

Media Framing of “Ultimatum, No Thanks” Protests in North Macedonia: Analyzing Nationalist Confrontation and Ethnic Solidarity Frames

Kuzey Makedonya’da “Ültilatom, Hayır Teşekkürler” Protestolarının Medya Çerçevelemesi: Milliyetçi Çatışma ve Etnik Dayanışma Çerçevelerinin Analizi

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Abstract

This article examines the media framing of the demonstrations in North Macedonia’s capital against the French proposal aimed at resolving the country’s dispute with Bulgaria and initiating EU accession talks. The protests, held from July 2, 2022 to July 16, 2022 under the slogan “Ultimatum, No Thanks,” reflected widespread opposition to the proposal, which many saw as detrimental to Macedonian national interests. Through a qualitative analysis of media coverage, specifically focusing on online media outlets, the study explores how different frames, such as Nationalist Confrontation and Ethnic Solidarity, shaped public discourse and perceptions of the protests. The government’s portrayal of the proposal as protecting the Macedonian language and identity contrasts sharply with the opposition’s view of it as leading to the ‘Bulgarization’ of the nation. This research fills a crucial gap in understanding the interplay between identity politics, diplomatic negotiations, and media representation in times of high political tension. The issue remains highly relevant today as it continues to be a significant obstacle to North Macedonia’s EU accession. The findings suggest that media framing significantly influences public opinion and political outcomes. Furthermore, the study highlights the broader implications for interethnic relations in the Western Balkans and the ongoing EU accession processes.

Keywords: Media Framing, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, EU Accession, Western Balkans

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Öz

Bu makale, Kuzey Makedonya'nın başkentinde, ülkenin Bulgaristan'la olan anlaşmazlığını çözmeyi ve AB katılım müzakerelerini başlatmayı amaçlayan Fransız önerisine karşı düzenlenen gösterilerin medya çerçevesini incelemektedir. "Ültime, Hayır Teşekkürler" sloganı altında 2 Temmuz 2022'den 16 Temmuz 2022'ye kadar düzenlenen protestolar, birçok kişinin Makedonya'nın ulusal çıkarlarına zarar verdiğini düşündüğü teklife karşı yaygın muhalefeti yansıtmıştır. Özellikle internet gazetelerine odaklanarak medyada yer alan haberlerin nitel bir analizini yapan bu çalışma, Milliyetçi Çatışma ve Etnik Dayanışma gibi farklı çerçevelerin kamu söylemini ve protestolara ilişkin algıları nasıl şekillendirdiğini araştırmaktadır. Hükümetin öneriyi Makedon dilini ve kimliğini korumak olarak tanımlaması, muhalefetin öneriyi ulusun 'Bulgarlaşmasına' yol açacağı yönündeki görüşüyle keskin bir tezat oluşturmuştur. Bu araştırma, siyasi gerilimin yüksek olduğu dönemlerde kimlik politikaları, diplomatik müzakereler ve medya temsili arasındaki etkileşimi anlamamızda önemli bir boşluğu doldurmaktadır. Konu, Kuzey Makedonya'nın AB üyeliği önünde önemli bir engel olmaya devam ettiği için bugün de oldukça güncelliğini korumaktadır. Bulgarlar, medya çerçevelemesinin kamuoyunu ve siyasi sonuçları önemli ölçüde etkilediğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca çalışma, Batı Balkanlar'daki etnik gruplar arası ilişkiler ve devam eden AB katılım süreçleri için daha geniş kapsamlı çıkarımların altını çizmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medya Çerçevelemesi, Kuzey Makedonya, Bulgaristan, AB Üyeliği, Batı Balkanlar

Introduction

This study examines the framing tactics used by media outlets in North Macedonia during the protests against the French proposal to resolve the dispute with Bulgaria and initiate EU accession talks. Under the slogan "Ultimatum – No Thanks," these protests highlight the interplay between media representation, public perception, and political discourse. Understanding these dynamics is crucial as they show how media framing shapes public opinion and political outcomes, contributing to political communication.

To understand the current events, we need to consider the historical context that has influenced them. The Bulgarian assertions about Macedonian ethnolinguistic identity have resulted in complex relations in the southern Balkans. The region, which includes parts of Greece, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia, is home to a people whose identity remains contentious. Bulgaria's veto against North Macedonia's EU accession negotiations in December 2020 and June 2021 stems from a long-standing historical dispute that has persisted throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Bulgaria's stance on the Macedonian question reflects a complex interplay of regional politics and historical narratives. International observers often link Bulgaria's current policy to rising nationalism and internal political turmoil, viewing the "Macedonian Question" as a tool for political leverage. As Brunnbauer (2002, p. 723) explains, Bulgaria's demands led to a nationalist counter-reaction in North Macedonia while at the same time complicating the work of a joint expert commission on shared history established in 2017. The connection between nationalism and historical narratives has shaped Bulgaria's veto on North Macedonia's EU accession, marked by demands for a Bulgarian perspective on their shared history.

The official name change from the Republic of Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia on February 12, 2019, further complicated the socio-political landscape. Social media has become a platform for expressing dissatisfaction over this renaming, reflecting deeper identity conflicts. The dynamics surrounding these topics underscore the media’s critical role in shaping public sentiment during political negotiations, as seen in the approval of the Prespa Agreement.

The protests under the slogan “Ultimatum – No Thanks” have reignited discussions about EU integration, nationalist conflict, and ethnic unity amid political maneuvering. These protests signify significant opposition to the French plan to resolve the dispute with Bulgaria and initiate EU negotiations. The protests center on opposition accusations that the plan embodies the “Bulgarization” of the country and that the government has not protected the Macedonian language and identity.

Public perception of these protests is powerfully shaped by media portrayal. This study examines frameworks such as nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and government secrecy through a qualitative analysis of media coverage from online outlets. By analyzing how key figures, including the President of the European Council, frame complex issues around the proposal, we aim to deepen our understanding of identity politics, diplomatic negotiations, and media representation in the region. As tensions persist and dialogue progresses, understanding the impact on interethnic relations in the Western Balkans and EU accession processes is vital. This study highlights the media’s influential role in shaping public opinion and political outcomes during periods of heightened political tension, aiming to explore the subtleties of the conflict between Bulgaria and North Macedonia and identify potential paths for positive communication and peacemaking.

