

ΣΚΟΠΙΑ, 5 ΙΟΥΛΙΟΥ 2026

ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ ΚΑΙ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ ΠΛΑΙΣΙΟ

[00:00-00:28] *[Τεχνική συζήτηση σχετικά με τον προβολέα, την παροχή ρεύματος και το καλώδιο HDMI.]*

[00:29] **Κική Σακκά:** I will introduce our guest, and I would very much like to thank him. I have known Mire for about twenty or twenty-five years - I am not sure exactly how long.

[00:42] **Mire Mladenovski:** Is that a good thing to mention? Let us say twenty.

[00:46] **Κ.Σ.:** He is also a former president of EuroClio.

[00:50] **Μ.Μ.:** As you are.

[00:50] **Κ.Σ.:** So there are two former presidents in the room.

[00:54] **Μ.Μ.:** And current ambassadors.

[00:56] **Κ.Σ.:** We met at a very different time, when tensions between our two countries were extremely high. We went through some difficult situations together. I remember that we later worked on a joint project, although I cannot remember exactly where our first meeting took place.

[01:17] **Μ.Μ.:** I remember. I believe we first met in 2002.

[01:25] **Κ.Σ.:** In 2002?

[01:26] **Μ.Μ.:** Yes, here in Skopje.

[01:31] **Κ.Σ.:** With Christina Koulouri.

[01:32] **Μ.Μ.:** Exactly, as part of the Balkan project. So we have known each other for twenty-four years.

[01:45] **Ομλητής:** We do not look old enough for that.

[01:52-02:05] *[Περαιτέρω συζήτηση σχετικά με τον εξοπλισμό.]*

[02:06] **Κ.Σ.:** This was another last-minute request to Mire. I asked whether he could find someone to explain the situation here and speak about history education. He was very willing, but because it is summer, most of his colleagues were away. He therefore agreed to prepare the presentation himself, despite having very little time and facing a difficult family situation. I would like to thank him again.

[02:56] **Μ.Μ.:** I appreciate that. I like her; if it had been somebody else, I might have thought twice.

[03:07] **Μ.Μ.:** But a promise is a promise. We had been discussing this meeting for a couple of years, and it has finally happened.

[03:17] **Ομλητής:** Nobody in Greece likes her. She is the only one. [Γέλια.]

[03:21-03:48] *[Τεχνική συζήτηση κατά την προετοιμασία της παρουσίασης.]*

[03:49] **Μ.Μ.:** While they are sorting that out, I would like to say a few words.

[04:07] **K.Σ.:** The floor is yours.

[04:08] **M.M.:** As today's host, at least for this part of the day, I hope you have enjoyed Skopje so far. I assume that this is the first visit for most of you. It is a pity that you have so little time, since I believe you are leaving tomorrow. I hope you still manage to see the Old Bazaar and some other places.

[04:47] **K.Σ.:** Thank you very much.

[04:48] **Ομκλητής:** You are very welcome.

[04:51] **M.M.:** I am not sure how much time I have, but I was asked to say something about history teaching and education in Macedonia. I have prepared a presentation, but please ask anything you wish and feel free to interrupt me.

[05:19] **K.Σ.:** First, tell us a little about yourself. How long have you been teaching?

[05:23] **M.M.:** Thirty-five years.

[05:29] **K.Σ.:** Thirty-five?

[05:29] **M.M.:** Yes. I have worked in the same school - even in the same classroom - for thirty-five years, and I plan to retire from that same school.

[05:42] **Ομκλητής:** The same school.

[05:44] **M.M.:** I was also one of the founders of the History Teachers' Association of Macedonia. I have been particularly active in methodology and history teaching. Here, teachers specialise in history: we graduate in history and teach history. In recent years, we have also taught a separate subject called civic education. In many countries, history is studied together with a second discipline, but that is not the case here.

[06:30] **M.M.:** After graduating, I began working at the school where I have now taught for thirty-five years. Throughout that time, I have tried to improve the way history is taught.

[06:43] **M.M.:** I remember that, as a student, I found history boring. I did not fall in love with history through the school system, but through other sources and experiences outside the classroom.

[06:58] **Ομκλητής:** Not through school?

[07:01] **M.M.:** No. I was born and raised in the former Yugoslavia, under communism. The system operated on the principle that there was one truth.

[07:30] **M.M.:** Education throughout Yugoslavia was based on the belief that there was a single truth about everything, especially history. You were not expected to think, investigate or discover. The system told you what had happened and what the truth was; you simply had to read and remember it.

[08:02] **M.M.:** But curious people - and there were many of us - encountered different stories about the past through parents, neighbours, books, newspapers and other sources. That was how I came to love history: outside the classroom. I was not unique in that respect.

[08:27] **M.M.:** When I became a teacher, Yugoslavia collapsed. It was an interesting but confusing period because we were moving from communism to democracy, and society did not really know how to manage the transition.

