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## IT’S TIME FOR A BABY! MOTHERHOOD AND NATIONALISM ACCORDING TO EXAMPLES FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Political centers of power in societies often try through different forms of nationalism to regulate gender roles of individuals. In this sense, in the Republic of Macedonia in the period 2006-2017, through various projects, the Government attempted to influence public notions on the role of women in the family and in the state. The representations are mainly in relation to the idea of increasing and strengthening the nation. At the center of this discourse is the “Macedonian” woman, who, by becoming a mother and giving birth to more children, will contribute to the nation’s growth.

**Keywords:** motherhood, nationalism, abortion, antiquization, family, campaigns.

*Todorov, get away from my womb!*<sup>2</sup>

Political centers of power often attempt, through different forms of nationalisms, to define gender roles of individuals in all aspects of their every-day life. In this sense, in the period 2006-2017 in the Republic of Macedonia one can note a number of examples of different projects, such as TV campaigns or newly erected monuments, reflecting nationalism in the frames of the cultural and architectural project “Skopje 2014”, initiated and financed by the ex-Macedonian Government, headed by the demo-Christian conservative party VMRO-DPMNE. According to its political program from 2006<sup>3</sup>, and as noted by Risteski, also in its Program from 2008, “one can see that this political party has a clear attitude towards the importance of cultural and art management, as well as towards the creation and re-creation of identity” (Ристески 2001: 12), followed by “reformatory steps related to re-organization of Macedonian national culture and identity” (Ристески 2011: 2). The main directions of the reorganization fall into the areas of urbanism and architecture (Мијалковиќ, Урбанек 2011: 76), and are implemented through certain measures that would culminate, later on, in laws accompanied with TV and internet

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2 One of the many mottos of the citizens’ and the NGOs at the protests against the draft-law on abortion held in June 2013.

3 The Program of VMRO-DPMNE promoted in 2006 is titled “Rebirth in 100 steps”, while its campaign in 2008 was promoted as “Rebirth in 100 steps: Upgraded and Extended”.

campaigns. Such populist strategies have directly intervened with the construction of gender roles in the frames of the family, especially regarding the role of women, whose aim should be to create a family and thus contribute towards the sustainability and, in case they give birth to multiple children, to the increase of the Macedonian nation.

In order to get acquainted with this politics, the research will use parts of Governmental campaigns broadcasted on national and local TV channels and on internet, combined with statements of activists, citizens – reactors, priests, medical personnel, materials that should provide a clearer image on the methodology of the nationalistic program of the Government in the period 2006-2017. A starting point of the effect these steps had could be the fact that the finances spent for advertisements against abortion presented ten percent of the annual budget of the Ministry of health dedicated to contraception. According to the data provided by civil organizations HERA and ESE for 2009, the year when the Government started the campaign titled “Choose life. You have a right to decide”, the Government allocated 36 million Macedonian denars from the budget for this activity. These organizations also state that until 2013, 180 million Macedonian denars were spent thereof (Mitrevska Marija, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 11.11.2013).

### **Antiquization of the concept of motherhood**

Inspired by Rogers Brubaker’s statement (Brubaker 1996) that “the nation should be perceived as a sum of practices, more than a category that should be analyzed”, nationalism should be treated as a mechanism of the socio-cultural realization of the nation. Risteski, based upon this author, analyzes the contemporary interpretations of the Macedonian nation. He notes that “the whole project Skopje 2014 /.../ could be read as a sum of practices, as texts, that could be interpreted as signs of the multilayered ideas and interpretations of nations” (Ристески 2017). Defined as “political fields” (Brubaker 1996: 16), they present “different locations and contents where national meaning, that is, the construction of nation is being disputed, produced and is faced with new challenges” (Brubaker 1996: 15-16, quoted by Ристески 2017). In this sense, this project includes also monuments that deeply touch the issue of family and the one of motherhood, and put them into function of the planned antiquization: “as it is locally called, that should support Macedonian legitimization as a separate nation in the country, but also abroad” (Мијалковиќ, Урбанек 2011: 80) and that will be in the spirit of the idea that “Macedonia could only defend its name [from Greece] if it proves that the Macedonian nation has its own antique roots”.

In the context of the same idea is the central position of the memorial fountain, which is known by the general public as the monument of Alexander the Great and his army (the “falanga”), and is officially named “The Warrior on a Horseback”. The essential meaning of this fountain could be discovered if analyzed through a wider focus, if the two newly arranged squares would be taken into account – the central city square “Macedonia” where the fountain of the “son” is located, and the square “Karposhovo vostanie” (Karposh Uprising), at the left side of the river Vardar, with the monuments of Philip II of Macedonia, according to historical narratives the father of Alexander the Great, and the one of Olympias, Alexander’s mother and wife of Philip II of Macedonia.