Bulgaria-North Macedonia Relations and Bulgaria’s Persistent Veto on North Macedonian EU Accession

The “Macedonian Question” emerged in the late 19th century as the Ottoman Empire weakened and newly independent states like Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria competed over territories in the Balkans. This region, where various ethnic and religious groups coexisted, gained strategic importance, and Macedonian identity has been central to international debate ever since. At the 1878 Berlin Conference, major powers demanded that the Ottoman administration implement reforms in Macedonia, overseen by foreign inspectors, marking the official beginning of the “Macedonian Question” (Adanır, 1996, pp. 122-123). As a response, Greece and Serbia increased their military presence in the region, with support from armed groups backed by Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbs, which led to intense conflict, especially near Thessaloniki and Bitola (Hacısalihoglu, 2008, p. 46). Macedonia subsequently became a focal point during the First and Second Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and both world wars. Following World War II, Macedonian territory was divided into three states: Aegean Macedonia to Greece, Pirin Macedonia to Bulgaria, and Vardar Macedonia to Yugoslavia (Rossos, 1991, p. 282). During the communist era, Yugoslav leader Tito and Bulgarian leader Dimitrov discussed a federation, with Yugoslavia seeking to include Pirin Macedonia; Bulgaria, however, postponed any move until a federation was formed. This led to significant ethnic and cultural shifts in the region. A policy of “Macedonization” saw 63% of Pirin Macedonia’s population registered

as Macedonian in 1946, though it was perceived as forced, causing local resentment (Georgieva & Konechni, 1998, p. 90). Later, Yugoslavia's dissolution and Macedonia's 1991 independence reignited old tensions. Bulgaria was the first to recognize Macedonia on January 15, 1992, to normalize relations; however, Greece contested Macedonia's name and symbols, imposing an embargo that severely affected its economy, ultimately leading to Macedonia's renaming as the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in a 1995 temporary agreement. Greece's vetoes on Macedonia's NATO and EU accession in 2008 and 2012 further delayed its international integration.

In 2017, Macedonia's Social Democrats signed the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation with Bulgaria to enhance regional dialogue. The Macedonian Orthodox Church also requested recognition from the Bulgarian Patriarch, signaling a shift in interchurch relations (Pieńkowski, 2018, p. 2). In 2018, the Prespa Agreement with Greece changed the country's name to North Macedonia, and other Greek demands were met. These agreements included parallel mechanisms between Bulgaria and Greece and were essential to resolving long-standing regional disputes. However, in 2020, Bulgaria vetoed North Macedonia's EU accession negotiations, driven by nationalist pressures, thereby rekindling tensions. Bulgaria's 2022 conditions for EU accession included constitutional guarantees for Macedonian Bulgarians, non-recognition of the "Macedonian language," and adherence to the 2017 Friendship Treaty (Narodno Sabranie na Republika Balgariya, 2022). These circumstances ignited considerable debate and protests in North Macedonia. On July 16, the Assembly of North Macedonia approved the French proposal, allowing negotiations with the EU to begin, though Bulgaria's veto remains a barrier to North Macedonia's EU path.

Based on historical and cultural disputes, Bulgaria's veto against North Macedonia's EU accession hinders EU expansion into the Western Balkans. Bulgarian nationalists have historically considered Macedonia to be part of their land. However, disputes regarding language, historical accounts, and minority rights complicate the work of joint commissions tackling these matters (Maglajlija, 2021). Bulgaria's stance on the Macedonian language as a dialect of Bulgarian complicates diplomacy. Although North Macedonia has met EU standards, Bulgarian opposition jeopardizes EU-Balkan relations and regional stability (Portal, 2024). The 2017 Treaty of Friendship was intended to promote bilateral cooperation; however, Djolai and Djordjevic (2021) noted that Bulgaria politicized the agreement, undermining the Joint Commission's work by imposing its own historical interpretations. Article 11(6) of the treaty, which calls for proactive measures against harmful propaganda, has been compromised by Bulgarian actions, with Bulgaria's EU membership leveraged to pressure North Macedonia (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2017). Bulgaria's handling of this issue raises questions about minority rights and the legitimacy of the European Court of Human Rights, threatening regional stability. Bulgaria's use of its veto power undermines diplomatic efforts and jeopardizes long-term stability, prosperity, and democratic progress in the Western Balkans.

Methodology: Framing Theory in Media and Political Communication

Framing theory is essential for unpacking the intricate relationship between public perception and media discourse. Drawing inspiration from Goffman's (1986) pioneering work, this theory

explains how media outlets present issues that highlight specific viewpoints while side-lining others. By framing stories, journalists craft cognitive structures that effectively shape how audiences perceive and react to socio-political issues (Langacker, 1990; Entman, 1993). In simpler terms, framing involves persistent patterns of cognition and presentation focusing on specific information while downplaying others. Symbol handlers routinely organize this discourse, whether it's through written or visual means (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). According to Neuman et al. (as cited in Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, pp. 94-95), frames act as conceptual tools that help individuals and media convey, interpret, and evaluate information. Additionally, Entman (1993, p. 53) points out that framing involves highlighting particular aspects of the world in communication texts to support specific definitions of problems, interpretations of causes, moral evaluations, or suggested solutions.

The influence of mainstream media on public perceptions of important societal issues is significant. Journalists make strategic choices in selecting and presenting information, which must be understood in broader institutional and sociocultural contexts. Richardson (2007, pp. 34–35) stresses that these decisions are deeply embedded in various linguistic and material contexts. How language is used carries political weight and can shape specific goals and modes of thinking. For instance, Kopytowska's (2020, p. 4) Media Proximization Approach sheds light on how certain realities—like political events or social issues—are brought closer to the audience, impacting how they perceive and judge these matters, particularly in an era dominated by online media.

In political communication, intentionally using frames to push agendas and influence public opinion is crucial. Lakoff (2004, p. 15) underscores how media and politicians use framing to sway public sentiment, often employing strategies centered around gain and loss to appeal persuasively. Fear tactics are frequently utilized to influence audiences by stressing dire consequences (Neuman & Levi, 2003). According to Kopytowska and Chilton (2018), such fear appeals trigger physiological reactions that can alter individuals' decisions. Furthermore, protest groups actively frame and negotiate their messages to make them engaging and coherent. Benford and Snow (2000) discuss techniques used by protest movements, such as diagnostic framing, which identifies issues; prognosis framing, which proposes solutions; and motivational framing, which justifies action. However, the media often leans towards negative framing that highlights violence and conflict, overshadowing the core concerns of demonstrators (Mourão, 2019).

The recent protests in North Macedonia provide a pertinent case study for analyzing how political discourse is framed. The French proposal regarding the country's EU accession marked a critical moment, complicating an already challenging path toward membership, previously hindered by Bulgaria's objections to North Macedonia's application. This proposal introduced a series of complex demands, one of which controversially required North Macedonia to amend its constitution to acknowledge ethnic Bulgarians (Vangelov, 2023, p. 161). Following the announcement, protests erupted spontaneously in late June 2022, with citizens voicing their concerns over perceived threats to national interests (Kocevski & Nofitoska, 2022, p. 20). From July 2 to July 16, Skopje became a focal point for demonstrations under the slogan 'Ultimatum—No Thanks,' primarily led by the VMRO-DPMNE party alongside various opposition factions. Over 10,000 individuals nationwide, including

members of the diaspora, participated in these protests, rallying against what they perceived as threats to Macedonian identity and sovereignty.

