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The Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the Republic of Macedonia

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Abstract

The 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. By achieving this goal i.e. Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia, the county will become a factor of stability on the unstable Balkan. Still not all of the Macedonian neighbors agree with this and some specific obstacles appeared.

Keywords: integration, Macedonia, EU, NATO, international relations

1. Introduction

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 its 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 [1].

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 too, because this term is much broader and more comprehensive than a simple desire of joining EU and NATO. To illustrate this it is enough to go back in time to the creation of an independent Republic of Macedonia.

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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.

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 on one hand and NATO and EU on the other hand. These relations observed are primarily through the prism of an application for membership of Macedonia in these organizations.

2. Materials and methods

The paper uses qualitative methods and descriptive research.

3. Macedonian –NATO relations

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. 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. 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 [3].

The reasons for joining NATO had still 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 (Although this is not mentioned in any official document by NATO or EU) for achieving another long-term goal of the Macedonian Foreign Policy and it was and still is joining the EU.

After finishing the Cold War, the North Atlantic Alliance had three rounds of enlargement. The first round was in 1999. NATO has expanded on the region of eastern and central Europe. During the first expansion according to Kuzev [2] 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 [2] the reasons lie in the role of NATO in the Kosovo war and the conflict in Macedonia in 2001. However, we can conclude that RM was not seriously considered for NATO membership in these two rounds. However RM 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 (consisting of the contenders to join NATO, at that time it were Croatia, Albania and Macedonia.) of countries 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. 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 RM 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.

4. Macedonian –EU relations

The relations between Macedonia and EU covered quite a wide range that could be part of an independent paper that would treat exclusively this issue. It would only be reminded here about the important dates in building of the EU - Macedonian relations in general and would look into their relationship from close distance.

Similar to NATO, the accession of Macedonia to the EU was determined as one of the top priorities of the young Macedonian foreign policy. Because of this in 1992 Macedonia appointed its representative in Brussels.

In 1995 the negotiations for signing an agreement for trade and transport between RM and EU began. It is signed in 1996. In 2000 the negotiations for concluding the Agreement of Stabilization and Association began. In 2001 it was signed in Luxembourg. In this way, Macedonia becomes the first country in the region to sign such an agreement. The Agreement of Stabilization and Association comes into force in 2004, after the successful ratification by all EU members. Next important year is 2004, when the Government of the RM at a ceremony in Dublin officially submitted the application for full membership in the Union. Towards realization of this objective, at the same year, the Government adopted a national strategy for membership. In the same 2004 Macedonia received the questionnaire from the European Commission. The answers of the questions were submitted back to the Commission in 2005. As response to all this, the Commission gave its opinion which recommended that Macedonia should be given the official status of candidate state for EU accession. Thanks to the positive recommendation by the Commission, RM officially becomes a candidate state at 17 December 2005. The process of becoming member more or less had a normal course during the following years. Macedonia was scanned regularly in the report of the Commission. Yet despite the individual approach, the EU applied regional approach and considered Macedonia as one of states of the Western Balkans. In 2009 the EU abolished the visa regime toward Macedonia, which means free movement with Macedonian passport without visas in Europe, for the first time after nearly two decades. 2009 is also particularly significant, because the Commission recommended opening negotiations for full membership for the first time. However, although Macedonia is a candidate country for membership more than 5 years and has been given a positive opinion by the Commission, the negotiations with the EU has not yet begun. The reason is similar as in the case of membership in the NATO pact and that is the opposition of one member of the EU-namely Greece, which blocked the further progress of the process of getting membership. Such an outcome which has been expected because it was hiding behind the famous phrase of "good neighborly relations" for many years as one of the conditions for entrance, later was eventually called by its real name and that was the problem which Greece has regarding Macedonia's name. So it came to an adverse situation, that if Macedonia wants to join the EU must meet the usual Copenhagen criteria (in fact, as any other candidate), plus one additional condition (which applies only to Macedonia) which is an agreement between Greece and RM about the name. It seems that the issue had reached the point that this additional condition imposes as the first and basic condition to start any negotiations. However, even in such a situation, almost all surveys of public opinion in Macedonia showed tremendous support for EU membership, but not if it means at the same time changing the name.

Viewed from outside the process of Macedonia's accession to the EU, several important moments should be singled out. Firstly, given the candidate status to Macedonia influenced quite stabilizing on Macedonia particularly on the interethnic field. With this act, the IPA- pre-accession funds became opened for Macedonia. Secondly, the EU was actively involved in managing the conflict from 2001 [4]. Despite all the accompanying controversies remains the fact that with the joint deployment of USA and EU it came to signing the Ohrid Framework Agreement that put an end to the conflict in Macedonia. Also, the EU made its first autonomous military mission ever (Concordia) exactly on the territory of RM. Although in reality it was about a simple change of flags (previous NATO mission gave the same mission to the EU, so NATO flag was changed with EU flag), this was still a significant step for Macedonia and for EU which thus demonstrated ability and willingness to take care of the problems in its yard by its self. In this context was also the EU police mission (Proxima) [5]

which succeeded the military one in post-conflict period in Macedonia. Both missions influenced positively on the stabilization of Macedonia and its 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 RM 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). 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 it could be additionally emphasized the absurd of the Greek claims.

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.

5. Discussion

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 chance 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 and the Turkey 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.

6. Conclusion

This paper is making attempt to present the history and current relations between republic of Macedonia and NATO/EU. The paper is treating these relations separately i.e. Macedonian relations with NATO and Macedonian relations with EU in the context of the Macedonian desire for Euro-Atlantic integration. However, we can conclude that Macedonian faced with the same obstacle in both organizations. The paper is trying to present its view concerning the possible resolution of this problem but further research is recommended.

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