyclopedia, that of the fertility law, in the case of the castle church in Skopje, antiurban project “Skopje 2014” and other irrational projects costs to Macedonian citizens more than one billion Euros

new debts in era of global crisis. The transition process was accompanied by low economic growth compared to neighbor countries. A recession was seen during the early 1990s, while after the conflict, 2001-2004 there was a growth which in the period up to 2007 was at 4%, while the 2008 GDP was even higher, at 5%. (nbrm.mk)



Source: Social Exclusion Survey, 2009 (Shukarov, 2011: 10)

### 3. Impact of the global economic crisis on the Republic of Macedonia

The serious economic crisis that emerged in U.S. – compared by some to the depression of 1930's – to expand to EU countries, had a tangible impact on the economy of the Western Balkan countries and RM. At the beginning of the crisis RM seemed that it would be immune to negative economic trends in Europe and would overcome the crisis without serious trauma, but the duration of the crisis was reflected in Macedonia. This "delay" in the effects of the crisis was because the RM's financial sector is not directly related to the financial sector of the U.S. and EU countries. But the crisis did not remain constrained to the financial sector but its effects were transferred to the real sector as well which began to show its effects on

the economy of Macedonia. The first effects were seen in the decline in domestic and foreign demand for goods made in Macedonia, such as metals, textiles, agricultural and food products, which led to a decline in exports by 43% in 2008. The negative tendency of decline in exports continued until October 2009 with a 24.5% decline, to start increasing by 4.4% in November 2009. (nbrm.mk) The industrial production also declined by 8% in the last quarter, by 10% in the first quarter of 2009 and by 9.1 % in the first quarter of 2010. The Greece crisis has a special effect with Greece being one of the leading investors in the RM in almost all sectors, especially in the oil industry, the banking sector and the textile. Because of the difficulties which Greece faced as a result of the debt crisis, textile companies with Greek owners were sometimes closed. These negative tendencies brought about the deceleration of economic growth. Economic growth in 2008 was significantly high by 4.8%, however, RM closed 2009 with a negative sign of economic growth by -0.9%. (nbrm.mk) 2010 brought an improvement so the economic growth rate reached positive figures by 1.8%. (finance.gov.mk) Due to the decline in industrial production and export sector, some workplaces were temporarily closed, the salaries were reduced and the number of layoffs increased in these sectors. As a result unemployment increased from 31.7% to 32.4% in the fourth quarter of 2009 and to 33.5% in the first quarter of 2010. CNN states that Macedonia's economy is among the worst in the world (on the same rate with that of Congo, Sudan and Belarus), with a high rate of unemployment (31.2%, which, according to analysts, is even higher taking the "gray market" into account). (kajgana.com) One of the consequences of the economic crisis is the reduction of the level of remittances which are of special significance for RM. According to the Ministry of Finances, remittances reach about 1 billion euros annually. (finance.gov.mk)

In an attempt to combat the effects of the crisis at the end of December 2008, the Macedonian government decided to initiate the first package of measures intended to protect the real economy from the financial and economic crisis already spread throughout the

world. The value of the package reached 330 million euros. The second package of measures included a great number of infrastructural projects.

In April 2009 the third package of 70 governmental anti-crisis (See: Bexheti, 2010) measures was introduced to mitigate the effects on the Macedonian economy from the global economic crisis. These measures relate to the supplementary budget, credit support for the business through a credit line from the EIB (European Investment Bank) of 100 million Euros and other measures for the easing of countries' export, improving liquidity and reducing business costs. With the rebalance, expenditures from the national budget were reduced 9%, or around 173 million Euros, and the budget deficit kept on the projection of 2,8 percent of GDP in order to maintain macro-economic stability and the exchange rate of the Macedonian Denar).