While exact attendance numbers were hard to pinpoint, estimates suggested a significant turnout, indicating a shift in public sentiment. One slogan echoed throughout the protests: “Macedonia is all we have, and we will never give it up under any conditions.” This powerful declaration reflected the protestors’ dedication to safeguarding their national interests from the perceived dangers of the French proposal (Tumanovska, 2022). Although the protests remained predominantly peaceful, they were not without incidents of violence, resulting in arrests and injuries on both sides. Ultimately, despite extensive media coverage, the demonstrations did not sway the government’s decision to accept the French proposal; however, they undeniably influenced the current political climate in North Macedonia.

Since 2010, the role of media in political communication has become increasingly pivotal. In recent years, media has emerged as a potent platform for disseminating carefully curated narratives, or frames, that simplify the flow of information for both government and the public. This simplification is vital for educating people about ongoing events and shaping public interest. The media can serve as a tool for government authorities or independent journalists, selectively presenting structured material to manage public perceptions of political matters. The importance of media framing in political communication is underscored by several key phenomena (Schaffner & Sellers, 2009). One is the “limited awareness” phenomenon, where individuals overlook essential information in favor of readily available, though less meaningful, data, leading to a narrow focus rather than a balanced understanding of events. Another is the “sufficient rationality” and “rational ignorance” phenomena, which describe how overwhelmed by information people are and how they often limit their engagement, resulting in an incomplete or distorted grasp of what is happening.

Framing is fundamentally about selecting and emphasizing specific elements of a perceived reality within written or spoken text to support a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993, pp. 52-53). This process often prioritizes the frame itself over objectivity and comprehensive accuracy, potentially skewing the facts presented. A media frame can take various forms—written, spoken, graphical, or visual—and contextualizes topics like events or issues within a message aimed at an audience (D’Angelo, 2017, p. 1). The communicator can be an individual or group within an official organization, such as media personnel, while the audience may include individuals or groups. Mediators play a crucial role in this process, encompassing production and distribution channels, such as print, film, traditional media, online platforms, and applications. Contextualization involves the communicator’s deliberate efforts to frame a topic, influenced by various factors, including social norms, organizational constraints, and the political leanings of journalists (Kazakov, 2014, p. 88).

Scheufele (1999, pp. 114-117) articulated that framing involves interconnected stages shaping media narratives. The initial stage, Frame Building, focuses on how factors within the media landscape, like journalists’ characteristics and organizational contexts, shape content creation. This includes the personal beliefs of journalists and the political slant of their outlets, alongside external

pressures from politicians or interest groups. The next stage, Frame Setting, highlights how frames are made accessible and meaningful to audiences by underscoring values and facts that resonate with them. The Individual-Level Effects of Framing stage examines how these media frames influence individuals’ behaviors, attitudes, and thought processes, illustrating the link between media narratives and personal perceptions. It’s essential to recognize that journalists are not merely neutral reporters; they are also influenced by existing frames, suggesting an interdependent relationship rather than a strict hierarchy. This dynamic indicates that journalists interpret events through the lens of pre-existing frames, which ultimately shapes how narratives are communicated to the public.

The current situation in North Macedonia is an illustrative case study for understanding the impact of media framing. In 2022, Bulgaria put forth conditions for North Macedonia’s EU membership talks, which included recognizing the rights of Macedonian Bulgarians in the constitution and non-recognition of the “Macedonian language.” These demands sparked significant controversy and led to widespread protests. Media coverage of these events demonstrates how framing shapes public perception and can influence political outcomes. By emphasizing specific aspects of Bulgaria’s conditions and the unrest that followed, media narratives shaped the public discourse, underscoring the critical role of framing in political communication.

This study explores the framing strategies employed by media outlets, mainly focusing on online platforms and their coverage of protest movements in North Macedonia. Through this analysis, we aim to deepen our understanding of the dynamics of media framing and its implications for public perception and political discourse. To enrich the quality of this research, AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and DeepL were utilized to gather information, correct grammar, improve sentence structure, and facilitate translation. By exploring how media framing operates in North Macedonia, this article seeks to uncover insights that can shed light on the broader impacts on public perception and political dialogue in the region.

Findings and Analysis

This section focuses on the analysis conducted and examines media framing during the ‘Ultimatum, No Thanks’ protests in North Macedonia in the context of nationalist confrontation and ethnic solidarity frameworks. In particular, attention is given to how these protests are portrayed in different online media outlets such as *Telma*, *24info.mk*, *Republika*, *Večer.mk*, *Meta.mk*, *Faktor.mk*, and *Kanal 5*, paying close attention to dominant threat frames surfaced during the chosen time frame—most notably, in July 2022, when public awareness and mobilization of the protests peaked. Insight is provided into the complex dynamics of media portrayal surrounding these crucial periods of social mobilization and political protest through the investigation.

„Ултиматум - не, благодарам“ - граѓаните осми ден протестираат



Објавено во: **Македонија**

11 Јули, 2022

Image 1. Image from The News Article by *Faktor*

Source: *faktor.mk* (2022)

Table 1. Media Framing in *Faktor* News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“‘Ultimatum – No Thanks’ – Citizens Protest for the Eighth Day”
Framing Analysis	Coverage framed within nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and government secrecy on July 11, 2022.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Highlights demonstrators’ patriotic songs and slogans, e.g., “Never the North, only Macedonia” and “Resignation.”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Emphasizes unified identity and national anthem played outside Parliament in symbolic solidarity.
Government Secrecy Narrative	Includes Levisa’s claims on lack of transparency, increasing public suspicion over the French plan.

The *Faktor* news story strategically utilizes three main frames—nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and government secrecy—to portray public protests against the French proposal, positioning these events within a broader narrative of Macedonian identity and political resistance (Table 1).

In the nationalist confrontation frame, *Faktor* emphasizes the protesters’ resolve to uphold Macedonian sovereignty through patriotic symbols and slogans. The chants “Never the North, only Macedonia” and “Resignation,” as noted in the article, are potent indicators of national pride and resistance. These slogans and patriotic songs paint the protesters as defenders of national integrity, rallying against perceived threats to their country’s identity. The ethnic solidarity frame broadens this narrative, highlighting a cross-party unity among protesters. This frame emphasizes the collective spirit and resilience of Macedonian citizens, who stand united beyond political affiliations. *Faktor* captures this unity with scenes such as the national anthem being played in front of Parliament, illustrating a symbolic act of solidarity. As the article states, “They called on Macedonian authorities to reject the French proposal,” reinforcing the sense of a united front.

Finally, the government secrecy narrative adds a layer of tension by featuring claims from the political party Levica, who allege that the government’s nondisclosure of details regarding the French proposal has fueled public suspicion. Statements from political figures, such as Arber Ademi’s remarks on restricted access to the protocol, deepen mistrust toward the government and suggest a deliberate concealment of information from the public. This multi-layered framing (Table 1) provides insight into how the protests are portrayed not only as a reaction to policy but as a critical assertion of Macedonian sovereignty, unity, and accountability. Through these frames, *Faktor* captures the urgency of the protests and the public’s broader concerns about national identity and transparency in government dealings.



