

The European Union and the modern Macedonian state: an uneasy relationship



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I will be speaking¹ more about us than about the Union, because I think that only by facing our own drawbacks, can we move forward. But, for almost quarter of a century, instead of facing our serious problems, we have learned how to ignore them, because we wished they were not there. Since they will not go away, we developed a capability to have simultaneously two convictions that cancel each other. For example: we see with our own eyes that the West helped us create and defend our independent state, yet we believe that Macedonia is the victim of the policies of the big powers who want to destroy our nation, language and identity; we want to be in the EU and in NATO, yet we are aware of the fact that alliances are created to defend the interests of their members, and that without resolving the problems with Greece, and with Bulgaria, if I may add, this cannot happen; every day we see the simple and undeniable fact that Macedonia is a society of several national, linguistic and religious identities, yet we are reserved towards a political

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system that would express them; we are aware that without democratic values laws are not worth the paper they are written on, yet we do not search for truth or care much about justice.

“In medicine, I believe, this way of thinking is called schizophrenia”, writes George Orwell of the behavior of people who “avoid simple and undisputed facts, even though in some part of their minds they are aware of their existence”. “We all are capable of believing in things that we know are not true, continues Orwell, and then, when proven wrong, rudely to twist the facts in order to prove we were right. In an intellectual sense, we can do this for ever, the only stopping being that, sooner or later, the false belief will smash from hard reality ...” Faced with difficult and unpopular political decisions we in Macedonia, have become incapable of confronting the lie with the truth, pacifying in our minds two things that cancel each other.

The Role of the European Union in the creation of the modern Macedonian state

I can tell you from personal experience that, contrary to the historical narrative that generations of Macedonians have been brought up, about the mighty Western powers that prevented us from having our own state, at the beginning of the nineties, Macedonia was welcomed by Europe with understanding and respect. Of course, during the Yugoslav dissolution, western politicians were not happy with the way these seven small states came to existence, through ethnic slaughters and so much human suffering, creating the biggest crisis of the Continent since the Second World War, but they respected our peoples will for independence. In that sense, one can honestly say that Macedonia was born in very favorable conditions: guided by the powerful European idea, the countries of the Community were making their last preparations for Maastricht, and the creation of the European Union. But their ambitions for a new Europe did not end here. With the end of the Cold War and the fall of the ideological barriers that separated the Continent, the Western European states could announce the creation of a United Europe around the principles of peace, democracy, freedom and human rights. The message from European politicians, diplomats and lawyers to the peoples of the Balkans was that the era of imperialism, when the big powers imposed territorial, national or political solutions, was over. In an atmosphere of global optimism about the future of the

Continent, we were told that our destiny is in our own hands and that we should find our way forward through peaceful and just solutions. The Conference on Yugoslavia, organized by the Community, gave Macedonia a very high and very visible international platform, from which to present the new state and its policies. Peoples previously not know could, thanks to the effort of the European Community, introduce themselves to the world. But, the Western powers did much more than this: together with the United States, the Community supported our territorial integrity, declaring the borders of the federal republic as the future international borders of the new European states. They gave us material support and helped us defend our territory by dispatching UN troops on our borders, including American soldiers from bases in Germany, stationed on the Skopje airport. In other words, the state of Macedonia was born in friendly Europe, with the complete support of the remaining super power – America.

Our communist past was of no interest to the European Union or to the USA. All they wanted to hear is what we think of the future. In the behavior of their politicians or their diplomats there was not a trace of any kind of triumphalism over the victory over their ideological enemies. Guided by the principle that what has been born should be given a chance to demonstrate its viability and decency, they were interested for the future of Macedonia as part of the Euro- Atlantic zone of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and market economy.

To this confidence in us, we responded with our own confidence in them. Macedonia opted for a policy of peaceful self-determination, and with the help of the Western powers we achieved our goal – independence through peaceful means. “Barely”, says Richard Holbruk in the introduction of a book where he writes that the dissolution of Yugoslavia “...was followed by four wars, first in Slovenia, then in Croatia, then in Bosnia and Herzegovina and finally in Kosovo...”Then he adds in parentheses (“The fifth in Macedonia, was barely avoided”).

The price of our peaceful policy was that we became members of the United Nations ten months later than the first former Yugoslav republic, Slovenia. “Last”, said the domestic critics of the policy of president Kiro Gligorov, not understanding that Macedonia was not late, but that others hurried to war. Of course, in the real world of international politics where the Macedonian state found itself for the first time in modern history, things did not turn out to be as simple as we expected. So, the new state had to learn quickly the old lessons of politics – to distinguish between law and politics in international relations. In those first years of independence, the

Community, then the European Union, and later NATO, became not only part of our solution, but also part of our problem. Namely, we had to learn that unions are created to defend the interests of their members, and that the primary responsibility of the big European powers is towards the unity of the alliance, and not to countries aspiring to join. The same could be said about the role of America in NATO and the international society as a whole, in preserving the unity of the alliance and the frame of the international society of states. We had to learn a bit from the Estonian proverb, about relations among states in international society: "If you have to kick a dog, see to it that it is a small dog".

