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## **Republic of Macedonia, the 30<sup>th</sup> Member of NATO?**

Strasko Stojanovski<sup>a</sup>, Dejan Marolov<sup>b\*</sup>

<sup>a,b</sup>*Goce Delchev Universty, Krste Misirkov 10-A, Shtp, 2000, Republic of Macedonia*

<sup>a</sup>*Email: strasko.stojanovski@ugd.edu.mk*

<sup>b</sup>*Email: dejan.marlov@ugd.edu.mk*

### **Abstract**

This article is dealing with the possible NATO enlargement with the only country from the Adriatic group that is still not member of the alliances i.e. Republic of Macedonia. The historical overview is given through which the most important moments and problems can be perceived. Furthermore, the paper uses representative research to determine the perceptions of Macedonian citizens towards the possible overcoming problems and the membership in NATO. The results show that there is consistent support for NATO membership from the late 1990-es, but there is tendency of mild decreasing, especially from the disappointment from the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, when Greece has imposed the right of veto and prevented Macedonia's membership. But when we made cross tabulation between the questions "Republic of Macedonia should become member of NATO" and "Would you support constitutional name change as a condition for EU and NATO membership", the support for NATO membership is lost. We can notice that the support for NATO membership is failing if this is related with the change of constitutional name as a condition. If this becomes the case we can expect stronger Russian influence, which can diminish NATO efforts for stabilization not only for Macedonia, but also and for the wider region.

**Keywords:** NATO; Macedonia; conditions; Euro-Atlantic integrations; southeast Europe.

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\* Corresponding author.

## **1. Introduction**

On the beginning of this paper let us firstly try to clarify the term “Euro-Atlantic aspirations”. By this term it is meant the existence of aspiration for integration into the Euro - Atlantic structures. That Euro-Atlantic integration is Macedonia's aspiration and top priority of the Macedonian foreign policy. It is interesting that this integration is desired by the most Macedonian citizens and is one of the rare issues on which there is consensus among political parties and citizens of different religious and ethnic backgrounds.

It could be simply said that the term ‘Euro Atlantic aspirations’ implied desire for membership of Macedonia in EU and NATO. However, this is big simplifying of the issue, because this term is much broader and more comprehensive than a simple desire for joining EU and NATO. To illustrate this, it is enough to go back in time of the creation of an independent Republic of Macedonia. Euro-Atlantic integration was set as one of the main objectives of the Republic of Macedonia since its creation as state (although at that time top priority was providing international recognition and UN membership). But against simplified view of the concept above, the Euro-Atlantic integrations were synonymous for changing the system, introduction of democracy, market economy and turning to the west. The Euro Atlantic aspirations precisely are the basis for establishing the strategic partnership with the USA. The aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration were of such a scale that they could directly affect the creating and shaping the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia. In this field, the foreign Policy of Macedonia is trying to follow the foreign policies positions of the USA and the EU on issues of international relations. To proof this it is enough to look at the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and to compare with the official positions of the USA, for example, about specific issues in international relations. On the other hand, the Republic of Macedonia as EU candidate is and shall be trying to follow the common positions of the EU regarding concrete issues[1].

So, it is indisputable that the term Euro-Atlantic integration is much more comprehensive and broader than simply joining the EU and NATO. However, it is the membership in EU and NATO, that is the most important thing and also the moment that can be considered that the aspirations have been met. However, the issue with the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Macedonia is a huge topic that deserves writing a separate paper specifically intended for that purpose. In this paper there is only a brief attempt to show the relations and to identify the main problems in the relations between the Republic of Macedonia and NATO. These relations observed are primarily through the prism of an application for membership of Macedonia in this organization.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The research was conducted in 2017 by survey on 364 persons, representative in gender, region, age, education, profession and social status. The research was focused on several aspects on Republic of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic perspectives, but also and some issues regarded migration crisis, economic aspects of investments and attitudes toward regional and global foreign politics. In this paper we are focused on NATO integrations. Some aspects also, like the name dispute with Republic of Greece are included and perceptions toward regional and global political influence.

### **3. Republic of Macedonia's Road to NATO**

By reference to Article 10 from the Washington Treaty (according to which, the Alliance can be expanded with new members ) since 1993, Macedonian Parliament decided to join NATO [2][3]. We must not forget that the same year Macedonia had great difficulties in the process of international recognition, not clearly marked northern border and military conflict in neighborhood. The adoption of this decision at this time was a strong signal that Macedonia ranks its NATO membership as one of its top priorities. Moreover, one should have in mind that this is the period of reconsideration of the role and the general need of NATO's existence in the world where the Warsaw Pact had disappeared[4]. Approaching the alliance, Macedonia became part of the Partnership for Peace in 1995. Macedonia was also involved in implementing of the action plan for NATO membership.