The Stone Bridge physically and symbolically connects these two, forming one “family”. Johnson states that the features of a location enable the building of its symbolic meaning, i.e. that “places by themselves present the meaning, thus becoming a physical location and a point of view of the interpretation”, which is justified by the mentioned complex (Johnson 1994, 1995). In this case, these monuments as a whole, as a physical location, are constantly upgraded with details that support the message and make it even clearer.

The fact that this arrangement should be treated as a whole is supported by the positions of the monument of the “parents” who are facing, both with their bodies and through their glances, the dominant central monument of their son – the great Macedonian hero, empowered by the highly erected hand of Philip, who greets the courage and the success of Alexander. This contact confirms that the “antique family” presents an integrated symbolical whole, set in a horizontal line that follows the physical direction and fills the most frequented public space in the capital. Thus, one could say with certainty that Risteski is right when stating that we should not treat them only as a naïve beautification of public space, since they “emphasize the political and cultural meaning related to them” (Ристески 2011: 4). The whole created by the squares is the space where the information on the importance of the “holly institution” should be passed to the younger generation, that should form a family, and to the women who should bear children.

In this case the very presence of the monumental “antic family” is not sufficient. Its sanctity is upgraded with the four depictions of the young Olympia during two phases – one of pregnancy and the other of motherhood. The first depiction (in the inner part of the fountain) shows the woman expecting the Macedonian hero, the second notion (in the outer part, in the middle) is her breast feeding Alexander, the third depiction (left from the second) is her carefully listening while he talks, thus presenting mother’s impeccable care and attention towards the young son, and the fourth depiction (on the right-hand side from the second) is one of a mother hugging her son, presenting the limitless motherly love towards her son. Though this depictions of the young Olympia, in the manner of Rousseau, the four basic features idealize “motherly love and the desire to dedicate the role of upbringing of children to women” (Srdic Srebro 2014: 39). Such idealization should present a challenge for each Macedonian girl and women, who should be responsible for the family’s and society’s reproduction: to be pregnant, and then after giving birth feeding her child, taking care of it and showing limitless motherly love. Such notions as the one of the “antic mother” facilitate the formation of the contours of the model of “ideal mother” (Srdic Srebro 2014: 39) in the contemporary Macedonian context, that should give birth to a child, feed it, love it and take care of the young son. This makes us support Srdic when she states that, although such models “vary depending on the socio-cultural context, (still) the cult towards the child remains dominant and sets the role of women in society” (Srdic Srebro 2014: 39). In this sense one can mention the authors that deal with folk culture, and its influences upon the concept of motherhood and its role in contemporary context. For example, Jakimovska puts this in relation to the social interpretation of the possibility of women to give birth and breast-feed, and indirectly to their biological sex, which is additionally defined in gender terms in frames of cultural models. Srdic additionally confirms that “the role of women is equalized with the role of the womb: giving birth and providing care for posterity as their basic elements” (Srdic Srebro 2014: 38). Thus, “in the sphere of the social such identification of women with birth at the same time is making them ‘responsible’ for reproduction of the community” (ЈАКИМОВСКА

2009: 102), which will be illustrated through an example further on in the text. Such a concept is in concordance with the interest of the community, and its regulation falls in the domain of the “collective female experience, which on the other hand becomes the basis of female identity” (Srdic Srebro 2014: 38). In the frames of such experience, Jakimovska also classifies breast feeding, which is “directly associated to motherhood, it is paradigmatic for everything that the mother literally and figuratively gives to her child – she feeds it with milk, but indirectly, through this act, she also ‘breast-feeds’ it with motherly love and care” (Јакимовска 2009: 155). Thus, a clear relation with the root of the concept of “ideal motherhood” is made, presented through the depictions of the young Olympia and her son. The difference is that in folk culture motherhood falls in the domain of *intimate* female culture, with women being the most relevant to talk about it, while the contemporary culture, the antiquized model becomes a part of the public sphere, and it is of public interest, which is a sufficient indicator that there is a intention to influence the concept of motherhood through the reorganization of family, with women and the reorganization of their role at all social levels being in the center of national attention.

## Law and campaigns

Maxwell writes that sexuality has played a central role in patriotic imagination since the emergence of nationalism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Maxwell 2016: 1). Such a concept was important for the regulated control of female sexuality (...) as a measure of the “authoritative nationalism sponsored by the state” (Brackwell 1996: 25). During the researched period in Macedonia, the demo-Christian ruling party VMRO-DPMNE and its supporters, inspired by the idea of sustaining traditional family values, has incorporated the issue of abortion in their concept of patriotism. Thus, “the patriots”, who will be analyzed further in the text, were the ones who took care of the social, and especially of the family role of women. Everyone else who did not explicitly support this party ideology became “a murderer” – a term used in a context that disqualifies individuals due to the expressed attitudes, oppositional to the patriotic ones when it comes to motherhood and abortion. These terms were used by the representatives of the Government policies, or their supporters, in the building of a public discourse, aiming to present them as damaging for the Macedonian national state. Through the establishment of the new dominant ideology of patriotism, covering the issue of the birth rate and the increasing of the nation, the “patriots” worried about national interests, have directed the policies on one hand towards protection of masculinity, and on the other towards explicit heterosexual erotic desires (Maxwell 2016: 1), which is not a topic of interest of this article, but also towards female fertility as a collective national treasure, due to which national state undertakes “measures that motivate the rise of the population “ (Maxwell 2016: 2). In the case of the Republic of Macedonia in the period 2006-2017, these plans in relation to motherhood are the ones that would set the direction of the Governmental decisions in relation to gender roles. Aiming to directly influence birth control and the decision on abortion, the Government, assisted by the media in the Republic of Macedonia, has proclaimed the concept of motherhood and families with multiple children as the only solution for the growth of the nation. This is how the state influenced the public discourse, that tabooed the procedures that do not fall into these conceptual frames, “as one of the ways in which