In March 2010 the government of RM initiated the fourth package of 24 anti-crisis measures. However, according to the data, these measures have not given the expected results. According to the official data of the State Office of Statistics, the average percentage of the poor citizens in the Republic of Macedonia in 2010 was 30.9%, in 2009 it was 31.1%, while in 2008 this percentage was 28.7%. These data show that poverty has increased in the 2009-2010 period. (Pajaziti, et. al. 2013)

2010 International rankings:	
- Doing Business	-32 (+37)
- Employing Workers	-58 (+64)
- Getting Credit	- 43 (-2)
- Protecting Investors	88 (+3)
- Trading Across Borders	- 62 (+1)
- Closing a Business	- 115 (+16)

Resource: Petkovski et.al., 2010: 17.

#### 4. Bi-national polarization of the two-decade destiny of Republic of Macedonia

Nationalism is closely related to the term of nation, contemporaneous understanding of which doesn't goes behind the 18th century. It started and rose up in Europe, together with the modern state. It is defined as the totality of symbols and beliefs that create the feeling of being part of a single political community. As cultural ideal, nationalism relies on the statement that the nation provides an essential form of belonging to the people. On the other hand, as a moral ideal, nationalism is the ethics of heroic sacrifice, that justifies the use of violence to protect one's country from enemies, internal or external. Like a universal phenomenon, it is a product of modern civilization that has effects upon social developments of many countries, very often having heavy consequences to the extent that a thinker once said: "Up to now it hasn't been invented a more destructive weapon as nationalism."

The ethno-nationalism phenomenon is present even in Republic of Macedonia in the form of a state-national nationalism and of a sub-national Albanian nationalism. (Engström 2002: 3-17, cited in Atanasov 2003:304). This is best seen in the two decades of transition, where there has been continual confronting in national-ethnic sizes between two subjects in this country, the Albanians and the Macedonians. A chapter that was thought to be over with the interethnic conflict of 2001 and the Framework Agreement which implied constitutional changes in favor of non-Macedonian ethnic groups and communities has however failed to bring *conclusive peace*. From 2006 and on the country has been living under the turbulences of permanent provocations by Macedonian state nationalism which showed itself in the most refulgent way in the case of the Macedonian Encyclopedia, that of the fertility law, in the case of the castle church in Skopje, antiurban project "Skopje 2014", handball fans in Nish or anywhere else throwing offending anti-Albanian slogans, the troubles in spring 2012 when two Albanians



were executed in Gostivar, children beaten in Skopje buses etc. These are only some of the “products” of policies of new millennium’s excommunicating Macedonian ethno-revivalism, of *nationalist hysteria*, of *momentum hypnosis*, of strongest paradigm in the Balkans from the fall of communism. (Maleski, 2012) The last cases with the concert of the 21-st anniversary of the Independence Day where three Albanian singers were offended in public in the presence of highest state dignitaries (among them President), the discriminating law for the members of military forces of RM by the 2001 conflict, and the Mass during the beginning of 2012-2013 academic year in the state university where members of other religions are studying as well are cases that tell about the social route of this country that is rapidly going towards the social dichotomy, towards creation of two opponent realities, with the potential to break violently apart this society. (Danforth, 1994) The Albanian nationalism is present in official holidays and private ceremonies, through exposing only Albanian flag and not official state one, arbitrary put statues of Albanian national heroes in different places and monolingual (Albanian) traffic-orientation sings in some public areas, nationalist euphoria in stadiums where nationalist songs are executed (“Oh what a Great Albania is...”), in alternative culture elements like graffiti (“Wake up UÇK/Albanian Liberation Army) etc. Albanian extremism either pushes for a more federalized Macedonia or even the unification of all Albanians in only one state. Reflexions of Albanian nationalist spirit are also present in politics. One of the important Albanian politicians declared that »Macedonia is an artificial state«. Some of them “question Macedonian national identity, claiming that it is an »artificially created nation« and are sceptical about the willingness of state institutions to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement”. (Saveski & Sadiku, 2012: 1-8)

But elements of genuine solidarity and coexistence are also present as in the case of pupil Muhamedali Jashari who was killed on April 8, 2011, in the yard outside the Zdravko Cvetkovski high

school in Skopje while saving the life of a ethnic Macedonian young (Darko Jancev) being attacked by three bullies. (balkaninsight.com)