The reasons for joining NATO had political, security and even economic nature. By joining NATO, Macedonia would have clearly determinate its place in the international relations, entering into alliance with the most powerful countries in the world. In this way, its own security would be guaranteed too. Finally, the NATO membership would have been a clear signal to potential foreign investors to invest their money in a stable and safe country, although located in the Balkans. The NATO membership was also seen as a necessary precondition for achieving another long-term goal of the Macedonian Foreign Policy i.e. joining the EU.( Although this is not mentioned in any official document by NATO or EU. For example, Ireland ,Malta, Austria and Finland are EU members, but not NATO members.)

After finishing the Cold War, the North Atlantic Alliance had three rounds of enlargement[5]. The first round was in 1999. NATO has expanded on the region of eastern and central Europe (Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic. During the first expansion according to Kuzev, the Macedonian public was divided about joining NATO. As main reason he mentions the lack of awareness of what NATO really means and what are the rights and obligations of a member state. The second round of enlargement took place in 2004, when Macedonia was not invited again for membership. It seems that during the second NATO expansion, the support for membership in the Macedonian public was at the lowest possible level. According to Kuzev the reasons lie in the role of NATO in the Kosovo war and the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 [6]. However, we can conclude that Macedonia was not seriously considered for NATO membership in these two rounds. However, Macedonia was primarily working on achievement of the NATO standards with the Ministry of Defense, and the North Atlantic Council consistently supervised the progress. As a result of this work, Macedonia was finally treated seriously about joining the NATO with the third expansion in 2008. Bucharest NATO Summit was a decisive moment for Macedonia's membership. At the same summit the whole Adriatic group of countries (consisting of the contenders to join NATO i.e.Croatia, Albania and Macedonia) was invited except Macedonia. Instead of a clear invitation Macedonia received a kind conditional invitation. Namely, although it was confirmed that all countries of the Adriatic group are eligible for membership in the Alliance, because of the opposition of Greece, Macedonia was blocked at the entrance to the alliance [7]. The condition for Macedonia to obtain an invitation is clearly formulated by finding a solution to the name dispute. This practically means that without an agreement about the name of Republic of Macedonia, with Greece, Macedonia could not entrance into NATO. This occurred even though USA President Bush announced several times that all three countries entered the Alliance

as a package. The Turkey even announced that if Macedonia is blocked, it will use its veto and block the other countries from the Adriatic group. Yet the fact is that none of these states stood firmly behind Macedonia, enough to be able to compete with the firm commitment of Greece.

About the relations between Macedonia and NATO another item that is out of the process of becoming membership should be particularly pointed out. In 2001, the tense year for Macedonia, NATO was actively included in the so-called operation "Essential Harvest", through which the paramilitaries NLA (National Liberation Army )was disarmed. Concretely with this operation NATO contributed to stabilization of Macedonia. The stabilization of Macedonia made gradual transformation from a country that needs foreign missions to maintain its stability into a country contributor to the world peace with its participation in NATO missions in Afghanistan.

However, one can conclude that in terms of its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, Macedonia is currently in a "road situation". This problem is a "hot chestnut" of the political parties in Macedonia and in Greece. Logically is the question, is there a way out of this situation? This paper does not offer any solution to the problem, but simply gives some of its own views and ways of thinking.

Thus, the Macedonian diplomacy failed to emphasize the principle which means, that each state acceding to NATO, recognizes the existing borders of the permanent members. For example, Ireland is not yet a NATO member for two reasons. The first and officially one is that in principle Ireland is a neutral country, and the second and unofficial one is that Ireland cannot recognize existence of the border with Northern Ireland (which is what it has to by joining NATO, because Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom which a member of NATO)[8]. One of the main Greece's arguments, why Macedonia cannot join NATO was that Macedonia has irredentism and pretension toward northern part of Greece. But, such claim of Greece was to be confronted with the principle of mutual recognition of borders that Macedonia would automatically accept by joining the NATO. Although, the result would be probably the same for Macedonia, but in this way the absurd of the Greek claims could be additionally emphasized.

Once it was seen that the "name" has become a requirement for entry into NATO, the Macedonian diplomacy must not only passively observe but to be practically involved in finding an alternative, even temporary. It was partly realized with the conclusion of the agreement of strategic partnership with the United States immediately after the summit and a little later with Turkey. Certainly this cannot be substitution for full NATO membership, but it may serve in short or medium term as a guarantee for the Macedonian security from external threat. In this context it should be emphasized that NATO is a military alliance, where if any member state is attacked by a third, the other states will jointly consider that, as if they were attacked too. Accordingly, NATO is not a military organization that protects the internal conflicts. Realistically it is unlikely that someone would attack Macedonia from outside and much more likely is the scenario that the dangerous primarily lies inside, within the possible national and religious conflicts similar to those from 2001. At the same time it is undisputed that if Macedonia becomes a member of NATO, it will have a positive influence on the relaxation of internal inter-ethnic relations.

