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DISTRUST, HOPE AND DISTRUST AGAIN: NATO AND MACEDONIA IN 1991-2001

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Abstract:

The article is devoted to development of relations between Macedonia and NATO during the last decade of XX century. The relations was a history of hope and distrust of young nation to get the security guarantee joining the last military alliance during the Balkan crisis in 1990s. The participation of NATO in Yugoslav crisis complicated relationships and had a huge impact on the development of cooperation between Macedonia and the NATO and reception of the North Atlantic Alliance in the new Balkan state.

Keywords: Macedonia, NATO, Balkans, Yugoslavia, FYRM

The proclamation of Macedonia's independence in 1991 took place against the backdrop of sharp changes in the international situation. There were rapid fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Eastern bloc and, especially, the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact. The Western and Eastern blocs were not united. A unipolar model of the world had become a reality. History of relations between the NATO and Macedonia was a history of hope and distrust of young nation during the Balkan crisis in 1990s.

The leaders of new Macedonian state could not ignore the crucial role of the external factors. They sought membership in some international organizations to consolidate the independence of the country. The main idea of the officials of the Republic of Macedonia was an accession to the UN, the EU and the NATO. The NATO in the list was to play the role of guarantor of the new state security. Many Macedonian politicians claim it was their idea to

join the NATO, but in fact the country without army had to find some guarantee of its security and idea to join the NATO was the only one realistic way out of the difficult situation. There was only one competing project in 1990s - it was "neutral Macedonia" or "equidistant Macedonia" by Kiro Gligorov and Trajan Gocevski.

The idea of joining NATO was expressed by the Defense Minister of the Republic of Macedonia T. Gotsevski on June 18th, 1992¹. It was assumed that such a move will help to maintain the security of Macedonia and accelerate its integration into the Euro-Atlantic processes. This idea particularly was expressed by the first President K. Gligorov in his memoirs: "As an independent state (as the JNA took all weapons from Macedonia) we had to build from scratch an army, to ensure civilian control of the army, to create a small well-equipped army, professional... As a small country with a small army in a similar situation, especially in the Balkans, we cannot defend ourselves. There is only one force in the world we have to join, which is called the "the NATO". We need the security of the state, which can only provide by NATO, the only reason we orient our army to NATO standards with the aim of as soon as possible to become a member of this organization."² The new Defense Minister Popovski officially announced that Macedonia wanted to join NATO on May 25th, 1993. After this statement the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Crvenkovski visited in Brussels, where he met and held talks on cooperation with the NATO Deputy Secretary General G. Moltke. The Macedonian parliament adopted a long-term program for accession to NATO on December 23th.³

Obviously the Macedonian authorities would like to improve relations with the USA by supporting the NATO and the USA initiatives in the Balkans. Soon after Macedonia declared independence, a problem of naming arose (so-called the Macedonia naming dispute between the Republic Macedonia and the Hellenic Republic). The dispute allows Greece to veto all Macedonian attempts of the Euro-Atlantic integration. At some point the Macedonia government had despaired and had proposed so-called a policy of equidistance. New hope to

¹ Колосков Е.А. *Страна без названия: внешнеполитический аспект становления македонского государства (1991-2001 гг.)*. – М.: Институт Славяноведения РАН, 2013. – 276 с.

² «Како самостојна земја (бидејќи ЈНА го однесе сето оружје од Македонија), ние треба од почеток да создаваме своја армија, да обезбедиме цивилна управа со армија, да изградимее мала доброопремна армија со професионалци... Како мала земја, со мала армија, со ваков свет, особено на Балканот, ние не ќе можеме да се одбрани сами. Затоа ќе мораме да се приклучиме кон онаа, сега единствена сила во светот, која се вика НАТО. Нам ни е неопходна безбедност на земја, а таа може да ни ја обезбеди само НАТО, само доколку се ориентираме нашата армија да функционира по стандартите на НАТО-алијансата, со цел што да побрзо да станеме нејзина членка.» - Цитата по: Тунтев А. *Република Македонија. Прва декада (1990-1999)*. Книгоиздателство: МИ-АН. Скопје, 2005. С. 210.

³ Тунтев А. *Република Македонија. Прва декада (1990-1999)*. С. 211

join NATO appeared only in 1995 after the Interim accord was signed between Macedonia and Greece.

The Political Committee of NATO formally proposed Macedonia to join the Partnership for Peace on November 9th, 1995, and on November 15th Macedonia became a 27th member of this international program of the military cooperation. An agreement of security was signed between Macedonia and the NATO on January 17-19th, 1996. By the way the Government of the Republic of Macedonia finally got some assurance of their safety.

In February 1996, the US Bureau of Macedonia had been promoted to the level of the embassy. In early March 1996, Bill Clinton signed a memorandum on the possibility of arms supplies to Slovenia and Macedonia. Macedonia became a member of the North Atlantic Council on March 12th. Soon, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Macedonia L.D. Frchkovsky declared the necessity of the NATO expansion in Southern Europe, referring to Macedonia and Albania, on a meeting of twelve countries of South-Eastern and Central Europe on March 20th. An individual program for Macedonia in the framework of the Partnership for Peace for the period 1996-1998 was adopted on June 12th, 1996. The Office of the Republic of Macedonia for contacts with NATO was opened on June 14th in Brussels. So it was the first steps towards rearmament the Macedonian Army.