[08:57] **M.M.:** It was particularly difficult in the classroom. For the first couple of years we were told to set the old textbooks aside and use manuals instead, but the available materials were insufficient. At the same time, I was happy to have the freedom to choose how I taught. The gradual transition from a single, one-sided historical narrative to a multiperspectival approach was fascinating, but we could not have made it without support from outside Macedonia, especially from EuroClio.

[10:01] **M.M.:** EuroClio is the European Association of History Educators. It supported us, as well as colleagues in Albania, Bulgaria and other countries facing similar problems during the 1990s.

[10:14] **M.M.:** The transition is still continuing. We want to achieve more, and to do better. Personally, I am not satisfied with the speed or the way in which the reforms are being implemented, but at least something is happening.

[10:34] **M.M.:** Teachers working in classrooms organised ourselves in order to help improve the system. That is the short version of my background. Perhaps I should now begin the presentation.

ΤΟ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΤΙΚΟ ΣΥΣΤΗΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ

[10:57] **K.Σ.:** From quite early on there were political problems concerning the name and related issues. Did these affect history teaching?

[11:11] **M.M.:** The name issue did not affect the official curriculum directly, because it concerned modern or contemporary history, which we did not really cover. Of course, when an issue is present in society, it may arise in the classroom even if it is outside the curriculum. Whether it is discussed depends on the individual teacher; it is not addressed through official channels.

[11:21] **M.M.:** Before discussing that further, I would like to give you an overview of our educational system. Every school subject has teaching standards as its basis. Writing standards is the easy part: you can almost copy them from the United Kingdom because the principles are universal rather than country-specific. The key terms are multiperspectivity, critical thinking, problem-solving and so on. The difficult question is how these principles are actually implemented.

[12:16] **M.M.:** In my view, history education rests on three pillars: the curriculum, the textbooks and the teaching process. The quality of the teaching depends on teacher training; the quality of the curriculum depends on those who design it; and the quality of the textbooks depends on their authors.

[13:31] **M.M.:** If we imagine these three pillars as a temple of history education, our temple is not in very good condition. All the necessary elements exist, but they are not in the right shape. I have criticisms of each pillar. Before discussing them, however, I need to explain the overall structure of the system.

[14:20] **M.M.:** We have two cycles: primary and secondary education. Primary education runs from the ages of six to fourteen, usually in the same school building. Secondary education covers the ages of fifteen to eighteen.

[14:48] **K.Σ.:** In Greece it is different. Primary education runs from six to twelve. From thirteen to eighteen, pupils attend lower and upper secondary school.

[15:00] **M.M.:** In primary school, pupils study certain historical periods. In secondary school, they study the same periods again in greater depth. It is therefore a spiral or cyclical system rather than a continuous one.

[15:25] **M.M.:** Traditionally, we used a chronological approach. We are now in the process of moving towards a thematic approach.

[15:55] **M.M.:** For every historical period, pupils first study what was happening globally, mainly in Europe. They then study developments in the region - the Balkans, especially the neighbouring countries - and finally national history.

[16:26] **M.M.:** I describe our national history as, in a sense, bi-national or multinational. The country is not inhabited only by ethnic Macedonians. Around a quarter of the population is Albanian, and there are also Turks, Serbs, Bosniaks, Vlachs and Roma. Communities recognised in the Constitution have the right to study in their own language and to learn about their own history. We therefore teach not only the history of the Macedonian people but also, for example, Albanian history.

[17:54] **K.Σ.:** Are these pupils in separate classes or separate schools?

[18:07] **M.M.:** The proportions on the slide may not be exact, but they give you a general idea. In practice, there are separate schools or physically separate parts of schools. We call this the linguistic division of education. Pupils study in Macedonian, Albanian and, where numbers permit, other languages such as Turkish, Serbian or Romani.

[18:45] **K.Σ.:** So pupils are no longer in the same school but attend different schools?

[18:47] **M.M.:** In many cases, yes. They are physically separated.

[18:52] **Ομλητής:** Apart from language and history, are there differences in the other subjects?

[19:02] **M.M.:** No. The history curriculum is the same, and the textbook is the same. The main difference is the language of instruction.

[19:10] **M.M.:** For each period, pupils study world history, Balkan history and developments in Macedonia. Albanian history is also included, but often as a separate lesson. For example, there may be one lesson on Macedonian culture and another on Albanian culture rather than an integrated account.

[19:50] **Ομλητής:** Is this compulsory, or can parents choose the language in which their children study?

[20:01] **M.M.:** Parents choose the language of instruction. An Albanian pupil may study in Macedonian, and a Macedonian pupil may study in Albanian, although that is uncommon.

[20:19] **K.Σ.:** I assume that everyone learns the Macedonian language.

[20:24] **M.M.:** Yes.

[20:41] **Ομλητής:** Do you teach Albanian pupils in primary school?

[20:59] **M.M.:** I do not, because I do not speak Albanian. Albanian-speaking pupils are taught by Albanian-speaking teachers.

[21:14] **Ομλητής:** How many universities offer history degrees?

