

# The First World War Monuments and Memorial Heritage in Macedonia<sup>1</sup>

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Topics such as the place and meaning of the events of the First World War are classic readings in Macedonian historiography and are mainly focused on examining the military developments in global frameworks, as well as considering them in local and regional frameworks in the Balkans. However, the increasing popularity of issues regarding the First World War, particularly the resurgence of politics of remembrance and attitudes towards monuments and memorials, happened on the occasion of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the war's end. Thus, public debate intensified in the Republic of Macedonia during the commemoration period, and the number of articles in

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**1** Due to the historical perspective of the analysis that follows, we use the name Macedonia for the country that had used the constitutional name Republic of Macedonia since the declaration of independence in 1991, and was recognised in the UN under the “temporary” name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, until in 2019, after the signing of the Prespa Agreement, it changed its constitutional name to the Republic of North Macedonia.

daily newspapers, online portals, and on local and national television channels increased, especially regarding events on the Macedonian (Salonika) Front and their representation in politics of remembrance and commemorations. The public discourse and media reports were mainly in line with the historiographical narrative of the First World War, which presents ethnic Macedonians “as subjects of violence and inevitable victims of their neighbours and their nationalist policies. Thus, in these papers the prevailing claim is that as a result of the wars, Macedonia was divided between the neighbouring states by artificial borders, and the Macedonian people were exposed to intensified denationalisation and assimilation” (Todorov 2016: 9), a claim supported by history textbooks, shaping the myth of the eternal victim. To this one can add representations of the First World War built into the verbal narratives of history teachers, which we listened to in history classes more than 25 years ago, in which the First World War was rarely referred to as “the Great War” in Macedonia, as was defined in the Western European discourse, but as “fratricidal war.” This naming is due to socio-political circumstances in which the local population in Macedonia, especially the male population, was involved in the two warring sides of the frontline, being brought into a situation where close relatives killed each other. Such an association among people, especially among those living in settlements on the frontline at the time, is also connected with the large number of killed family members, the stories of which are still fresh, providing a reason to strengthen and maintain the already strong representation of Macedonians as victims of the First World War (Stojanov 1969; Andonov and Emšov 1982; Stojčev 2007; Stojanova 2019).

Both of them were mobilised in 1914 by the Serbs and, following Serbian command, were sent to the Serbian-Austro-Hungarian front near the Drina River. Petre was taken prisoner by the Austro-Hungarians and then sent to Bulgaria as a “Macedonian Bulgarian” in one of the Bulgarian divisions on the Salonica Front, in the sector of the Mariovo Mountains, namely, the Sokol Hill. His brother Mitre was in Corfu with the Serbian army, after which his 21st Infantry Regiment was sent to fight against the Bulgarians precisely at the position of the Sokol Hill, from where you can also see the village of Staravina and the entire Mariovo valley. One serving in the Serbian, and the other in the Bulgarian army, for two whole years buried in the trenches of the Sokol Hill, fighting for the interests of others, both Petre and Mitre did not know that they were fifty meters away, separated by a wire barrier (Boseovski 1997).

In a remark by historian Vanče Stojčev, precisely this is cited as the reason why the Macedonians killed in the First World War

remained only in their families' memories, which are slowly fading. And according to author Petar Stavrev, "the reason can be seen in the effort to forget why wars take lives and create tragedies, and if we think about them, perhaps the future will seem darker" (Stavrev 2006).

#### HOW DID UNRECOGNISABLE SOLDIERS ON THE SALONIKA/MACEDONIAN FRONT FROM MACEDONIA BECOME FORGOTTEN?

Apart from armies that came from other parts of Europe, the most numerous population on the front was the local population living in the area along the frontline. After the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, followed by the First World War, as a result of nationalist and big-state ideas in this area, the borders between the created Balkan states began to shift. Depending on the success of the warring parties' military conquests, the local population was mobilised in various armies for their military campaigns, without taking into account their local identities.

Although the First World War started on the Salonika/Macedonian Front, there was an assumption in historical accounts that the front played a smaller role compared to others, such as the Western or the Gallipoli Front. Such an assumption is based on the impression that in terms of military developments, the Salonika/Macedonian Front was quite static, like many other fronts, during all four years, except for the last few months. However, this did not mean that the loss of human life was smaller compared to other fronts.

