

The Ethnic Relations in the Macedonian Society Measured Through the Concept of Affective Social Distance

Asst. Prof. Kire Sharlamanov

Faculty of Communication
International Balkan University
Republic of Macedonia.

Asst. Prof. Aleksandar Jovanoski

Law Faculty, Kicevo
University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bitola
Republic of Macedonia.

Abstract

The research of certain aspects of coexistence of the members of different ethnic groups in contemporary societies implies more comprehensive scientific approach. Very often, the subject to sociologic interest in these socio-cultural surroundings represents reflection of political and legal solutions. However, the interethnic relations are characterized by their own specialty, which is more significant in sociological researches. This work includes an attempt, by using the Bogardus scale, to measure the attractiveness and the social distance between different ethnic groups in the Macedonian society. Important variables in the research of this issue include the characteristic independence of the Republic from the former Yugoslav federation, the internal conflict from 2001 and the Ohrid Framework Agreement – which defined the political and constitutional system of the country. The analysis for locus operandi uses the Macedonian and the Albanian ethnic community as demographic, political and economically most important communities in Republic of Macedonia.

Key words: social distance, ethnic relations, Macedonians, Albanians, Republic of Macedonia.

Introduction

The pattern of behavior of the individuals who belong to different ethnic groups is a precondition for stable social development of the ethnically heterogeneous societies. Republic of Macedonia is an example of a multiethnic society consisting of different ethnic groups who have a tradition of mutual coexistence with historically ambivalent periods of coexistence. However, it seems that there were always manners how to overcome these interethnic tensions, expressed in many different forms from political to interpersonal. The ethnically and culturally heterogeneous character of the Macedonian society is mostly perceptible in the demographic indicators. According to the last census of the population who took place in 2002, in Macedonia there are 1, 297, 981 or 64, 2% Macedonians, 509, 083 or 22,9% Albanians, 77, 595 or 3,9% Turks, 53. 879 or 2, 7% Roma, 35, 939 or 1,8% Serbs and 17, 018 or 0,8 % Bosnians.

Taking into consideration the history of the interethnic relations and the resolving of the interethnic misunderstandings in the theo-political context that Macedonia is part of, the pattern of behaviors in the interethnic relations is a very significant factor for the harmonic social development. Republic of Macedonia is a country which in 1991 declared its independence from former Yugoslavia, where due to improper regulation of interethnic relations and the atavisms from the World War II, few bloody interethnic conflicts happened in the 1990s. Yet, unlike the contemporary Macedonian society, the ethnic distance in former Yugoslavia was low and from the 1960s until 1989, it had a trend of constant fall. For example, immediately before the beginning of the wars in former Yugoslavia in 1989, 71% of Croats showed preference to work together with Serbs and vice versa, 59% of the Serbs showed preference to work together with Croats. Unlike the relations between Serbs and Croats, between Macedonians and Albanians there are certain objective factors that cause the distance. Namely, while Serbs and Croats speak almost the same language, the languages of Macedonians and Albanians have no similarities. Also, while Serbs and Croats are dominantly believers from different denominations within the same religion, Macedonians and Albanians are mostly believers in different religions.

Although in the 1990s Macedonia avoided the interethnic conflicts and declared peaceful independence, at the beginning of this century, Macedonia has experience with a military conflict. More precisely, a military conflict occurred in 2001 between the members of the security forces of the country (the army and the police) and armed paramilitary formations which were created by Albanians. This conflict ended by accomplishment of a political agreement, i.e. the Ohrid framework agreement, which inter alia, foresees an increase of the rights of members of minority communities. This, inter alia, in practice implies strengthening of the political and the self-managing position of Albanians.

The experience from the development of interethnic relations shows that an analysis of the pattern of behaviors between the members of different ethnic groups is required. It is in the interest of sociology, in what manner the individuals who belong to different ethnic groups, initiate interaction, what is the type of relations which develop between the members of the separate ethnic groups etc. Sociologists try to answer to the question, whether the members of two different ethnic groups live with each other in an integrated multiethnic society or *one with the others* in two separated societies. The research process in this text is limited only to the most numerous ethnic groups in R. Macedonia, Macedonians and Albanians. However, the analysis is more profound and reviews the information that the individuals get for the members of the remaining ethnic groups and the religiousness of the same. This problem was indicated as having essential importance in the detection of a certain influence on the pattern of ethnic relations in R. Macedonia.