[21:22] **M.M.:** Three. One teaches in Albanian and the other two in Macedonian. The curriculum and textbooks are the same; they are simply translated into the language of instruction. The same applies to Serbian-language teaching.

[22:03] **M.M.:** Primary education covers the ages of six to fourteen, but pupils first encounter history in the fourth grade. At that stage the subject has a different name.

[22:15] **M.M.:** In grades four, five and six it is called History and Society, combining history with elements of civic education. This is part of an ongoing reform, and the name and structure may gradually be extended to other grades.

[22:52] **M.M.:** In the fourth grade, the topic is "My Country": pupils learn general information about the state, national holidays, institutions and similar matters. From grades one to five, pupils have one class teacher for almost all subjects.

[23:24] **M.M.:** From grades six to nine, subjects are taught by specialist teachers. In the fifth grade, pupils study "The Past": basic concepts such as historical sources, time and chronology. They then move through ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary history in the later grades. Our contemporary history curriculum ends in 1997, only a few years before the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. That remains a difficult subject. How far do you reach in Greece?

[24:20] **K.Σ.:** Are you asking whether we teach the recent wars in Yugoslavia?

[24:26] **M.M.:** Yes, and how far your own Greek history curriculum goes.

[24:29] **K.Σ.:** In theory we are supposed to reach the 1990s. In practice, we usually run out of time and rarely get beyond the 1950s or the period immediately after the Second World War.

[24:44] **M.M.:** The Civil War?

[24:47] **Ομλητής:** It is not really discussed in depth.

[24:50] **M.M.:** It is a difficult topic. Recent history remains painful everywhere, although for us some of these events are even more recent.

[25:07] **K.Σ.:** I remember an experience from the Joint History Project. We were in Zagreb, working in groups of teachers from across the Balkans on the volume about the Second World War. There was a very fierce disagreement between Serbian and Croatian colleagues. They began in English and then switched to Serbo-Croatian. One of them stood up and said, "A few years ago I was in the army."

[25:58] **M.M.:** They had literally been shooting at one another.

[26:00] **K.Σ.:** It was extraordinary and deeply painful.

[26:03] **M.M.:** I remember. One participant, now a university professor in Sarajevo, was a Bosniak. Another, now a professor in Banja Luka, was a Serb from Republika Srpska. They had been on opposing sides of the war.

[26:27] **M.M.:** The war ended in 1995, and this meeting took place only six or seven years later. Today they are very good friends and even make dark jokes about having once tried to kill one another. That change represents enormous progress after a bloody war. Some of us were also directly affected by the conflict in 2001. There is no excuse for avoiding difficult, controversial and sensitive topics. If teachers do not address them, somebody else will - and those people may exploit them. Politicians, in particular, can turn such topics into weapons and use them to spread hatred. I often use the European expression "responsible teaching." We must be responsible teachers and think about the future. The past has already happened. Hate speech and the spreading of hatred cannot lead to a better future.

[28:00] **M.M.:** Let me return to the number of teaching hours. In the fourth grade there are only six hours of this subject in the entire year.

[28:18] **Ομλητής:** Six per week?

[28:21] **M.M.:** No, six per year. The children are very young and the content is introductory: the country, national holidays and similar topics. More substantial history teaching begins in the sixth grade.

[28:43] **K.Σ.:** Before that, it is an introduction. From the sixth grade, there are two hours per week.

[28:51] **M.M.:** In general, pupils receive around seventy-two lessons per year. In History and Society, approximately sixty-two lessons concern history and ten concern society or civic education, including human rights, the political system and how institutions function. In secondary education, I will focus on the gymnasium rather than vocational schools such as technical or medical schools, where history may be taught for only one or two years. In the first year of gymnasium, history now covers all periods through a thematic approach. This reform began last year. Previously, the course was chronological and the first year focused on ancient history.

[30:16] **K.Σ.:** Greece introduced a thematic approach in the gymnasium this year as well.

[30:23] **M.M.:** As I said, perhaps somebody is pushing all of us in the same direction.

[30:25] **K.Σ.:** How many themes are studied each year?

[30:33] **M.M.:** I believe there are four or five main themes, with sub-themes. I can show you the separate curriculum document later. The second year still covers medieval history chronologically, although it is expected to become thematic. In the third year, modern and contemporary history are combined. At present, history in the fourth year is an elective focused on national history across all periods, allowing pupils to study it in greater depth.

[31:41] **M.M.:** The plan is eventually to introduce thematic history across all periods there as well. More importantly, history will become compulsory for only two years, with later study depending on the pupil's choices. From the perspective of our profession, this means that history is losing ground.

[32:06] **K.Σ.:** Will national history still be taught?

[32:09] **M.M.:** I do not think the authorities have fully decided. What is clear is that they want history to be compulsory for only two years.

[32:24] **Κ.Σ.:** So it will disappear from the other years unless pupils choose it?

[32:26] **Μ.Μ.:** Yes. It will be an elective. A pupil may decide not to study history and instead choose subjects more relevant to a future university course. Similar developments are occurring elsewhere in the former Yugoslav region. Perhaps someone thinks that the Balkans already has too much history and should have less of it. There is a quotation often attributed to Churchill, although I checked and it is not actually his. Churchill did have a habit of borrowing other people's sayings. [Laughter.]

