

The impact of postponed accession of Republic of Macedonia in the Euro-Atlantic structures to the inter-ethnic relations



Bekim Nuhija

Southeast European University- Tetovo

PhD candidate at University of Maastricht

b.nuhija@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract

The reason why the Republic of Macedonia, unfortunately, has remained outside of Euro-Atlantic integrations, is of internal and external nature. The internal cause is the conduct of the Macedonian political leadership, which to a great extent, does not take serious actions to resolve the name dispute with Greece and the external cause – the Greek behavior, which is misusing its previous membership in EU and NATO.

The paper analyses the advantages of Macedonian Euro-Atlantic integration. On the one hand, the accent is put on Macedonian political leadership and its false willingness to resolve the name dispute with Greece - set as a condition for our integration. On the other hand, the paper discusses the consequences of postponement of Euro-Atlantic integrations and its impact to inter ethnic relations.

Key words: integration, name dispute, foreign policy, inter-ethnic relations, Macedonia

After its independence in 1991, Macedonia adopted the denomination of the Republic of Macedonia,ⁱ after peacefully seceding from Yugoslavia. In the same year, Macedoniaⁱⁱ adopted its constitutionⁱⁱⁱ and since April 1993 it has become a full member of the United Nations under

the provisional denomination of “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (FYROM), due to the Greek veto against its constitutional name.

Macedonia faced many international challenges after its independence: the UN imposed an economic embargo on Yugoslavia between 1992 and 2000, the Greek imposed a trade embargo because of its denomination during 1993-1996, the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis and the 2001 internal ethnic crisis – because the independence^{iv} of Macedonia and its Constitution were interpreted differently by the Albanian^v and Macedonian communities^{vi} of the country.

In the newly formed Republic of Macedonia, several conflicts emerged among the various ethnic groups, especially between the majority Macedonians and the main minority Albanians. First of all, the referendum on independence held in 1991, was boycotted by the Albanian population of the country. Continuing the path of boycott, the Albanian community also boycotted the census which followed after it. In addition, as the result of the independence and the adoption of the constitution which was considered as being brought about without mutual consent, in 1992 the Albanian community^{vii} held a plebiscite of its own in which it opted for autonomy, but that could not be achieved due to political constraints. The boycott continued during the census of 1994, which was monitored by the international community, resulting in its rejection due to the fact that the 23% shown as the percentage of the Albanian population was considered too low by the Albanian community.

The major dissatisfaction of the Albanians with the Constitution^{viii} was caused by its preamble which was considered to be a major set-back in comparison with the Constitution of the defunct Socialist Republic of Macedonia, because it proclaimed Macedonia as a national state of the ethnic Macedonians, guaranteeing also the full civic equality and permanent peaceful coexistence of the Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and other nationalities with the ethnic-Macedonian people, the Slavic speaking majority of the population of Macedonia. This has subsequently meant that only ethnic Macedonians can solely have rights to their own statehood^{ix}. In addition, the new Constitution declared the Macedonian language and the Cyrillic alphabet as the only official language and alphabet of the country, which did not allow the Albanian and other communities’ access to higher education in their mother tongue.

All this deteriorated the constitutional position of the Albanian community and was considered to be a permanent generator of crises, proclaimed as such also by the Albanian

political parties of Macedonia. Many consider these as being the main cause for the continued ethnic tensions in the country and the subsequent events of 2001. During 2001 the Albanian population living in the Republic of Macedonia formed a National Liberation Army, which sporadically clashed with the Macedonian police and army units, leading to civil unrest and interethnic animosities, which resulted in around 36 deaths and many more injuries and a significant ethnic cleansing activity, resulting in the destruction of each other's churches and memorials in the ethnically mixed areas, during the 6 months of the unrest which is remembered as the 2001 "war" in Macedonia.