Of course, I am speaking about the relations of Macedonia with Greece, a member state of the EU and of NATO, with all the implications that follow from this simple fact. When the Arbitration Commission of the EC decided that Slovenia and Macedonia should be recognized as independent states, it was a triumph of law. But when Germany recognized Slovenia and Croatia, and Greece blocked Macedonia that was pure politics. The arsenal of political arguments such as "state interest", "lack of state interest", "priority of the domestic political agenda", "solidarity of the alliance", "elections" and so on, made us understand that international law does not function in a vacuum but is part of a political milieu of relations among sovereign states driven primarily by their interests. If that could be understood by Krste Misirkov in 1903, in whose "On Macedonian matters", the word "interest" is the most used word, there was no reason why it could not be understood by us in 1991. Alas, the capability of Misirkov to understand international relations was far greater than that of the contemporary interpreters of his works ninety years later. We refused to look for a possible solution in the narrow space created by the western powers arguing that international law was on our side. In 1993, when our state, paralyzed by internal divisions, could not speak with one voice, three countries of the European Union – Britain, France and Spain, sponsored a resolution for membership under "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", and pushed us into the United Nations. This act was motivated by their interests towards their awkward partner Greece, but also their interests for a stable Macedonia in a stable Balkans. With wholehearted support of the European Union and America, Macedonia became a member of the United Nations. This was the end of the common responsibility for the creation of the independent Macedonian state in Europe. But they never

stopped helping us preserve it in times of trouble, and to this very day we rely on their support and assistance.

This, ladies and gentlemen is the truth. It is a lie that contemporary Macedonia is a victim of the policies of the West, namely the EU and the USA. Yet, for twenty four years, this lie persists in the minds of people. This lie has a higher status than the truth because, very early, politician and intellectuals understood that the old narrative of the destructive role of western powers planted in the minds of peoples brings tremendous political gain. When people are led to prefer the lie to the truth something must be done about that. How is it that we neglected truth in favor of a lie?

On the role of Macedonian nationalism

Only the very careful observer in search of truth will notice that when it became evident that Macedonia, with the help of the EC and the USA, will become a member of the UN, a new rhetorical page was turned in our relations with the West. The historical narrative about the evil Western powers who always work to our disadvantage, came to life again. Why? Because, Macedonian nationalism finally had its proof that the West wants to destroy our nation and, of course, our language and identity: membership to the UN not under our constitutional name but under the reference “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. Nobody bothered to consult common sense: why would they bother to work so hard with us in order that we get the international status of a sovereign state, before starting to destroy us. Our nationalism, spread throughout the specter of party politics, had its case: yet another historical humiliation of the Macedonian people. At the very moment of our nation`s greatest triumph, the name question became the symbol of our greatest defeat. So the old narrative easily took hold of men`s hearts and minds. If we sincerely celebrated the fact that one of the smallest nations in Europe got its own state and became a member of the world organization of states, the outcome of the voting in the Macedonian parliament would not have been with only 30 deputies “in favor” (28 “against” and 18 “undecided”). In order to win power or stay in power, Macedonian politicians, from these early days of our independence, followed the easy logic of appealing to emotions such as pride

and humiliation, not to the reason of voters. The lie that the West was against Macedonia in 1993 became politically very profitable.

Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, we started turning back to the source of our national suffering and our national myth, namely, that we have had a state that was divided among our neighbors during the Balkan wars. Sadly enough, we never had such a state. Speaking truth, one must mention the part from the report of the Carnegie Commission for International Peace that visited Macedonia after the two Balkan wars in 1912 and 1914 to register the horrors of ethnic wars in which not only armies, but whole populations fight each other. This is the part: "The most natural solution of the Balkan imbroglio appeared to be the creation in Macedonia of a new autonomy or independent unity, side by side with the other unities realized in Bulgaria, Greece, Servia and Montenegro, all of which countries had previously been liberated thanks to Russian or European intervention. But this solution had become impossible, owing first to the incapacity of the Turkish government and then to the rival pretensions of the three neighboring States to this or that part of Macedonian inheritance".

Our nationalism is the product of the sentiment of common suffering for and the feeling of belonging to the land of Macedonia that survived the pan-Bulgarian idea among the Slavic population in the last European province of the Ottoman Empire. The historical longing for one fatherland, the memories of the division of that fatherland among neighboring states, are directly connected in the minds of peoples with the Greek demands for the changing of the name of our state. The logic is: they took our land, now they want to take our souls.

Of course, facing the realities of the twenty first century is much more productive than lamenting on missed chances in history, over which we have no influence whatsoever. The first truth that we have to face is that history cannot be mended; that former enemies can become friends; that the role of Balkan politicians is to inform their peoples that there are no more barbarians on their borders, thus beginning a process of reconciliation amongst nations; that guided by these principles, through an open and sincere dialogue we can find solutions for our misunderstandings...This would be a good start, but first we must do away with the lies with which politicians control the minds and hearts of peoples.