[33:40] **Μ.Μ.:** Now that you understand the structure of the system, we can look more closely at the textbooks. I brought some examples. They are written in Cyrillic, so you may not be able to read them, but you can at least see what they look like. I have to take them home again because they cannot be bought in shops.

[34:49] **Ομλητής:** The textbooks?

[34:52] **Μ.Μ.:** Yes. Nobody in Macedonia can buy these textbooks.

[34:58] **Κ.Σ.:** Because they are provided free of charge?

[34:59] **Μ.Μ.:** The state provides them free to pupils, but they are not sold commercially. These two copies were lent to me and I must return them. Even I cannot purchase them. At first, some books were available as PDF files, but the authorities no longer want to make them available in that form. I do not know why. Perhaps the people making these decisions do not know either.

[35:58] **Μ.Μ.:** Under communism there was, naturally, only one approved textbook. When society and the market opened, there was a period in which several textbooks were available and teachers could choose between them. We have now returned to a system with only one textbook per grade. In my view, this is because the textbook market is valuable and somebody wants the entire share of it.

[36:47] **Ομλητής:** And the textbook is not available online.

[36:53] **Μ.Μ.:** As an association, we have campaigned strongly for an open market, but it has not been permitted. The argument is that our country is too small. Yet Slovenia is similar in population and size and offers teachers several textbooks for each grade. The issue is profit rather than educational principle.

[37:30] **Ομλητής:** A monopoly.

[37:31] **Μ.Μ.:** Yes, it is a monopoly.

Η ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ: ΟΠΛΟ Ή ΕΡΓΑΛΕΙΟ;

[37:35] **Μ.Μ.:** That covers the textbook pillar. What was the third pillar?

[37:43] **Ομλητής:** Teaching.

[37:54] **Μ.Μ.:** I could speak about teaching for hours, but I have given myself permission to offer a ten-minute lecture - perhaps five minutes, since most of you are experienced colleagues. This is my favourite lesson. Its title is "History Education: A Weapon or a Tool?" There should be a question mark on the slide.

[38:47] **M.M.:** I often use the following idea: those who cannot offer you a better future offer you the glory of the past. I first heard it from one of the founders of EuroClio. When she visited Skopje after the construction of the many new monuments, she asked why there were so many. I told her not to ask me - I had not built them; it was a government project. Her conclusion was that those unable to offer a better future often offer a glorious past instead. I believe that applies widely across the Balkans. We are often trapped in the past. That is the introduction; now the lesson begins.

[40:31] **M.M.:** Many people believe that learning history means learning the truth. Personally, I think the idea of "the truth" is sometimes overrated. Historians, teachers and students are naturally curious and ask questions about the past. But there are two broad types of questions: questions of historical orientation and questions of historical thinking. Questions such as who, when and where often concern basic facts. Who are we? A Greek group. When are we meeting? Today. Where are we? At the City Park Hotel. We can agree on these facts because they can be checked. But if I ask how you came here, there may be many answers. Some travelled directly by bus; others may have gone first to Athens and then continued by bus. If I ask why you came, the answers will vary even more. One person wanted to visit Skopje; another wanted to hear this presentation. If I ask what happened during the visit, one person may remember a boring lecture, another the food, and another the frescoes in a monastery. The answer depends on personal experience.

[42:45] **K.Σ.:** I would call that interpretation.

[42:48] **M.M.:** Yes, interpretation is a better word. We can agree relatively easily on basic facts, but deeper questions produce different answers depending on what is asked and from which perspective.

[43:05] **Ομλητής:** Even a "who" question can sometimes be complicated.

[43:18] **M.M.:** That is true, although some elements can still be checked. If education focuses only on factual questions, it rewards the person who can remember the most information. But is that really what we need? I often ask colleagues who received the highest grade in physics whether they still remember Newton's second law. They knew it at the time, but many no longer remember it. Knowledge can be temporary. If you do not use it, you lose it, especially now that factual information is readily available online. What we need are skills.

[44:22] **M.M.:** To form my own conclusion, I need to hear your interpretation, her interpretation and other perspectives. The ability to compare them and reach a reasoned conclusion is a skill. Skills endure longer than memorised information. Once you learn how to ride a bicycle or swim, you generally retain that ability. Historical thinking should work in a similar way. As a responsible teacher, I want to develop my pupils' skills rather than simply test whether they can recall names and dates.

[45:30] **M.M.:** Consider the questions that are often asked in national history: Which nation is older? Who arrived first in the Balkans? Who has the historical right to a particular land? Who is the victim? What answer will every group give?

[45:58] **Ομλητής:** We are.

[46:01] **M.M.:** Exactly. No matter whom you ask, the answer will be "we are the oldest" and "we are the victims." But two groups cannot both be uniquely the oldest. If education continually asks questions of that kind, where does it lead? It leads to disputes over controversial and sensitive topics, to misunderstandings and attempts to prove one another wrong. We create prejudices and stereotypes: "Greeks are stupid," "Macedonians are idiots," and so on. The eventual result is conflict and divided societies.