Image 2. Image from The News Article by *Telma*

Source: *telma.com.mk* (2022)

Table 2. Media Framing in *Telma* News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“A large protest in front of the government under the motto ‘Ultimatum – No Thanks,’ where the French proposal for the negotiating framework was rejected.”
Framing Analysis	The news utilized nationalist confrontation and ethnic solidarity to frame citizen backlash against the French proposal.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Nationalist sentiments were emphasized, showcasing the protesters’ commitment to sovereignty and identity. “ <i>When we say no, there is no us, what good is the European Union?</i> ”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Ethnic unity across cities was highlighted, demonstrating resistance that crossed political lines. “ <i>No one should interfere from outside; we ourselves should solve the problem.</i> ”
Government Secrecy Narrative	Reflected dissatisfaction with transparency and decision-making, as protesters sought a more inclusive approach.

The *Telma* news article frames the protests against the French proposal by emphasizing three key narratives—nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and government secrecy – to highlight the Macedonian public’s rejection of external influence and demand for transparency (Table 2).

In the nationalist confrontation frame, *Telma* underscores the protesters’ commitment to safeguarding Macedonian sovereignty and identity. Statements like, “*When we say no, there is no us, what good is the European Union?*” capture a sentiment of resistance toward perceived external control, depicting the protest as an assertion of national pride. These declarations present the demonstrators as guardians of Macedonian heritage, resisting what they view as detrimental international interference.

The ethnic solidarity frame broadens this portrayal by underscoring a collective front among Macedonians from various cities and backgrounds. The protest is described as transcending political divisions, with statements such as “*No one should interfere from outside; we ourselves should solve the problem.*” reflecting a unified stance. This framing of solidarity highlights a widespread national identity that unites citizens beyond party lines.

Lastly, the government secrecy narrative addresses the protesters’ concerns over the government’s lack of transparency in handling the proposal. Criticisms of limited information on the negotiation process reflect a more profound call for openness and accountability in national governance. By capturing this demand for transparency, *Telma* portrays the protest as a defense of Macedonian sovereignty and a challenge to opaque domestic politics. Through these frames (Table 2), the article conveys the protests through these frames as a significant expression of national unity, identity, and public demand for government accountability.



МАКЕДОНИЈА

ВМРО-ДПМНЕ: Масовно да кажеме „Ултиматум - НЕ БЛАГОДАРАМ“ и денес во 19 часот пред Влада

Масовно да кажеме „Ултиматум - НЕ БЛАГОДАРАМ“ и денес во 19 часот пред Влада, ова се надпартиски протести поддржани од сите.



Image 3. Image from The News Article by Kanal 5

Source: *kanal5.com.mk* (2022)

Table 3. Media Framing in Kanal 5 News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“VMRO-DPMNE: Massively Say ‘Ultimatum – No Thanks’ Today at 7 PM in Front of the Government.”
Framing Analysis	Highlights nationalist struggle and political mobilization against threats to Macedonian sovereignty.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	VMRO-DPMNE and supporters rally to defend national interests: “...assert their rejection of assimilation and stand in defense of national and state interests.”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Citizens from diverse backgrounds united in protecting Macedonian sovereignty: “...peacefully express their stance against pressures on Macedonia’s European path.”
Government Secrecy Narrative	VMRO-DPMNE pressures the government to reject EU-related measures perceived as a threat.

The *Kanal 5* news article frames the protest against the French proposal through narratives of nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and governmental resistance, focusing on a mobilized response against perceived threats to Macedonian sovereignty and identity, as outlined in Table 3.

The nationalist confrontation frame is evident in *Kanal 5*’s depiction of the VMRO-DPMNE party and supporters rallying around slogans like “Ultimatum – No Thanks.” This frame underscores the party’s and protesters’ determination to oppose external pressures, painting the protest as a

movement to defend Macedonia's national interests. With language such as, "We call on citizens to gather...to assert their rejection of assimilation loudly and dignifiedly," the article conveys the demonstration as a patriotic stand against foreign influence.

In the ethnic solidarity frame, the article emphasizes the participation of a broad population, portraying the protest as a unified stance against perceived encroachments on Macedonian sovereignty. Statements like, "The mass protests are a way for citizens...to peacefully and dignifiedly express their stance against pressures...on Macedonia's European path," highlight the shared commitment of Macedonians across ethnic and political divides. This broad support reinforces a collective identity rallying for self-determination.

Finally, the government resistance narrative focuses on VMRO-DPMNE's intent to compel the government to protect Macedonia's sovereignty in the EU accession process. The article frames this as a grassroots call to action for greater governmental accountability, capturing the sentiment that the government should act decisively to prevent any perceived erosion of national interests. Through these frames, *Kanal 5* positions the protest as a unified and forceful response to safeguard Macedonia's autonomy and uphold democratic values (Table 3).

Пред Владата во Скопје продолжи протестот под мотото „Ултиматум – Не благодарам“

Пишува: **Мета**

4 јули



Фото: VMRO-DPMNE



**Нашите вести е
вашето сандач**

Секој ден во 17 ч.
добивајте ги вестите с

Image 4. Image from The News Article by *Meta.mk*

Source: *meta.mk* (2022)

Table 4. Media Framing in *Meta.mk* News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“Protest Continues in Front of the Government in Skopje Under the Motto ‘Ultimatum – No, Thank You.’”
Framing Analysis	Depicts the Skopje protests as a defense of Macedonian sovereignty and cultural identity.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Demonstrators reject the French proposal, citing threats to Macedonia’s cultural uniqueness and sovereignty: “...denying the right to self-determination... unilateral erasure of cultural and historical uniqueness.”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	United stance on protecting Macedonian language and culture; journalists emphasize Macedonia’s fair treatment of neighbors and opposition to EU demands: “...they want us to accept something we are not.”
Government Secrecy Narrative	Critics argue that the proposal compromises Macedonian interests for European ideals, portraying the government as yielding to external pressures.

The *Meta.mk* news article employs a framing strategy centered on nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and government resistance, painting the Skopje protests as a staunch stand for Macedonia’s sovereignty and cultural identity (Table 4). Through the nationalist confrontation frame, *Meta.mk* highlights demonstrators’ opposition to the French proposal as a perceived danger to Macedonia’s unique cultural and historical attributes. This portrayal reflects an inherent conflict between protecting national heritage and perceived external threats, as protestors argue that conditions tied to EU accession compromise Macedonian sovereignty. Statements featured in the article, such as the denial of Macedonian self-determination and language, further underscore this resistance to identity compromise.

The ethnic solidarity frame deepens this message by showcasing a unified front among Macedonian citizens driven by shared cultural concerns. Statements from journalists like Milosavljević reinforce the theme of solidarity, portraying Macedonians as a cohesive group committed to safeguarding their heritage. This framing emphasizes that the resistance extends beyond political affiliations, binding citizens through a shared responsibility to uphold their cultural identity and values.

