

Push and Pull:

Europe in the Balkans and the Case of Macedonia

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In 2003, at the summit in Thessalonica the member states of the European Union issued a declaration promising the countries of the Balkans a secure future of full integration in a united continent. Seven years later the situation seems not quite so optimistic, due to a reinforcing interplay between confusion and discord in Brussels and resurgent bilateral disputes between members and aspirants, which have resulted in a frustration of *feeling stuck* among the countries of the so-called western Balkans. Since 2005 the pervasive enlargement fatigue and the emergence of bilateral vetoes by neighboring countries, for the first time, brought the EU promise into question. The consequence of this commitment deficit by Brussels poses dangers for both Balkan stability and EU foreign policy and therefore must be immediately addressed.

For the Balkans, a region where the only historical continuity has been discontinuity, an interruption, actual or perceived, in the process of EU integration can destabilize the region and undo the unprecedented achievements to date. Since the fall of Yugoslavia, the two pillars of stability in the region have been the United States military commitment, present through NATO, and the prospect of EU integration. As the US commitment is being reduced and redirected, the relative importance of the EU role rises proportionally. In a fragile environment where Bosnia still seems shaky, and Kosovo poses new political and legal challenges, the EU cannot afford another lapse.

Failure in the Balkans will have several consequences for the Union. An unstable southeast Europe is prone to penetration by islamist extremists

from the Middle East and a greater proliferation of organized crime, notably small weapons, drugs and human trafficking. Furthermore, the broader lessons drawn from the crises of the 1990s demonstrate that it is practically impossible to ignore problems in the Balkans, for sooner or later they will spill over and necessitate interventions, in one way or another, by the EU, the United States and Russia at a considerable cost. Bearing in mind the already staggering influx of EU money into the region, the costs at this stage would be even greater. Finally, failure to make Balkan stability irreversible will discredit enlargement as a viable policy tool for the Union, reducing its leverage in the region, with the potential of affecting the EU's efforts with the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean rim countries – not a good start for a robust and comprehensive EU foreign policy.

The purpose of this paper is two fold: to contextualize the western Balkans in a broader historical framework of a long-standing unsettled area and argue for the EU's unique opportunity to pacify it; and second, through the case of Macedonia, to examine recent relations with the EU. Following a brief overview of the turbulent history through the prism of the protracted decline of the Ottoman Empire, the paper focuses on the case of Macedonia for two reasons. First, there EU integration has had positive transformative influence, but also on repeated occasions the lack of commitment has prevented the country of moving forward. Secondly, Macedonia consistently illustrates the new stalemate in integration caused by the commitment deficit and the bilateral disputes that impede Euro-Atlantic integration strategy.

A Troubled Peninsula

From the onset of the ninetieth century, the Balkans have been in a state of flux of revolutions, wars, redrawing of borders and social unrest, that began with the protracted decline of the Ottoman empire. The Balkan turmoil repeatedly disrupted security beyond its borders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tying the fate of the region with that of the west. In the Balkans, the three empires of Russia, Austria and Turkey fought for territory and supremacy, nudged in one direction or another by France, Germany, and Britain; a struggle that culminated in 1914. It was in the Balkans again, where the disintegration of Yugoslavia of the 1990s stunned the rest of Europe, instigating a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) for the

nascent Union, as well as the first EU civilian and military missions as part of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP).

When Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, the shock reverberated through the Ottoman Empire, leaving two vast, unsettled areas: the Middle East and the Balkans. Out of the debris of the Turkish realm in Europe, there rose and fell kingdoms and republics in various shapes and forms. Divergent and contentious as they were, the one commonality the statelets of the Balkans have had is the influence of, and interaction with “the west” and the defining influence it had on them (and on the west). As Susan Woodward argues:

“The search for a form of government suitable to the social and economic conditions of each country has always been characterized by a constant interaction between internal and foreign affairs. Whatever natural balance might have prevailed indigenously, it has always been overwhelmed by the policies of European empires. Nonetheless, outsiders tend not to recognize this, including their role in shaping identities and political outcomes.”¹

Maria Todorova adds that the “size, shape, stages of growth, even the very existence of the different Balkan states was almost exclusively regulated by great power considerations following the rules of the balance-of-power game.”² This dynamic persists to the present day, with the European Union replacing the different empires, and in fact, acting as somewhat of an empire itself. Having declared the intention to absorb of the region, the Union is the one formation that can pacify the Balkans and secure peace and stability on the whole continent.