Unlike the membership in NATO, EU accession is on a more distant stage. So, it is legitimate to question whether it should be entered into NATO if this means change of the Republic of Macedonia's name? In such a course of events there is a possibility for further conditions by Greece or other states in the process of joining the EU (where Macedonia is in a relatively early phase). What should be done is to avoid the trap and that only under guarantees about the membership in both organizations the compromise can be made. Meanwhile the strategic partnerships with the USA [9] and the Turkey [10] are relative guarantee for the security of the Republic. On the other hand, the relations with NATO we will maintain constantly through our missions, such as in Afghanistan. Certainly this scenario in longer term brings danger to the stability but it does not apply exclusively to Macedonia. If NATO and EU do not gather forces in order to help in solving the Balkan problems which hinder the integration of some states, a creation of a kind of gray zone in the Balkans, consisting of states that are not integrated would be likely possible. In this context is primarily Kosovo, which can hardly become a member of EU and NATO, for the simple reason that in both organizations there are states that do not yet recognize it. Another example is Serbia, also the Republic of Srpska as part of B&H, which due to understandable reasons hesitate to get a membership in NATO even they are offered. Staying outside the security umbrella of NATO and eventually of EU of these countries, would create a serious unsafely enclave in Europe.

#### **4. Results from the research**

We can notice from the research that the majority of the population supports Republic of Macedonia's NATO membership. Or 62,9 % agree that Republic of Macedonia should become member of the NATO alliance, 24,2 % are indecisive and only 11, 5 % are against. Furthermore, 30, 5 % have strong support on NATO membership and 32, 4 % are also supportive, but not with strong determination (Figure 1). This support is more or less consistent from the late 1990-es, but there is tendency of mild decreasing, especially from the disappointment from the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, when Greece has imposed the right of veto and prevented Macedonia's membership.

In general by age there is stabile support for NATO membership by all categories. The biggest support by age is to those who are more than 60 years old (75 %), and the least support those who are between 18-29 years old (58, 4 %).

When we are looking professional orientation we can notice that the biggest support is Retired (73, 3 %) and the Employees in the Public sector (71, 5 %), and less supportive for membership of Republic of Macedonia in NATO are the University Students (58, 4 %), where the strong support is only 22, 6 %, and Employees in the Private sector (61, 2 %) (Figure 2).

But when we made cross tabulation between the questions "Republic of Macedonia should become member of NATO" and "Would you support constitutional name change as a condition for EU and NATO membership", the support for NATO membership is lost. From those who have strong support for NATO membership high 74, 8 % disagree for membership in case for constitutional name change as a condition. Or, for those which are supportive for NATO membership, 83, 9 % are disagreeable this to be with constitutional name change. This

percentage is almost absolute (96, 3 %) to those which are already opposed to NATO membership (Figure 3).

