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Skopje 2014 and Growing Authoritarian Rule in Macedonia

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What is Skopje 2014?

- government and municipality-led project
- ready-made video content: mixture of buildings, monuments, squares, bridges, sculptures and other structures in the city center of Skopje
- published 4 February 2010

Introduction

- final cost of the project: Unknown
- final number of construction sites: Unknown
- final date for finalization of all activities: Unknown
- the main ideologist of the Skopje 2014 project:
Officially unknown

Introduction

- Nikola Gruevski, former Macedonian PM (December 2015):

We won't build new monuments, all construction sites will be finished, new facades of current buildings will be changed in future

- Reasons why this project is beneficial:

- to build the national institutions of the country;
- to strengthen the national identity of Macedonians,
- to boost the number of tourists in Skopje;

PROS positions for Skopje 2014

- baroque as a architectural style originates from Macedonia (*Vangel Božinovski*)
- Skopje 2014 will give back the lost identity of the Macedonian capital (*Kosta Mangarovski*)
- chance to build our own space identity, city identity and national identity (*Slobodan Živkovski*)
- many institutions will have their own buildings (*Nikola Gruevski*)

CONS positions for Skopje 2014

- non-democratic system established in the country: Balkan-style despot that decides for everything, including architecture
- direct provocation for Greece
- construction sites opposing the Master Plan of the city of Skopje
- urban planning against legislative procedure
- copy-paste buildings from other European capitals

CONS positions for Skopje 2014

- behind closed doors project: prominent architects and artists have not been involved; professional associations have not been asked
- excluding project: only four of all monuments and sculptures dedicated to Albanian historical figures
- suspicion for corruption and criminal activities
- citizens have not been asked
- falsification of Macedonian history



Figure 1. Alexander the Great arrived at the square Macedonia (Build, 2011).

Decision-making process in the Skopje 2014 project



- the beginning of the Skopje 2014

project – the case with reconstruction of the National Parliament building (October 2006)

- **initiators:** Ljubiša Georgievski – Macedonian Parliament Speaker and Nikola Gruevski – Macedonian Prime Minister (Vojnovska, 2006)

- **inspiration:** Reichstag building in Berlin (Vest, 2006)




Reconstruction of the Parliament building in Skopje

- the Parliament building – cultural monument of first category
- additional floors onto this building against the law
- two architectural Competitions organized by the National Parliament




Reconstruction of the Parliament building in Skopje

- final results of the Competition: the best architectural work designed to look like the Reichstag building in Berlin (Bogoeva, 2007a) (Vojnovska, 2007b)
- members of the National Cultural Heritage Protection Office, Association of Architects of Macedonian and oppositional political parties resigned from membership in the architectural jury (Bogoeva, 2007a)



“We can’t blame the construction itself (the Parliament building) at this point for our immaturity when dealing with its historicity. The real relation with this building cannot be created with a debate about the given constants deriving from the existing legislation. These constants are not subject for negotiation. They are here to be respected!”

Kokan Grčev, President of the Association of Architects of Macedonia (11.7.2007)



- Museum of Macedonian Struggle, the Old Theatre, and the City Hall – buildings part of the 2006 election program of the ruling party

- Nikola Gruevski's cabinet in 2006: all of these buildings are going to be build in the city center (Vojnovska & Bogoeva, 2006)



Figure 2. Skopje 2014 on the left bank of Vardar River (Build, 2015).

Urban planning and the Skopje 2014 project

Detailed Urbanist Plan for the city center after the 1963 Skopje Earthquake (author: Kenzo Tange and associates)	Adopted in 1967 on the basis of the decision made by international jury in July 1965
Detailed Urbanist Plan for the city center of Skopje (author: Miroslav Grčev and associates)	Adopted in 1997 after six years of decision-making process
First change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in October 2007 (Date: 9.10.2007)
Second change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in July 2008 (Date: 9.7.2008)
Third change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in February 2009 (Date: 27.2.2009)
Fourth change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in January 2010 (Date: 29.1.2010)
Fifth change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in October 2010 (Date: 6.10.2010)
Sixth change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in May 2011 (Date: 31.5.2011)
Seventh change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in February 2012 (Date: 1.2.2012)
Eighth change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted June 2012 (Date: 28.6.2012)
Ninth change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the Skopje city center	Adopted in December 2012 (Date: 21.12.2012)

Table I. Dates of adoption of the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the city center of Skopje (Grčeva, 2013b); (Kapital, 2007); (Galić, 1968).

The first change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan

- in this change were incorporated: the monument of the Alexander the Great, the building of the Macedonian National Theatre, the reconstruction and upgrading of the Parliament building, the Macedonian Philharmonic orchestra hall and the City Hall (Trajkovska, 2007a) (Mitevaska, 2007b)
- initiator: Macedonian government (Mitevaska, 2007a)
- adopted changes – given in front of the Constitutional court



The second change in the Detailed Urbanist Plan


- new proposal nine months after the first change;
- initiator: Macedonian government (Trajkovska, 2008c)
- strong propaganda campaign: birth of the idea for construction a new church at central square
- fierce reaction from society – three groups arose: supporters of the church; supporters of the mosque; opponents of any sacred buildings



- **final decision:** new church included, mosque excluded from the plan

- **the City of Skopje:** illegal changes – they are against the Master Plan for the City of Skopje