## 5. Ethnic Distance-Gap in Economic Relations: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analyses

One of the important concepts of sociology is *social distance* that means the degree of acceptance or rejection of social intercourse between individuals belonging to diverse racial, ethnic, or class groups. Social distance refers to the distance between different groups of society on the basis of racial, ethnic, sexual, and class differences and so forth. This concept emphasizes the fact that different groups are not closed to one another because of their social differences, and the distance is usually assessed by measurements developed by social psychologists. (Altunsu, 2007: 79)

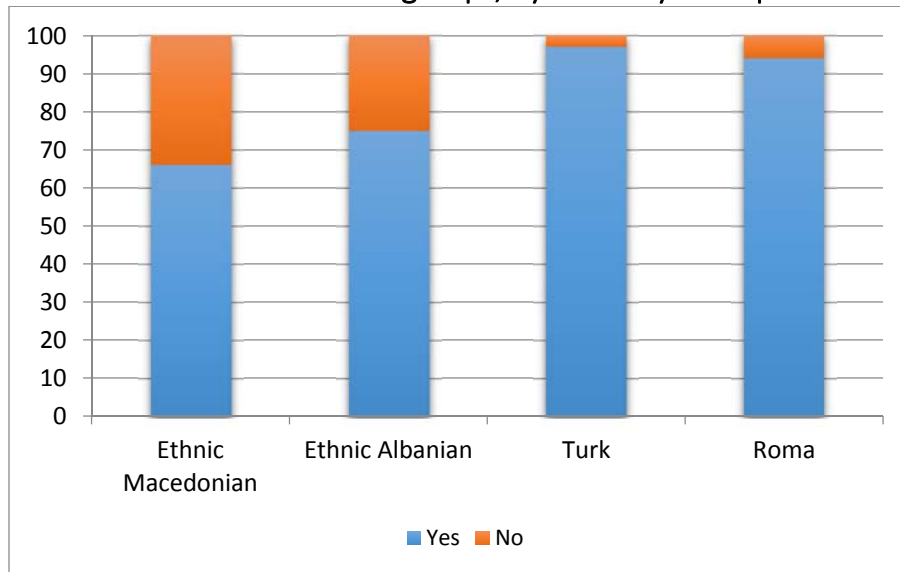
ethnic groups' images about the other groups, their attitudes towards the others, their interactions and the social distance with each other and their willingness to improve the interethnic relations with the other groups.

All the indicators tell us that the state called Macedonia with a heterogeneous multiethnic identity since its establishment is being made to be a national state of the Macedonians, which has generated a divided society, as well as "an ethnization in all spheres of life" (Atanasov, 2003:142), in which in turn nationalism is a "constitutional element of the political action and identity" (Warren, 1993:17). In Macedonia, in many cases, two truths are being promoted, which are utterly different, and continue to live; each one in its own social reality, contributing so little in what we call a plural society. This concept is in contradiction with the multicultural democracy, which is an antithesis of the national state and which requires the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia to denationalize their state and live in a cultural deconstructivism (N. Frazer) or cultural relativism. (See: Pajaziti, 2011)

Today we live in the era of globalization, of global village (McLuhan), in the third millennium, when the consumerist spirit is very strong, when people consume products that are coming from different parts of the globe. Big malls and buying the famous “logos or brands” are the part of the new *modus vivendi*, massconsumerism, as a social and economic order and ideology that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-greater amounts. This spirit is present in Macedonian context, McDonalds, Burger King, Polo Shark, Adidas, Puma, Gant, Ramstore, Carrefour, Skopje City Mall, Veropulos... In our society we can find even shopaholics, people who can't stop spending money at the mall. Skopje is supposed to be planetarised society but the ethnocentric tendencies are also very strong in the capital of Macedonia that is becoming metaphor of *divided city* in two sides of the Vardar river, Macedonian (right side) and Albanian one (left side).

Nationalism as phenomenon is present in citizens relations even in the economic relations or transactions. Based on a research done in 2009 (survey of 1,000 respondents across the country), as below figure shows 1/3 of the ethnic Macedonians and 1/4 of the ethnic Albanians hesitate or refuse to shop in stores owned by members of different ethnic groups. Roma and Turkish minority member according to this are much more openminded in economic relations. Comparing two biggest ethnic groups, we conclude that ethnic Macedonian's community is ore selective in this aspect than Albanian, its representatives select the market or shop from where buy their goods.