women would attain motherly behavior, the ideology of motherhood and the motivations to fulfill the ideal motherly role” (Radulovic 2008: 160). Public discourse has thus been used as a praxis that systematically creates the object about which it speaks (Fuko 1998: 54), but it was built also as a “specific way of speaking and as a tool for modeling opinions and gender stereotypes (...) a system of images, metaphors, notions, sayings and expressions that use certain way to construct a certain object” (Radulovic 2008: 160-161).

The source of the idea of construction of public discourse sponsored by the governing parties, besides having deeper roots, can be noted in a more concrete form in the Strategy for demographic development 2008-2015, of the pre-electoral program of the party VMRO-DPMNE from 2008. In this strategy, which is an upgraded version of the one from 2006, the interest is directed towards “slowing down the population decrease and creation of conditions for sustainable demographic development, decrease of regional demographic disparities, support of family and family values and the quality of life of the population” (*Rebirth in 100 steps. Upgraded and extended* 2008: 119). The intention of the strategy is on first glance well-intended, since the measures refer to regions that according to statistics are facing demographic collapse due to the low birth rate. However, in the post-election period of 2008, when the Government formed by VMRO-DPMNE has gained strength, other measures were undertaken that have revealed the true party goal of the envisaged steps: to penetrate further into the social structure and to define the role of women; young women to realize themselves in the frames of the family, a marital couple consisting of a man and a woman; in the frames of the family every woman to become a biological mother. The defined role of women in the strategy was supported by legal changes, that regulate the role of women in society, but also through the pressure put by the Macedonian Christian Orthodox church – Ohrid Archbishopric that has repeatedly publicly promoted its attitude towards this issue, which is identical to the one of VMRO-DPMNE, that biological motherhood is the basic and most important social realization of Macedonian women. The regime, though such established contours of the party project and its ultimate goal, has implemented its influence upon public discourse that was constantly built, so that we embrace it and behave accordingly (Radulovic 2008: 163), which, according to some authors, blinds us for everything else that falls outside the frames of learned behavior as a desired one (Gergen 2006: 73, according to Radulovic 2008: 160). In this case, as with many others during the same period, we were conscious about the reality of which we became a part. Since, equally as in the past, Macedonian medical science did not offer a suitable solution on the issue of pregnancy and its termination, and in the named period it was instructed to implement already given decisions by the party and the administrative institutions, its solution regarding this issue was given by the Church. It pronounced its opinion in the name of religion and the teaching of the church. Making its appeal towards Christians and the faithful, the Church tried to impose its influence upon the whole population, especially regarding the issue of abortion. Priests have been presenting similar statements as the ones of the Government, supporting the proposed changes of the law. Such emphasized public discourse presupposed the prevention of other possibilities, different from the ones offered by the party and the Church, so one could get an impression that, if women would choose a solution outside of this regime, they would be morally and socially degraded. Surely, this manner of social sanctioning is not an exclusive element of this period. Examples related to this issue can be found in a number of works written