Active contacts between Macedonia-NATO were continued in 1997: The NATO Secretary General Javier Solana visited the Skopje on March 24-25th, an expanded program for the Republic of Macedonia was adopted in April, and the ARM participated military exercise "Savior" on May 12-16th, a Macedonian mission NATO got permanent status on August 17th.

After aggravation of the situation in the Balkans in the end of 1990s Macedonia began to show interest in the deployment some NATO troops on its territory because of the Albanian Unrest of 1997 and the Kosovo crisis in 1998. The NATO, in turn, preparing for a conflict with Serbia, began a policy of political isolation of Milosevic. That process was contributed when VMRO-DPMNE was coming to power in Macedonia. Macedonia received a formal request from the NATO on the use of its airspace on June 12th, 1998. Macedonia agreed to provide its territory for NATO forces at the end of 1998, when it was clear confrontation between NATO and the Yugoslavia was inevitably.

The Kosovo War was the very serious challenge for the idea of the Euro-Atlantic integration of not only the Macedonian state, but also for all post-socialistic countries. The war divided the Macedonian society – supporters and opponents of the war against Yugoslavia.

The Macedonian authorities asked an invitation in the NATO as a reciprocal step⁴. But in fact they got just a new wider agreement "The main treaty between Macedonia and NATO on the operations of the NATO mission in the Republic of Macedonia." According the agreement, which the main task was "to improve relations between Macedonia and NATO," the status of NATO forces, which were located on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, was fully negotiated⁵.

The NATO's military operation against Yugoslavia was the culmination of the Yugoslav crisis. An independent, sovereign and internationally recognized state was attacked by the USA and their allies without a sanction of the UN Security Council. Apart from the Serbian-Montenegrin Yugoslav Macedonia suffered the greatest economic losses because of the NATO's operation. Macedonia had to shelter a large number of Albanian refugees and had to suffer because impact and consequences of the severance of economic relations with the Yugoslavia - one of the most important trading partners of the young state.

And the first signs of dissatisfaction with the policy pursued by the authorities appeared before the NATO operation. A large rally against the deployment of NATO troops in Macedonia was in Kumanovo on February 25th, 1999. The next protest, which was attended by about 15 thousand participants, was organized in Skopje on March 15th.

The Serbian community in Macedonia, the Democratic Party of Serbians, the Union of Communists and others organized a large protest in Skopje on March 25th, the day after the start of the NATO bombing. Also there were incidents near the US Embassy and the hotel "Alexander Palace". Subsequently the opposition organized other protests that were during the all period of bombings in all major cities of Macedonia: Skopje, Kumanovo, Negotin, Kicevo, Gostivar, Ohrid, Struga, Bitola and others.

The addition of disapproval from a significant portion of the Macedonians of Slavic origin, dissatisfaction with the placement of the NATO forces was expressed also by Albanian

⁴ Тунтев А. *Република Македонија*. С. 217.

⁵ *Основен договор помеѓу Република Македонија и НАТО за операциите на НАТО мисиите во Република Македонија. Скопје, 24 декември 1998.* / Документи за Република Македонија 1990-2005. С. 820.

minority: the main slogan of the rally on June 10th was "NATO in Kosovo, and not in Macedonia."⁶

The Macedonian authorities were also divided. The President K. Gligorov, who was in office until November 19th, 1999, and who traditionally considered as a pro-Serbian politician, expressed dissatisfaction with the policy pursued by the government of VMRO-DPMNE, led by Georgievsky. The government at that time tried to get from the US guarantees of protection in the event of a hypothetical aggression of the JNA (there were a K. Gligorov letter to B. Clinton, on March 6th and a Clinton response on March 26th) and care for joining the NATO and the European Union (Georgievsky visited in Bonn on March 31th)⁷.

The NATO Summit was held in Washington on April 23th, 1999. Macedonian delegation arrived in the United States. There were the President K. Gligorov, the Foreign Minister Alexander Dimitrov, the Minister of Defense Nikolai Klyusev and the Chief of the General Staff T. Krstovski. In his speech K. Gligorov said that the territory of Macedonia cannot be used for military action against any of its neighbors, and lamented the difficult situation of refugees. However, Alexander Dimitrov and Javier Solana on April 23 signed a new agreement on the legal aspects of the stay of the NATO troops on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. K. Gligorov again publicly expressed dissatisfaction with the policies of the NATO in relation to Macedonia on April 26th in Washington, DC, which again showed there were serious tensions between the government and the president.

The Kosovo war ended in Macedonia. The peace negotiations between Yugoslavia and the NATO was started in Kumanovo, on June 8-10th. Later on June 22, Clinton visited Skopje, a refugee camp in Stenkovetse and the NATO troops⁸.

The next challenge for Macedonia-NATO cooperation was the military crisis in 2001. Macedonia was on the brink of a civil war at that time. Nobody in Macedonia had caused enthusiasm the NATO's role in resolving the crisis and the subsequent disarmament of Albanian rebels.