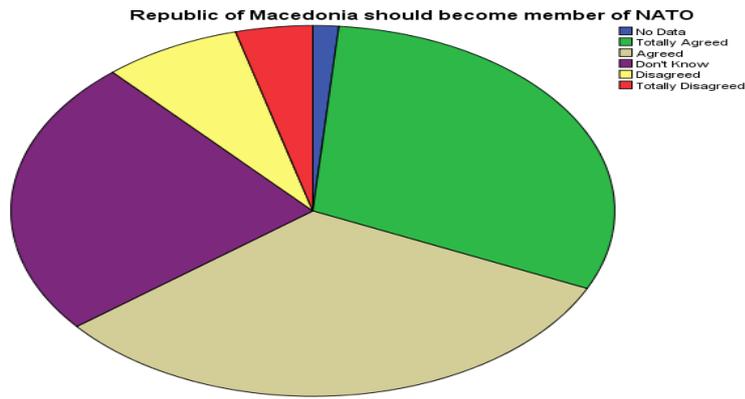


Figure 1

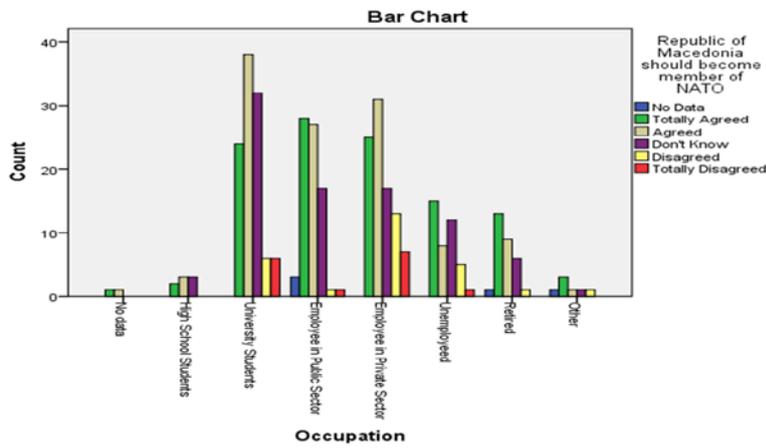


Figure 2

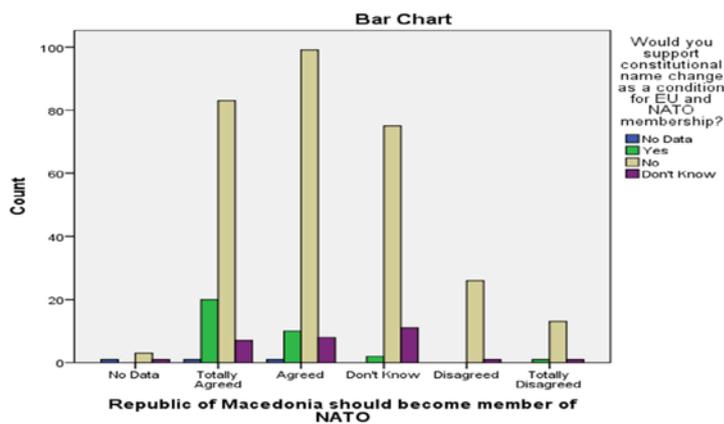
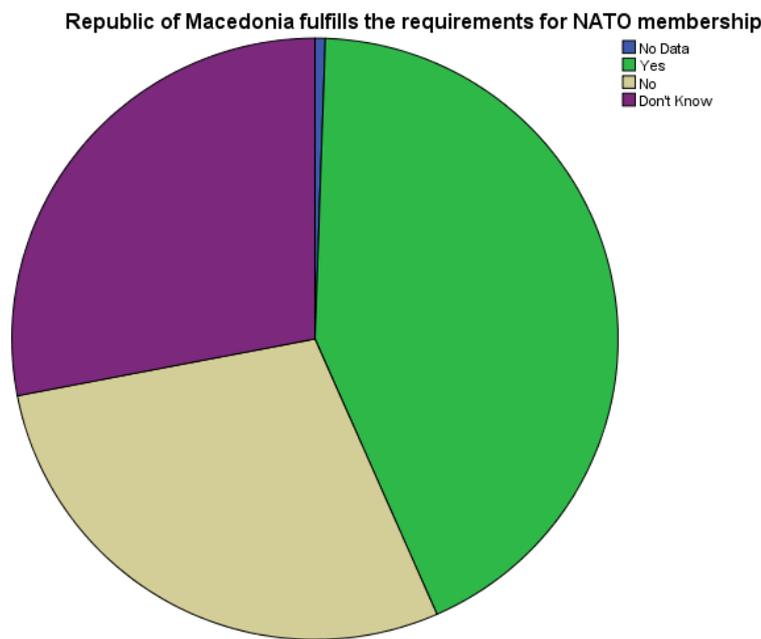


Figure 3

42,9 % of Macedonian citizens think that Republic of Macedonia fulfills the requirements necessary for NATO membership, 28, 6 % believe that those requirements are not fulfilled and 28 % don't know (Figure 4). Even Republic of Macedonia had fulfill great deal of the requirements for NATO membership with professionalization of the army and active participation in NATO missions (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Afghanistan) and active support of US intervention in Iraq, yet there are issues of modernization of the Macedonian army directly connected with the lower percentage of GDP for defense (NATO required 2 % from national GDP, and Republic of Macedonia has less than 1 %). Regarding the political criteria, Macedonia had accomplished required standards at least a decade ago, but the open name dispute with Greece prevented the possibility for membership.



**Figure 4**

The main expectations from membership in NATO alliance are related with Improvement of security (44, 2 %) and Improvement of international relations (14 %). Those attitudes are related with rational expectations of NATO membership as a form of confirmation of Macedonia's sovereignty in turbulent region of South East Europe where some of the dark dreams of expansionist nationalism still exist. Also in the last few years, the Balkans become once more place for clash of the world and regional powers for political influence and control. The last one is strongly connected with the desire of Russia to recapture some of the spheres of interest, but also and the real treat from international terrorism regarding the migration crisis and the new destabilization of the Near East. In this sense the perception for NATO membership as a security shield is expected. The improvement of international relations of the county is related with the possibility for active participation on decision making process in NATO. Surprising, there are low expectations from NATO membership regarding Improvement of interethnic relations (8 %) and Improvement of the Economy (8, 2 %). The fact that the interethnic relation questions in the last 15 years are solved by institutional means, and orientation on NATO alliance exclusively for protection of foreign treats, lower this expectation from the Macedonian citizens. The question of the

Economy is for certain the biggest problem for all citizens in Republic of Macedonia. But, even is well known that NATO membership can create climate for increased economic development of the new member countries, yet the biggest economic expectations are related with the possibility of EU membership (Figure 5).