by female researchers, who deal with folk culture, but also speak about cultural models in contemporary social context. For example, Jakimovska notes that social pressure as a regulatory mechanism could be manifested through different forms, with almost the same intensity, in folk, rural and urban, i.e. contemporary culture – where the party ideology based on nationalism dominates the discourse. She illustrates this through a text found on the last page of the so called “Motherhood booklet”, an official document that each pregnant woman who has health insurance obtains once she is pregnant, where the most important data related to the pregnancy are noted. The example is from 2007. The author justly notes that the text contained in this document, verified by medical institutions, reflects and promotes an attitude that is at the same time the one of the state: that giving birth to a healthy progeny is a ‘biological task’ of each woman. Having in mind that this text is included only in the mother’s booklet and not in a similar one for the father (which actually does not exist), says Jakimovska, the state confers this task exclusively to women, the same way as God has conferred this task to women in a particular Macedonian folk story (ЖАКИМОВСКА 2009: 103). In the given period the Church confers this task to women in the name of God. Jakimovska examines such an attitude towards women expressed also in an advertisement for a private gynecological hospital, specialized in marital infertility, that using an imperative refers only to women, creating an impression that women are the ones that “not only could, but probably have to be mothers in order to be treated not only as women, but also as – humans!” (ЖАКИМОВСКА 2009: 104). In the cases of gynecologists that implement the procedure of termination of pregnancy, after the new law in this area was established in 2013, they face constant hesitation when making decisions at a number of levels, since the very law is formulated in such a way that “is confusing when it comes to doing their job” (Здравковска 2017: 51-52). They are under huge pressure due to the “influence of the high fees and sanctions (...) The legal fees for the institutions that do not respect certain articles of the law varies from 25-50,000 EUR, while the doctor who would not perform the intervention in accordance to the law is punished from 5-6,000 EUR and the same is valid for the members of the Commissions”. Such inconsistency of the legal segments results with medical personnel performing their duties in constant fear that they could be punished for not adhering to the Law, and that they would risk their authority and integrity. These examples show that such regulation, in the researched period, is exclusive only in the way it utilizes the mechanism for political purposes, in the name of state goals, that culminates in cases when due to different reasons women have still not given birth to a child, are not in the possibility to do so, or have no desire to become mothers.

## The family

In the researched period, the Government prioritizes the family. The strategy in the Program commences with the party’s attitude in relation to the importance of the family, emphasizing the creation of a multiple children family as an ideal, that presupposes concrete measures: “The family is the basic tenant of society. Multiple children families have a long tradition, that started to disappear in the last 20 years in Macedonia (...) It



is high time to start a debate concerning this issue, but also to implement concrete measures” (*Rebirth in 100 steps. Upgraded and extended* 2008: 119). TV and internet campaigns present a good illustration of the above mentioned, being related to few key segments: fetus, abortion, enlarge the family – have a third child, and family values. Through short videos, but also through the so called TV “family magazines”, the Government’s idea envisaged by the strategy is promoted. If one pays close attention to the dynamics of the frequency of their broadcasting and re-broadcasting, the intensions are clear – to use national and local television channels to cover most of the territory of the country. The text and the introductory song of the so called family show broadcasted during 2-3 seasons, “Time for a baby”, aims to present families that have three or more children as a positive example of successful families, but also as an ideal, desired social model. The show is a part of the campaign “Increase the family, have a third child” and the introductory songs presents a kind of public call for identifying with the presented individuals and join the cause, since it is time for a baby (!):

*“The more the merrier/I would give everything for this/to have more clever kids in our country/That look like their mothers and fathers/Even if each third child is brought by the stork*

Think of us, think of tomorrow/When you think of me, think of yourself/The time has come, for a new tomorrow/It is time for a baby!/Time for a baby!”

In order to understand the logic of the media in relation to this campaign, it should be noted that this show was broadcasted every Sunday at 2.10 pm – a period when one assumes that it is time for Sunday lunch, and all members of the family are gathered, including the ones that could be a potential target group regarding this issue. Even more, the influence of the campaign is elevated due to the politics of inclusion of the campaign in the local media. Their task is to share and re-broadcast the show in the smaller cities, in order to show their engagement in the great plan of the party, to deal with an issue of national importance. Such an example is a television channel from Bitola, that covers the city of Bitola, Prilep and the surrounding settlements. For an even bigger coverage, the episodes of the family show are published on the you tube channel *Macedonian nation*, or at the Portal of the city of Kratovo and the Osogovo region, *Aberdzija*.

In the second short movie of the campaign “Increase the family, have a third child” the idea is that each family should strive to achieve the ideal multiple children family, but the narrative goes even deeper in presenting this model as a value from the past, that should be copied from “our grandmothers and grandfathers” and in the spirit in which our children should be modeled in the future:

*“Everyone helped everyone else, everyone worked something. They all took care of each other. Today? Today it is our turn. To raise and educate our children regarding the values of our grandmothers and grandfathers. We should be the*

*same as them. Children are our biggest treasure*” (“*Children are our biggest treasure #ThirdChild, Macedonian nation*)

Simultaneously with the party campaign of the Government, financed with state money through which the Government tries to penetrate into the families and to manage them “from inside”, the realization of the planned strategy from 2008 has started, that supports this model also with a special Law. The strategy contains draft-measures, that directly intervene with social structures related to the family, giving birth and birth rate. These measures promote multiply children families as the only solution for young people, and in a less direct form it marginalizes and stigmatizes, and later on through the law in a less explicit way, discourages the right of choice of women to terminate pregnancy:

- Improvement of the system of financial aid for the first born child in order to eliminate the material census for realization of the right, with a tendency to increase the value of the one-time assistance of the families;
- Financial stimulation for a third-born child for marital couples that live in regions in which the birth rate is under 2,1 living child per woman;
- Providing legal minimal pension for women who have given birth and raised 4 or more than 4 children, in case they do not meet the criteria for retirement;
- Continuous media campaign for promotion of family and a third child, aiming to influence the awareness of young marital couples who have a possibility, but do not decide to have more children, or more than one or two children;
- Analyzing the possibility of the right of man for a short-term maternity leave, one or two months after the birth of the child, aiming to help the mother in the starting post-partum period, and to take care of the health of the baby and its needs;
- Providing a right of maternity leave for all mothers that do not have the same rights as the ones who are employed, in the frame of the legally prescribed absence due to pregnancy, giving birth and motherhood, in a value of at least 30% of the average salary in the Republic of Macedonia in those municipalities where the birth rate is under 2,1;
- Support of the combination of professional and family life for marital couples that have young children or take care of disabled members of family;
- Improvement of the living conditions on national level for young married couples and families with more than four children, in the regions with low birth rates and a high rate of aging of the population;
- Motivating the employment of young unemployed parents that take care of children themselves, as well as of parents of children with special needs;
- Improvement of the conditions for planning a family and motherhood through measures that strengthen the role of primary health care, increase of coverage and sustainability of services related to reproductive health, reduction of abortion rates, developing of networks of advisory centers for reproductive health of young people at the level of local community, health education of adolescents in schools, promotion of modern contraceptive



methods, improvement of control of sexually transmittable diseases, supporting initiative for assistance of marital couples that are treated for infertility and improvement of quality of health protection and utilization of contemporary medical technology in the treatment of infertility.

*(Rebirth in 100 steps. Upgraded and extended 2008: 119-121)*

## **Law on abortion and the measures for “changing one’s mind”**

The measure for reducing the abortion rate is included in the last paragraph, in the frames of the ones whose aim is improving the conditions for planning of family and motherhood, thus creating an impression that it is a marginal one. In 2013 the Government submits a draft-law on termination of pregnancy in the Republic of Macedonia, with an argument that the Law has been passed allegedly in 1977, and that it needs to be changed. In the reactions of the well informed lawyers in the country, among which the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Republic of Macedonia, one can note the reckless attitude of the institutions that worked on this serious proposal, and their superficial statement in the official documents submitted to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. For example, the lawyer Mirjana Najchevska, President of the Helsinki Committee of the Republic of Macedonia, in her comment related to this law will note that there are frivolous statements of the Government firstly in connection to their request for changes of the law from 1977, when no such law was officially passed (see more: Hajčevska 2013). The changes, according to her, apply to a law passed in 1972. The consecutive changes were made in 1976 and in 1995, and not in 1977. If one goes deeper, the fact that one side uses false information as a fact, without checking them first, shows an intention to promote the proposal and the planned measures, and not to give an essential argument regarding the changes. Other responsible persons, functionaries, also referred to the proposal in the same way. This could be illustrated with the following example. The director of the state Clinic of Gynecology at that time, in a media article, attempts to clarify the draft-changes of the law, stating that: “This law is one of the most liberal laws in European countries, even more liberal in comparison to the one passed in 1977” (portal MKD, 21.06.2013). The difference between the laws is defined as modernizing of the existing one, that respects the right of woman’s decision, since the article in which the agreement from the husband is needed has been canceled. However, it gives each woman a chance to reflect and confirm if she wants to terminate her pregnancy”. A novelty in the law is that it emphasizes the signing of a request addressed to the doctor who would perform the intervention and it focuses upon “the advice which the doctor has to provide before the intervention” (portal MKD, 21.06.2013). Another element, which is absent from the previous law, is the possibility for the woman to think about her decision three days prior to the intervention. These changes that were announced by the manager of the Clinic are the main reasons for the public reactions, which during that period protested against this draft-law. Among other civic organizations, in relation to this law, the first to express its critical attitude was the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Its arguments were that the law is being promptly passed without any urgent need, in absence

of a public discussion. Among other things, their reaction pointed to the fact that the law "... was passed on the fast lane, in a period of two week, disabling any consultation and public debate with the main interlocutors, such as medical experts, female organizations and civil society" (Okno.mk, 29.06.2013). Another identified qualitative weakness is its actual similarity to the previous one, although the alleged intensions were to improve it and liberalize it. This was noted by the NGOs, emphasizing the chapters regarding the counseling of women as the most problematic:

*"What remains unchanged is the formal request that has to be filled on paper, the biased counseling which the doctor focuses upon the advantages of continuing with pregnancy, the three days waiting period after the obligatory counseling, and the written permit. We are mostly interested in the documents upon which the counseling is based, since the law itself is not complete, i.e. integral" (Jovanovski Bojan, HERA, 10.06.2013).*