Hence, in regard to the information which was filtered through the media in the period before the interethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia, it was often assessed that they are “artillery preparation of the site” before the commencement of the real war. These media wars, between the media which were under the control of different ethnic groups, practically created black and white picture about the members of the separate ethnic groups. With the creation of stereotypes and prejudices about the members of the other ethnic communities, they facilitated the war against the members of the ethnic groups who perceived themselves as less valuable (Opacic and Vujadinovic 2005; Malesevic and Uzelac 2004). Religiousness, on the other hand, according to some research, Tasheva (1999) is an important factor which greatly determined the relation toward the members of the remaining ethnic groups in the Republic of Macedonia, in a manner that the members of the other ethnic groups are perceived through the sameness or the difference in religion.

Hence, one can expect that with the increase of religiousness, also the distance between the members of ethnic groups with different religion will increase, but the cohesion between members of different ethnic groups who share the same religion will increase as well. And conversely one can expect that with the reduction of religion, the social difference between the members of different ethnic groups with different religion will also increase, and the cohesion between the members of different ethnic groups with the same religion will reduce. For the research of the pattern of behaviors in the interethnic relations, the concept of social distance was developed in sociology in the beginning of 20th century. Through this concept, with an appropriate methodology, Park (1924) tried to research the relations between the white and the black population in USA. We use the same concept in this research, and we'll apply this concept taking into consideration all previously indicated specifics of the Republic of Macedonia.

Interethnic Relations

(Attractiveness – Distance)

Social distance is the extent of acceptance or refusal of social relations between individuals who belong to different ethnic, racial or social groups. For the purposes of analysis of this important social phenomenon, the concept of *affective social distance* was developed in sociology, which focused on the affective personal relationship of sympathy or antipathy towards the members of the remaining ethnic groups in the society. The attractiveness of the individual ethnic group and the preferences in regard to the remaining ethnic groups could be shortly determined as patriotism and it is something that is characteristic for most individuals. However, it would be naïve to expect that all individuals feed equal extent of affection to the members of their own ethnic group.

The connection of the members of the group with the group itself, has its dynamics and depends on certain factors such as:

- the economic factors – the ethnic group is more attractive when it matches with the status group, that is, when it offers them higher social status to its members. In a situation of extremely difficult economic conditions, the deteriorated economic condition can also increase the attractiveness of the group to its members. Hence, in the first case, the group is attractive to members outside of the group and in this regard it can be expanded and increased, while in the second case, it keeps part of its coherence, but only for the members of its own groups, and in this regard it struggles for existence.
- the political factors – people with weaker establishment in the social niche to which they belong, show greater affection to their own ethnic group. Simultaneously, in a time of fast social changes, people return to their collective (ethnic) identity and show more predisposition to this identity,
- space factors – the affection to the individual ethnic group grows when the mobility in to society is intensified, as well as the penetration of the members of one ethnic group at the territory of another ethnic group,
- social factors – the ethnic group is more attractive when the members of the lower-ranked group penetrate more in the professional positions which are dominated by groups with higher social positions. The fear of competition influences on the increase of attractiveness of the ethnic group Tasheva (1998: 81-82).

Generally speaking, one can say that collective identities enable a feeling of safety and stability of citizens and they return to them, showing great connection to them in periods when their safety has been threatened – regardless of whether such danger has economic, political, territorial or social nature. Simultaneously, as much as they show greater affection to the members of their own ethnic group, individuals also show distance, especially towards the members of a competitive ethnic group, which is perceived as a source of danger. Such distance could be an indicator about certain stereotypes, even discrimination of the people who belong to certain marked ethnic groups. For this reason it is important that if distance exists, it should be identified.

Method

Taking into consideration that our research is based on the examination of the *affective social distance*, a Bogardus scale (1933) has been used for affective social distance which reflects the emotional (affective) reactions of the individuals in regard to the members of the remaining social groups. Namely, a questionnaire has been used in our research, in which the respondents were asked to answer the following question: Specify what kind of connection would you like have with the Macedonians in R.M.? And precise what kind of connection would you like to have with the Albanians in R.M.? The options for an answer of the question were the following:

- to prohibit their entry or stay in R.M.
- to allow them to enter in the country as tourists
- to be citizens of R.M.
- to be my neighbors or to live in the same building with them
- to create a kinship by means of marriage

In order to locate the reasons that could have an impact on social distance, using the acknowledgements from The Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977), we tried to determine the source of information for the members of the remaining ethnic groups and its relation with the social distance which the respondents show in regard to the members of the remaining ethnic groups. The questionnaire was limited to one hundred randomly selected respondents, in three cities from the R. Macedonia – Skopje, the capital of Republic of Macedonia with ethnically mixed, but dominantly Macedonian population; Tetovo, where dominantly Albanian population lives and Strumica, where Macedonian population lives. The questionnaire was answered by 40 respondents in Skopje, 30 respondents in Tetovo and 30 respondents in Strumica. According to the national structure, 56 of the respondents were Macedonians, 40 were Albanians and 4 Turks. In regard to gender structure, 55% of the respondents were men, while 45% were women. Thus, the sample due to its size does not leave space for generalizations on the assumptions for representativeness, but only a right to interpret the positions which were shown by the respondents in one intersection point in the space/time dimension.