Finally, the government resistance narrative critiques the national administration, characterizing it as willing to yield Macedonian interests to EU requirements. Through commentary from public figures, *Meta.mk* suggests that the government’s acceptance of the proposal represents a neglect of Macedonian sovereignty in favor of broader European goals. This framing implies that, for demonstrators, rejecting the proposal is not merely political but a necessary defense of national interests. As outlined in Table 4, *Meta.mk*’s framing positions the protests as a collective rejection of the perceived erosion of Macedonian identity, sovereignty, and cultural heritage.

Нема отстапување од Македонија: И денес протест „Ултиматум – НЕ благодарам“

МАКЕДОНИЈА 07.07.2022 / 9:28



Image 5. Image from The News Article by *Republika*

Source: *republika.mk* (2022)

Table 5. Media Framing in *Republika* News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“No Retreat from Macedonia: ‘Ultimatum – NO, Thank You’ Protest Continues Today.”
Framing Analysis	Portrays protests as grassroots resistance against assimilation and government coercion, aiming to protect Macedonian identity.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Highlights demonstrators’ opposition to constitutional changes for Bulgarian inclusion, stressing Macedonian autonomy: “ <i>The Constitution is not Wikipedia.</i> ”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Demonstrates unity in opposing assimilation, with protesters committed to preserving Macedonian culture: “ <i>There is no turning back. There is no retreat from Macedonia.</i> ”
Government Secrecy Narrative	Organizers emphasize resistance against governmental compromise of sovereignty and warn of possible police provocations.

Republika.mk frames the protests through a lens of nationalist confrontation, ethnic solidarity, and government resistance, emphasizing the protests as a determined stand for Macedonian sovereignty (Table 5). The nationalist confrontation frame is central, portraying demonstrators as unwavering defenders of Macedonian autonomy. Their opposition to amending the constitution for Bulgarian inclusion underscores a shared belief that national identity should remain intact, a sentiment captured in statements like, “*The Constitution is not Wikipedia.*” This resistance to external influence solidifies the protestors’ narrative as protectors of Macedonia’s foundational principles.

The ethnic solidarity frame reinforces this by illustrating widespread unity among citizens against perceived assimilation pressures. This framing paints the protest as a collective effort to safeguard Macedonian identity, transcending individual backgrounds. Slogans like “*There is no retreat from Macedonia*” symbolize a joint commitment to preserving cultural heritage, reflecting a shared resolve across the citizenry.

Finally, the government resistance frame captures protest organizers’ warnings about potential government and police provocations, portraying the administration as possibly yielding to external pressures. This perspective fuels the protesters’ commitment to resisting what they consider a governmental compromise of national interests. As summarized in Table 5, through this tri-layered framing, Republika.mk portrays the protests as a collective effort to resist any erosion of Macedonian identity and autonomy, thereby reinforcing the broader narrative of national unity and resistance.

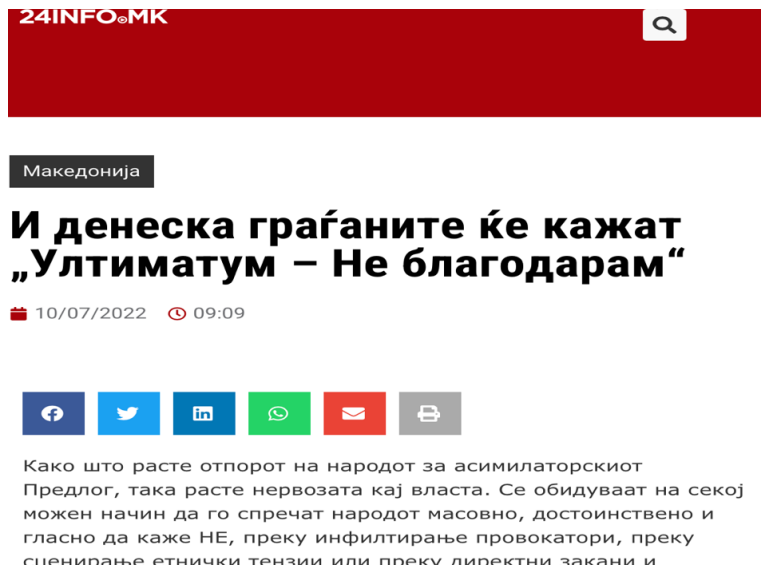


Image 6. Image from The News Article by 24Info.mk

Source: 24info.mk (2022)

Table 6. Media Framing in 24Info.mk News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“Today, Citizens Will Say ‘Ultimatum – No Thanks.’”
Framing Analysis	The ongoing protests are framed as grassroots resistance against government coercion and perceived threats to identity.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Emphasizes opposition to proposed changes seen as harmful to Macedonian identity, portraying protests as patriotic defiance: “ <i>As the people’s resistance grows, so does the government’s nervousness.</i> ”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Highlights unity among citizens, experts, and intellectuals opposing the proposal, reflecting a collective commitment to preserving Macedonian culture: “ <i>The people, intellectuals, and experts see that this proposal is bad.</i> ”
Government Secrecy Narrative	Critiques government tactics that instill ethnic tension and suppress protests, alleging concealment of detrimental details in the draft protocol.

In the news article by *24Info.mk*, the framing of the protests emphasizes a robust grassroots resistance against government actions perceived as coercive and detrimental to Macedonian identity (Table 6). The nationalist confrontation frame is prominent, depicting demonstrators as defenders of national sovereignty who oppose proposed changes threatening their cultural integrity. This perspective is reinforced by statements that indicate a growing public resolve, highlighted by the assertion, “*As the people’s resistance grows, so does the government’s nervousness.*” Such language positions the protests as patriotic against external and internal threats, portraying participants as committed to protecting their national identity.

The ethnic solidarity frame further enriches this narrative by showcasing a united front of citizens, experts, and intellectuals who oppose the proposed policies. This shared determination underscores a commitment to preserving Macedonian heritage in the face of assimilation, as articulated in the quote, “*The people, intellectuals, and experts see that this proposal is bad.*” This framing illustrates the protests as a communal effort, where diverse societal segments converge to defend their cultural identity and autonomy.

The government resistance narrative also critiques the administration’s tactics, alleging attempts to create ethnic tension and suppress dissent. The article suggests that the government is deliberately hiding essential details about the draft protocol, indicating a lack of transparency and a potential violation of the interests and dignity of Macedonians. As captured in table 6, this multi-layered framing thus positions the protests not just as a reaction to specific policy proposals but as a broader assertion of national pride, unity, and a demand for accountability from the government, reinforcing the urgency of the public’s call for change.