This segment is a part of the reaction of 72 non-governmental organizations, professional associations of gynecologists and the international factor against the Law on abortion, and the decision of the Constitutional court to reject their recommendation to withdraw the law from urgent procedure, and to pass it through regular procedure, thus providing a wider consultative process. In spite all their efforts for a quality new law, they were rejected by the Government, which was verified by the Constitutional court, and thus the old law remained in force. According to them the law was partial, non-integral and fragmented. A culmination of the rushed procedure is that "the Constitutional court instead of protecting the Constitution, allowed an administrative body to decide on the implementation of constitutionally guaranteed rights (...) the state has been given a role of women's guardian, having the right to say what is good for their health, their life and their bodily integrity. Thus all women were proclaimed unsuited for making decisions concerning their health. The limitation – one abortion per year was passed by the Constitutional court in a vacuum, without taking into account what can happen in everyday life" (Natasha Boshkova, Coalition on Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities, 09.10.2014). According to them, this leaves a space for easier manipulation of the procedure, especially when it comes to counseling of the pregnant women, which has to be conducted by the doctor who will perform the intervention, and that are novelties in the law. They define this measures as "changing the pregnant woman's mind", who has to wait three days after the counseling took place, in order to submit the necessary documents for the procedure for pregnancy termination. This issue can be discussed further, which will be done in the text that follows. Still, we would shortly go back to the dynamics of the passing of the changes in order to obtain a clearer image on the Governmental policies during this period related to the law on abortion. Since the first passing of the Law on pregnancy termination of the Socialistic Republic of Macedonia, published in Official Gazette 22/1972, the first draft-law proposed by the Government was submitted to the Parliament on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2013, in order to be passed through a shortened procedure. During those 41 years since, the law has been changed only twice, in 1976 and in 1995. After the passing of the law in 2013 through a shortened procedure, in the next three years, there are four changes of the law, two from 2013, one from 2014 and one from 2015. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, through a shortened procedure, a new law has been passed! Isn't this indicative?

The arrogant attitude of the Government towards the organizations and the public that did not agree with such policies has deepened controversies and has created social polarization of the public that can be felt even to this date. This is one of the reasons for this research and the interest towards this topic. It was already said that polarization is a result of the established politics in relation to the law, but it is also a result of the media campaign financed by the Government during this relatively long period. According to the statements of the activists, at the very beginning they were not able to see through the intention of the state organs – to realize the party politics in relation to family and motherhood versus abortion. My feelings, as well as the ones of my close friends with whom we have discussed the primary campaign activity in 2009, is identical to the ones of activists that reacted through protests during the summer of 2013.

*“The anti-abortion campaign, if I am not mistaken, has started in 2009, and in a silent way, it did not cause a big reaction. I remember the posters that started to appear without anyone...of dead fetuses, they played a shock tactics, used a shock tactics to induce an emotional reaction. But there were no big reactions. Somehow we ignored them. Besides certain individuals that reacted and made guerilla actions, a major part of the public did not react (Ana Vasileva, “Fight in a female way”, Abortion stigma – what was not right with the Government campaign, 10.12.2015)*

Zdravkovska concurs with the opinions of the activist stated above, in a research related to reproductive politic in the Republic of Macedonia and the effects of TV campaigns on the abortion law from 2017, adding: “From the moment of the construction of the public space through the campaigns, a divisive atmosphere was created when it came to the classification of the intervention, as well as regarding a certain dose of obligation to take a stance or side regarding this issue. The division is clear – dualism that presents two contradictory view points: one side that defines itself as more conservative and thinks that the right of the baby’s life should not be discussed, that even classifies abortion as murder; and the other side that defines itself as more liberal and that focuses upon the individual right of choice of women” (Здравковска, 2017: 8). Surely, the discussion regarding this issue in different societies, as well as in the Macedonian one, is nothing new, but the debate is a global one, differentiating two groups, one that is pro-life, and the other pro-choice. A common goal of both groups is the reduction of the number of abortions, as stated by Jana Kocavska (Tiiit. Ink., 10.12.2015, in “Abortion stigma – effects of the changes of the law). She focuses upon the fact that both campaigns go into explicit examples and explanations on which side is better, which according to her is unacceptable. Although in the public sphere the two opposing sides in Republic of Macedonia discuss holding strong opinions, there is a big difference compared to discussions led in Western European countries. In these countries the discussion includes all state and non-governmental organizations, while in the Republic of Macedonia there is either no discussion whatsoever, or it is conducted outside the institutions, as in the case of the analyzed period when the Government was not interested to have a discussion with the NGOs, so that it was organized “post factum”, i.e. after a step of the Government was already taken about which the organizations were either not informed or did not agree with them, and were organized only by and among the activities and the NGOs who wanted a more liberal solution to this issue. Governmental institutions did not participate

in these debates, due to the lack of interest of the Minister and the Government. Such “absence” was justified with the need of passing a law through a shortened procedure, without hearing different points of view and attitudes of the general public. Instead of a positive answer to the calls for discussion by the NGOs, and due to the need to justify one’s own behavior, contra-protests were organized by the supporters, the younger members and the Union of Women of VMRO-DPMNE. In this sense, for example, the attitude of the younger members and the Union of Women of VMRO-DPMNE, expressed in Prilep in 2012, is interesting.