As the result of the armed conflict during 2001, a peace agreement, called the Ohrid Framework Agreement, was mediated by the NATO and the EU between the fighting parties. The Agreement, signed on the 13th of August 2001, was negotiated between the four major Macedonian and Albanian political parties, mediated and guaranteed by the international community. It envisaged significant constitutional and legal reforms, concerning especially the status of the Albanians. The agreement set forth a list of concrete constitutional and legal reforms to be undertaken by the Macedonian Parliamentary Assembly in the field of decentralization of the public administration, non-discrimination, equitable representation in the public bodies, foreseeing also special parliamentary procedures for the protection of minorities, for the education and the use of minority languages, expression of national identities. The Ohrid Framework Agreement and the constitutional amendments which followed its adoption aimed at promoting Macedonia as the state of all its citizens. Among the basic principles of the Framework Agreement are that the use of violence in pursuit of political aims is unconditionally forbidden, that only peaceful political solutions can assure a stable and democratic future for the country, that the sovereignty and territorial integrity and the unitary character of the state are inviolable and must be preserved and that the multi-ethnic character of the society must be preserved and reflected in public life. There is a common understanding that the implementation of the agreement is and will be an ongoing process for a significant period of time and is crucial for securing the peaceful inter-ethnic relations across the country. In addition, its implementation is still on the top of the agenda, and is seen as a precondition for the accession of Macedonia to the EU and the NATO.

While it is very true that the Ohrid Framework Agreement was the product of the military crisis of the time and most likely it would not have existed at all without it, it is also true that it reflects the calls for major constitutional and legal reforms that would reflect the ethnic composition of the country. The principles were consequently embodied in the relevant pieces of legislation enabling full implementation of the Framework Agreement and the constitutional amendments. About 70 new laws or amendments to existing laws were adopted in the past years to complete the legislative framework supporting the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

EU and NATO

Accession of the Republic of Macedonia together with other Balkan states^x into the European Union is very important and changeable topic for aspiring countries as well as for the EU itself.

In the Copenhagen summit^{xi} the enlargement policy of the EU was discussed and it was decided that Macedonia and other Balkan countries can and will be accepted as partners and become full members of EU if they fulfill the Copenhagen criterias.

The decision taken in Copenhagen was the most important one for Macedonia and other Balkan states since they became partners of Accession Partnership with European Union.

The advantages of membership of Macedonia in the EU are:

- Its citizens can live, move and work in a wide space that extends from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea and from the Black Sea to the Atlantic Ocean;
- Macedonian products could be exposed to the world's largest market undergoing standard procedures;
- With EU enlargement towards the Balkans is given the opportunity to re-unification of the European continent.

Nearly 12 years have passed since when it signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Macedonia. After a negotiation

process that lasted more than two years, the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Macedonia on April 9, 2001 was signed in Luxembourg, the during a special ceremony at the margins of the General Affairs Council. Also, Interim Agreement covering market issues was signed. It was an event of great political, symbolic, economic and practical importance which marks an important step in the process of establishing closer relations with the Western Balkan countries.

The Republic of Macedonia is the first country with which negotiations for a Stabilization and Association Agreement have been completed successfully and the agreement is formally signed. On January 24, 2000 Council adopted negotiating directives of the Commission in accordance with the provisions of Article 300 of the Treaty on European Union. Then negotiations were launched by the Commission in Skopje on March 5, 2000, following three rounds of negotiations.

The political significance of the Agreement is quite high because it gives the Republic of Macedonia the status of potential candidate and thus opens up the possibility for a future admission to the European Union. This is made explicit in the preamble, which calls "the European Union's readiness to integrate the Republic of Macedonia and its status as a potential candidate for EU membership on the basis of the Treaty of the European Union at the same time fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria defined by the European Council 1993, which is the subject of a successful implementation of this agreement, notably regarding regional cooperation.

The ultimate goal of regional stability and integration, as well as respect for fundamental rights and minorities constitute a central foundation of the agreement and are included in the preamble and the fundamental principles of the Treaty.

In 2005, the country was officially recognised as a European Union candidate state.

As numbered in its strategic objectives, one of the major political goals of the country is to be fully integrated into the European and international organizations, in particular the European Union and the NATO. All opinion polls show that there is massive support for this European and transatlantic integration of the country, and therefore most citizens of Macedonia see this path as the only long term solution for the problems in the political and economic sphere.