The Balkans and Western Europe were introduced to each other quite late, but when they did the relationship was as intense as it was dangerous. The conquest of Egypt by the expeditionary force led by the young general Bonaparte, nakedly revealed the impotence of the Ottoman Empire, giving rise to the so-called eastern question of what will replace it.³ In 1807,

¹ Susan WOODWARD, *Milosevic Who? Origins of the New Balkans* (London School of Economics & Political Science: Hellenic Observatory Discussion Paper No. 5, July 2001), 3.

² Maria TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 169.

³ B. LEWIS, *What Went Wrong?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31.

the Emperor Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I of Russia at Tilsit planned a partition of the Ottoman lands in Europe, giving the eastern Balkan provinces to Russia, the western parts to France, with some territory in Bosnia granted to Austria.⁴ However, by the time the Ottomans started contending with the western way of doing business, the rise of the Balkan peoples had become their principal existential threat. “The French Revolution, and the arrival of French troops and – more dangerous – French ideas in the eastern Mediterranean brought radical change.”⁵

The dynamic of Balkan politics in the nineteenth century was determined by several reinforcing factors: the continued Ottoman decline, the awakening of subject nationalities and the interest and rivalries of the great powers.⁶ In 1804, the Serbs launched a national uprising and by 1815 were recognized as a principality under Ottoman suzerainty; shortly followed by the even more dramatic Greek uprising a few years later; an event which galvanized considerable support in the west. The western powers assumed an ambivalent attitude towards these developments in the Balkans, which came to be known as the eastern question. In fact, the illustrious German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck remarked that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier. Yet the eastern question from the third quarter of the nineteenth century and onwards was to demand much of the great powers’ attention. The numerous unresolved issues resulted in “frequent crises, wars, and revolutions during the remainder of the nineteenth century. It contributed to the causing of two world wars in the twentieth century, one precipitated by events in Serbia [...]”⁷ In 1878, the new and zealous kingdom of Bulgaria made vast territorial extensions at the expense of the Ottomans, codified in the ill-fated Treaty of San Stefano, only to see the British and the Germans reverse those gains at the Congress of Berlin later that same year, to the sheer horror of the Bulgarians. It was at this grand gathering also that Austria-Hungary got the right to occupy Bosnia, prompting the British Premier Benjamin Disraeli to declare peace in the Balkans.

⁴ LEWIS, 33.

⁵ *Ibid*, 34.

⁶ L. S. STAVRIANOS, *The Balkans since 1453*. (New York: New York University Press), 215-230.

⁷ David THOMPSON, *Europe Since Napoleon* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 346.

The peace did not last long, for in 1912 Greeks, Serbs, Bulgars and Montenegrins joined forces together, for the first and last time, in a league against the remnants of Ottoman rule. The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) were “a crescendo of Balkan nationalism, forced into a common cause by Turkish intransigence and focused on the complex problems of Macedonia [which] even the congress of Berlin had not tried to tackle [...]”⁸ As soon as they had chased out the Turks from the continent, the belligerents turned against each other, in a more familiar pattern of activity. The gains and losses of all parties were not to last for long, being overshadowed by the outbreak of the Great War in the summer of 1914, following the assassination of the Austrian Archduke by the Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo.