Depending on the military successes of armies in the Balkans, parts of Macedonia became part of the Kingdom of Serbia (South Serbia), and the population was included in Balkan developments as part of the Serbian army; whereas after the military successes of the Bulgarian army, they became conscripts in the Bulgarian or other armies. Usually, both sides did not recognise the identity of the local people originating from Macedonia, especially of males who were actively involved in the army forces, and often even had a negatory attitude towards it. The attitude of non-recognition due to denial of the population's local identity has been discussed on several occasions by Eric Hobsbawm (2001; 2015), Božidar Jezernik (2002), Ilka Thiessen (2006), and others. Their discussion on the non-recognition of Macedonian identity complements and covers the period before and after the First Balkan War, the Second Balkan War, and the First World War, when the region of Macedonia was divided between the already-formed Balkan

states. In the period after the “Great War,” in 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS) was formed. In their discussions, Hobsbawm and Jezernik recognise these wars as a singular contextual unit due to their temporal closeness, but mostly due to influences of cause and consequence. Macedonian historians have also written about the military events of 1912–1918 as a singular contextual unit, starting from 1969 with the first historiographical work that represents “the most descriptive and still the most referenced historiographical work in Macedonian historiography” (Todorov 2016: 9). This points to the fact that historical texts on this period of war, regardless of their approach, are still in relatively few numbers, and therefore, according to historian Todorov, the historiography of the First World War “is almost absent, if compared to that dedicated to the Second World War” (Todorov 2016: 14).

The epitaph on the tombstone of the soldier Petko Liskovski can serve as confirmation of the contextual whole, where one clearly sees the dynamics of changing armies on the territory of Macedonia, as well as the impact of changes in the war on the dynamics of the local population’s identity construction in their role as soldiers on both sides of the frontline. The tombstone and inscription, placed and written by Petko’s descendants, sheds light on the construction of the local people’s identity discourse, or the myth of the “suffering” victims in the military context. Journalist Žaneta Zdravkovska, in an article on the case of Liskovski Petko, equates this soldier’s fate with the fate of Macedonia:

This is how relatives describe the life of the former suffering soldier from Macedonia, Petko Liskovski, who from 1910 to 1918 was forced to fight in three foreign armies, which were sometimes enemies. Irrefutable proof of this horror, say relatives, is Liskovski’s tombstone next to the church Ascension of Jesus in the Bitola village of Dobruševo. Through it, relatives wanted to depict, in the shortest manner possible, one of the bloodiest periods of Macedonian history. They wrote on the grave: “Here lies Petko Liskovski, a Turkish soldier from 1910 to 1912, a Serbian soldier from 1914 to 1915, and a Bulgarian soldier from 1916 to 1918.” Next to each date, they placed photos of Liskovski from the time when he was a Turkish, Serbian, and Bulgarian soldier.

“He had five sons. The grave was made based on their idea. They found the pictures and arranged them on the monument. The idea was for this to serve as evidence of Macedonia’s history, of how our people were mobilised in foreign armies. There were other soldiers from the village who changed several military uniforms, but their children did not bother to put pictures on the graves so that too would be remembered,” said Metodija Talevski, grandson of the deceased Liskovski. (Zdravkovska 2013)



Fig. 1 and 2: The soldier Liskovski Petko's grave, Dobruševo village

## THE POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE AND MONUMENT NATIONALISM AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE TERRITORY OF MACEDONIA

After the end of the First World War and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a part of Macedonia entered the composition of the newly created kingdom, although not as a recognised separate entity with its own ethnic uniqueness and characteristics. Immediately after the establishment of the new state, a special Decree for the Arrangement and Maintenance of Military Cemeteries and Graves in the Homeland and Abroad was passed in 1919, which, was translated into law in 1922 (“Zakon o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova”) wherein, in accordance with general human values, it was determined that “regardless of the religion of the deceased,” their eternal resting places should be organised and well-maintained. As such, according to the signed agreements, graves of soldiers, prisoners of war, and integrated persons, as well as former citizens of Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria, would also be maintained (Zakon o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova, 3–4).

According to the rhetoric of the newly-created state, military cemeteries and graves were to be maintained “as bright memories of difficult days in the battle for freedom and unification of our tri-named nation,” while priests of the parishes where these cemeteries