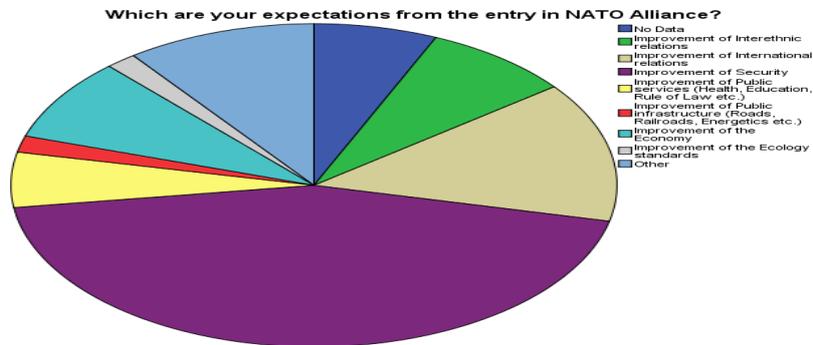


Figure 5

The positive attitudes for NATO membership are radically changed when imposed condition for the membership is the change of the constitutional name of the country. On the question Would you support constitutional name change as a condition for EU and NATO membership?, only 9, 1 % answered with Yes, high 82, 1 % with No and 8 % with Don't know (Figure 6). This leads to the assumption that forced name change inside the constitution as a condition for NATO membership can be contra productive and even damaging for NATO support in the county. This can open way for influence from other countries, as Russia, and in future can become factor of destabilization in the country, but also in the wider region. The solution probably can be find in double formula where the NATO membership can be related with the usage of provisional name The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or other name generated as a result of negotiations with Greece, but just for this purpose or international usage and not by changing of Republic of Macedonia's constitution declared by Greek erga omnes formula.

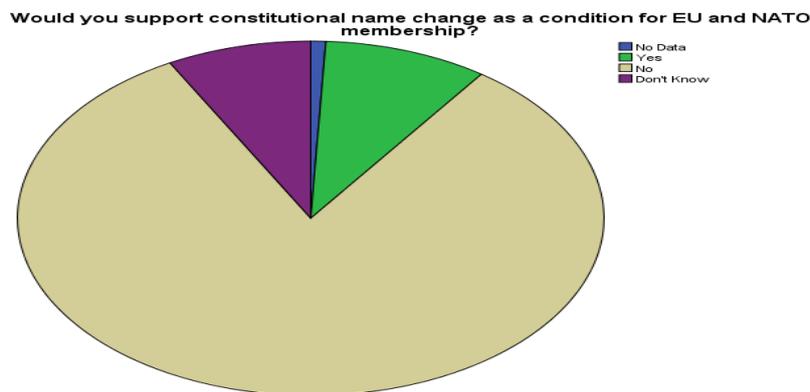


Figure 6

Asked, Which obstacle you find as most significant for Macedonian's EU and NATO integration?, Macedonian citizens as the biggest obstacle located the Name dispute with Republic of Greece (36, 3 %), then as a second

factor is the Political crisis in the country (23, 6 %), but also and the High level of corruption in the state (15, 7 %) and Deprived economy (14, 6 %). The noticeable fact lays in the significance of the recent political crisis, which was not an issue before. Also we can notice that Interethnic relations, which were the one of the biggest problems are less significant in the perceptions (only 2, 2 %), and this can be seen as positive element (Figure 7). Yet, there is necessity for the country to work on improvement on the economy, the rule of law and political stabilization via institutional solution of all political issues and strengthening of the democracy.

For the High School students (37, 5 %) the biggest obstacle for Macedonia's EU and NATO integration is Depraved Economy, for University Students (35, 8 %), Employee in Public sector (36, 4 %), Employee in Private sector (33, 3 %) and Retired (60 %) is The name dispute with Republic of Greece, and for Unemployed the biggest obstacle is The Political crisis (Graphic 8).