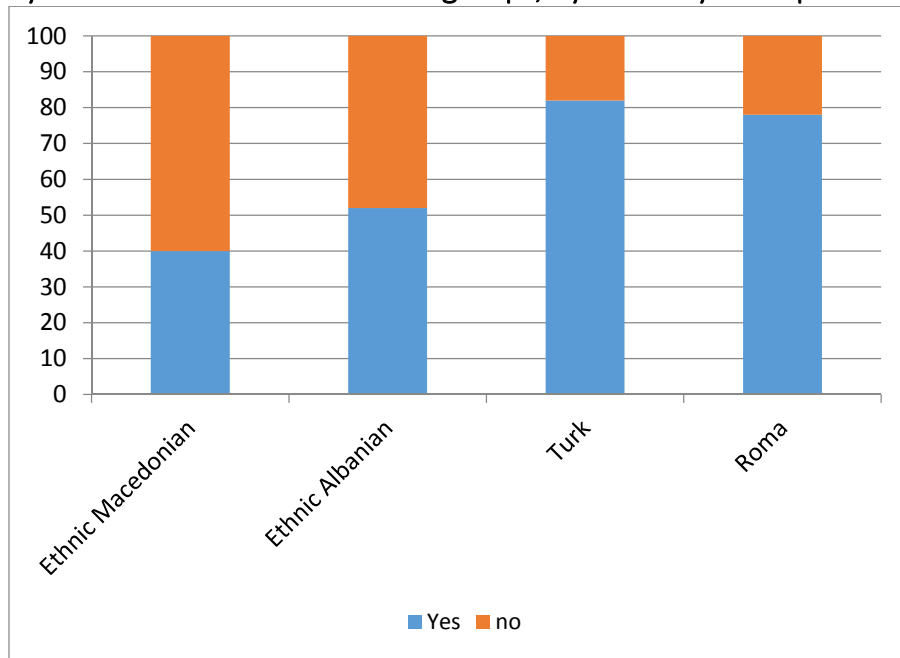
Figure 1: Whether respondent shops in stores owned by members of different ethnic groups, by ethnicity of respondent



*Source: PCA Household Survey September 2009*

About half of the respondents frequently go to restaurants or coffee bars owned by persons from a different ethnic group. The majority of those who do not do so are ethnic Macedonians (see Figure 3.17), live in rural areas, are older women (57%) with primary school education and with an income up to 6,000 denars, whose households barely make ends meet, who have “poor standard, dilapidated housing” (61%) and are from the East or Southeast region.

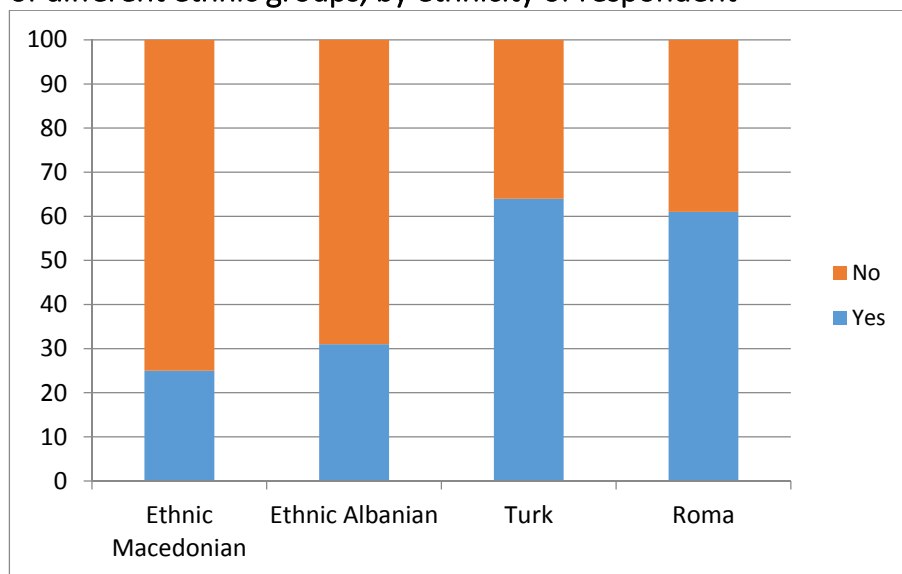
Figure 2: Whether respondent patronises restaurants owned by members of different ethnic groups, by ethnicity of respondent