were located, were obliged “to perform religious rites in the name of their relatives and the grateful motherland on Saint Vitus day and all Saturdays of Souls” (Zakon o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova, čl.5, 5). The Law in Article 17 also regulated the appointment of priest-guardians, which gave the military cemeteries a sacred character, especially in the region of Macedonia, in localities “in Thessaloniki for cemeteries in the territory of Greece from Thessaloniki to Lerin and Kanal, along the Serbian-Greek border in the localities: Kajmakčalan, Ostrov, Sorovič, along the villages of the Meglen plain, Kožuv, Zborsko, Veternik, Dobro Pole, Sokolec, Vertekop, the cemeteries from Lerin to Čegan as well as the cemeteries in Thessaloniki ... On Kajmakčalan a priest-monk would be appointed as priest-guardian” (Zakon o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova, čl. 17, 9). All priest-guardians were designated by law as civil servants. Since military cemeteries were considered temporary solutions, the law established that as soon as the appropriate conditions were created, the cemeteries would “be concentrated in such a way that in every area where they are located, respectable memorials will be erected in the form of chapels, churches, mausoleums with ossuaries underneath” (Zakon o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova, čl. 20, 10). Thus, through memorial commemoration, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes began to construct the ideals of liberated and united territories, gradually introducing the idea of Yugoslavism, primarily in the spirit of unification of the “tri-named nation,” while erecting special memorials to mark national and ethnic boundaries of the new state. Having no place for the Macedonians, the significance of Old Serbia (Kosovo) and South Serbia (Macedonia) was especially emphasised in the creation of mythical images of Serbdom in these areas, for the purposes of which special cultural and educational policies were planned in state policy. In the period leading up to the Second World War, on the territory of Macedonia, all previously known locations of military cemeteries were constructed and arranged in accordance with the Law on the Arrangement of Our Military Cemeteries, as well as a large number of chapels, memorial ossuaries, and monuments dedicated to the battles of the Balkan Wars and the First World War.

After the establishment of the Kingdom of SCS and the adoption of regulations for the treatment of military cemeteries and graves, some of the deceased soldiers’ remains were relocated to collective cemeteries in larger cities along the frontline: Bitola, Prilep, and Skopje.

## GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN PRILEP

In 1916, German soldiers built a cemetery with 2000 grave sites in Prilep. Fifteen years later, the official German cemetery service converted these war cemeteries into collective cemeteries. Although there were no battles in Prilep, here one also finds a German sanitary tent (field ambulance). Not far from Prilep stretched the Salonika/Macedonian Front.

Soldiers from Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, and Turkey, as well as civilian workers from Serbia and Albania, found their eternal peace here. Heinrich Ebert, the son of the first president of Germany, Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925), is buried in this cemetery. The cemetery was built after the First World War and the Second World War, and for a long time, it was in bad condition. The renovation process started in 2006 and lasted until 2009 (*Kraljevine Srbija i Crna Gora u ratovima 1912–1918*).

## GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN BITOLA

The battles that took place in May 1917 in the vicinity of Bitola between the French armies on one side and the German-Bulgarian armies on the other side resulted in a large number of victims, who were initially buried in the surrounding areas. Later, they were transferred to the newly created military cemeteries. As a result, the German military cemetery in Bitola was built on a hill in the northwestern part of Bitola. “Tottenborg” or “City of the Dead” had been constructed for more than a year, and is the work of the famous German architect Robert Tischler. The project was completed in 1929–30, and construction work began in 1934. The German military cemetery in Bitola holds the remains of 3406 German soldiers who died and were originally buried in the vicinity of Bitola.

## BULGARIAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN THE VILLAGE OF CAPARI, NEAR BITOLA

In the western part of the village of Capari, there is a Bulgarian military cemetery with around 300 soldiers who died in the battles around Crvena Stena on Pelister in May 1917. The cemetery has recently been restored.

## FRENCH MILITARY CEMETERY IN BITOLA

The French military cemetery in Bitola is the largest military cemetery in the Republic of North Macedonia, where more than 13,000 soldiers of the French army killed on the Salonika/Macedonian Front are buried. The cemetery contains 6262 individual graves and around 7000 soldiers buried in a common grave. The cemetery was built following the end of the First World War. The remains of fallen soldiers along the frontline through Mariovo, as well as in parts of Pelagonia and Prespa, were carefully searched for and exhumed. Above each grave, a metal cross with the French tricolour was placed, with basic information about the deceased engraved. Among the Muslim soldiers, an Islamic religious symbol was placed instead of a cross. The French military cemetery in Bitola was opened on September 15, 1923, on the fifth anniversary of the Battle of Dobro Pole. The Battle of Dobro Pole took place from September 15 to 18, 1918, during which the Entente Powers made a breakthrough on the Salonika/Macedonian Front. On the eve of the 100th anniversary since the end of the First World War, the construction and opening of a memorial museum was announced. It is a memorial to the fallen French soldiers and the Macedonian civilian population who suffered during the war. In the memorial museum, the life of the soldiers and the civilian population is shown through photographs of the Manaki brothers, dolls depicting soldiers and their life stories, personal memorabilia, and a relief map depicting the Macedonian front, which is particularly interesting (<https://bitola.info/mk/muzej-francuski-grobishta/>).

## SERBIAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN BITOLA

The Serbian military cemetery in Bitola is located in the southern part of Bitola as an extension of the so-called Bukovo Orthodox Cemetery. Serbian soldiers who died in the Battle of Bitola and soldiers who died in the vicinity of Bitola during the First World War are buried here. Additionally, one can see tombstones of people who died after the end of the war in the cemetery. There are 1321 metal crosses there, and the remains of the deceased are placed in the memorial ossuary under the central cross-shaped monument. The construction of the memorial ossuary began in 1926, based on the project of architect Momir Korunović. The cemetery was reconstructed on several occasions, once in 1980, and most recently in 1998 with the support of institutions of the Republic of Serbia.



## SERBIAN CEMETERY VILLAGE IN SKOČIVIR, MARIOVO

In the autumn of 1916, during the the First World War, the village of Skočivir was on the front line, after which the fighting moved a few kilometres away, becoming an important communication point for the Entente powers. In 1916, the hospital of the Russian princess Alexandra Naryshkina was established in Thessaloniki, and the following year, 1917, the Polish Hospital for Scottish Women also operated near Skočivir. The location of these two hospitals provides an explanation for the large number of graves from the First World War that are noticeable in two places: the first is the courtyard of the church “St. Petka,” and the second is today’s military cemetery by the road passing through the Konjarka picnic area and leading to the Kajmakčalan peak. In addition, there is still a so-called “French road” near the village that once connected Skočivir with today’s abandoned village of Cegel. There once used to be a cable car between these two villages that served to deliver military material. The cemetery covers an area of around 3,500 square metres, and around 500 Serbian soldiers who died in the battle of Kajmakčalan are buried there (Solakovski 1998: 7–12).

## SERBIAN CEMETERY NEAR THE VILLAGE OF DOBROVENI, BITOLA

The Serbian military cemetery in the village of Dobroveni is located within the local cemetery at the entrance of the village. During the First World War, there was a hospital in the village, which is why several hundred soldiers were buried here.

## GREEK MILITARY CEMETERY IN VALANDOVO

The remains of 118 soldiers of the Greek army who died during the fighting on the Salonica/Macedonian Front in September 1918 are buried in the Greek military cemetery near Valandovo.

## FRENCH CEMETERY IN SKOPJE

The First World War French military cemetery in Skopje is located on the hill of the Skopje Fortress. It was built in 1926 and holds the remains of 2930 French soldiers, of which only 930 have names. Among these soldiers, there are quite a few from Morocco and Senegal. The graves are divided into two larger plots with a path leading to the central memorial monument. The monument is reached through a centrally placed gate and a tree-lined stairway, while the two side paths lead to tombs of the same type. From the highest point, there is a pleasant view of Skopje and mountain Vodno. The opposite side is accessed via a large staircase.

The commemoration is done in the spirit of classical styles, characteristic of the eclectic period. The comparison with antiquity is unavoidable.

On a large base, four columns with Ionic capitals are placed, above which we find an architrave, a frieze, and a cornice. A sculptural torch with an eternal flame rises above the roof elements.



Fig.3: View of the central monument in the cemetery (photo by MARH, <https://marh.mk/francuskite-voeni-grobishta-vo-skopje/>)



Fig.4: A close-up view of the central monument in the cemetery (photo by MARH, <https://marh.mk/francuskite-voeni-grobishta-vo-skopje/>)

## BRITISH MILITARY CEMETERY IN SKOPJE

The British military cemetery (124 soldiers) in Skopje is located next to the church of St. Archangel Michael and the student campus of St.

Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. The Skopje British Cemetery was created after the Armistice when burials were gathered together from Kumanovo British Cemetery, Prilep French Military Cemetery, Veles British French Military Cemeteries, and other burial grounds. The great majority of those are buried here were men of the RASC (MT), who died of influenza after the Armistice with Bulgaria. (<https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/54345/skopje-british-cemetery/>).

#### GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN GRADSKO

The German military cemetery in Gradsko belongs to the lesser-known military cemeteries in Macedonia, which have gained relevance in recent years. Located on the outskirts of Gradsko, the cemetery is hard to see, especially due to its neglected state.