Out of the subsequent Paris Peace Conference of 1919 came a new Balkan experiment: Yugoslavia. The various Slavic peoples that for so long had lived under Habsburg or Ottoman rule, fused themselves in a country that was several times bigger than the pre-war Serbia and surrounded by the defeated, if bitter, enemies Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria. This first Yugoslavia, dominated by the Serbian ruling families was plagued with problems both internal and external. The lack of cohesion and distrust between the various constituent people, namely the Serbs and the Croats, ensured Yugoslavia would not survive too long.

“Within Yugoslavia, peoples who had little in common except language never agreed on a common interpretations of what the country meant. Yugoslavia paid a heavy penalty for its gains during the Second World War, when its neighbors, with much help from Germany, seized back the land it had won at the Peace Conference and its people turned on each other [...]”⁹

After the eventual victory in 1945, Josip Broz – Tito, the leader-to-be of the new Yugoslavia managed to put the pieces back together. But as the great man died in 1980 and communism collapsed with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia declined yet again in a cascade of anarchy, violence and war, first in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia-Kosovo, and finally Macedonia.

⁸ THOMPSON, 473.

⁹ Margaret MACMILLAN, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), 123-124.

Macedonia: A Country on the Brink

The disintegration of the 1990s produced a deeply fragmented and unstable Balkans, with the various republics falling out of the Yugoslav Federation. Macedonia though the only one to come out of that unholy union peacefully, has and, to a certain extent, continues to exist within a fragile and complex internal and regional paradigm. The scholar and journalist Elizabeth Pond sums it up keenly when stating that “by its fifteenth birthday, the new state [Macedonia] of 2 million had survived an almost successful assassination attempt on its first president; the overnight influx of more than 300,000 refugees from Kosovo, equal to 15 percent of the population; armed ethnic clashes that looked like the start of a fifth war of the Yugoslav succession; and the death of a second president in a plane crash [...] Throughout the period Macedonia repeatedly appeared to be lurching into civil war.”¹⁰ Yet each time, this small country stepped back from the edge of disaster and in December 2005 became the surprising candidate country for EU accession, behind the politically and ethnically more stable Slovenia (member since 2004) and Croatia. How this feat was achieved is a tragic-comic story of episodes, alternating between inattentiveness and alienation, and intensive attention between the EU and the successive Macedonian governments.

When Tito’s Yugoslavia was falling apart, Macedonia somewhat reluctantly became independent in 1991.¹¹ As it became evident that there was no way of saving the federation, Macedonians overwhelmingly expressed their support for an independent Macedonia at a national referendum.¹² The nascent Republic, on its own for the first time, found itself in a diplomatic vacuum and fearing a violent incursion by the Yugoslav army (JNA), as was the case with Slovenia and Croatia. Luckily due to the efforts of then president Kiro Gligorov an agreement was reached with Slobodan Milosevic and the Belgrade establishment, whereas the JNA would withdraw from the country, taking most of the equipment and weapon supplies. International

¹⁰ Elizabeth POND, *Endgame in the Balkans: Regime Change, European Style* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 168.

¹¹ Sabrina RAMET, *Balkan Babel The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the War for Kosovo*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), 183.

¹² The referendum was largely boycotted by ethnic Albanians.

recognitions started slowly, but Greece, objecting to the country's name, accused the authorities in Skopje of irredentism and withheld EC/EU recognition, imposed an economic embargo and sealed off its northern border. Greece contended that Macedonia had claims on its northern provinces and feared an invasion. This seemed, however, unlikely since after the Yugoslav National Army retreated from Macedonia, it left behind a military corps of some 12,000 active troops and four tanks;¹³ scarcely a viable counterforce to the 113,000-strong army, equipped with heavy artillery and in possession of a considerable air force, not to mention NATO membership.