But, the public opinion regarding the NATO membership of Macedonia is divided between the Macedonian and Albanian views^{xii}. The ethnic Albanians of Macedonia support more the Macedonian membership than the ethnic Macedonians do.

There are many ways of interpreting these views. One of them is that the Albanian population living in the Republic of Macedonia is showing much more interest in faster access to the Euro Atlantic structures, considering that joining these structures, overall economic and social welfare will be improved.

The Albanian population considers that Macedonians (presented by their main political parties) should be flexible and give priority to the membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures instead of the other priorities of its foreign policy^{xiii}.

One of the criteria's that the European Union requires from the states that aspire to join this organization is good neighboring relations and policy. In this direction the Republic of Macedonia has undertaken several steps resulting in signing bilateral agreements in different fields, for example: social policy, simplifying the custom borders procedures, etc.

But, is this enough? Although undertaken efforts in a positive direction, certain problems with neighbor countries may appear in the near future.

The relations with Serbia are at a satisfactory level. Macedonia and Bulgaria have cooperative relations. Bulgaria still refuses the recognition of Macedonian Nation and language, hence this Bulgarian approach, in the future can stop the integration of the Republic of Macedonia into the EU as well as NATO, despite positive declarations by Macedonian and Bulgarian politicians on excellent bilateral relations. Macedonia and Kosovo have very friendly and amiable neighbor relations. The bilateral relations between Albania and Macedonia are at a satisfactory level. Albania has recognized Skopje under the United Nations provisional reference of the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". But, will Albania in a certain moment, stop Macedonian accession into the Euro Atlantic structures using the constitutional status^{xiv} of the Albanian population living in Macedonia as a prerequisite for its membership into the abovementioned structures is an issue that the policymakers should consider seriously?

How long Macedonian citizens should wait in order to become full members of EU and NATO, knowing the fact that Greece is already a member of the abovementioned structures and has a lot of instruments at its disposal, which can be used to stop or postpone our accession? In

the NATO summit of Bucharest, Greece used her veto and blocked the accession process, with the justification that the Republic of Macedonia has an open dispute with Greece regarding the constitutional name. The name dispute between Macedonia and Greece actually is the main reason why the process of integration has stopped, or at least that's what we've been told and is aware of. Until today, exactly 5 years have passed and there is still no solution on the horizon.

Without undermining the national feelings of the Macedonian population^{xv}, the efforts of the Macedonian politicians, especially of the party in power, are not sufficient^{xvi}.

Excluding other ethnical groups from this process and asking them to be loyal citizens of the country, seems to be very risky political decision, especially knowing the fact that they consist 35.82 %^{xvii} of the total number of the population of this multi ethnical state.

Postponement of EU integration and its impact to interethnic relations

The process of EU integration has been delayed so long, that Macedonian citizens see it as an imaginary thing that never comes, in a way becoming a "myth" for them. Aside from these structures surely will have negative impact to interethnic relations among major ethnical groups living in the Republic of Macedonia. Unemployment, and poverty among other ethnical groups living in Macedonia caused by postponed integration^{xviii}, may reflect in the occurrence of conflicts^{xix}, based on ethnic grounds, justified by the insufficient commitment of Macedonian political parties in the process of integration.

Being a member of a stabile, democratic and secure community, growing an internal market, increased domestic demands (customs-free access to 500 million consumers), free movement of labor force, goods, services and capital, easier access to EU financial institutions and funds, increase of the GDP growth, will surely increase the Macedonian economic standard, quality of life, and its citizens will not be interested in creating or supporting conflict situations^{xx}.

The European Union and NATO do not accept candidate states which have open issues with neighbor countries. Republic of Macedonia must find the strength and courage and enter in direct negotiations with Greece aiming final and lasting solution to the name issue. The essence of compromise is winning and losing at the same time. We must make detailed analysis of what

we win by keeping current static position (in the name dispute with Greece) and what we lose staying aside from Euro-Atlantic structures. One of the indispensable conditions for compromise with Greece is consensus within political factors in Macedonia and Greek conviction that Macedonia is interested to reach a compromise.