- new version of the Detailed Urbanist Plan sent to the Constitutional court



- official pro-government discourse in media: separation on ethnic basis (“We” against “Them”) and inside Macedonians (“traitors” against “patriots”)

- outline of the second change: new buildings on the left bank of the Vardar river and more than 50 monuments and sculptures (Trajkovska, 2008b)



- the main barrier for the Skopje 2014 project – **the Constitutional court**

- **two rejected decisions** by this court in May 2008 and February 2009 (Trajkovska, 2008a) (Trajkovska, 2009)

- **government decision**: one of the new buildings will become official seat of the Constitutional court (Duvnjak, 2008)



- nine changes in the Detailed Urbanist Plan for the city center – a path for the Skopje 2014 project

- the Constitutional court in one case repealed the changes in the Detailed Urbanist Plan (June 2010)

- the revoked changes were re-adopted in a normal procedure (October 2010)

Official promotion of the Skopje 2014 project

- ready-made video promoted in a hotel
- promoters: Elizabeta Kancheska-Milevska (the Ministry of Culture); Koce Trajanovski (the Mayor of Skopje); Vladimir Todorovic (the Mayor of the Municipality of Centar)
- video material that visually shows all buildings and monuments that will be build in the next years in the city center of Skopje

Reaction from the Macedonian society

“Our faculty as the most competent and the only institution in this country of this kind must be consulted for such major activities in the Macedonian capital” (Petrova, 2010)

(Elizabeta Avramovska, university professor, Faculty of Architecture)

“In this case were consulted only those architects, sculptors and artists that were involved in the “game”, which meant their support for the project came automatically” (Frangovska, 2010c)

(The Macedonian Association of Art Critics and Art Historians)



Reaction from the Macedonian society

- public letter from the President of the Association of architects of Macedonia, Danica Pavlovska:

“We, architects, together with citizens, are placed in unworthy position. Professional and general public opinion are excluded from making important decisions from the Skopje 2014 project” (Build, 2010d)



Activities by the Macedonian Association of architects

- April 2010: open letter to the government – request for access to all documents from the Skopje 2014 project (Angelovska, 2010b)
- May 2010: open letter to the National Cultural Heritage Protection Office – request for help to reevaluate the Skopje 2014 project (Angelovska, 2010c)

Reaction from the Macedonian society

March 2010 (newspaper Dnevnik and Opinion Research and Communication Agency Rating)	58% AGAINST	39% FOR
June 2010 (the American International Republican Institute)	66% AGAINST	26% FOR
October 2012 (TNS Brima Gallup Int.)	57,8% AGAINST	26,4% FOR
July 2013 (Ipsos Strategic Puls and Institute Dimitrija Čupovski)	34% AGAINST	63,6% FOR

Table 2. National surveys that show the opinion of citizens for the Skopje 2014 project (Utrinski vesnik, 2010); (Jovanovska, 2010); (Šaševski, 2012); (Kanal 5, 2013).



Figure 3. New “baroque” facades in the city center of Skopje (Build, 2014).

(II) legal aspects of the Skopje 2014 project



(II) legal aspects of the Skopje 2014 project

- architect Leonora Grčeva: visualization of buildings is not a project – International Competition for Urbanist Plan have not been organized (Grčeva, 2013)
- architect Georgi Konstantinovski: All buildings on the left bank of the Vardar River are contrary to the Master Plan for the City of Skopje (Konstantinovski, 2012)



(II) legal aspects of the Skopje 2014 project

- **monuments of national importance:** approval should be given by the National Parliament, not by the Municipality of Centar (Vojnovska, 2010a)
- **revision commission that investigated the Skopje 2014 project:** The Municipality of Centar had no authorities to construct monuments in the city center of Skopje (Taseva & Malinovski, 2013: 2)

(II) legal aspects of the Skopje 2014 project

- reconstruction of the old facades in the city center of Skopje – around 100 buildings are included in the project
- some buildings protected by the law as cultural heritage included in the project (Denkovska, 2011)
- the case with Macedonia's government building: process of reconstruction against author's copyrights of the original architectural design (Angelovska, 2011) (Klimeski, 2014)

(II) legal aspects of the Skopje 2014 project

“If someone wants to change one building, and its author is still alive, then, he has to be asked about it, and, as you can see, I’m alive” (Klimeski, 2014)

(Petar Mulickovski, architect, former Harvard and Berkeley student)

“In response to your question, I would like to emphasize that none of the officials from both the Ministry of Education and Science and the University of Skopje, never contacted me about the ongoing project to build other faculties in the area of University Centre in Skopje” (Blaževski, 2016)

(Marko Mušič, Slovenian architect, former president of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts)

(II) legal aspects of the Skopje 2014 project

- some authors publicly refused to give approval for reconstruction of their architectural works
- architect Slavko Brezovski: I'm strongly against changing the original facade of my building and I will never give approval for construction activities (Build, 2014)
- Association of Architects of Macedonia: it is particularly unacceptable to do such thing without permission from the author (Angelovska, 2011)



Conclusions

- authoritarian idea for reconsideration and reevaluation of the Skopje city center
- project still in progress
- exclusion of key associations and prominent intellectuals in the decision-making process
- exclusion of citizens in the decision-making process



Figure 4. New “baroque” facade in the city center of Skopje (Build, 2012b).

“Skopje may look like Rome or Paris, but the city is going to lose its identity” (Build, 2012a)

Paul Noritaka Tange, Japanese architect

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