#### STRUGGLES IN THE POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE ON THE TERRITORY OF MACEDONIA FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO TODAY

During the Second World War, Macedonia was invaded and occupied by Germany and its allies, during which it was annexed to the Kingdom of Bulgaria and placed under its administration. In the period from 1941 until the liberation of Macedonia by the Communist Party-led partisan movement, the Bulgarian government established its own policies of memories and historical narrative from the position of the official Bulgarian state, denying the official and historiographical discourse of the Serbian state, and of Serbian victims until then. This particularly affected the commemoration of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, especially in terms of the attitude towards memorial heritage, which primarily celebrated Serbian national history. Thus, the Serbian memorial ossuary in Dolno Karaslari, near Veles, was destroyed by the Bulgarian authorities during the Second World War, and after liberation, a meteorological station was built in its place. Today, there is only a sign that there used to be a memorial ossuary on the site (*Kraljevine Srbija i Crna Gora u ratovima 1912–1918*).

In April 2022 in Karaslari, a memorial ossuary dedicated to 12 Muslim soldiers from Algeria who fought in the French army during

the First World War was restored. The memorial ossuary was erected in 1929. The monument was restored in 2022 by the French organisation *Souvenir Française* from Paris, and the French ambassador to the Republic of North Macedonia, representatives of the Macedonian authorities, and the local self-government attended the celebration (*Rekonstruirano spomen obeležjeto na zaginatite francuski vojnici vo selo Karaslari*).

In memory of the Kumanovo battle (October 23–24, 1912), after which the Turkish military forces withdrew and the territory of Macedonia was liberated, in accordance with the politics of remembrance and in honour of the fallen soldiers of 1937, the monumental



Fig. 5: The memorial ossuary devoted to the 12 Algerian Muslim soldiers in the French Army renewed and re-opened in the village of Karaslari in April 2022 (Photos from the portal Duma.mk, <https://duma.mk/region/rekonstruirano-spomen-obelezjeto-na-zaginatite-francuskite-vojnici-vo-selo-karaslari/>).

memorial complex of Zebrnjak was built near Kumanovo, based on the project of architect Momir Korunović (*Kraljevine Srbija i Crna Gora u ratovima 1912–1918*).

In the ossuary, at the foot of the monument, the bones of fallen soldiers from the Battle of Kumanovo, soldiers who died during the First Balkan War, as well as remains of those who died during the First World War were laid. The common memory of all three conflicts, commonly represented as the “wars from 1912 to 1918,” was preserved. In May 1942, the obelisk was blown up by the Bulgarian army.

Following the liberation of Macedonia and the creation of socialist Yugoslavia, the memorial heritage of the First World War and collective memories of the Great War—a fratricidal war in Macedonia—were pushed to the background. Despite strong and impressive images of military actions, the large military presence of the warring sides, participation of the local population in the military, and

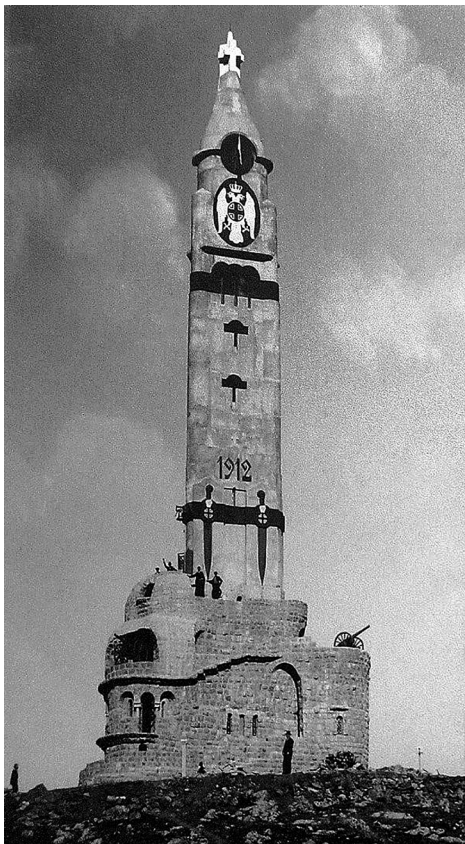


Fig. 6: Zebrnjak, memorial complex, Kumanovo region, in its original form.<sup>2</sup>

background actions along the Salonica/Macedonian Front, public discourse and politics of remembrance were met with a large dose of indifference, with a tendency of complete forgetting these events, as a result of the official animosity towards Macedonians who actively participated in the events yet were never mentioned. More importantly, collective memories were increasingly conceived of in local contexts, in the sense that animosity towards the warring sides was supported as an answer to the Greater Serbian and Greater Bulgarian national concepts, which continued to consider Macedonia and Macedonians as part of their own national territory and remembrance. The maintenance of military cemeteries and other memorials from the wars between 1912 and 1918 in Macedonia was generally incentivised by the

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**2** MARH – Makedonska arhitektura. Zebrnjak, Kumanovo, [https://marh.mk/zebrnjak\\_kumanovo\\_korunovich/](https://marh.mk/zebrnjak_kumanovo_korunovich/)



Fig.7: Zebrnjak, memorial complex, Kumanovo region, today.<sup>3</sup>

states (Serbia, Bulgaria, Germany, France) whose armies were involved in the military actions through their embassies, ministries, and institutions for the protection of cultural monuments (*Ambasada Republike Srbije, Skoplje*).