### **Statement – Stop abortion**

“There are 42.000,000 women in the world having abortion annually, that is each fifth pregnancy is terminated with an abortion. As a consequence of illegal abortions, each seventh minute a woman dies. According to the report of the Statistical Office of the European Union, each 30 seconds in Europe one abortion is performed. There are more victims of abortions than all murders and tyranny combined. We, as the Union of Young Forces of VMRO-DPMNE and the Union of Women of VMRO-DPMNE, proudly and bravely say NO to abortion! We do not support it due to moral, civilized and social reasons. In this context we appeal to all those who through an abortion kill their own children, that this is the way in which they destroy their country, their family, their nation and the future. Murderous deeds result with murderous consequences, and in this case those are permanent infertility, removal of the womb, and often death of the pregnant woman. An absence of moral and legal protection of the fetus, as well as the absence of guarantee of his life, makes all declarations for protection of life meaningless. Thank you.” (Union of Young Forces of VMRO-DPMNE and the Union of Women of VMRO-DPMNE, 28.12.2012).

Their tendency is to blur the border between what is a legal and an illegal abortion, to intentionally influence the listeners and viewers, to focus upon “the victims of the invisible war” called abortion, whose ultimate victims are one’s own country, family, nation, and future, and the punishment of women who chose to perform a murder is permanent infertility, permanent removal of the womb and her own death. This party campaign financed with state money is subliminally influencing people in order to initiate fear in women, and to induce a judgment by others related to such women, that on the other hand influences her decision to terminate pregnancy. In one of the short movies it is insisted upon the fact that each abortion up to the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy is equal to murder, which suggests that the right to choose equals becoming a murderess (!). In 2009 TV Orbis from Bitola broadcasted a program, that contained a text titled “Abortion – Old topic, new dilemmas”. It covered the controversial topic of abortion, to adopt it or not, and the NGOs which during that period “who were pro forbidding abortion. Through posters presenting morbid images they requested a law to be adopted that would completely forbid violent termination of pregnancy” (Abortion – old topic, new dilemmas, 24.01.2009). Such an utilization of a shock-tactic continued in a form of a campaign, that suggests to Choose Life, visually promoting this idea, while providing the opportunity for a free choice, but in fact taking away this opportunity through the suggested solution.

## Campaign: Choose Life – Fetus

During the first week it has a unique genetic code, during the third week it obtains a blood circulation and the heart starts to pound. During the fifth week it already has a brain activity. During the sixth week it has a formed face and can feel pain. Seventh week – makes respiratory movements, eight week – it hears sounds. If abortion is a right to choose, murder is not! Choose life, you have a right to choose. Project of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (*Multiple children families*, 20.12.2012)

The condemnation of abortion that through the media campaign gained a negative social connotation of a murder, has been strengthened, and the process of finding a solution became even more complicated, when the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric started to publicly support this idea, and few of its representatives have publicly declared their personal attitudes during TV discussions, through statements or liturgies during the important religious holidays. The most vocal was the Archbishop of Prespa and Pelagonia region and the administrator of the Australian and New Zealand Macedonian Orthodox Christian community, Petar. At a press-conference for Kanal 5 TV, he supported the draft-law, but also declared that abortion is a double sin. His statement was re-published and commented upon on different portals. “We know that this is a matter of a conscious, intentional killing of children in the wombs of their mothers. The church cannot be silent and wants to raise its voice. We are obliged to say that one should not create a public opinion that abortion is something that is allowed. Some NGOs, that declare themselves as Christian, create an opinion that abortion is something that it is allowed while damaging human kind and the nation (...) The risk of abortion is also a suicide, since women through the abortion risk to remain infertile or risk their own life, which is a double sin” (Portal Press 24, 31.05.2012; Porta Republika.mk, 31.05.2013). His message targets Christians, and not atheists, and disqualifies the procedure, disqualifies the non-governmental organizations as illegitimate to speak on this issue, and at the same time defines them as damaging for society. This statement has initiated strong public reactions, especially in feminist circles.

As already mentioned above, the attitude of all civil organizations, citizens, and members of feminist circles, who were against such policies of the Government, concentrated upon four points of the new law from 2013. Although they have already been indirectly analyzed, concerning the controversial segments called “4 obstacles for a free choice” (HERA, 02.06.2013), still it is interesting to focus upon them as a concrete measures through which the party, using state institutions, conducted its nationalistic program. We saw that the new law is confusing for the doctors, but also that the prescribed high punishments present a huge pressure upon their work. For Zdravkovska the only novelty in the law, which is in contradiction to any improvement and development of this procedure is the administrative complexity and limitation of the work of the gynecologists. According to her “this fact can be confirmed through analyses of the emergence of written request for pregnancy termination, that was introduced in the law from 1972, but was canceled latter on, in 1976” (Здравковска 2017: 51). We agree with the statement that the alleged “modernization” of this segment of the law is actually going back to the old Yugoslav law from 1972.