When Macedonia sued Greece in front of International Court of Justice, we expected that the International Court's of Justice decision would significantly affect the solving of the name dispute and related to it - our Euro-Atlantic integrations, hence, the ongoing negotiations were considered formal. The Republic of Macedonia won the legal battle, but politically, the process did not move from the previous positions. The court's decision showed that both sides on the name dispute are strongly positioned and that it will be hard to find a compromise solution for the dispute.

As to the Macedonian side, I'm strongly convinced that this decision put an end to some ridiculous theories of some "intellectual circles" which were considering that there is an international and European plot against Macedonian identity. The fact that these intellectual circles are close to the ruling party and through their media follow its political line, give us to know that in the future, VMRO is not ready to make any compromise on the name issue. Furthermore, for VMRO compromise does not have political sense anymore. That is why after the court decision, it is more difficult to "sell" it to its members and voters. Henceforth, VMRO will be even more skeptical in seeking a solution to this problem and the solution for it will have to come from another side.

Judging by the statements of Greek politicians, neither are they ready to soften their views. We get the impression that they have become a victim of typical Balkan stubbornness and they are taking more radical positions. Some of them are even calling for Greece to fully withdraw from the Agreement and to continue to use their veto power everywhere. On this side of the border this may look nationalistic and irrational, but viewed from a Greek angle, it does not seem so. Greece is passing through a difficult period in which they seek a comprehensive political consensus for the reforms that they have to obtain, and in these conditions, we cannot expect them to deal with external issues for which they cannot agree between themselves. Ultimately, for Greeks, the name issue is a second-hand problem, and they do not lose anything if it's delayed, hence they are not in a hurry to seek a possible solution. In these times it's

difficult to be a Greek prime minister, and quite unique smart political move that they can use is to put a veto to Macedonia.

As regards to the position of the international community, from which too often we expect to solve our problems, the shortest and best answer is that Europe's decisions are more politically based than based in legal facts^{xxi}. Moreover, now Europe is facing economical crises and consequently it's enlargement it's not her priority. In fact, almost all member states are trying to find whatever reason as justification for postponement of enlargement. Greek opposition to Macedonia's name serves as great reason. At the same time, the U.S. is preoccupied with its economic problems; its foreign policy is focused on China and the Middle East.

The problems of a small and unimportant country are not part of their mathematics (now we are paying the price of ignoring benevolent advices of George Bush presidency, which had more knowledge and interest about the name issue than its usual for one U.S. president). So it is obvious that international community will not deal too much with our EU and NATO integration. Looked from their perspective, to us was given a message to resolve the name dispute, set as a condition for our integration, in this line, every politician which tries to ignore this, looks like a student who requires a higher grade without resolving given assignments by his professor.

The last factor that could be a catalyst for resolving the name issue is DUI, from which was expected in this direction to squeeze VMRO inside the coalition. But this mission of DUI has resulted in just some ideas that look more like excuses for failure. Statements requiring Macedonia to join NATO under the provisional reference (option which is eliminated long time ago) or request to start the negotiations with the promise to resolve the name dispute in a year (if the name can be resolved within a year, why is it not resolved until now?) do not have nothing to do with reality and it seems that they refer only for internal consumption. Thus, we get the impression that DUI does not have the knowledge or does not want to face VMRO regarding the name issue. Solution will not come from this direction.

In conclusion I can say that until the next elections, there is no other factor that will push for a solution of the name dispute and related to that - our integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. It is time for citizens to face the bitter reality that they will not be a member of EU and NATO for a long time. Those that have based their business, career or general welfare,

assuming membership in these structures, should look for other alternatives. Meanwhile, our neighbors are making great strides in this direction, and this is another reality that we have to accept. The world will not stop on the problems of a small, poor and insignificant country like ours. We must be aware of the Macedonian position and power in international relations and better understand the real politics.