*Source: PCA Household Survey September 2009*

“The most problematic situation is the relative lack of business relations between members of different ethnic groups. Over two thirds (68%) of respondents do not have business relations with persons from a different ethnic group. The situation regarding ethnic groups is shown in Figure 3. On average, people of Albanian ethnicity are more likely to trade across ethnic groups than those of Macedonian ethnicity.” (PCA, 2010)

Figure 3: Whether respondent does business with members of different ethnic groups, by ethnicity of respondent



*Source: PCA Household Survey September 2009*

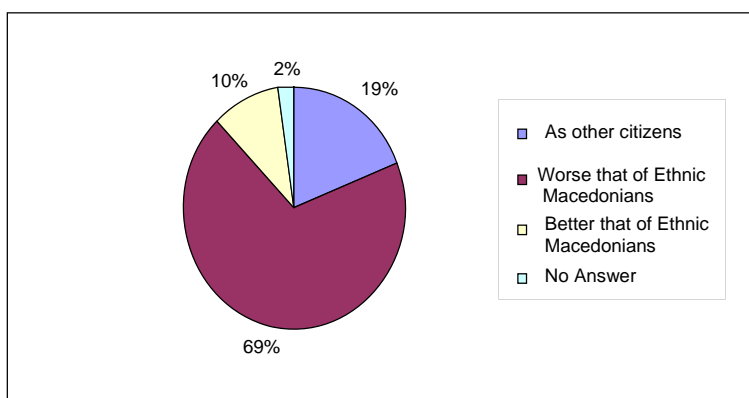
It is not surprising that there are no significant opportunities for business relations in the regions that are ethnically more homogeneous. For example, in the East region, where the majority are ethnic Macedonians, only 15% have business relations with members of other ethnic groups. In Polog, where the majority are Albanians, almost one third (32%) have business relations with members of other ethnic groups. In the Southwest, where the population is ethnically mixed, almost a half of respondents (48%) have business relations with people from another ethnic group.

The profile of those who have business relations with people from another ethnic community consists mainly of men from urban centres; younger people; members of the Turkish nationality; with higher education and income; who have paid jobs and whose families easily make ends meet and who consider they have a good standard of living.

According to a study (survey with 542 respondents) done by the author and two university colleagues (J. Abdullai and E. Aziri) with different social categories in three important regions of

Republic of Macedonia inhabited dominantly by Albanians: Polog (Tetovo and Gostivar), Skopje and Lipkovo-Kumanovo, Macedonia's ethnic Albanians complain about their situation vis-à-vis the majority community, ethnic Macedonians (69 are of the opinion that they live worse than Macedonians). 40.8% of respondents have claimed their collective situation has worsened. (Pajaziti et.al., 2013)

Figure 4. Quality of life of Ethnical Albanians in Macedonia



An important part of this paper is the qualitative research (done in June-July 2014), interviews with shop and company owners, business community, with citizens etc., and the part of results are shown below:

- No 1: *Last times, when face incidents, there is decrease of profit. Macedonians rarely go to Albanian restaurants and shops.*
- No 2: *They come to buy at us when there is no Macedonian marketer. I buy strictly at Albanians. In 1993/94 Macedonian World Congress made a call for boycott Albanians.*
- No 3: *90% of business with the "other". At the time at turbulencies we feel the effect of ... Institutional economic discrimination is present: Economic Chamber of North-Western Macedonia. The QUALITY is most important element in business.*



Photo 1, 2, 3. Grafittis from Gjorçe Petrov after the case of May 19, 2014: Call for boycotting Albanians' economy (Boycott: I do not buy at Albanians!), voice of rationality (My father is Macedonian, my mom is Albanian, whose shop I have to burry! – Photos made by the author June 23, 2014) and the whole Macedonia reality (My nationality is poverty – Photo by author August 22, 2014)

