

COVID 19 IMPACTS ON DEFENCE CAPABILITIES DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: COVID 19 severely disrupted our way of life and caused social and economic dysfunction. Many spheres of social life as the geopolitical, economic, security, defense, socio-humanitarian, psychological, communication, health and other has influenced by COVID 19. Many countries, including North Macedonia, were forced to adjust the economy growth. The consequences for the economy growth will be felt not only in 2020 but also in beyond. The adjustments in the GDP have reflected on the defense expenditures of the countries. The reduction of defense expenditures mostly has reflected on the development of defense capabilities. The realization of the equipment projects was postponed. Any further delay in the equipment projects will seriously affect the further development of the state defense capabilities, and may disrupt the readiness of the Armed Forces of Republic of North Macedonia. The pandemic has tested the country's resilience in dealing with security threats, and contingency plans. The magnitude of the pandemic underscored the importance and utility not only of national capacities and capabilities engagement, but also of the solidarity that the Alliance has demonstrated in action through its civil emergency response mechanisms. Additionally, the utility of the defense capacities and the Armed Forces in support of the civilian authorities in a crisis situation or state of emergency caused by endangering the health of the population comes to the surface. Although no one can say for sure when the pandemic will end, however, we must learn from the past and the experiences gained from dealing with COVID 19. What we need to do in the near future is to establish more precise mechanisms, tools and procedures for the possible use of national capacities and capabilities in dealing with similar situations. Therefore, it is very important for the North Macedonia to adhere to the obligations and guidelines of the Alliance for investment of 2% of GDP in defense, of which at least 20% to be allocated for the development of new military capabilities.

Keywords: COVID 19, defense capabilities, Armed Forces, civil emergency, NATO.

Introduction

The beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century will be remembered after the "health tsunami" caused by the SARS - Cov - 2 virus, which was officially named COVID 19. It was expected that this pandemic caused by the SARS - Cov - 2 virus would be suppressed like the epidemics caused by the corona viruses MERS - COV in 2012 and SARS in 2002-2003. Basically, mortality in MERS - COV and SARS was significantly higher than in SARS-Cov - 2. The first two corona viruses remained regionalized in countries where they first appeared or they spread to some neighboring countries, mostly in Asia with isolated cases in the other parts of the world. Initial expectations were that SARS - Cov - 2 will end as in

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previous cases of epidemics caused by the corona virus, localized and regionalized without significant disruption of normal life and economy as in the previous two cases. But the reality was different than expectations. In the beginning, the countries did not take the threat of the new respiratory syndrome seriously and ignored it or equated it with a slightly more severe form of seasonal flu. A few months after the first reported case in Wuhan, China, several countries began to report a sharp rise in the number of people infected by SARS - Cov - 2, as well as an increased mortality rate among infected by the new virus from corona family. Health workers have issued serious warnings to politicians and the public about the possible serious consequences that the uncontrolled spread of SARS - Cov - 2 could have on overall life on the planet. Already in March 2020, many countries began to feel the negative effects of SARS - Cov - 2 and introduce restrictive measures to prevent the further spread. It was more than clear that humanity was unexpectedly facing a global health pandemic to which medicine in the twenty-first century had no answer.

COVID 19 as a Security Challenge

Less than two years after the first appearance of the COVID 19 the pandemic severely disrupted daily life and caused global social and economic dysfunction of countries. The impact of the pandemic caused by COVID 19 gradually but surely began to be reflected on the geopolitical, economic, security, defense, socio-humanitarian, psychological, communication, health and other spheres of social life. The uncontrolled spread COVID 19 suggests that pandemic easily can be transformed into a security crisis. According to NATO research, COVID 19 causes the greatest concern among the citizens of the Alliance, and its uncontrolled spread is considered as the greatest threat to their security. More than 50% of the population of NATO member states considers COVID 19 as a security crisis for their country. Interestingly, during pandemic there has been a decline in perception of war as a threat among the Allied citizens from 17% in 2019 to 14% in 2020 (The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.45). On the other hand, it is interesting that in 2020 there is an increase of 29% in the perception of COVID 19 as a security threat, in comparison with 2019 when only 11% on population saw COVID 19 as a security threat while in 2020 that number rose to 40%. Also, 39% from the citizens considered the economic crisis to be a serious challenge to the Alliance's security concerns in 2020 versus 33% in 2019 (The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.45).