It is clear that the name dispute has delayed the process for five years now and the consequences are slowly but surely coming into plain sight, if these politics continue, deterioration will come sooner or later. The name issue will keep us as hostages until the government shows a sincere willingness to reach a compromise. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the whole political specter should be more committed in fulfilling the required conditions set by the EU for integration into this organization. Moreover, the transformation of the name problem into identity issue indicates that the government is deviating from its declarative determination for Macedonia's quick integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

ⁱ The Republic of Macedonia has a total area of 25,713 km² (9,928 sq mi) with 748 km (465 mi) of boundaries, shared with Kosovo along 159 kms or 99 miles to the northwest, Serbia (62 km or 39 mi) to the North, Bulgaria (148 km or 92 mi) to the east, Greece (228 km or 142 mi) to the south, and with Albania (151 km or 94 mi) to the west. With its geographical position, it is a transit route for shipment of goods from Greece, through the Balkans, towards Europe and through Bulgaria to the East.

ⁱⁱ Macedonia was the only republic that gained its independence peacefully, avoiding the Yugoslav wars of secession of the 1990's.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to article 1 of the Constitution, The Republic of Macedonia is a sovereign, independent, democratic and social state.

^{iv} As mentioned, Macedonia became independent in 1991 and adopted a Constitution as basis for the new legal order of the country.

^v The term Albanians referred in this document refers to the Albanian community in the Republic of Macedonia.

^{vi} The term community is the correct one according to the Framework Agreement and the Constitution Amendments. Other terms, such as "nationalities" were used prior to the Framework Agreement. This caused confusion about the meaning of citizenship of a specific country.

^{viii} The constitution of Macedonia (of 1991) has changed its original Yugoslav times formulation, which had stated that "Macedonia is the state of the Macedonian people and of the Albanian and Turkish minorities".

^{ix} Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia.

^x Abania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro

^{xi} From 12-13 December 2002

^{xii} In 2010, the secretariat for European affairs conducted a survey which recorded a decline of the support for the European integration. The survey showed that for more than 66.5 percent of the citizens, the protection of the country's name as Macedonia is more important than membership of the European Union and NATO. For 26 percent of those surveyed, the European Union and NATO are more important than the name. More drastic is the difference regarding the ethnicity of the respondents – for about 82 percent of the Macedonians the country's name comes before NATO and the EU accession. For less than 78 percent of the Albanians in Macedonia, EU and NATO accessions are more important than the name, available at: http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/BalkanMonitor-2010_Summary_of_Findings.pdf, p. 14

^{xiii} Most of the Albanians consider themselves as kept as hostages by Macedonians politicians which are disabling their right on joining the European and International organizations, since they consider that their approach in resolving name dispute with Greece is not enough serious, and that is mainly because of putting on top of the agenda of foreign policy priorities.

^{xiv} Most of the Albanians living in Macedonia consider them discriminated in many areas: human rights, employment, allocation of budget funds etc.

^{xv} Moreover, Albanians encourage them to find a solution which will not threaten the Macedonian national identity, individuality of the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language and culture

^{xvi} Currents government official position is: "Regarding the political dispute imposed by Greece about the constitutional name of our country, the Government is willing to continue the Macedonian - Greek political dialogue, on the basis of established strategy and principles. The Government will not accept a change of the Constitution, with an aim of changing the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia and will not accept ideas and suggestions that would threaten the Macedonian national identity, individuality of the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language. The Government will not accept any solution regarding the name imposed by Greece without previous conducted referendum by the Macedonian citizens.

^{xvii} <http://www.stat.gov.mk>, according to 2002 census.

^{xviii} That is mainly because of giving priority to the name dispute.

^{xix} Maleski D (2010) Law, Politics and History in International Relations: Macedonia and Greece. *New Balkan Politics, Issue 12*.

^{xx} Poverty, unemployment and other economic problems are main factors of increased illegal activities

^{xxi} Maleski D (2010) Law, Politics and History in International Relations: Macedonia and Greece. *New Balkan Politics, Issue 12*.

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