On the character of our state

The truth about the multiethnic character of the Macedonian state created headaches amongst many ethnic Macedonians when we declared independence in 1991. I remember a time when president Gligorov told me about the view of one of the vice-presidents of the Macedonian government that too often I use the word “multiethnic”. I, personally thought that we do not use the word often enough and that we do not pay attention to our multiethnic reality, which could cost us dearly and lead us into conflict. The conflict took place, from which time on we live with a lie that we do not know what happened to us in 2001, words that are repeated by politicians and intellectuals with unbearable easiness, meaning that it was a doing of some foreign power.

The truth is that democracy understood as series of electoral cycles could not by itself resolve in a just way the relation “polis-demos”, “state- people”. That dialogue and agreement must precede the shaping of the political institutions, because a democratic state is possible only if it is legitimate in the eyes of all its constituent parts. Otherwise there is no democratic state. In the case of Macedonia, for the constitution to be accepted by all, it had to regulate the relation “state-peoples” in a just way. We could not achieve the agreement with the political representatives of the Albanian community in 1991, that we did ten years later with the Ohrid Framework Agreement, sponsored by the US and the EU.

This agreement is but a step forward, towards a different interpretation of our patriotism: “Macedonian unity is plural, and can be preserved only as a permanent equilibrium among ethnic groups, religions, interests and regions. Macedonian unity can never be absolute, rigid, simple, and must always be a balance between a multitude of interests, towards which we aspire with moderateness and tolerance”. This is a quotation from Walter Lippman, an American liberal thinker and journalist, written in 1935. I changed the word “American” with the word “Macedonian” and added the words “ethnic groups”. In any case, the final part of the message refers to both countries: “If we want to achieve a better future for our children, we must unite around a new kind of nationalism”. This message has a very special meaning for us. Our new nationalism obliges us to accept and to love Macedonia the way it really is – multiethnic, and not the ethnically pure Macedonia from the dreams of our nationalistic leaders. Accepting this would be a huge step on the road towards the European Union.

On freedom and democracy

In the past years I have often asked myself what is happening to freedom and democracy in Macedonia: why is it that we have elections, we have a constitution, we have laws, we have political institutions, we have courts, yet something is missing. That which is missing cannot be found in the electoral process, in the constitution, in our political institutions, in our courts, because it is in us. The spirit of the laws is in us. The manifestation of this spirit is in the moral dedication for the respect of rules, in our resistance towards all kinds of arbitrary and capricious behavior contrary to the laws that govern us. In practice, the spirit of the laws in a society manifests itself in the moral dedication of peoples to truth, justice, reason in disagreement, mutual trust... Without moral dedication towards these values which must be engraved in the hearts of people, laws are not worth the paper they are written on.

The lack of knowledge of these values that should be at the foundation of Macedonian democracy is the result of a lie that somehow the democratic process, by itself, will produce change for the better. This is the source of that lethal interpretation of democracy as the ceremony of multiparty elections. Keeping this lie alive, creates a favorable environment for tricky and unscrupulous individuals to satisfy their lust for power, money, fame or privileges. Because a disoriented people, without values to guide him through life, can easily be cheated to believe that everything that has “democratic legitimacy” is permitted. That, of course is not true, because without European democratic values like truth and justice, the ballot can give legitimacy to all kinds of undemocratic behavior to groups that rotate in power. Accepting this too, would be a huge step towards the European Union.

Conclusion

How is it that “lies” and “myths” occupy such a distinctive place in Macedonian politics? I cannot think of a better answer than the fact that there are not enough lovers of truth. And there is, of course, the question of human nature. Through the experiences of centuries, people have acquired the knowledge that human nature is afraid of the labor, the patience and the

inconveniences necessary to discover the truth. Human nature is often afraid even of the truth, which can be very disturbing. But there is yet another interpretation, the one given by Francis Bacon who in his essay “On truth” in the sixteenth century, writes:” People love the lies they tell not only out of pleasure, as is the case of poets, or out of profit, as with merchants, but simply for the lie itself”...- “...a natural, though corrupted, love towards the lie”.

Yet today, the road towards European Macedonia leads through doing away with our oriental mentality based on fraud. We are a free people since 1991, but what is the meaning of freedom for men in whose hearts and minds are engraved the vices of the Orient and its millennial autocratic tradition. It is not enough that we keep repeating that the Communist ideology recognized only one truth, and not to be aware that we legitimize lies. Only by affirming truth as a value, can we create a society which gives priority to voices of reason. The road will not be easy since we live in a society which does not recognize a different truth from the one that serves the party cause or the cause of foxy, lucrative individuals with their network of supporters.

The worries of the European Union in its expansion to the East, have always been that corrupted politicians from Eastern Europe will sit in the chairs in Brussels and will take part in making decisions on the fate of Europe. The worries of the Americans are that such politicians, representing their states in NATO, will influence world affairs. With the disclosure of the wiretappings and the huge corruptive affairs in Macedonia, we see that such worries were not baseless. What should follow is Western pressure on our state for moral criteria in politics that only the best can live up to. Maybe this combination of domestic and foreign pressures can affirm the political ideal that “Honesty is the best policy”. But this will not happen before we ourselves manage to make a distinction between “the lie” and “the truth”, and to stop treating “the lie” as an option in political debates, because truth is one thing and a lie is a lie.

Thank you.