(Source: The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.45)

Statistics show that the number of deaths as a result of COVID 19 in 2020, in some countries exceeded the number of deaths during World War II. The number of death in the United States during World War II was 416,800 on the battlefield over a four-year period (The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, 2021), while until May 31 2021 or for a period of one and a half years died about 600,000 citizens as a result of COVID 19 (COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, 2021). The situation is similar with the United Kingdom where in 6 years during World War II about 383,600 soldiers died, while in a year and a half until May 31, 2021 according to the same sources, the number of deaths as a result of COVID 19 was 128,000. In France, the number of deaths as a result of COVID 19 for the same period according to the same sources is 104,000, while the total number of deaths for the four years in World War II was 217,000 soldiers. With the exception of Russia, China, Germany and Japan, in almost all other countries the death rate from COVID 19 is approximately the same or with little variation compared to the death rate in World War II. If we add to these comparisons the current numbers of deaths as a result of COVID 19, we can clearly see that pandemic as a security threat becomes even greater. However, it is expected that with the mass vaccination of the world population, the pandemic of COVID 19 will be brought under control. Moreover, in this context there are other additional challenges that give COVID 19 additional elements of a security threat: the repulsion of the population to be vaccinated, the effectiveness of mass immunization plans where they have the capacity to produce, distribute and effectively apply of the vaccine.

Namely, regarding the repulsion of the population for vaccination, the data show that it is encouraged by various anti-vaccination associations up to the delivery of false news and disinformation about the harmfulness of certain vaccines. Such information raises doubts about the efficacy and repulsion of immunization of the population. In any case, the public will understand that the benefits of immunization far outweigh the side effects of the vaccination process and the vaccines themselves. The second segment is related to the plans for mass immunization to global resistance and the capacities for production and distribution of vaccines of the pharmaceutical companies, and the cost of the same. It is estimated that it will be several years before the entire world population is immunized with COVID 19 vaccines. It is ironic that wealthier countries have reserved initial doses of vaccines for themselves, causing a "vaccine crisis" and "vaccine diplomacy paradigm", while the poor countries are forced to wait in line to get the vaccines needed to immunization their citizens.

COVID 19 Implications on Economy

Many countries, including North Macedonia in the first half of 2020 were aware that the projected economy growth will undergo some adjustments primarily due to the measures taken by countries to prevent the spread of the pandemic and to protect the health of citizens while taking care did not cause dysfunction of national economies. The measures included temporary shutdown of industrial, production, service and other non-essential facilities, and citizens were quarantined for several weeks. In the long-term, such measures were not really sustainable because the consequences for the economy would be deadly. On the other hand, the race for additional funding was more than current. Politicians have been forced to find more funds from central budgets to deal the pandemic than other state-funded projects. Part of the funds was provided by world investment funds regardless of the amount of interest.

Usually in such situations, the defense expenditures and other costs in the category of non-essential expenditures are the first to be cut. Additionally, in the context of the policy for dealing with extraordinary economic contraction, the need for austerity was imposed. A number of state-funded projects were postponed and funds diverted to support the health sector. Also, parts of the funds were aimed at stimulating general consumption through state support to companies and vulnerable categories of citizens.

The decline of economies globally in 2020 as a result of COVID 19 was -4.2% (The World Bank, 2021), and for European economies was -5.2% (IMF, 2021). The largest decline in the economy was observed in highly developed economies, especially in economies dependent on tourism, for example the economy of Spain, where GDP fell by as much as -11%. The less developed economies of Southeast Europe, which are not members of the EU, registered an average decline of -3.5% in 2020 (IMF, 2021).