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ДОМА МАКЕДОНИЈА БАЛКАН СВЕТ СКОПСКА ЕКОНОМИЈА КУЛТУРА LIFE ЗАБА

Дома > МАКЕДОНИЈА > Пред почетокот на сенародниот протест „Ултиматум – Не бла

МАКЕДОНИЈА

Пред почетокот на сенародниот протест „Ултиматум – Не благодарам“ Мицкоски порача: Не ни треба Европа ако треба да се асимилираме

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Image 7. Image from The News Article by *Večer*

Source: *Večer.mk* (2022)

Table 7. Media Framing in *Večer* News Article

Element	Details
Headline	“Before the Start of the Nationwide Protest ‘Ultimatum – No Thank You,’ Mickoski Sends a Message: We Don’t Need Europe if We Have to Assimilate.”
Framing Analysis	Frames Hristijan Mickoski’s rejection of European integration as a defense of Macedonian identity and cultural heritage.
Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Mickoski emphasizes the importance of maintaining Macedonian identity against assimilation, portraying VMRO-DPMNE as defenders of sovereignty: “ <i>Today, Macedonia is awakening... the Macedonian people will not forget.</i> ”
Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Highlights unity among citizens across political lines, reflecting a collective commitment to protecting Macedonian identity: “ <i>At this large national protest, there is no politics, there is only one party, and that is Macedonia.</i> ”
Government Secrecy Narrative	Mickoski criticizes the government for prioritizing foreign interests over Macedonian sovereignty, accusing it of disregarding public sentiment in EU negotiations.

The article from *Večer* prominently features Hristijan Mickoski, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE, articulating a strong rejection of European integration if it entails sacrificing Macedonian identity (Table 7). This framing positions Mickoski as a defender of national sovereignty, resonating with the nationalist confrontation frame. By declaring that “*Macedonia is awakening*,” Mickoski paints a picture of an assertive citizenry ready to resist external pressures threatening their cultural integrity. His comments evoke a sense of patriotic duty among protesters, emphasizing that the sacrifices demanded for EU membership are unacceptable and framing the protests as a noble stand against cultural assimilation.

Moreover, the article captures a notable ethnic solidarity among demonstrators, transcending political affiliations. Mickoski’s assertion that “*there is only one party, and that is Macedonia*” underscores a collective commitment to defending Macedonian identity, illustrating a unified front against perceived external threats. This portrayal reinforces that the protests represent a broad societal consensus focused on preserving national dignity and heritage rather than merely reflecting partisan politics.

In addition to emphasizing national pride, Mickoski’s critique of the government illustrates the government’s resistance narrative. He accuses the administration of placing foreign interests above those of the Macedonian people, suggesting that the government disregards public sentiment in favor of EU negotiations. This criticism not only strengthens the legitimacy of the protests but also frames the current political discourse as one where the government is seen as compromising national interests. As outlined in Table 7, the overall framing in the article thus reinforces a narrative of resistance, patriotism, and unity, positioning the protests as a crucial moment in defending Macedonian identity against external pressures.

Table 8. Framing Analysis Findings According to Entman's Theory

Example	Nationalist Confrontation Frame	Ethnic Solidarity Frame	Government Resistance Narrative
Example 1, Faktor, 11.07.2022	a. Patriotic songs and slogans highlight nationalist sentiments. b. Protesters as defenders of Macedonian sovereignty. Excerpt: <i>"Demonstrators sang patriotic songs and chanted 'Never the North, only Macedonia,' 'Resignation.'"</i>	a. Solidarity beyond party affiliations. b. Unified identity against external threats. Excerpt: <i>"They called on Macedonian authorities to reject the French proposal. The national anthem was played in front of the Parliament."</i>	a. Critique of government secrecy on the French plan. b. Suspicious assessment of government actions.
Example 2, Telma, 02.07.2022	a. beliefs of demonstrators. b. Focus on resistance and VMRO-DPMNE officials. Excerpt: <i>"When we say no, there is no us, what good is the European Union?" said one citizen."</i>	a. Unity across party lines. b. Criticism of government secrecy. Excerpt: <i>"No one should interfere from outside; we ourselves should solve the problem," said another protester."</i>	a. Criticism of government's handling of the French plan. b. Protests with senior party officials present.
Example 3, Kanal5, 04.07.2022	a. VMRO-DPMNE's nationalist stance. b. Protests as resistance to foreign influences. Excerpt: <i>"We call on citizens to gather at 7 PM to assert their rejection of assimilation and to stand in defense of national and state interests."</i>	a. Unity of diverse backgrounds. b. Collective stance against pressures. Excerpt: <i>"The mass protests are a way for citizens, regardless of affiliation, to express their stance against pressures imposed on Macedonia."</i>	a. Demand for mass protest participation. b. VMRO-DPMNE as defenders of Macedonian interests.
Example 4, Meta.mk, 04.07.2022	a. Opposition to French proposal as threat to cultural uniqueness. b. Criticism of government for undermining national security. Excerpt: <i>"Denying the right to self-determination and conditioning EU integration on erasure of cultural uniqueness is not part of EU membership criteria."</i>	a. Unity in support of Macedonian interests. b. Government criticized for compromising national interests. Excerpt: <i>"Bulgarians are taking advantage of Macedonians, now they want us to accept something we are not."</i>	a. Critique of the proposal's threat to sovereignty. b. Demonstrators as a grassroots movement against foreign threats.
Example 5, Republika, 07.07.2022	a. Demonstration as defense of autonomy against integration. b. Shared commitment to preserving heritage. Excerpt: <i>"There will be no change to the Constitution to include Bulgarians, because the Constitution is not Wikipedia."</i>	a. Solidarity in defense of Macedonian interests. b. Resistance against assimilation and Bulgarianization. Excerpt: <i>"There is no turning back. There is no retreat from Macedonia."</i>	a. Criticism of proposed constitutional amendments. b. Government accused of caving to external pressure.

<p>Example 6, 24info.mk, 10.07.2022</p>	<p>a. Opposition to assimilatory proposal as patriotic defense. b. Defying administration’s intimidation. Excerpt: “As the people’s resistance to the assimilatory Proposal grows, so does the government’s nervousness.”</p>	<p>a. Unity of experts, intellectuals, and citizens. b. Call for widespread demonstrations as collective resistance. Excerpt: “The people, intellectuals, and experts see that this proposal is bad. It gives Macedonia two options: either to negotiate endlessly or to assimilate.”</p>	<p>a. Critique of government’s infiltration and threats. b. Demand accountability and responsiveness to public demands.</p>
<p>Example 7, Večer, 02.07.2022</p>	<p>a. Mickoski rejects European integration if it threatens identity. b. Importance of preserving Macedonian identity. Excerpt: “Today, Macedonia is awakening, and all those who want to end Macedonia with a signature in a day or two, the Macedonian people and citizens will not forget.”</p>	<p>a. Unity despite political differences. b. Criticism of administration for prioritizing foreign interests. Excerpt: “At this large national protest, there is no politics, there is only one party, and that is Macedonia.”</p>	<p>a. Critique of government for disobeying people’s wishes. b. Presenting VMRO-DPMNE as the people’s voice.</p>

The framing analysis table provides a comprehensive overview of how various media outlets articulate the narratives surrounding the protests in Macedonia. Each frame – Nationalist Confrontation, Ethnic Solidarity, and Government Resistance – intersects and informs the political landscape, revealing the complex dynamics of identity and governance within the context of these events.

