



# Error Kolektiv is Here to Destroy Your Perception of Skopje

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What exactly the Balkans are is a far more complex question than just locating it on the map. According to [Slavoj Žižek \(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj\\_%C5%BDi%C5%BEek\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_%C5%BDi%C5%BEek), the Balkans represents less so a geographical space than an ideological construct to denote a set of characteristics of violence, feral joy, and entrenched memories. It is something that is always the ‘other’ towards the southeast. It is always the ‘other’ that technically is in the West, yet has been tainted by the East. Either too Slavic, too Byzantine, too Turkish - until finally it reaches its conclusion of the cradle of European civilization in Greece. Scratching the surface, what is evident is that to be “Balkan” has little to do with geography, per say, but rather reflects an imagined space, which Žižek characterizes as a location where “nothing is forgotten and nothing learned.”

Like most dominant narratives, the myths surrounding the Balkans reflect less on the individuals living in the countries typically associated with the concept and more on the reproduction of a Western gaze. Speaking about this gaze, Žižek said,

*Balkan regularly has served as a kind of blank screen on which Western Europe projected its own repressed ideological antagonisms, generating a series of fantasmatic images of Balkan.*

This fantasy of the Balkan wildness operates to be juxtaposed to a civilized Western Europe that looks on with horror at the animalistic violence, despotic leaders, and sustaining prevalence of the Turkish toilet in whatever they decide is the Balkans. The “Balkans” is an empty signifier that floats along political discourse to be filled by Western fantasy when the circumstances demand it.

With the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and subsequent European Union expansion, the fantasy of the Balkans has likewise seen a partition of the antagonisms that are projected upon the countries associated with the concept. Romania has come to conjure hordes of migrants on Western shores. Serbia is the unrepentant war criminal and Putin-sympathizer. Albania is where both your daughter and your car are sold off on the black market to shady Muslim men. Bosnia is where trauma lingers and serves as justification for Western suspicion of EU expansion. The fantasy of the Balkans itself has been Balkanized and each country has assumed a distinct identity (yet not exclusive) of those ideological antagonisms that Žižek spoke about.

One country that attracts far less attention than the lands surrounding it, but is equally spoken about in pejorative terms, is Macedonia. Perhaps due to it not being involved in any of the major wars during the 90's, Macedonia is often simply ignored. This still has not stopped a coherent discourse of denigration, mockery and general indifference emerging among Western Europeans.



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Macedonia tends to gather most attention in the West through its continuing struggle with Greece regarding Greek refusal to accept Macedonian's name due to unjustified Greek fears of irredentism. This awkward dispute over something so seemingly trivial as a country's name is often used as fodder for Western media to let out a sigh and humorously joke about the absurdity of the conflict. It reflects the Western belief of a Balkan predilection with nationalism instead of so-called real priorities, like democratization and economic growth.

Another re-occurring example that is used by Westerners to dismiss Macedonia is the ongoing construction work in the centre of Skopje. The haphazard beautification project entitled *Skopje 2014*, initially started by the then VMRO-DPMNE ruling party, has attracted plenty of international ridicule. Intended to affirm Macedonian national identity and give Skopje a more neo-classical look, the project quickly jumped from an initial cost of €80m to €560m, while giving Skopje a kitschy *Game of Thrones*-style makeover. As poverty continues to plague Macedonia, this antiquization of the

city has turned out to be a terrible case of corruption. Much of the money spent on this unwanted project was given to companies with links to the government, much to the anger of working-class Macedonians. Instead of attracting positive international attention, as was intended, it has become a source of ridicule.

All this political fighting and mismanagement of public funds happens against the backdrop of mass migration of young Macedonians. Like other post-socialist countries, Macedonia has struggled to keep its youth in the country, with 85 percent of university graduates saying their future lies elsewhere. The exodus of Macedonia's youth is exasperated by the Bulgarian government making their citizenship highly accessible to Macedonians, thereby opening up the EU zone for many young people.