It is important to note that those who are against those changes see them as an opportunity to manipulate both involved sides, the patients and the doctors. If we stick to the time-table of the changes of the articles in the law, our interest will be directed towards the newly introduced obligatory counseling of the pregnant woman by the gynecologist from the institution where the woman has applied to terminate pregnancy. At the beginning, after the introduction of the procedure, the content and the way in which this counseling will be performed was not clear. The only information concerning the procedure was a campaign that explained the reforms of the pregnancy termination law, but not this particular procedure. This caused great doubts, that the procedures are dubious, and as an illustration we can mention the short movie from the campaign concerning the reforms of the health system dedicated to abortion, published on internet on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2013. One patient is pregnant and undergoes an ultrasound examination with the gynecologist, who intends to start a procedure to terminate pregnancy. The dialog is conducted between the patient and the doctor. The patient asks questions in relation to the novelties in the law. The conversation is going on until the moment when she poses a question about the risks and the consequences of the abortion. The doctor invites her to his office to give her the information. At this moment there is a cut. The counseling of the patient is not shown in the film. It continues from the moment when it is over, and the doctor expresses a hope that he did not miss anything in his advices. Such an illustration, that does not provide an explanation on a very important segment such as counseling becomes an indication of the unknown intention of the film. The idea, to show and explain everything through the dialog, when it comes to counseling is a complete fail. The procedure is justified only through segments that have been filmed. Still, is this sufficient?

The Government and the Minister of Health, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2014, passes a Regulation of the content and the manner of counseling the pregnant women prior to pregnancy termination (published in Official Gazette of RM/148), that defines the obligatory counseling of the pregnant women. According to the directions included in the first article of the Regulation, the doctor is obliged to inform the woman “on the potential advantages of continuing with the pregnancy, as well as the risks of conducting, i.e. not conducting the intervention to terminate pregnancy upon health and the life of the woman...” (Regulation..., 2014). Article two of the Regulation defines the methodology of the procedure of counseling, that should be done orally and contain explanations, printed materials and a visual presentation of the dynamic ultrasound of the fetus and its description”, when “women are enabled to hear the heartbeat of the fetus”. Such a Regulation for counseling, when the doctor insists on the advantages of continuing pregnancy and the risks of abortion, was estimated by the professionals from the NGO Hera as a “biased counseling, that falls outside the responsibilities and the preparation that should be conducted by the doctor (on the potential advantages for continuing pregnancy) (4 obstacles to the right of free choice, HERA, 02.06.2013). A woman is first subjected to a moral and emotional pressure to change the decision that she has already made, or if she does not change her mind she would be subjected to health risk, to look for service at places which are not safe, outside the health system. After she passes the counseling, the doctor is obliged to note her husband. The fee for not respecting this obligation is 2000-3500 EUR. After the counseling, as a measure for “changing one’s mind” there is a obligatory waiting period that lasts three days. The procedure of pregnancy termination



should not be performed earlier than that, with the exception in cases when the pregnant woman is a minor, a woman with mental health problems, or in cases when the doctor noted a clear indication that the procedure should be performed, a decision that he makes based upon complete medical documentation. Such measures, according to the representatives of the organization “have no other goal except to put the woman in a moral dilemma after the biased counseling, if she should go with the abortion after all or not” (Natasha Boshkova, SZPMS, 09.10.2014). A result could be that the “woman would turn to illegal abortion, for which she does not have to submit a request nor to wait for a confirmation, she does not have to wait three days to change her mind and the service is cheaper”, and on the other side she would free the budget from spending on activities that the Government finds socially unacceptable and needless in such an important period for the Macedonian nation.

## Conclusion

The situation in the Republic of Macedonia in the period 2006-2017 in which the dominant ideology is nationalism financed by the state was such that it allowed the Macedonian “patriots” to take in their hands the care for the survival of the threatened Macedonian nation. Thus, the ideal formation of multiple children families was located in the center of the planned party program financed by the state budget. The responsibility for creating a family is on the ideal mother, as a biological task and the only desired social contribution of Macedonian women. According to the imagined model, this is the unique way in which a woman-mother could provide a true contribution to the enlargement of Macedonian nation. The program has been implemented through a law from 2013, that was revised in a number of versions in a short time. This is an indication of the weakness of the legal solution, which has been passed without any consultation with the wider public. Simultaneously, and even before the creation of the draft-law for canceling pregnancy, the Government started with financing of a number of TV and internet campaigns. Their main goal was to build an image of the ideal model of a multiple children family, versus the damaging procedure of pregnancy termination, i.e. abortion. For the ones obliged to keep traditional values the so called “patriots”, every other alternative option for a social realization of women is out of question and undesirable. No matter if the procedure for the termination is justified or not, the woman who decided to take this step and go through with the abortion according to the Government campaign was publicly denounced as a murderer!

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