The Nationalist Confrontation Frame underscores a prevailing sentiment of nationalism and resistance to perceived external threats, particularly from foreign proposals. This frame often employs emotive language, patriotic symbols, and calls to unity, positioning the demonstrators as protectors of Macedonian identity and sovereignty. For instance, national anthems and slogans reinforce a collective identity rooted in national pride and resistance against foreign influences. This framing reflects broader political anxieties regarding national autonomy in the face of European integration and external pressures.

In tandem, the Ethnic Solidarity Frame emphasizes unity across diverse political and social affiliations, presenting a collective stance that transcends partisan divides. This frame is crucial in illustrating how citizens rally around a shared identity and common cause, regardless of their political background. The emphasis on solidarity fosters a sense of community among the protesters, which is vital for mobilizing support against government actions perceived as compromising national interests. The narrative of solidarity not only serves to unify protesters and amplifies their collective voice against government secrecy and external interference.

Finally, the Government Resistance Narrative critically addresses the government’s perceived failures and secrecy in handling the situation. This frame articulates a growing mistrust of government intentions and actions, suggesting that the administration fails to act in the citizens’ best interests. The portrayal of protests as a grassroots movement against governmental mismanagement highlights

the demand for accountability and transparency. By connecting citizen protests to broader narratives of resistance, this frame reinforces the need for governmental responsiveness to public demands.

Collectively, these frames illuminate the multifaceted political context surrounding the protests. They illustrate how national identity, solidarity, and resistance to governmental authority are intricately linked, shaping public discourse and influencing political outcomes in Macedonia. This analysis reveals the power of framing in mobilizing public sentiment and guiding the narrative surrounding contentious political issues. By intertwining these narratives, the discourse on the protests reflects immediate concerns and engages with deeper historical and cultural themes inherent to Macedonian society.

Conclusion

The media's portrayal of the 'Ultimatum-No Thanks' demonstrations in North Macedonia reveals an intricate interplay of narratives, showcasing the complex relationships between public sentiment, political activism, and media discourse. The intentional application of framing tactics in various online media contexts highlights the coordinated efforts to sway opinions and win over supporters of opposing agendas. The widespread use of ethnic solidarity and nationalist confrontation frames highlights the critical role that framing plays in forming collective understandings of sociopolitical events while illuminating the intricacies of identity politics and national consciousness.

The nationalist confrontation frame is a dominant framing method in media coverage. It emphasizes the perceived challenges to Macedonian sovereignty and cultural identity. Media sources aimed to evoke strong emotions and rally public support for the protest movement by depicting demonstrators as patriotic defenders of Macedonian interests. To incite public sentiment and delegitimize dissenting voices, patriotic slogans and symbols were deliberately used to frame resistance to the protests as unpatriotic or hostile to national interests. Media sources sought to strengthen demonstrators' feelings of collective identity and solidarity by placing the protests within the framework of a nationalist confrontation. This helped to create a unified resistance against perceived exterior encroachments.

Apart from the nationalist confrontation frames, the widespread deployment of ethnic solidarity frames underscores the importance of collective identity in shaping public opinions and driving social activism. Media outlets emphasized the unity of purpose among demonstrators from various backgrounds to showcase broad support for the protests and a shared commitment to preserving Macedonian history. By fostering a sense of communal connection and empathy within the larger Macedonian population, this framing strategy aimed to mobilize support for the protest movement. Additionally, media sources aimed to highlight the importance of cultural preservation and the defense of collective identity against perceived foreign threats by placing the protests within the framework of ethnic solidarity.

The intricate relationship between ethnic solidarity and nationalist confrontation in North Macedonia demonstrates the complex interconnection between identity politics, media discourse, and political mobilization. Emphasizing shared objectives and communal identity in ethnic solidarity

narratives fueled the protest movement, while nationalist confrontation narratives prioritized the protection of national sovereignty and cultural heritage. When combined, these narratives influenced public opinion, mobilized support, and provoked opposition against perceived threats to Macedonian identity. Nevertheless, the polarizing effects of these narratives exacerbated societal divisions, escalating tensions and deepening ideological differences.

The examination of media framing during the 'Ultimatum-No Thanks' protests highlights the crucial impact of framing on public discourse and collective action. By employing nationalist confrontation and ethnic solidarity frames, media outlets sought to shape public opinion, foster unity, and mobilize opposition against perceived threats to Macedonian identity. Nevertheless, the widespread use of polarizing framing strategies also emphasizes the difficulties of navigating identity politics and promoting inclusive dialogue in a deeply divided society. The role of framing in shaping public discourse remains a significant subject for further research and exploration, particularly as North Macedonia grapples with the complexities of nationalism and identity.

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Appendix-1*

1. English translation of the news from *Faktor.mk* news website

“Ultimatum – No, Thank You’ – citizens continue to protest for the eighth day”

Under the slogan “Ultimatum – No, Thank you,” the eighth consecutive protest against the French proposal is happening in Skopje this evening. The demonstrators sing patriotic songs and chant slogans such as “Never the North, only Macedonia!” and “Resign!”. They demand that the Macedonian authorities reject the French proposal. The national anthem is sung in front of the parliament.

There was also unrest last week, and some people were detained.

Arber Ademi from the Levica political party openly says that the government is hiding the protocol. Arber Ademi, head of the European Affairs Commission, says that the Protocol has not been published under the pretext that it has not yet been finalized and signed.

2. English translation of the news from *Telma* news website

“The Major Protest Took Place in Front of the Government Under the Slogan ‘Ultimatum – No, Thank You,’ and the French Negotiation Framework Proposal Was Rejected.”

Today, thousands of people protested in front of the Macedonian government building under the slogan ‘Ultimatum – No, Thank You,’ expressing their dissatisfaction with the French negotiation framework proposal. Citizens from various cities across Macedonia gathered in front of the government building, stating that a firm ‘NO’ response should be given to the French proposal and that it should be rejected. Some added that if they were to give up everything required to enter the European Union, there would be no point in seeking it.

“What’s the value of the European Union once we no longer exist?” one citizen questioned. “No one should interfere from the outside; we should solve our issues ourselves,” another woman protester asserted. “When it comes to national interests, we should stand united. We can argue about other matters, but never about national interests,” voiced yet another participant.

The protest was organized without any civil or partisan political organization. However, high-ranking leaders of the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE, especially party leader Hristijan Mickoski, also joined the protest.

“If we are going to be assimilated, we do not need Europe. I do not want Europe because I have the right to remain Macedonian, to speak the Macedonian language, and to fight for my Macedonia, my identity, my culture, my history, and my heritage. We will wait. If Europe is not ready to accept us in a civilized and dignified manner, to where we rightfully belong – Europe – then we will wait. When

* All translations from Macedonian to English in this section have been carried out by the author.

people come who understand what we are trying to convey today, that message will be: Macedonia comes above all, Macedonian identity comes above all,” stated Mickoski.