With the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991 and the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, most military cemeteries and other monuments dedicated to the First World War were left in a devastated and neglected state, clearly showing that official Macedonian politics at that time did not yet have an interest in their maintenance. The practice of ignoring remembrance continued by “Macedonian society and its political and intellectual elites, who were mainly guided by a national approach to remembering the past, [and] never erected a monument or a memorial centre to commemorate this event” (Todorov 2016: 17).

And after the creation of the Macedonian state of Ilinden in Prohor Pčinjski, they were left to celebrate and glorify the states that forced them to fight for them, to represent them as their warriors. No

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**3** Photographs by Filip Mihajlov, MARH – Macedonian Architecture. Zebrnjak, Kumanovo. [https://marh.mk/zebrnjak\\_kumanovo\\_korunovich/](https://marh.mk/zebrnjak_kumanovo_korunovich/)

one has yet desired or had the courage to tell them that these were our people, and not Bulgarians, Serbs, or Greeks, as was represented by the propaganda at the time. Those people deserve much more respect from the Macedonian state, their grandchildren and grand-grandchildren should know of the military suffering they survived. Almost a century has passed since that hell, their memories are fading, and those people of ours should not be forgotten, erased from our memory. If nothing else, a monument should be erected to them that testifies and warns of that terrible time so that it never happens again (Cvetanovski 2010).

Thirty years after Macedonia's independence, a period of redefining memories of the First World War began after the year 2000, so interest in the suffering of the local population, and especially fallen soldiers from Macedonia, began to be profiled through ideas for the construction of monuments or memorial landmarks where the Macedonian ethnicity of the deceased would be clearly marked. In the context of growing interest from European countries that participated in the First World War and events to mark the 100th anniversary of its end, a number of military historians started to propose erecting a monument in honour of fallen Macedonian soldiers in the war. Historian Vanče Stojčev, a professor at the Military Academy in Skopje and the Faculty of Law in Štip, suggested such an idea publicly in 2006, claiming that:

The only way to repay them is for the state to erect a monument in their honour, on which it would be written that they fought in various armies, that they were put in positions where they had to shoot at one another and die for the interests of others. (Cvetanovski 2010)

Such ideas, which aim to legitimise the ethnic status of deceased Macedonian soldiers, contribute to the reactivation of the animosity in memories and memorial nationalism related to the wars in the Balkans, including the First World War. On September 20, 2016, several high-ranking Bulgarian officers, accompanied by Greek officers, erected a plaque on Kajmakčalan, commemorating Bulgarian soldiers without permission from Macedonian authorities. According to their explanation, the reason for not requesting permission was the fact that until then all similar requests for placing monuments dedicated to Bulgarian soldiers were left without a response from Macedonian authorities. Two days later, on September 22, Bulgaria's Independence Day, journalist Milenko Nedelkovski published photographs of himself breaking the plaque with a hammer. The incident gained widespread media attention (Peev 2022).

In the context of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War, a team from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments from Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, conducted a field visit and provided a report on the inspection and conditions of the memorial complex in Kajmakčalan. The report includes another incident, indicating that memorial violence and conflicting memories of the First World War are still present, with Macedonia still being a battlefield for memorial symbols. The report states:

On the cross before the chapel, the chapel fence, and lighting rod base, there are visible remnants of a painted Bulgarian flag. At the end of August, an unidentified individual spray-painted the Bulgarian flag on these places. As a result of photographs from the scenes spreading on social media networks, over the next several days (if not the very next day) unidentified individuals painted over the flag using white paint. (Lajbenšperger)

By the end of 2021, Bulgarian president Rumen Radev, in the context of an escalating dispute between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia related to the negation of Macedonian ethnic identity, the Macedonian language, and Macedonian history,



Fig. 8: A Bulgarian delegation on Kajmakčalan, 2016 (“Pretstavnici na bugarskata i na grčkata armija se poklonija na Kajmakčalan“).





Fig. 9: Serbians on Kajmakčalan.



Fig. 10: A plaque placed by Macedonian activists on Kajmakčalan.