[47:18] **M.M.:** I saw this happen in the former Yugoslavia. People who had lived together began competing over who was the victim. Because society repeatedly asked those questions, the process ended in a bloody war.

[47:48] **M.M.:** Imagine instead that we ask how it is possible for us to be sitting together today. One answer is that a responsible and open-minded person decided, twenty-four years ago, to bring people together across a border. By meeting us, you recognised the human being in us. People who have never met someone from the other side may still hold strong prejudices. Some people hate us without ever having met us. Likewise, some people here hate Greeks they have never met or spoken with. They see only an enemy because that is what they have been taught. It is easy to manipulate children when they are young. They spend fifteen years in an educational system hearing the same messages. If we want to answer more meaningful questions - why something happened, what its consequences were and what legacy it left - we need multiperspectivity. I need to hear your story, which means I need to meet you. I also need to tell you my story. We may still disagree, but at least we understand what the other person thinks. Whether we intend it or not, another perspective then enters our minds.

[50:15] **M.M.:** Young people often have more natural empathy and respect for others. Children of different backgrounds play together. Hatred is learned later. Through education and society, we can either develop their empathy or train them away from it. Understanding and tolerance become possible when we listen to one another's stories, including personal stories. That approach creates open-minded people - people who respect and are willing to hear other opinions. The European Union speaks of unity in diversity. The former Yugoslavia used the phrase "brotherhood and unity." Whatever words we choose, the principle should exist not only on paper but in everyday life - among Macedonians and Greeks, and among Germans, Italians, French people and everyone else. The hoped-for result is peace and multicultural societies. We can remain different while living peacefully and respecting one another. Before we become Greeks or Macedonians, Christians or Muslims, we are human beings.

[52:34] **K.Σ.:** That is why we should support and promote eTwinning and exchanges between classes.

[52:41] **M.M.:** Absolutely. Erasmus and similar programmes are extremely valuable because they allow people to meet. In 2000, I worked for the first time with Albanians from Albania and Bulgarians from Bulgaria in a joint project organised by EuroClio. Everyone arrived believing that they possessed the truth. I can admit now that I was a nationalist at the time because the system had raised me that way. I tell a different story today. That is the difference between using history as a weapon and using it as a tool.

[53:47] **M.M.:** The quickest way to change from weapon to tool would be through the top of the pyramid - ministries and political leaders. But in my personal view, politicians often prefer to use history as a weapon because they benefit from it and can keep people manipulated.

[54:13] **M.M.:** A group of us has therefore tried to change things from the bottom up, at grassroots level. We have not achieved everything we hoped for, but the situation is certainly different from twenty-five years ago. Change through education is slow. We are a bit of a rock-and-roll generation: we want everything immediately. Life does not work that way. At the very least, we should leave a mark for future generations. Meetings like this may look small in terms of numbers, but they are not insignificant. You will share this discussion with friends who may not be historians, and I will do the same. The key phrase is responsible teaching.

[55:38] **K.Σ.:** Bravo. Thank you.

[55:43] **M.M.:** I am open to questions.

ΣΧΟΛΙΚΑ ΕΓΧΕΙΡΙΔΙΑ, Η ΣΥΜΦΩΝΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΕΣΠΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΟΙ ΕΘΝΙΚΕΣ ΑΦΗΓΗΣΕΙΣ

[55:45] **K.Σ.:** I have a question about the curriculum. What are its stated aims?

[55:51] **M.M.:** There are many. I have them, but not in English; I would have to translate them.

[56:01] **Ομλητής:** This textbook was published in 2025, so it is recent. Are all the history textbooks new?

[56:21] **M.M.:** Not all of them. The books for the sixth and seventh grades are new, and a new one is expected each year as the system moves from a chronological to a thematic approach. Before the 2025 reform, the previous major change had been in 2005.

[57:04-58:58] *[Συζήτηση ενώ οι συμμετέχοντες εξετάζουν και μεταφράζουν αποσπάσματα από τα σχολικά εγχειρίδια. Ορισμένα σημεία της ηχογράφησης δεν είναι σαφή.]*

[58:59] **M.M.:** Which title would you like translated?

[59:11] **M.M.:** "The Arrival" or "Migration of the Slavs in the Balkans," in the sixth century. The arrows indicate the directions of movement.

[59:56] **K.Σ.:** After the Prespa Agreement and everything connected with it, have there been any changes in the textbooks?

[1:00:09] **M.M.:** Do you mean changes in the historical narratives? These are new books, but I do not think the narratives have changed significantly.

[1:00:15] **K.Σ.:** So the account of the origins of the Macedonian nation remains connected with Alexander the Great and the ancient Macedonians?

[1:00:26] **M.M.:** It is not stated explicitly in those terms, but the overall reading suggests that the modern Macedonian nation is presented as a mixture of ancient Macedonians and Slavs.