A stage was also set up in front of the government building, where various speakers addressed the protesters. Journalist Toni Stoyanovski gave an emotional speech, saying “No Passage” to the French proposal. “We are well-intentioned but not naive. We mean no harm, but we won’t tolerate harm any longer. We will simply say ‘No’ to all offers and conditions imposed on us,” added Stoyanovski.

Professor Elka Yacheva Ulchar from the Krste Misirkov Macedonian Language Institute stated in her speech, “The proposal from Bulgaria aims to erase our language, a language that has existed for a century as the Macedonian language recognized globally and in science. The Macedonian language is not a dialect of any language. Like every national standard language, it has developed all functional styles, such as literary, scientific, administrative, and journalistic. By what right and by what European standards should we Macedonians abandon our language and history and enter the European Union stripped of our identity?”

Although the protest was not announced as partisan, VMRO-DPMNE spokesperson Naum Stoilkovski emphasized that the protests would continue tomorrow at the same place and time.

3. English translation of the news from *Kanal5* news website

“VMRO-DPMNE: ‘Ultimatum – No, Thank You’ – Let’s Say It Together Today at 19:00 in Front of the Government”

Today at 19:00, let’s all shout together in front of the Government building under the slogan “Ultimatum – No, Thank You.” Everyone supports these non-partisan protests. VMRO-DPMNE supports the people’s “Ultimatum – No, Thank You” protest. We invite our citizens to gather today at 19:00 in front of the Government building for a strong show of participation, a stance of dignity, and a loud declaration of NO to assimilation, defending national and state interests.

These major protests offer a way for citizens, regardless of ethnic, religious, or political identity, to express their stance against the threats and ultimatums imposed on Macedonia on its European path with honor and peace. These mass protests aim to pressure the Government to reject the unprincipled and demeaning proposal and to return to the core European, democratic, and human principles that are the foundation of Macedonia’s European integration. The Kovachevski government should not compromise with pressures that could lead to Macedonia’s eternal status as a negotiator or complete assimilation.

These protests are nonpartisan and civil, uniting many people, intellectuals, and social actors. Therefore, we call for massive participation and motivation to communicate to the government that it must respect the people’s will. Our people’s message is clear: “Ultimatum—No, Thank You.”

4. English translation of the news from *Meta.mk* news website

The “Ultimatum – NO THANK YOU” Protest Continues in Front of the Government

Last evening, the protest under the slogan “Ultimatum – NO THANK YOU” continued in front of the Government building in Skopje. Participants opposed accepting the French proposal for negotiations on Macedonia’s EU membership. According to them, conditions such as rejecting the right to self-determination and linking Macedonia’s EU integration to the unilateral erasure of cultural and historical uniqueness and the unilateral non-recognition of the language are neither EU membership criteria nor a rule among member states.

Television hosts Dragan Milosavljevic and Darko Janevski addressed the gathered citizens. Milosavljevic noted that Bulgarians persecuted Macedonians not because of anything they had done but merely because they had been honest neighbors, and now, under the guise of European values, they were pressuring Macedonians to accept something they should not. Janevski stated that citizens gathered “to say no to this proposal that harms us,” adding that “we will either exist or be erased.” He also emphasized that the falsehood that the Macedonian language is protected and cemented has been imposed on them for days.

5. English translation of the news from *Republika* news website

Macedonia Stands Firm: “Ultimatum – NO THANK YOU” Protest Continues Today

The organizers of the “Ultimatum – NO THANK YOU” protest have stated: “There is no turning back – no concessions from Macedonia. Today at 7:00 PM, starting from the Ministry of Justice and moving toward the Government building, we will hold a protest to express our opposition to constitutional changes, such as the inclusion of Bulgarians in the Constitution. The Constitution is not Wikipedia, and the protest will end in front of Parliament. No police provocations will intimidate us. There are no ethnic tensions here, only protection against the crimes and betrayals facing Macedonia. Do not fall for police provocations. Ultimatum, no thank you. We oppose assimilation and Bulgarization.”

The protest call also urges, “Stand up collectively. Macedonia is our last stronghold.”

6. English translation of the news from *24Info.mk* news website

Today, Citizens Will Say “Ultimatum – NO THANK YOU”

Ahead of today’s protest, VMRO-DPMNE said, “As public resistance to the assimilation proposal grows, the government’s nerves are fraying. They are trying to suppress the people’s collective, honorable, and loud ‘No’ by infiltrating provocateurs, stirring up ethnic tensions, or resorting to threats and intimidation. However, the people are not afraid. The more pressure they apply, the more motivated the people become, responding even louder and with greater numbers at the protests.”

Intellectuals and experts consider this proposal absurd, as Macedonia has two options: endless negotiations or assimilation. The protocol, which the government has concealed but has been published by foreign media, includes concrete obligations for Macedonia, such as changing textbooks, altering historical truths about characters and events, and amending the Constitution – profoundly humiliating requirements.

Citizens see through the government’s attempt to cover this humiliation and ultimatum with a theatrical display in parliament, but it’s meaningless. The government should come to its senses and listen to the people’s clear stance against ultimatums and authoritarian demands.

The more Kovachevski and the government disregard the people’s demands, the more significant these protests will become. VMRO-DPMNE supports these large-scale, peaceful, and honorable public protests, calling on citizens to gather today at 7:00 PM in front of the government building and say more emphatically, “ULTIMATUM, NO THANK YOU!”

7. English translation of the news from Večer news website

Mickoski: “If Assimilation Awaits Us, We Don’t Need Europe”

Ahead of the “Ultimatum – NO THANK YOU” civil protest, VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski issued a powerful statement, saying, “If assimilation is the cost, we don’t need Europe. Today, Macedonia is awakening, and the Macedonian people and citizens will never forget those who want to end Macedonia. If we must be assimilated, we do not need Europe.”

Mickoski elaborated on this sentiment: “I don’t want to be part of Europe if it means sacrificing my right to be Macedonian, to speak Macedonian, and to fight for my Macedonia, my identity, culture, history, and heritage. That is my message tonight, echoed by tens of thousands of our citizens just weeks after the major event on June 18.”

Addressing the government, Mickoski dismissed concerns about foreign messages, like that of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, focusing instead on the thousands gathered to send a clear message of “no” to the latest proposal. “We will wait,” he said. “If Europe is not ready to accept the honorable and dignified Macedonian people, we will wait until we can claim our place there. We’ll take our place when those who truly understand us are ready to engage. Macedonia comes first, and Macedonian identity is paramount.”

Highlighting the non-partisan nature of the protest, Mickoski emphasized, “This is not about politics; there is only one party here, and that is Macedonia.” He noted that people from all political backgrounds and independents were united here, expressing their shared views and demonstrating a strong stance on social media.