Results and Discussion

The Basic Assumptions of the Interethnic Coexistence in R. Macedonia

The review of the table indicates that the attitudes of the respondents Macedonians regarding the relation with the remaining Macedonians, Serbs, Roma and Vlachs are in positive correlation, while the attitudes towards Albanians and Turks are in negative correlation. If a more detailed review is made, certain nuances in attitudes can be determined. Namely, for Macedonian respondents, Serbs are an ethnic group with which they would most willingly get into closer relations, next are Roma, and Vlachs are last. The greatest is the distance which the respondents Macedonians show in regard to Albanians, while the distance which they shown to Turks is smaller.

Table 1: Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation between Different Nationalities

		Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Macedonians in RM	Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Albanians in RM	Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Turks in RM	Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Serbs in RM	Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Roma in RM	Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Vlachs in RM
Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Macedonians in RM	Pearson Correlation	1	-,173)	-,130)	,498**	,394**	,284**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,106	,228	,000	,000	,008
	N	93	89	88	91	87	86
Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Albanians in RM	Pearson Correlation	-,173)	1	,699**	-,337**	,178	-,141)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,106		,000	,001	,104	,202
	N	89	91	87	90	85	84

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The conditions with the Albanians is similar, who show maximal positive correlation towards the members of their own ethnicity, smaller, however still very high positive correlation towards the members of the Turk ethnic community and social distance to Serbs, Macedonians and Vlachs. The social distance is smallest towards Vlachs, bigger towards Macedonians and importantly bigger towards Serbs. Considering the religiousness at the respondents and the dominant religion of Macedonians, Serbs and Vlachs as Orthodox Christians and the dominant religion of the Albanians and Turks who are mostly Muslim, one could assume that the religion has influence on the social distance between the members of certain ethnic groups. Namely, the question “Do you believe in God”, was positively answered by the members of all ethnic groups. See table 2.

Table 2 : Relation Between Nationality and Belief

		Do you believe in God?		Total
		Yes, I’m a believer	I cannot decide	
Nationality of the participants	Macedonian	51	4	55
	Albanian	40	0	40
	Turk	4	0	4
Total		95	4	99

If the social distance is analyzed taking the religion into consideration, one can see that it is especially expressed towards the atheists, while the members of all religious groups answered that they wish to have maximally good relations with the members from the same religious group, which indicates the high level of confessional cohesion.

It seems that the distance occurs naturally because of the fear from the unknown, the unknown culture, religion, tradition etc. This is also shown by the results of the question regarding the source of information of the respondents about the members of the other ethnic communities. Namely, some of the important sources of information include the direct contact, the conversation with friends and media, whereupon it seems that there is difference between Macedonians and Albanians. The answers of the respondents Albanians express greater distance towards Macedonians, the same build their attitudes about the others on the basis of the media information, while Macedonians whose attitudes express greater distance towards Albanians, built their attitudes mostly on the basis of direct contact and conversation with friends.

Table 3: Relations between Type of Contact with other National Groups and Source of Knowledge about other National Groups in Macedonia

Do you have direct contact with the members of the remaining groups in RM?	How do you form your cognitions about the members of the remaining groups in RM?					Total		
	through direct contact with them	through conversation with friends	through conversation with relatives	through media information	in another manner			
YES	Nationality of the respondents	Macedonian	31	7	0	9	47	
		Albanian	18	12	4	0	34	
		Turk	0	2	0	2	4	
	Total		49	21	4	11	85	
NO	Nationality of the respondents	Macedonian		2		4	9	
		Albanian		1		3	5	
	Total			3		7	14	
OTHER	Nationality of the respondents	Albanian	1				1	
	Total		1				1	
Total	Nationality of the respondents	Macedonian	31	9	0	13	3	56
		Albanian	19	13	4	3	1	40
		Turk	0	2	0	2	0	4
	Total		50	24	4	18	4	100

If the ethnic distance of the Albanian respondents towards Macedonians is analyzed, one can notice that regardless of the source of information about the Macedonian, not a single Albanian has shown preference to establish family relationships with Macedonians. This state is an indicator about an exceptionally high level of ethnical distance. Simultaneously, the only Albanian respondent who answered that entrance in the country should be prohibited for Macedonians, obtains his information about Macedonians on the basis of the media Information and he did not have direct contact with members of the Macedonian ethnic community.