[1:00:39] **K.Σ.:** In other words, figures such as Philip and Alexander, and the ancient inhabitants of the region, are included in the national narrative. Was a joint scientific committee not supposed to examine such narratives?

[1:01:13] **M.M.:** That work has not yet taken place. I know which university professor from the Macedonian side was expected to participate, but the process depends on a political decision. At the moment, the dispute with Bulgaria has become the more immediate issue.

[1:01:33] **M.M.:** We resolved the dispute with Greece, and now we have another one.

[1:01:39] **K.Σ.:** We also saw the large monuments, which many of us found unattractive. Some of them had what we might call corrective or explanatory inscriptions.

[1:01:52] **M.M.:** The agreement required such inscriptions to be added.

[1:01:55] **K.Σ.:** But in many cases they had been erased, covered or removed.

[1:02:01] **M.M.:** Personally, I do not think that approach can work very well. It is also unusual; I do not know of many comparable examples elsewhere. But politicians agreed on what they agreed.

[1:02:19] **K.Σ.:** How did the public respond?

[1:02:23] **M.M.:** The public did not accept it, at least not the majority.

[1:02:27] **K.Σ.:** That is one reason Zaev is now politically finished.

[1:02:29] **M.M.:** Yes. Most people did not accept it and saw it as a national issue. A minority supported the changes, not because they accepted the Greek arguments, but because they wanted the country to move towards the European Union. Without that goal, the issue would probably not have been discussed.

[1:03:02] **M.M.:** Personally, as a historian and as a citizen, I do not think these arguments are important for our future. What changes in your life or mine if you believe one version and I believe another? You probably cannot trace yourself directly to Aristotle, and I cannot trace myself directly to Philip II. We could argue until tomorrow without changing our positions.

[1:04:41] **M.M.:** I remember that period. There were secret discussions involving Mitsotakis and Macedonian political leaders, even ideas about a closer federation or association between Greece and Macedonia. Nothing came of them.

[1:05:00] **M.M.:** Sometimes societies are simply not ready for major changes. Political leaders may find common ground, but changing an entire society takes time - or, unfortunately, a dramatic event such as a war. We do not want a war. Of course not. Even today, the majority may not like the Prespa settlement, but many have gradually swallowed it and learned to live with it. Our dispute with Bulgaria is now even more serious.

[1:05:54] **K.Σ.:** What do the Bulgarians want?

[1:05:56] **M.M.:** One issue is the inclusion of Bulgarians in our Constitution, even though only a few thousand people identified themselves that way in the census. Many people here believe that Bulgaria uses this demand as part of a broader refusal to recognise us as a separate nation.

[1:06:20] **M.M.:** They argue that we are Bulgarians rather than Macedonians, and they challenge the distinctiveness of our language. Greece disputed our name, but it did not generally claim that we were Greeks or deny our nationality in the same way.

[1:06:31] **M.M.:** Of course, there remains the question of Macedonians in Greece. As I understand it, Greece officially recognises only the religious minority and does not recognise ethnic minorities in the same terms.

[1:07:22] **K.Σ.:** We discussed this on the way here. Greece includes people of Albanian origin and Slavic-speaking communities, yet there is little willingness to recognise them as minorities or

provide schooling in their languages. In my view, the lack of recognition of the Slavic-speaking population in Greek Macedonia is a problem.

[1:08:12] **M.M.:** I meet members of those communities when I visit places such as Drama and Florina.

[1:08:19] **Κ.Σ.:** The language used for minorities also changes according to political circumstances. The Muslim minority in Greece has at different times been described as Turkish or simply Muslim, depending on where the state perceived the threat. That is another example of history and identity being used politically.

[1:08:43] **M.M.:** Politics can use these matters as weapons.

[1:08:50] **Κ.Σ.:** The problem begins when a society is afraid to acknowledge realities of that kind.

[1:08:55] **M.M.:** I believe change will come slowly. For some people it is painful because they are not accustomed to thinking in those terms.

[1:09:06] **Ομλητής:** It is not painful; it is simply foolish.

[1:09:09] **M.M.:** I mean painful for some people, not for everyone. Sometimes such voices are not truly the majority, but they are loud enough to appear so. Those of us who disagree should perhaps speak more loudly, although aggression is not in everyone's character. I am glad that we can discuss these questions calmly among ordinary people.

ΕΞΕΤΑΣΕΙΣ, ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΑ ΚΑΙ Η ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

[1:10:06] **Κ.Σ.:** A general question: when pupils finish secondary school, do they take university entrance examinations?

[1:10:13] **M.M.:** They take an examination called the Matura, although the exact requirements vary. Very high-performing pupils may be exempt from certain parts. Faculties with many applicants, such as medicine or law, may also organise their own entrance tests.

[1:10:52] **Ομλητής:** Who supervises those examinations? In Greece, if universities organised their own admissions, there would be concern that university professors might favour their own children.

[1:11:14] **M.M.:** Such abuse is always possible here as well.