Table 1. Real GDP Growth
(Year-over-year percent change; aggregation based on GDP in purchasing power parity terms)

	April 2021 WEO				October 2020 WEO			Difference		
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
Europe	1.7	-5.2	4.5	3.9	-7.0	4.7	3.2	1.8	-0.2	0.7
Advanced European Economies	1.4	-6.7	4.5	4.0	-8.1	5.2	3.2	1.4	-0.7	0.8
Euro Area	1.3	-6.6	4.4	3.8	-8.3	5.2	3.1	1.7	-0.8	0.7
France	1.5	-8.2	5.8	4.2	-9.8	6.0	2.9	1.6	-0.2	1.3
Germany	0.6	-4.9	3.6	3.4	-6.0	4.2	3.1	1.1	-0.6	0.3
Italy	0.3	-8.9	4.2	3.6	-10.6	5.2	2.6	1.7	-1.0	1.0
Spain	2.0	-11.0	6.4	4.7	-12.8	7.2	4.5	1.8	-0.8	0.2
Nordic Economies	1.6	-2.4	3.2	3.2	-4.2	3.5	2.8	1.8	-0.3	0.4
Other European Advanced Economies	1.6	-7.9	4.9	4.6	-8.5	5.4	3.3	0.6	-0.5	1.3
United Kingdom	1.4	-9.9	5.3	5.1	-9.8	5.9	3.2	-0.1	-0.6	1.9
Emerging European Economies	2.4	-2.0	4.4	3.9	-4.6	3.9	3.4	2.6	0.5	0.5
Central Europe	4.5	-3.2	3.6	4.8	-4.1	4.5	4.4	0.9	-0.9	0.4
Eastern Europe	2.2	-3.1	3.6	3.6	-4.4	2.8	2.4	1.3	0.8	1.2
Russia	2.0	-3.1	3.8	3.8	-4.1	2.8	2.3	1.0	1.0	1.5
Southeastern European EU Member States	3.9	-4.5	5.5	4.8	-5.2	4.7	3.9	0.7	0.8	0.9
Southeastern European Non-EU Member States	3.6	-3.5	4.7	4.3	-5.0	5.5	5.2	1.5	-0.8	-0.9
Turkey	0.9	1.8	6.0	3.5	-5.0	5.0	4.0	6.8	1.0	-0.5
Memorandum										
World	2.8	-3.3	6.0	4.4	-4.4	5.2	4.2	1.1	0.8	0.2
United States	2.2	-3.5	6.4	3.5	-4.3	3.1	2.9	0.8	3.3	0.6
China	5.8	2.3	8.4	5.6	1.9	8.2	5.8	0.4	0.2	-0.2

Sources: IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, and IMF staff calculations.

Source: IMF April, (2021), GDP Growth in Real Terms 2021.

The economic recovery is expected only in the second half of 2021, i.e. in the years after 2022. The world economic growth projections for 2021 are optimistic in the range from 4% (The World Bank, 2021) up to 6% (IMF, 2021) and are based on the process of immunization of the world population. Forecasts for economic growth in Europe are expected in the range from 3.2% in the Nordic economies up to 6.4% in Spain (IMF, 2021).

The drop in economic growth of -4.1% caused North Macedonia to face the deepest recession in the past two decades. This decline in GDP growth caused an increase in unemployment that reached the level of 16.7%, but also an increase in public debt that reached the level of 60% of GDP (The World Bank, 2020a). With this North Macedonia reached the upper limit of the middle indebted countries. The largest decline in GDP from the Western Balkans was observed in Montenegro in range of -12% due primarily to the decline in tourism in this country.



Source: The World Bank, (2020b) GDP Growth in Real Terms of the Western Balkans Countries in 2021.

The projections for economic growth in 2021 are quite optimistic and for North Macedonia and for Montenegro the growth of 3.6% and of 6.9% is forecast respectively.

COVID 19 Implications to Defense Expenditures

In the run-up to the Pandemic in March 2020, the NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg was very careful about the COVID 19 implications on the economies and projected GDP growth, as well as on the defence expenditures of Alliance member countries. Stoltenberg (2020a) said that: “There will be severe economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis...And in the short term, consequences not only for the total economy, but for government budgets. When we think about long-term consequences, it is too early to say anything with certainty. You have to remember that when NATO allies agreed to invest more in defense, they did so because we live in a more uncertain, unpredictable world. This has not changed; I expect allies to stay committed to investing more in our security. We also need to remember that by investing more in our security and armed forces, we are providing surge capacity for all our societies to deal with unforeseen events, crisis and natural disasters, as we, for instance, see now” (Aitoro, 2020).