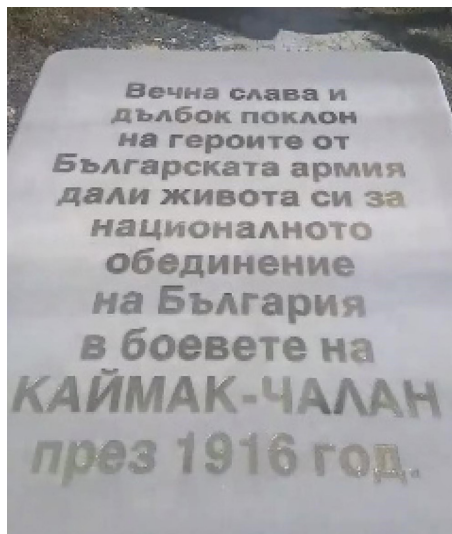


Fig. 11: A plaque, which Bulgarian citizens wanted to be placed on Kajmakčalan (“Dinko vraten vo Bugarija zaedno so spomen pločata koja sakaše da ja postavi na Kajmakčalan”).



Fig. 12: Journalist Milenko Nedelkovski breaking the plaque placed secretly by Bulgarian citizens on Kajmakčalan (“Kleveti, kritiki i zakani za novinarot Milenko po uništenata spomen ploča na Kajmakčalan”).

publicly condemned the “desecration of Bulgarian military cemeteries in North Macedonia” (Blaževska 2021), stating that he had asked the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria to investigate the case, without providing any explanation for the potential reasons behind such an act. As a result, the issue of memorials in Macedonia was associated in the public, both domestic and foreign, with the apparent ignorant and careless attitudes towards all things related to Bulgarian history. Regarding the memorial monument for the

193 Bulgarian soldiers based near the Gradsko-Prilep expressway route, in the vicinity of Kavadarci, for which Bulgarian media (Tomčev2022) published accusations against Macedonia, the Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Culture announced:

First, the main monument does not fall under any regime of protection for a monument of cultural heritage, but despite that is in good condition, without damage; second, the monument is surrounded by agricultural that which is tended to by circling the site; third, the monument is outside the planned zone for construction and is not affected by any kinds of construction activities; and fourth, this monument does not include any cemeteries or graves, while based on the field visit, it is unknown whether its state had been different in the past. Hundred metres from the monument, there is another smaller landmark of unknown memorialisation. (MNR 2021)

#### MACEDONIAN MEMORIALS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Despite numerous initiatives coming from individuals and citizen's associations, the state has not yet constructed or accepted any memorial landmark dedicated to the First World War as a state monument. The state's memorial indifference in terms of articulating collective memories of the past and wars from 1912 to 1918 in Macedonia was overshadowed by the monument "boom" of the "Skopje 2014" project that took place in the city of Skopje. This national project in the sphere of memorial nationalism indicates that the intention was to skip the wartime period of 1912–1918 and engage in the construction of a national stratigraphy, aiming to strengthen the ancient layer through numerous "antiquisation" projects of monuments in that style.

Nevertheless, individual memorial projects commemorating the end of the First World War were not entirely absent. One such memorial landmark was discovered in the village Brod, in the vicinity of Bitola. The monument, as is written in Macedonian, French, Serbian, English, German, and Bulgarian, is dedicated: "To the fallen soldiers and civilians on the Macedonian (Salonika) Front, commemorating 100 years of the end of the First World War (1914–1918)." (*Vo Brod otkrien spomenik za žrtvite od Prvata svetska vojna*).

Near the village of Crnobuki in Bitola, right next to the monastery St. Atanas, a memorial cross is raised in honour of the Macedonian population that died during the Balkan Wars and the First World War. The plaque below the memorial cross includes the text: This memorial cross is dedicated to all known and unknown Macedonian soldiers



Fig. 13: Memorial to fallen soldiers and civilians of the First World War (Vo Brod otkrien spomenik za žrtvite od Prvata svetska vojna).

forcefully mobilised by Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, and to the suffering civilian population in the Balkan Wars 1912–1913 and the First World War 1914–1918. May their memory be eternal. From the Macedonian people, November 8, 2015, Crnobuki village. (Spomen krst na makedonskoto naselenie zaginato vo Balkanskite vojni i Prvata svetska vojna vo blizina na selo Crnobuki, opština Bitola).