## 6. Conclusions

Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians live in two different economic spaces even though they live in the same society. The thesis that “they stick to their own space thus maintaining it. For example, Macedonians rarely visit Albanian shops, cafeterias, neighborhoods, etc.” (Ralchev, 2001) is verified by latter researches. Thus communication channels between two groups day by day are becoming more narrow. Ethnicity applied as structural criterion leads to dividing social and economic life, that is today's reality. The tendency of permanent ethnic tensions (Skopje Castle, urban buses, Monster 2012, Gjorçe Petrov 2014 where the Albanians' shops, restaurant were burried by the Ethnic Macedonia youn hooligans) deterriorates economic relation between two communities. As we observed from a Skopje neighborhood, extremist messages are given via grafitti (Boycot: Do not buy from the killers!). The country's two main ethnic communities, Macedonians and Albanians, remain stubbornly locked into separate parallel worlds (PCA 2009). Ethnic discourse has become a fundamental driving force of people's



identification. It is obvious that ethnically determined economy is predominant in our society. Citizens are oriented to buy and sell with themselves, with entities that are ethnically colored. The vast majority as a major factor for negative climate and living standards see the political factor. There is a perception that the Albanians have lower quality of life than Macedonians.

## 7. References

- Altunso, L. (2007). *Ethnic identity and social distance in Ankara*. Ankara: Middle East Technical University.
- Bexheti, A. (2010). "Anti-Crisis Measures in the Republic of Macedonia and their Effects – Are they Sufficient?". Bamberg University BERG Working Paper Series on Government and Growth.
- Cowan, J. K. ed. (2000). *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity: The Politics of Identity and Difference*. London: Pluto Press.
- Danforth, L. M. (1994). "Nationalism and Pluralism in the Heart of the Balkans: The Republic of Macedonia", *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, No. 18. 2 (Summer).
- Maleska, M. (2010). "Quality of Life and Socio-Economic Conditions", in William Bartlett (ed.), *People Centred Analysis Report: Quality of Social Services*, Skopje: UNDP & SEEU.
- Maleski, D. "Koengzistencija ili neegzistencija", <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-10-17-maleski-mk.html/11.12.2012>.
- Pajaziti, A. (2011). *Culture and Quality of Life: The Case of Macedonia*. Skopje: Logos-A.
- Pajaziti, A. et. al., (2013). *Quality of life in global crisis era: The reality of Macedonia's Albanians*. Skopje: Institute for International and Political Studies.
- Petkovski V. et.al. (2010). "Improving business environment and labour market in Macedonia by transfer of successful know-how

---

from Slovakia”. *Report on Business Environment and Socio-Economic Situation in The Republic of Macedonia*. Skopje: Slovak Aid.

▪ Ralchev, P. (2001). “Why Ethnicity Matters – The Case of Macedonia”. Paper presented at the International Conference “The Future of the Balkan Region”, held in Bucharest on July 9-10, 2001

▪ Saveski Z. & Sadiku, A. (2012). *The Radical Right in Macedonia*. Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

▪ Shukarov, M. (2011). “Macedonia: Transition – Widely Perceived as Unsuccessful Project - statedominance in social and economic life”. (<http://wbc-inco.net/attach/Transition.pdf>)

▪ Vajdenfeld, V. (1999). *Demokracia dhe ekonomia e tregut në Evropën Lindore*. Tirana: Shtëpia e Librit & Fondacioni Soros.

▪ <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonians-shed-spotlight-on-hero-boy/20.XI.2013>

▪ [www.nbrm.mk/25.09.2012](http://www.nbrm.mk/25.09.2012)

▪ [http://www.finance.gov.mk/files/u1/Bilten\\_12\\_2011\\_mak.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.mk/files/u1/Bilten_12_2011_mak.pdf)

▪ <http://forum.kajgana.com/threads/cnn>

▪ [www.finance.gov.mk](http://www.finance.gov.mk)