However, as the crisis deepened and it became clear that it would not be resolved quickly, NATO experts and Secretary-General Stoltenberg himself warned that any irrational cuts in defense spending would have far-reaching security consequences for both members and the Alliance. That will reduce their resistance and will increase the Allies’ vulnerability to external threats. The lessons learned from the past show that the reduction of defense spending mostly reflects on the development of defense capabilities, i.e. the delay in the implementation of the equipping projects for the armed forces. The Alliance’s policy in this area has been set in principle by the recommendations of the 2014 Wales “2/20 Defense Investment Pledge”. This means that Allies are obligated to invest in long-term and stable financing in defense and to reach the level of 2% of GDP for defense spending by 2024, of

which at least 20% will be invested for new equipment including research and development of new capabilities. This policy of the Alliance on the eve of the NATO 2021 Summit may undergo some adjustments in order to increase the existing running costs.

In October 2020 the NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg in GLOBSEC 2020 Bratislava Forum stressed that...” While prioritizing defense in the middle of a health crisis is not easy; we need to stay the course. Because the threats and the challenges that made us agree to spend more in the first place have not disappeared. Because the pandemic has demonstrated the vital role that our armed forces play in support of civilian efforts. And because we need to maintain our technological edge in a competitive world” (NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 2020b).

Despite declining economic growth and the threat of a pandemic, there has been a steady increase in defense spending over the past six years, in line with the recommendations of the 2014 Wales Summit. On the contrary 2020 marked the sixth consecutive year of growth in defense spending by European Allies and Canada, with an increase in real terms of 3.9% from 2019 to 2020. Moreover, in 2020, 11 Allies met the guideline of spending 2% of their Gross Domestic Product on defense, up from just three Allies in 2014 (The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2020, 2021,p.52).



Source: The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.52.

COVID-19 has made the security environment more unpredictable. The need to keep investing in defense remains essential for Allies than ever. Despite to expectations that defense investment will decline, nineteen Allies spent more in real terms on major equipment than they did in 2019.



Source: The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.52.

Eighteen Allies met the NATO-agreed 20% guideline to invest in new major equipment compared to seven in 2014 (The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.50).

Regarding the continuity of investing in defense expenditures “the Allies are not just spending more on defense and delivering more of the heavier, high-end capabilities NATO needs. They are also improving the readiness, deploy ability, sustainability and interoperability of their forces in line with the NATO Capability Targets. These targets aim to ensure that NATO has the capabilities and forces it needs “(The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2020, 2021, p.50).

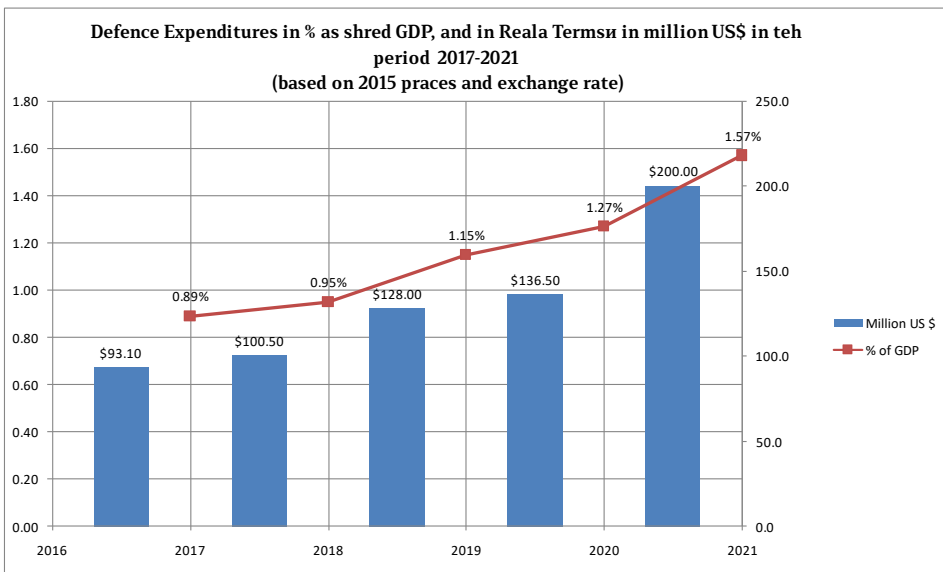
COVID 19 Implications on North Macedonia’s Defense Expenditures