The public opinion to the NATO in the country had been deteriorating during Macedonian crisis 2001. As result the VMRO-DPMNE government lost ground and the SDSM came to power.

⁶ АФПРФ. О. 5. П. 8. Д. 2. Л. 144.

⁷Тунтев А. *Република Македонија*. С. 218-219.

⁸Тунтев А. *Република Македонија*. С. 219.

Firstly the US strongly supported the Macedonian government action against "terrorists", but after it became clear that ARM could not defeat the rebellions supported of the local Albanian population, and Macedonia governments did not ready to compromise, the White House changed its position. According to T. Gotsevski, he was advisor of the president of the RM during the Macedonian crisis 2001, 70-80% of the rebellions were not citizens of Macedonia in the beginning of the conflict. But at the end of the conflict 70-80% of the rebellions were from Macedonia⁹. The same information is reported by the Albanian minority parties.

The Washington as the EU pressure forced the opposing forces to conclude the Framework (Ohrid) Agreement, which put an end to the fighting, but did not add the popularity of the US and NATO in Macedonia. The Framework Agreement had allowed the Americans to keep the peace in this important region of the Balkans and to achieve even more control over the internal affairs of the Republic of Macedonia.

After the Ohrid the NATO started Operation Essential Harvest (on August 22-27th, 2001). The main task of the operation was the disarmament of the Albanian rebellions. As a result, the operation was able to collect only 4 thousand weapons. This number was criticized by the Macedonian government and the Macedonian society, firstly, because the Macedonian side was estimated the total number of the Albanian rebels weapons about 60-85 thousand and, secondly, because collected weapons "could be exhibits of a historical museum". These events further undermined the trust to the NATO in the Macedonia society.

Any case the new the SDSM government continued the policy of the Atlantic integration of the Macedonia and the next setback of the Macedonian way to the NATO would be in the 2008 Bucharest Summit of the NATO. First of all, the Macedonian authority sent personnel in support of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan in 2002. Later a combined medical team was deployed in Afghanistan in August 2005¹⁰. But the Macedonian name dispute continued creating barriers on the way to the euro-atlantic integration. Even the recognition of Macedonia by the United States in 2004 (according the Macedonian government it was the biggest success of the Macedonian diplomacy) did not change position of Greece.

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¹⁰*NATO's relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* // NATO official website
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48830.htm – 28.12.2015

Attempts to reconcile the parties were made just on the eve of the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. It was not a secret that Greece could use veto. It was many times underlined by Greek politicians. For example, Minister of Foreign Affairs Dora Bakoyannis said that "The Hellenic Parliament, under any composition, will not ratify the accession of the neighbouring country to the EU and NATO if the name issue is not resolved beforehand"¹¹. Greek Prime Minister K. Karamanlis, who firstly denied that Greece would use its veto¹², confirmed it later¹³.

There were no results during Macedonian-Greek negotiations in November-December 2007. It was the same in January-February 2008. The situation worsened by the fact the right-wings politicians organized rally in both countries: on February 27th 2008 in Skopje¹⁴ and on March 2^d in Thessaloniki¹⁵. After unsuccessful meeting on March 17th, 21st and 25th Matthew Nimetz, who intermediated Macedonian-Greek name dispute negotiations, had to recognize the failure of negotiations.

Macedonia was not invited in the NATO¹⁶. The Macedonian authorities got just a promise that "Republic of Macedonia will be invited to start accession talks as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the issue over the country's name has been reached"¹⁷. The news created political crisis in Macedonia: the Macedonian parliament dissolved itself on April 11th.

So, the idea joining the NATO is the main foreign political doctrine of the Macedonian authorities even today. According officials in Skopje, many problems of the young state could be solved by joining the NATO and, later in the EU. But in fact nobody know when two countries could decide who have more rights to use name "Macedonia". And it is very difficult to predict the future results of the Macedonian Euro-Atlantic integration process.

¹¹«The Hellenic Parliament, under any composition, will not ratify the accession of the neighbouring country to the EU and NATO if the name issue is not resolved beforehand». Answer of FM Ms. D. Bakoyannis regarding the FYROM name issue. 29 August, 2006 // Embassy of Greece, Washington, DC.

<http://www.greekembassy.org/Embassy/content/en/Article.aspx?office=1&folder=24&article=18371>

¹²I Never Used the Word Veto//To Vim. 23 January 2007.

<http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=53&fid=5953596> – 28.12.2015

¹³Karamanlis: No accession without a solution for the name//Eleútheros Týpos. 19 October 2007

<http://www.e-tipos.com/newsitem?id=13321> – 28.12.2015

¹⁴Macedonians Rally 'To Protect Name'// Balkan Insight.com. 28 February 2008

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8192/> – 28.12.2015

¹⁵LAOS Demonstration next Wednesday in Thessaloniki// Enet.gr. 3 March 2008.

http://www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=110.id=22605288 – 28.12.2015

¹⁶Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008. Par. 20.

http://www.summitbucharest.ro/en/doc_202.html – 28.12.2015

¹⁷NATO's relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia // NATO official website

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48830.htm – 28.12.2015