#### VICTORY–100 YEARS LATER MONUMENT IN GRADEŠNICA VILLAGE, MARIOVO

The monument Victory–100 Years Later was placed in the village of Gradešnica, Mariovo region in 2019. The village of Gradešnica is located in the Mariovo region, which was on the very frontlines during the Salonika/Macedonian Front. During the First World War it was set on fire twice, and the population was displaced several times. The author of the monument is artist and sculptor Zlatko Bojkovski, born in the village of Gradešnica, having grown up with stories of the First World War from his grandparents.

“I am sorry that there is no monument in our country dedicated to the First World War. This monument is dedicated to the victims. We cannot glorify this war because there were horrible consequences here, however, we must acknowledge the victims, as our land has given many of them,” Bojkovski stated. (M. M. 2019)

The monument (a sculpture of a horse with a raised hoof) weighs around two tons and is constructed from shrapnel, bombs, helmets, and other remnants of the First World War, and honours *all victims* of the war.

“In Gradešnica there still are remnants of the war that took place a century ago. But, because this is a larger monument of around two tons, I ventured through Kajmakčalan mountain and collected the pieces one by one. It is hard to find them now. They are dangerous, there are some unexploded grenades in the border strip, so I carefully collected the ones that exploded. Then I worked on thoughtfully putting together every piece of shrapnel, grenade, bombs, helmet, creating a horse that symbolises life above death,” says Bojkovski. (Zdravkovska 2019)



Fig. 14 and 15: The monument Victory–100 Years Later in the village of Gradešnica, Mariovo region, by sculptor Zlatko Bojkovski (Monument “Victory - 100 Years Later”, Gradešnica village, Mariovo region”; М.М. “Споменик за жртвите од Првата светска војна откриен во Градешница,” Нова Македонија [Skopje], online publication, 5.8.2019, accessed on 05.05.2022).

## CONCLUSION

The increasing attention to questions relating to the First World War, especially the politics of remembrance and attitudes toward monuments and memorial landmark, began with the 100th anniversary of the war's end. In that period, an intense public and media debate was taking place in the Republic of Macedonia, especially in regard to events on the Macedonian (Salonica) Front and their representation in politics of remembrance and commemorations. In these debates, a special accent was placed on the attitudes of warring sides toward the local population of Macedonia, which was mobilised in different armies without taking into account their local identities.

After the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and the adoption of the decree, later law,<sup>4</sup> on the treatment of military cemeteries and graves dating to the First World War, some of the remains of the deceased soldiers were transferred to collective cemeteries in larger cities on the frontline, including Bitola, Prilep, and Skopje.

After the liberation of Macedonia and the creation of socialist Yugoslavia, the First World War memorial heritage and collective memories of the Great War, referred to in Macedonia as the fratricidal war, were relegated to the background. Collective memories were increasingly conceived of in a local context, in the sense that animosity against the warring sides was supported as a response to the Greater Serbian and Greater Bulgarian national conceptions, which continued to consider Macedonia and the Macedonians as part of their national territory and remembrance.

Around thirty years after the independence of Macedonia, a period of redefining remembrance of the First World War began after the year 2000, and interest in the suffering of the local population and particularly the fallen soldiers from Macedonia began to be profiled through ideas for the construction of memorials and memorial landmarks where the Macedonian ethnic identity of the deceased would clearly be marked.

The memorial indifference of the state in terms of articulating collective memories of the past and the 1912–1918 wars were overshadowed by the monument “boom” happening in Skopje as part of the “Skopje 2014” project.

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**4** Law regarding military cemeteries of soldiers of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, as well as cemeteries of missing soldiers and sailors, prisoners of war, and interned persons of German, Austria-Hungarian, and Bulgarian armies buried on the territory of KSCS.

Nevertheless, individual monument projects commemorating the end of the First World War were not entirely absent.

The memorial monument Victory–100 Years Later was placed in the village of Gradešnica, Mariovo region, in 2019. The village of Gradešnica is located on the frontline and during the First World War was set on fire two times, and the population displaced several times. The monument (a sculpture of a horse with a raised hoof) weighs around two tons and is constructed using shrapnel, bombs, helmets, and other the First World War remnants, and is dedicated to *all victims* of the war.

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Zakon o uredjenju naših vojničkih groblja u otadzbini i na strain, kao i groblja iyginulih vojnika i mornara, ratnih zarobljenika i interniranih lica, državljana: Njemačke, Austrije, Ugarske i Bugarske sahranjeni na našoj državnoj teritoriji, Državna Štamparija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, Beograd, 1922, 1–13. Accessed on 09.05.2022. <https://www.uzzpro.gov.rs/doc/biblioteka/digitalna-biblioteka/1922-zakon-o-uredjenju-vojničkih-grobalja.pdf>

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