Two years before joining NATO, the Republic of North Macedonia has finally returned to the path of stable defense funding. Although the first years were more stabilizing than with significant growth in defense expenditures, the steps to meet the Alliance commitments made at the 2014 Wales Summit have certainly been determined. In March 2020, the Republic of North Macedonia officially became a full member of the Alliance and was obliged to implement NATO policies and recommendations in all areas of planning, including those related to the sharing of the burden and the reasonable challenge of capacity development. In 2020, defense expenditures in North Macedonia were projected and approved at the level of 1.37% of GDP or in real terms US \$ 138 million. Of these funds, 18.23% or in real terms US \$ 33.6 million were allocated for the purchase of new major equipment, i.e. for development of the defense capabilities of the Armed Forces. According to data obtained from the Ministry of Defense through free access to public information, it can be clearly seen that due to COVID 19 in May and September the total defense expenditures for 2020 were reduced by US \$ 29 million or the defense expenditures as a shared of GDP were reduced from 1.37% to 1.27%. With the two rebalances of the budget, the defense expenditures underwent significant corrections, especially in the area of non-essential expenditures and equipment

and modernization. Thus, the initially envisaged funds for equipment in the amount of 18.23% or in real terms US \$ 15.8 million were reduced to 11.44% or in real terms US \$ 17.8 million (Ministry of Defense, 2020a). This reduction of the funds for equipment and modernization have reflected on the dynamics of the realization of the equipping projects of the Armed Forces given in the Long-Term Defense Capability Development Plan 2019-2028 - LTDCDP 2019-2028. Despite the reductions, it is significant to note that there has been continuity in the financing of ongoing Armed Forces equipping and modernization projects. The truth is told, the cuts were not only due to the impact of the pandemic on defense spending, but also due to the contraction of economies and the inability of manufacturers to deliver military equipment and armaments on time.

It is encouraging that the adopted budget for defense expenditure for 2021 reached 1.57% of GDP or in real terms is US \$ 200 million, of which 25.69% or US \$ 51 million have been allocated for the new major equipment and R&D (Ministry of Defence, 2020a). According to defence minister Shekerinska – Jankovska (2020) “With the budget for 2021, we will continue the process of equipping and modernization of the Army, for which 38 percent more funds have been provided than in the budget for 2020...We are really investing in the next generation of equipment, the next generation of armaments, the provision of technology, the provision of appropriate equipment that will be appropriate for a NATO member state. The crisis situation with COVID-19, which we are finding ourselves in, best shows that investing in the Army is an investment in the security of all citizens. In these three years, the increase in the defense budget has enabled us to obtain a motivated, better trained and better equipped Army”.

We welcome the fact that, the defense budget for 2021, which is growing continuously for the third year with an average annual level of 0.2 percentage points of GDP. If this growth continuous in the following years, we can freely expect that North Macedonia will achieve the 2014 Wales Summit “2/20 defense pledge” before 2024.



Source: Ministry of Defense of North Macedonia, 2020a.

COVID 19 Implications on Defense Capabilities Development

The Armed Force's equipment and modernization projects are divided into two groups of priorities. The first group includes those intended for the needs of the declared forces for NATO activities in the field of collective defense such as the Light Infantry Battalion (LPG) and other units. The second group includes the other units of the Armed Forces. According to the projects presented in the Plan for equipping and modernization, which is an integral part of LTDCDP 2019-2028 through several annual contracts it is planned to procure new armored vehicles, non-combat vehicles, logistics equipment for declared units, information equipment and cyber security equipment, infantry and artillery equipment. For this purpose, the Government of North Macedonia is expected to spend 699 million Euros for those equipping projects in the next 10 years (LTDCDP 2019-2028, 2019).

That the plan is realistic and achievable according to the level of ambitions is confirmed by several announcements for the public which are delivered on the official WEB page of the Ministry of Defense of North Macedonia, and refer to the procurement of new equipment for the needs of the Armed Forces in recent years.