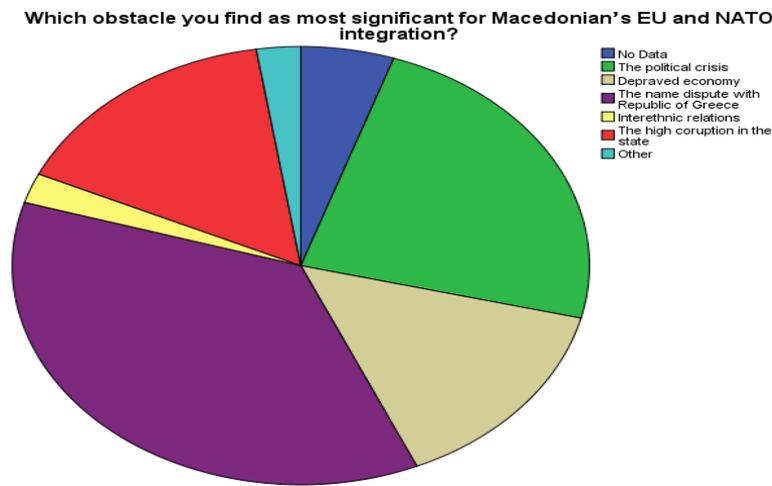


Figure 7

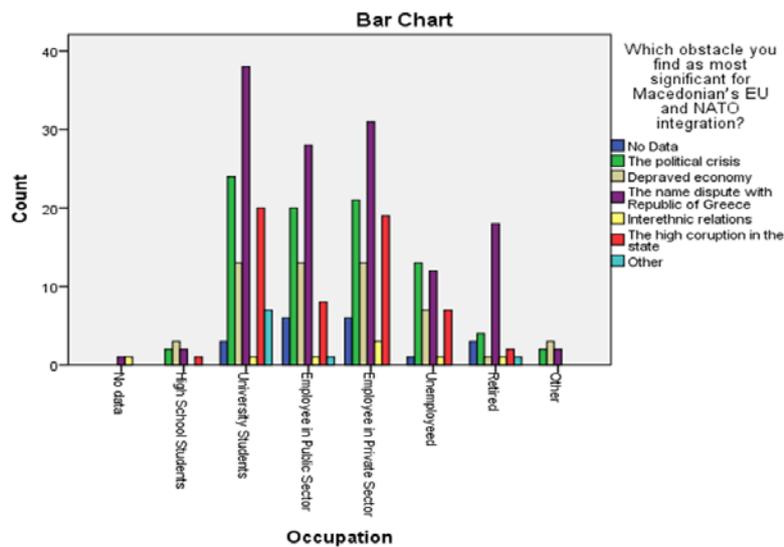


Figure 8

Even, by first look the next questions are not directly related with NATO membership, indirectly they refer to significant aspects of the same. On the question Which of the region countries is the closest/friendliest towards Macedonia?, the highest percentage goes to Serbia (53 %). We have to notice that Serbia is not a NATO member state, and this is problematic regarding the fact that the combined perception toward regional NATO member states (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Croatia and Montenegro) is lower (39, 7 %) (Figure 9). This can be explained with traditional connections with Serbia and the present Yugo-nostalgia, but also and the neutral status of Serbia.

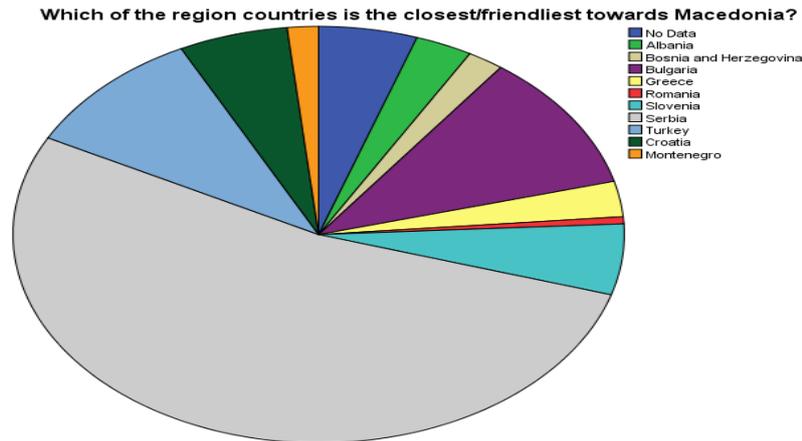


Figure 9

A bit different is the position on Macedonian citizen toward the perception on world powers. On the question Which of the world powers is the closest/friendliest towards Macedonia?, there is almost equal division on the attitudes regarding Russia (33 %), Germany (24, 5 %) and United States (23, 4 %). The perceptions for Russia are related with the traditional linguistic and religious (Orthodox Christianity) connections, but also a result on the frustrations on Macedonian citizens on the lacking of perspectives for EU and NATO integrations, which are mainly based on the blockade by Greece. In this sense this perception is also stimulated by the lack of interest in Brussels's bureaucracy for expansion of the European Union, regarding other European priorities and problems, but also and more aggressive Russian propaganda and expansionist foreign policy. The perceptions toward Germany are the most puzzling. Since Germany does not have bigger visibility even in soft policy, the only argument can be referred with strong economic relations with Macedonia. The fact is that the biggest trading relations on Republic of Macedonia are with Germany, and also in this country is the biggest Macedonian emigration in Europe. The perceptions toward United States are not simple reflection on the US position in the world politics, but should be seen as sharing of the same value system, in first place democratic values. Also the strong bilateral ties between the two states (The agreement for strategic partnership), are improved with cooperation in education, economy, culture and the security. All of those factors, and other, as the more preferable foreign language in Macedonia is English, are key for the high level of empathy of Macedonian citizens toward US. On this question, differently from the previous one is significant to make a notice that Macedonian citizens are having stronger feelings of closeness toward NATO states (UK, Germany, US, France) (52, 6 %), than non NATO countries (Russia and China) (37, 9 %) (Figure 10). The biggest connection to Russia is by Employee in Private Sector (40, 9 %), High School students (37, 5 %) and Unemployed (34, 1 %).

In the perceptions US is the closest / friendliest for Republic of Macedonia for the Employee in Public Sector (27, 3 %), Unemployed (24, 4 %) and the University students (23, 6 %). And Germany is preferred by the Employee in Public Sector (28, 6 %) and Unemployed (26, 8 %) (Figure 11). In sense of education there is direct connection between the education and the perception of the friendliest world power county toward Macedonia. We can noticed that by increasing of education level there is stronger feelings toward Russia (Primary education 25, 7 %, High school education 33, 5 % and High University education 35, 6 % chose Russia). There is similar tendency and toward United States (Primary education 8, 6 %, High school education 24, 6 % and High University education 24, 4 % chose US). But there is opposite tendency regarding Germany (Primary education 28, 6 %, High school education 26, 3 % and High University education 23 % chose Germany).