[1:11:20] **Ομλητής:** Are the examinations not supervised by the ministry?

[1:11:23] **M.M.:** Even ministry supervision does not automatically prevent problems.

[1:11:27] **Κ.Σ.:** In Greece, the national university entrance examination has remained largely untouched for decades. It is one of the few institutions that people still broadly trust.

[1:11:41] **M.M.:** Here there have been cases in which examination papers were leaked. The authorities caught those responsible, but the risk exists. Universities also have a responsibility for the quality of the pupils they admit. If they accept weak students, the quality of the institution eventually declines. That is one reason our universities do not appear highly on international rankings such as the Shanghai ranking.

[1:12:11] **Κ.Σ.:** How many universities do you have?

[1:12:12] **M.M.:** Too many, in my opinion. Some barely function as serious teaching institutions. Large companies sometimes specify in job advertisements which universities' degrees they will accept because they know the differences in quality.

[1:12:50] **Ομλητής:** The country has fewer than two million inhabitants - around 1.8 million.

[1:13:05] **M.M.:** We even have universities with links to Turkey. Macedonian students study in Turkey, and Turkish students study here. There is nothing wrong with exchange itself, but the quality varies greatly.

[1:13:20] **M.M.:** Private universities are expensive and mainly serve foreigners and wealthy Macedonian families. In my personal view, some wealthy students damage the academic culture because they believe, "I am paying, so I must graduate."

[1:13:39] **A.K.:** I have experience of both systems. I was born here, have Greek family connections, completed secondary school here and began a tourism degree in Ohrid. After my first year, I had the opportunity to continue at a private institution in Corfu.

[1:14:19] **A.K.:** I therefore know what private education can be like both here and in Greece. You pay, but whether you benefit depends partly on what the institution offers and partly on whether you choose to make use of the opportunity.

[1:14:34] **A.K.:** In Corfu, I felt that I received value for what I paid. Some wealthy parents, however, pay only so that their children can obtain a degree. The student may care only about the certificate. I could have paid my fees, rarely attended and done very little, but I wanted to learn. That was my choice.

[1:15:11] **A.K.:** The same distinction exists in private medicine and private clinics. Some private institutions are led by highly qualified specialists and provide excellent services. Others lack tradition and quality. Here, for example, the American College has a good reputation, but many newer private institutions do not.

[1:16:15] **M.M.:** Are there any other questions or comments?

[1:16:19] **K.Σ.:** Comments and compliments are also welcome. Meetings of this kind are always valuable.

[1:16:42] **M.M.:** I asked earlier about the Greek Civil War. Is it included in your curriculum, and do you teach it through projects?

[1:16:52] **Ομλητής:** It is in the curriculum.

[1:16:53] **Ομλητής:** Projects can be done, depending on the teacher.

[1:17:07] **M.M.:** Is the Civil War still strongly present in Greek society?

[1:17:14] **K.Σ.:** Very much so. It never really ends. During the years of the economic crisis, public discourse returned strongly to divisions framed in the language of the Civil War.

[1:17:31] **K.Σ.:** We are supposed to have overcome those divisions, but society remains wounded. The economic indicators may appear positive while ordinary people do not feel any improvement. Teachers' salaries were cut by around forty-five per cent, and pensions were almost halved.

[1:18:08] **K.Σ.:** The country may appear successful in public relations, but Eurostat indicators place Greece near the bottom of the European Union. We used to be closer to the middle. Our prime minister speaks excellent English and is very effective at public relations, but that does not mean people experience prosperity.

[1:18:43] **M.M.:** Do Greek pupils study the history of our country or that of other neighbouring countries?

[1:18:49] **K.Σ.:** Very little. We encounter the region mainly through the Macedonian Struggle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Balkan Wars and then the Second World War.

[1:19:09] **K.Σ.:** Your curriculum includes quite detailed study not only of Greece but also of Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia. Regional history is not taught well in Greece. I would say that Greek history education is no longer openly nationalist in the old sense, but it remains ethnocentric: almost everything is viewed through the national lens.

[1:20:01] **M.M.:** I understand the distinction, although ethnocentrism can easily become a path towards nationalism.

[1:20:09] **K.Σ.:** That is exactly what I mean.

[1:20:12] **M.M.:** Studying other societies and perspectives would help pupils understand their own history better.

[1:20:19] **K.Σ.:** I served twice on committees preparing new Greek history curricula, in 2011 and 2018. Both proposals were praised as excellent, but neither was implemented.

[1:20:38] **M.M.:** Implementation is always the problem.

ΚΟΙΝΑ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ, ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΤΙΚΟ ΥΛΙΚΟ ΚΑΙ ΤΕΛΙΚΗ ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ

[1:20:46] **M.M.:** I would also like to show you some of the educational materials we have developed. I will be brief. The first project, represented by the green book, involved Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. It concerned experiences of communism and involved primary and secondary teachers, university professors, methodology specialists and researchers from institutes in the three countries.

[1:21:54] **M.M.:** We realised that we could not begin by discussing the most painful topics. Communism seemed like a shared subject, but even that experience was different in each country. The important principle was comparison rather than an attempt to impose one common story.