According to defense minister, in 2020 in the field of equipment: "The armed Forces received three new additional engineering machines ..., and the procurement of light armored vehicles for the Light Infantry Battalion Group, which is our NATO declared unit, is in progress" (Ministry of Defense, 2020c). Also, in 2020, an agreement with the Czech Republic for the donation of CBRN equipment for the needs of the armed Forces in amount of 190,000 euros was signed (Ministry of Defense, 2020b). In March 2021, through a donation from the United States, the realization of the project for conversion of personal weapons with 5.56 mm caliber rifles have began. In the first phase, the United States donated 1269 M-4 automatic rifles to the Armed Forces, which are completely used for the needs of the Light Infantry Battalion Group. This project is expected to be fully completed in 2022, and includes other additional military equipment and equipment for the protection of soldiers (Civil Media, 2021). In April 2021, the Republic of Turkey donated a towed train intended for transport of armored vehicles and heavy machinery (Ministry of Defense, 2021d).

In the context of procurement of new equipment for the Armed Forces, and according to LTDCDP 2019-2028, procurement of a total of 249 Light armored vehicles on wheels (LAV) in a total value of 249 million Euros has been planned to take place in two periods, 151 in the period 2019-2024 year and 98 in the period 2025-2028. According to the Ministry of Defense, the Government of North Macedonia "will invest total value of about 210 million dollars is a continuation of the already started multi-year project (2019-2024) for the procurement of (151) Light Armored Vehicles (LAV) as the main project in the LTDCDP 2019-2028 for modernization and equipping of the Armed Forces". This project is focused on Light Infantry Battalion Group equipping. The project is being realized as a multi-year project in cooperation with the US Government by using the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Program, whereby US funds such as European Recapitalization Incentive Program (ERIP - where for the fiscal year 2017 for North Macedonia approved US \$ 30 million exclusively for the purchase of LAV), CRIF¹⁵ and the 333 Program (Section 333 Authority to Build Capacity – Defense Security Cooperation

¹⁵ CRIF is a global company specializing in credit bureau and business information, outsourcing and processing services, and credit solutions. Established in 1988 in Bologna (Italy), CRIF has an international presence, operating over four continents (Europe, America, Africa and Asia).

Agency) are used and the participation of the US Government will amount to about 20-25% of the total amount. Delivery of vehicles is expected to begin in 2022" (Ministry of Defense, 2021a).

Despite the positive trend in the procurement of new equipment, as a result of the reduction of defense expenditures in 2020, especially those intended for equipping the Armed Forces, it can be noticed that some of the projects that should start in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and which are planned with the Plan for equipping and modernization have been postponed. This sent a clear message that in the long run any further delay of the equipment projects implementation will seriously affect the further development of the country's defense capabilities, and may disrupt the Armed Forces readiness. The delay in the start of implementation included projects related to the procurement of 44 Non-Combat Motor Vehicles worth 4.3 million Euros, Special Equipment and Special Forces Vehicles worth 18.4 million Euros, Military Police Equipment worth 14.5 million Euros, 18 howitzer 105 mm worth 6.4 million Euros, Very Short Range Air Defense battery worth 20 million Euros and other projects according to LTDCDP 2019-2028.

An additional challenge for the realization of the planned equipping projects in 2020 was the Armed Forces engagement in support of other state institutions and the citizens in dealing with the pandemic. Namely, from the beginning of the pandemic, the Armed Forces were called to support the forces of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health and the Local Self-Government in the dealing with COVID 19. The engagement of the Armed Forces was for the entire duration of the state of emergency from March 13 to June 13 as well as during the crisis from November 20 to December 10. For the entire period of engagement of the Armed Forces in support of the civil authorities and citizens during 2020, a total amount of 40.5 million denars or US \$ 797 000 were spent (Министерство за одбрана, 2021b).

Additionally, within the engagement of the Armed Forces in support of the forces of the Ministry of Interior in dealing with the migrant crisis on the southern border during 2020, an amount of 20.4 million denars or US \$ 399 000 were spent (Министерство за одбрана, 2021c).

In total, for the engagement of the Armed Forces in support of the civil authorities and the citizens in 2020, the Ministry of Defense spent an amount of 60.9 million denars or US \$ 1 196 000. This is a solid amount which is close to 1% of the 2020 defense budget or 6.7% of the funds spent on equipping and modernizing the Armed Forces in 2020. If the expenses incurred by the Armed Forces during the state of emergency and crisis in 2020 were reimbursed, then these funds could be used for the realization of some of the planned equipping and modernization projects.