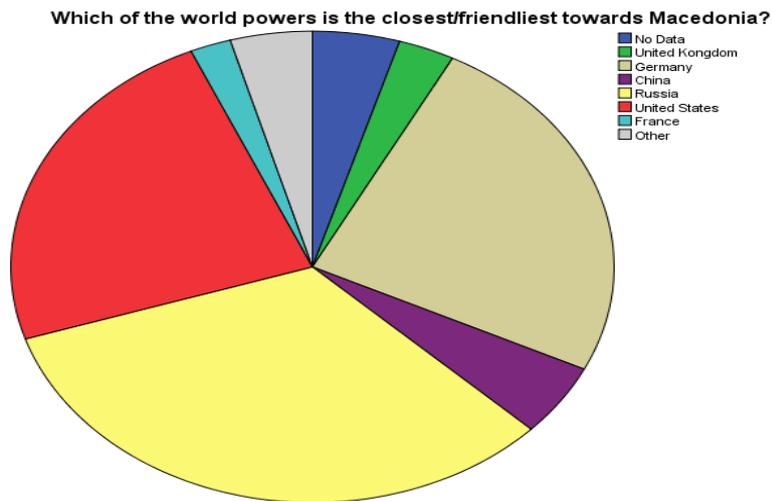


Figure 10

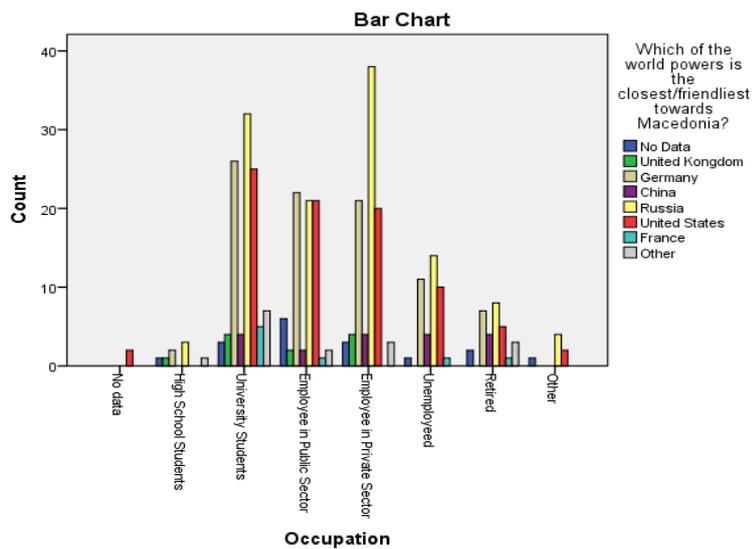
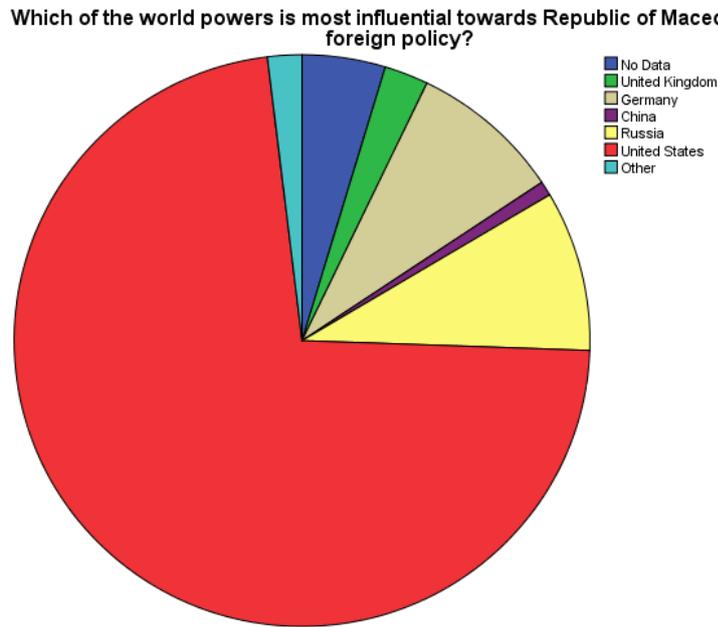