[1:22:17] **M.M.:** Another project concerned the former Yugoslavia. We struggled even to agree on the title. One possibility was "Yugoslavia between East and West," which was accurate but rather dull. Another focused on everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

[1:22:40] **K.Σ.:** Many of these publications can be downloaded as PDF files from European project websites.

[1:22:45] **M.M.:** Let me explain one experience. I participated as a local researcher in a project that brought together Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. Macedonia had not been directly involved in those wars, so I was accepted by all sides. I understood the local context in a way that some

Western European organisers did not. There were roughly twenty Serbs, twenty Bosniaks and twenty Croats. Each group had an informal leader whom the others followed. The European organisers wanted them to discuss the recent war only a few years after it had ended. That was simply too early. They had come and were willing to participate, but the process was stuck. I told the organisers to trust me. I found a good bar in Sarajevo and arranged for it to be reserved for our group.

[1:24:12] **M.M.:** I brought a laptop and organised karaoke using songs from the former Yugoslavia - songs everyone had grown up with and associated with shared memories. Singing together helped them begin to see one another not first as Serbs, Croats or Bosniaks, but as human beings. By the end of the night everyone was dancing and, yes, many were drunk. We had to start the next day's session in the afternoon rather than at nine in the morning. But it worked because the situation required attention to emotion, not merely a rigid, bureaucratic project plan.

[1:25:34] **M.M.:** History education is not a factory. You cannot simply assign tasks in a mechanical way when people carry deep emotional wounds. We admitted that the group was not ready to discuss the hardest subjects. We therefore began with culture, food, tourism and other "soft" topics that connected people without immediately hurting anyone. Only after trust had developed could the group move towards more sensitive subjects. A later publication involved many of the same people and addressed very sensitive topics, not only the recent wars but controversial issues reaching back to the Middle Ages. The process included both "soft" and "hard" workshops, but the soft work had to come first. If your goal is only publicity, you can begin with a hard topic and create headlines for two days. But you may cause damage that lasts twenty years. That is why much of our work was conducted quietly, without the media. The media often want conflict: someone insulting or attacking someone else. A group gradually becoming friends is not considered news. But that slow relationship-building is what makes serious educational work possible. We have also produced material on the 2001 conflict, a recent and painful event that is not covered in the official curriculum. We developed curricula and model lessons showing how it might be taught.

[1:27:46] **M.M.:** I am currently working with Macedonian Muslim and Albanian colleagues on a project about 2001. The wider public does not yet know much about it. When society is not ready, professionals still have a responsibility to begin the work. If historians and teachers do not do it, who will? Pupils will otherwise learn only the separate stories told by their fathers and mothers.

[1:28:24] **K.Σ.:** One of the publications is available in three languages used in the country, while many of the others are in English and can be downloaded. The Joint History Project source books are also available in several languages. They contain extensive collections of sources on the Balkan Wars, the Second World War and other major topics and are very useful for teaching.

[1:29:27] **M.M.:** I understand. Sometimes I pretend not to understand Greek so that I can see what your intentions are. [Laughter.] I was also involved in that project, so I know the material well.

[1:29:43] **Ομλητής:** Are pupils here interested in history?

[1:29:50] **M.M.:** In general, many pupils are not automatically interested in learning anything. Much depends on the teacher. My pupils are interested, but you have to find a way to make the subject engaging. History can be extremely boring if it is taught badly.

[1:30:06-1:30:44] *[Η ομάδα συζητά το υπόλοιπο πρόγραμμα της επίσκεψης και την προγραμματισμένη μετάβαση στο πρόσφατα ανακαινισμένο σχολείο ενός άλλου συναδέλφου.]*

[1:31:02] **Ομλητής:** What do people here generally think about Greeks?

[1:31:14] **M.M.:** In general, many believe that Greece has treated Macedonia unfairly, both today and especially in the past. This view is closely connected with the Greek Civil War and with people who left or were expelled from Greece and lost their property. Here they are often called "Aegeans," meaning people whose family origins are in Greek Macedonia. My best man at my wedding, for example, comes from such a family.

[1:32:01] **Ομλητής:** What does a fifteen-year-old pupil in North Macedonia know about the Greek Civil War?

[1:32:13] **M.M.:** We teach it in school. It is presented as a conflict between two political visions for Greece: one side wanted a communist system similar to those established elsewhere in the Balkans.

[1:32:29] **Ομλητής:** So pupils here know something about it.

[1:32:30] **M.M.:** They know quite a lot.

[1:32:32] **Ομλητής:** Greek pupils know almost nothing about the Greek Civil War.

[1:32:38] **M.M.:** We do. As I told you, we even study the Filiki Eteria.

[1:32:46-1:33:37] *[Σύντομη ασαφής συζήτηση σχετικά με ένα έγγραφο ή αρχείο.]*

[1:34:04-1:34:11] *[Καταληκτικές παρατηρήσεις και ευχαριστίες.]*