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Despite a long history of a strong counterculture, it has become increasingly difficult for young people to help shape Macedonian society when there are few jobs and little hope to find employment, particularly in the creative industry. Without young people, it is impossible to challenge the dominant perception of Macedonia. In the face of this struggle, one concept store on Kosturski Heroi is trying to challenge the belief that young people are unable to challenge the negative perception of Skopje.

**Error Kolektiv** (<https://www.instagram.com/errorkolektiv/>) is a concept store in Skopje and is the first of its kind. Often, ideas of concept stores conjure images of overpriced scented candles and other shit that bored rich people love. Co-founded by **Milena Atanasova**, **Emilija Misheva Stavrova** and **Ilija Stefanovski**, Error Kolektiv looks to show that people can be progressive and innovative, while remaining in Skopje.

Error Kolektiv emphasizes the word “kolektiv” in their name. The co-founders of the store are the creators and designers of all the brands within it. The collective setup offers a chance for all three designers to exhibit their work collaboratively while working on their brands independently. Coming from working-class backgrounds, the collective

setup allows them to share space, as opposed to having their own individual spaces, which would have been cost prohibitive.

Fashion and costume designer Milena founded the brand **ATAMI** (<https://www.facebook.com/studioATAMI/>), which produces sleek, feminine designs that are accessible and not exclusionary. Emilija is a journalist by trade but now works as an illustrator with her brand **Em Ellephanski**. Originally, this started out as a hobby but eventually her prints and journals depicting surrealistic characters became her full-time occupation. **error of harmony** (<http://errorofharmony.com/>) is Ilija Stefanovski's skate brand that focuses on fashion, photography, and boards. A graduate of the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje, Ilija's brand explores both the macro and micro aspects of the city. The trio opened Error Kolektiv based on their shared friendship, respect, and a desire to see Skopje become a space for creativity.



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**Легенда:**

	Достапен интернет		Оспособено за бебиња
	Wi-Fi зона		Допуштено за деца
	Плаќање со кредитни картички		Климатизирано
	Паркинг		Работиме нон-стоп
	Работиме со плави картони		7 дена во неделата
	Достапно за хендикепирани		6 дена во неделата
	Домашна посета		Достава
	Дозволено за миленичиња		Јавен превоз
	Не е дозволено за миленичиња		Хотел со 3 ѕвезди
	Прилагодено за пушачи		Хотел со 4 ѕвезди
	Музика во живо / DJ		Хотел со 5 ѕвезди
	Базен		Достапен сеф
	Фитнес центар		Фен во соба
	Спа центар		

(<http://www.postpravdamagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/lkoni-legenda.jpg>)

The store is built on a belief of fostering Skopje's artistic community. All three co-founders find inspiration and hope in their nation's capital, and they're not alone. However, they know they must foster a culture where individuals can expect innovative yet quality products from local artists. They understand that they are competing against fast fashion, cheap imported goods, and an absence of state support for artistic ventures. Speaking to Milena, she said "supporting the local scene and local artisans is a process of creating a loving relationship between the creator, the creation, and the

buyer. It is in contrast to the exploitation in the billion dollar corporate industry that is indifferent to that relationship.” Despite these hurdles, Error Kolektiv is here to destroy any of the preconceived notions that outsiders have about Skopje.

Spaces like Error Kolektiv prove to other citizens that they neither need to leave home nor look for the approval of outsiders to be creative in Skopje. According to Milena, “We believe that through Error Kolektiv, we will motivate our colleagues to work and exhibit in Macedonia. Furthermore, we also hope that we will improve the connection between the artists and the audience, while enhancing knowledge of each other.”

In this way, Error Kolektiv becomes a transformative space. It is an act of not just amazing creativity but also a resistance and counterpoint to Western perceptions and an unfair economy. They hold the capacity to be the conduit and inspiration where creative and talented individuals build a pathway to be both successful and creative.

It is early days for Error Kolektiv. Without a major budget for advertisement or a massive buyers community, paying rent can be tough some months. Like other businesses, there is no promise of success but Error Kolektiv is working tirelessly to sustain their vision for a progressive and dynamic Skopje. They willingly embrace this struggle though, and understand that what they are doing is having an impact. As Milena says, “We are that error - that glitch in our society that will change perceptions and ways of doing things.”

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