Similarly to Albanians, no Macedonian respondent answered that he wishes to establish family relationship with Albanians, which is an indicator of an exceptionally great mutual ethnic distance. The Macedonian respondents who answered that Albanians should be prohibited to enter in the country (the two respondents), obtained their cognitions about Albanians through direct contact with them. 12 respondents Macedonians who wanted Albanians in to enter in R. Macedonia only as tourists, also obtained their cognitions about Albanians though direct contact with them.

Table 4: Relations between Kind of Relations with Macedonians and Source of Information

Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Macedonians in RM?			How do you form your cognitions about the members of the remaining groups in RM?					Total
			through direct contact with them	through conversation with friends	through conversation with relatives	through media information	in another manner	
Their entry or stay in RM should be prohibited	nationality of respondents	Albanian				1		1
	Total					1		1
only as a tourist in RM	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	1					1
	Total	Albanian	1					1
As a citizen of RM	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	5	2	0	6	1	14
		Albanian	8	5	3	1	0	17
Total		Turk	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Total		13	7	3	8	1	32
As a neighbor in the same street	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	2	0	0	1		3
		Albanian	9	7	1	0		17
Total		Turk	0	2	0	1		3
	Total		11	9	1	2		23
To create a kinship by means of marriage	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	21	7		4	2	34
		Albanian	0	0		1	0	1
Total		Turk	21	7		5	2	35
	Total		29	9	0	11	3	52
Total	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	29	9	0	11	3	52
		Albanian	18	12	4	3	0	37
Total		Turk	0	2	0	2	0	4
	Total		47	23	4	16	3	93

The majority of Macedonian respondents, who stated that they obtained their cognitions about Albanians through the media, answered that they would like Albanians to be citizens, but not their neighbors, or to establish family relations with them. This also confirms the already perceived conditions of a relation of distancing.

Table 5: Relations between kind of Relations with Macedonians and Source of Information

Specify what kind of connection would you like to have with Albanians in RM?			How do you form your cognitions about the members of the remaining groups in RM?					Total
			through direct contact with them	through conversation with friends	through conversation with relatives	through media information	in another manner	
Their entry or stay in RM should be prohibited	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	2	2				4
	Total		2	2				4
Only as a tourist in RM	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	12	1		2	2	17
	Total		12	1		2	2	17
As a citizen of RM	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	8	6		6		20
		Albanian	4	2		2		8
Total		Turk	0	1		2		3
	Total		12	9		10		31
As a neighbor in the same street	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	7	0		1	1	9
		Albanian	2	1		0	0	3
Total		Turk	9	1		1	1	12
	Total		9	1		1	1	12
To create a kinship by means of marriage	nationality of respondents	Albanian	12	9	4	1	1	27
	Total		12	9	4	1	1	27
Total	nationality of respondents	Macedonian	29	9	0	9	3	50
		Albanian	18	12	4	3	1	38
Total		Turk	0	1	0	2	0	3
	Total		47	22	4	14	4	91

Conclusive Considerations

Although the data obtained in this research do not satisfy the minimum for representativeness of the analyses, still, the general assessment is that, in regard to the question whether the members of the separate ethnic groups in R. Macedonia live in one or two separated societies, the results show that the citizens of R. Macedonia after all, live in an ethnically divided society with quite expressed ethnic distance, especially between Macedonians and Albanians. The results of this research also show that in the contemporary Macedonian society there is greater ethnic distance than the one which existed between the members of the separate ethnicities in former Yugoslavia, out of which R. Macedonia became independent. The main trend which is present in all analyses in this work, is that the social distance in Republic of Macedonia has ethnic sub-context, while the preferences in regard to companionship and acceptance of the members of the remaining ethnic groups depend on the religious matrix which they share. In this regard, quite expectedly, the analyses have shown that the Orthodox Christians prefer to maintain closer relations with the members of this religion, while the Muslims also prefer to maintain and nurture their relations in their religious circle. The social distance between Macedonians and Albanians is most obvious in the answers where both do not want to establish relative relations with the members of the other ethnic groups.

Albanians express the biggest extent of distance towards Macedonians, although the intergroup cohesion is mostly due to the attitudes towards the members of the other ethnic groups, which are based on information from media, conversations with friends and other forms of indirect informing about Macedonians. A different tendency is noticed at Macedonians, that is, their attitudes in regard to Albanians are mostly based on previously made direct contact with them or in conversations with friends.

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