Figure 11

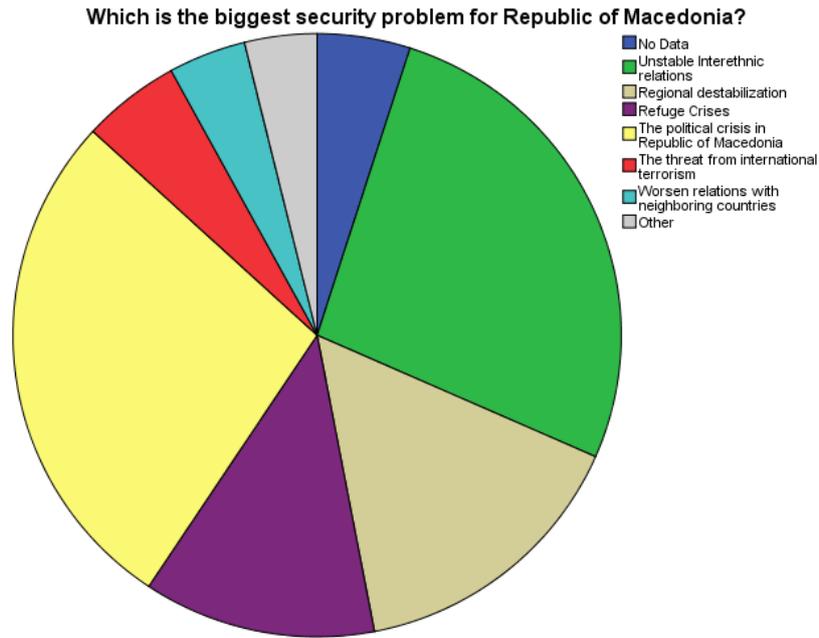
On the question Which of the world powers is most influential towards Republic of Macedonia's foreign policy?, there is clear domination on the United States (72, 5 %), before Russia (9, 1 %) and Germany (8, 5 %). This refers to the real situation, where Republic of Macedonia's foreign politics is traditionally connected with the United States, on the first place, which culminated with the agreement of strategic partnership (Figure 12).



**Figure 12**

Independently of the questions regarding the NATO membership of Republic of Macedonia, we imposed and the question Which is the biggest security problem for Republic of Macedonia?. We can notice certain differences from the previous answers. The biggest security problem at the moment for the Macedonian citizens is the Political crisis in Republic of Macedonia (27, 5 %), then the possibility of Unstable interethnic relations (26, 6 %), the wider Regional destabilization (15, 4 %) and Refuge crisis (12, 4 %). Less significant are the Treat from international terrorism (5, 4 %), and Worsen relations with Macedonia's relations with the neighboring countries (4, 1 %) (Figure 13). The political crisis as a factor of security destabilization is recent, but the most threatening. Since we can notice this factor in the obstacles for NATO membership, we can assume, that the very membership, regarding NATO as a value system, can create preconditions for development of the democratic capacities in the country and political stabilization in the future. Interethnic relations are seen as a security treat but are not a problem for NATO integration. This means that the interethnic problems in Macedonia are in its latent stage at the present, but this does not means that cannot escalate in future. Even NATO can improve the stability of the county, yet, the main role of NATO is to protect the country from foreign treat of non NATO members. Interethnic relations are potential internal problem, and even involves other countries, those are already NATO member states, as Albania, or with strong NATO presence, as Kosovo. The regional destabilization was always a big issue in the Balkans. Opening on one question or problem can easily destabilize all of the region. Those open questions are mainly related with the status of Republika Srpska and the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the future of Kosovo, Interethnic relations and the

future of the nature of Macedonia's unitary character, but also some issues relating the South Serbia, Croatian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even Sandzak. The refugee crisis is a novel problem. But this does not make it less significant. Only in the period of 2015/16 more than one million refugees crossed Macedonia. The fear is not related only with terrorism threats as in Western Europe, but more sensible economic issues if the refugees are forced to stay in Macedonia, and strong fear of demographic reconfiguration of the state in short time. Beside the low level of natural population growth, the last one is increased by the fact that, as in the wider region states, in Republic of Macedonia there is great mechanical depopulation caused by emigration.



**Figure 13**

## 5. Conclusion

Since the independence, Republic of Macedonia has a clear strategy towards Euro-Atlantic integrations. So, the membership in NATO alliance is high in the strategy of her foreign politics. But, this process was blocked by series of factors, including the most significant related with the name dispute with Republic of Greece and the veto in the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008.

By the conducted survey we can notice that there is high support between Macedonian citizens toward NATO integration. The main reason is related with security stabilization and improvement of international position of the country. Yet, the biggest security problems related with unstable interethnic relations or the Political crisis in the country are not directly related with the NATO integration. High percentage of the citizens believe that Macedonia is fulfilling the conditions necessary for NATO membership, but also there are obstacles, both internal, as recent Political crisis or Deprived economy or external, from which the most significant is the blockade from Greece.

We can notice that the support for NATO membership is failing if this is related with the change of

constitutional name as a condition. If this becomes the case we can expect stronger Russian influence, which can diminish NATO efforts for stabilization not only for Macedonia, but also and for the wider region. The solution can be found in dual formula, where Republic of Macedonia can become member of NATO alliance by provisional name the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or other name generated as a compromise with Republic of Greece for international usage, or just for this purpose. Any change of the name by forced change of Macedonian constitution will be contra productive and will have opposite effect in sense of NATO integration losing support of public opinion.

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