COVID 19 Implications on Building Resilience of the State and Alliances Solidarity

The pandemic has severely tested the state's resilience in dealing with security threats, crisis and contingency plans, and the sustainability of ongoing missions and operations. The serious implication of the pandemic underscored the importance and usefulness not only of engaging national capacities and capabilities, but also of the solidarity that the Alliance has demonstrated in action through its crisis response mechanisms. Additionally, the usefulness of the defense capacities and the Armed Forces as a subject of the defense system, which

even in conditions of a pandemic has been engaged in supporting the civilian authorities in a crisis, i.e. a state of emergency, comes to the surface.

In the period when the pandemic was gaining momentum and it was clear that its intensity exceeded the capacity of other state institutions, it became more than clear that the Government must activate the response mechanisms in case of a pandemic. The mechanisms included declaring a state of emergency in the country and engagement of the Armed Forces in support of civilian authorities, i.e. in support of other state institutions (primarily the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior and Local Self-Government).

The engagement of the Armed Forces in support of the civilian authorities has an aim at a pragmatic, more efficient and faster response of the state and enabling the health authorities and the police to engage in direct challenges in dealing with the pandemic and protecting the health of the citizens. In fact, the support of civil institutions in various civil emergencies situations is invaluable for a society because it instills in citizens a sense of security and confidence in the functioning of society. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare comprehensive plans for the functioning of the state in civil emergency situation. This would provide mechanisms and procedures for effectively dealing with the consequences of natural disasters, man-made catastrophes, epidemics, climate change and other non-military threats, but also ensure comprehensiveness of the state defense capabilities development and is promoted "coordinated inter-ministerial cooperation with relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions and enabling forces and expertise to respond to modern challenges "(Defense Strategy, 2020, p.11).

The declaration of the state of emergency on the entire territory of the state showed that certain challenges are still ahead of us, especially those related to the absence of law for state of emergency and the (non) existence of operational plans, mechanisms and standard operating procedures of state institutions and others agencies for coordinated and coherent action in a state of emergency.

The challenge is further complicated by the fact that many state institutions and agencies do not have their own operational plans integrated into one single Comprehensive Plan for engagement of government institutions and agencies in crisis and state of emergency situation (Whole of Government Approach - WGA), or Comprehensive Plan for engagement of the whole society (Whole of Society Approach - WSA) in dealing with such situations. On the other hand, the institutions that had such plans by not being updated for a long time in accordance with the multidimensionality of security challenges and threats, have also faced with the need to update them in accordance with the unpredictability and multidimensionality of contemporary challenges and threats. In general, the absence of such plans and continuous exercise training on their applicability and effectiveness have caused some difficulties in the coordinated government or social response or individually in response to all involved state institutions for emergency action, i.e. in this case in dealing with the pandemic.

The WGA & WSA provide a precise and clear definition of the role that each state institution, agency and part of the non-governmental organizations and other entities would play in crisis situation and state of emergency. This implies an obligation not only to develop, but also to maintain the capacity and capabilities to deal with the consequences of natural disasters or man-made catastrophes, pandemics, climate change and the like. That is, the bodies of the state administration preventively, but also every institution and agency, as well as other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other entities

should have developed their own detailed plan for work and functioning in crisis situation and state of emergency. Thereby, all plans of the state institutions and the non-governmental sector should be united in a comprehensive plan of action in crisis situation and state of emergency. In principle, the “guardian” of such a plan should be the institution responsible for crisis management or, ultimately, the Government. This, basically, is not something new for us, because this conceptual approach to action and organization in case of crisis situation and state of emergency was a functional and integral part of the defense system of the Republic of Macedonia until the mid-nineties of last century.

Building the mechanisms for resilience and response in case of natural disasters, crisis situation and state of emergency is an important content of the activities of the member states, but also is in the context of integral and solidarity engagement of the Alliance. It is in the function of building resilience for the successful implementation of the three core tasks of the Alliance - collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security. As it is known, the collective defense implies the use of the Armed Forces in exercising the right to individual, i.e. collective defense of the state if it is attacked. From other hand, crisis management operations are closely related with engagement and conducting crisis management operations in which the Armed Forces are placed in support of the civilian authorities in crisis situation, i.e. state of emergency. The use of Armed Forces in the context of cooperative security implies engagement in international operations led by the Alliance and contributing to global peace, but also host nation support of the country in dealing with the challenges and consequences of natural disasters and man-made catastrophes. Within the Alliance, the decision to use the AF is a national responsibility and therefore all their activities and engagements inside and outside the country should be coherently planned and coordinated.

The support of the Alliance of our country in dealing with the pandemic was coordinated through the established mechanisms for the Alliance to act in such situations. The Alliance has prepared procedures and institutional mechanisms for action in crisis and emergency situations within the Euro - Atlantic Disaster Respond Coordination Center - EADRCC, but also through various Trust Funds.

The EADRCC is NATO's principal civil emergency response mechanism in the Euro-Atlantic area. The Centre functions as a clearing-house system for coordinating both requests and offers of assistance mainly in case of natural and man-made disasters, pandemic, climate changes and other non military threats (EADRCC, 2020).

The solidarity of the Alliance and its members has been demonstrated on several occasions through the delivery of assistance to our country in medical equipment and other medical supplies of dealing with the pandemic coordinated through the EADRCC.

Namely, through the NATO Pandemic Response Trust Fund, our country received a donation of 60 transport respirators with a total value of €1.4 million (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020). Norway donated € 300,000 in medical supplies and other medical equipment for the ROLE 2 MTF, provided through the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (Ministry of Defense, 2020d), 13,500 rapid tests for COVID 19 (Ministry of Defense, 2020f) which are intended for the Armed Forces and the citizens of North Macedonia and 100 respirators for the needs of the health sector (Ministry of Defense, 2021e). A donation of 600 medical protective suits for multiple use, 300 pairs of goggles and 300 visors was received from Bulgaria (Ministry of Defense, 2020e). In October 2020 and in February 2021, a donation

of medical protective equipment, tents, generators, and 4 pulmonary ventilators were received from Slovakia (NATO, 2021a). Also, in February 2, the Ministry of Health of North Macedonia received a donation of 60 sets of ventilator equipment. This donation was made possible with financial contributions by the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands, United Kingdom as well as the United States. This equipment adds to the delivery of 60 ventilators in October 2020 (NATO, 2021b). According to the Minister of Health, Venko Filipce, the assistance and donations that our country has received through NATO mechanisms and on a bilateral basis from the NATO member countries during the crisis, "from the very beginning, and that was one of the key factors in managing the crisis over the past period, and today as well" (Ministry of Defense 2021e).

Conclusion

Although, no one can say for sure when the pandemic will end, we must learn from the past and the experience gained from dealing with COVID 19. What we need to do in the near future is to establish more precise mechanisms and procedures for possible use of national capacities and capabilities in dealing with similar situations. It is necessary to pay attention to the development of a Comprehensive Action Plan for all state institutions and agencies in case of crisis and state of emergency. This implies the need to increase not only the national but also the collective ability to act in such situations, to increase investment in the development of defense capabilities of the state, but also to invest in building resilience of the defense system.

It is necessary to normatively regulate the crisis, i.e. the state of emergency and to precisely differentiate in which conditions one moves from one to another and which capacities and capabilities are used in dealing with such situations. It is also necessary to further regulate the mechanisms and procedures for the engagement of the Armed forces in support of the civilian authorities in terms of which forces, means, when and under what conditions they are engaged and who will bear the costs for their engagement. In that way, the defense resources would be used rationally and care would be taken to maintain and improve the combat readiness of the Armed Forces.

Therefore, it is necessary for the Republic of North Macedonia to adhere to the obligations and guidelines of the Alliance for investment of at least 2% of GDP in defense, of which at least 20% to be allocated for the development of new military capabilities. It should be understood as a concept of building national and social resilience complementary to defense capabilities intended for collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security within the Alliance. Only the rational use of resources will achieve results in dealing with crises that exceed the capacity and capabilities of state institutions whose primary task is to deal with them.

The Alliance's support in situation of crisis and state of emergency is always welcome, but it must not be the primary mechanism for dealing with such situations. The first answer is always given by the national institutions that are responsible for acting in a crisis and state of emergency. The state must invest in strengthening the capacities and capabilities of these institutions, as well as occasionally test the functionality of the established mechanisms for crisis response, i.e. emergency, as well as the functionality of the plans for functioning of its institutions in such situations.

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