On December 16, 1991 the European Community (EC) laid out three conditions for the recognition of Macedonia, including a constitutional amendment guaranteeing respect for existing borders; a declaration that it harbored no territorial pretensions to its neighbors and a promise not to interfere in internal Greek affairs.¹⁴ The government dutifully fulfilled these requirements and the Badinter Commission¹⁵ declared that Macedonia, together with Slovenia, met the conditions for EC recognition. Nonetheless, the EC did not honor its promise to recognize the Republic of Macedonia and gave into Greek demands over the name. The Greek border remained sealed, cutting off foodstuffs and medical supplies that were transported from the port of Thessalonica. By 1994, fearing escalation of the regional war then rampant in Bosnia, the Franco-German mediation and pressures on the Greek government were starting to bear fruit.¹⁶ Eventually, the embargo was lifted and an interim agreement between the two countries was struck under United Nations (UN) auspices, pending a final solution on the name dispute. Macedonia emerged from its diplomatic quarantine, joined the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

¹³ RAMET, 185.

¹⁴ RAMET, 184.

¹⁵ The Arbitration Commission of the Conference on Yugoslavia (commonly known as Badinter Arbitration Committee) was set up by the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community on 27 August 1991 to provide the Conference on Yugoslavia with legal advice. Robert Badinter was appointed to President of the five-member Commission consisting of presidents of Constitutional Courts in the EEC. The commission has handed down fifteen opinions on "major legal questions" arisen by the split of Yugoslavia.

¹⁶ RAMET, 185-187.

(OSCE) and become the second member, after Slovenia, of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

Concurrent with the international turmoil, Macedonia struggled with internal tensions between the Macedonian majority and the considerable ethnic Albanian minority, concentrated in the western part of the country along the border with Albania and Serbia-Kosovo. In 1995, violence erupted in Skopje as police clashed with Albanian protestors who demanded opening of an Albanian language university. The clash exacerbated ethnic tensions in the country and added to the already considerable list of grievances by the Albanians. However, little if anything was done to address these problems and the ethnic situation remained tense. When the war in Kosovo erupted in 1999 the massive arms proliferation and the psychological and political boost to the Albanian cause in Serbia, it became a matter of time before the situation in Macedonia was again inflamed.

The UN Interim Accord between Macedonia and Greece was settled in the context of a broader international momentum conflict resolution in the Balkans centered on the Dayton Accords.¹⁷ However, the EU willingness to address Macedonian (or Serbian) long-term stability fell short.¹⁸ Unfortunately it took another armed conflict, this time in Macedonia itself, for the international community to reengage with the country. In January 2001, in the north-western mountainous region of Macedonia, along the Serbian-Kosovo border, armed paramilitary groups were caught on camera by the national television station *A1* in full occupation of an ethnic Albanian village. This marked the beginning of an armed struggle between the government of Macedonia and the Albanian paramilitary group known as the National Liberation Army (NLA). Confrontations between the state police and military, and the NLA were localized and while the human casualties of the 7-month conflict were relatively minor, there was a significant population displacement, both internally and to the neighboring countries. As a result of this instability the Macedonian economy suffered severe setbacks. In 2001, gross national product (GNP) plummeted by 4.5% and industrial production fell by 8.8%, while agricultural production was reduced by 13.3%. Inflation rose to 5%, and exports were reduced by 20%, raising the

¹⁷ ICG 2009, 3-4.

¹⁸ Dayton also failed to address the Kosovar question, which violently resurfaced a few years later.

trade deficit to \$513 million, with many independent analysts estimating unemployment at circa 40%.¹⁹

The conflict was put to an end in August of the same year, when in the city of Ohrid, representatives of the four largest political parties, two ethnic Macedonian and two ethnic Albanian, under the aegis of the EU, joined by NATO and the OSCE, signed what became known as the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). This peace deal made provisions for a large array of constitutional and systemic changes to public institutions, aiming at larger recognition and protections of the rights of minorities, that is to say of the ethnic Albanian minority.

The OFA was a big step forward in initiating a move away from the centuries-old practice of defining national identity in Macedonia, and indeed the wider Balkans, in terms of ethnic identity. More importantly, it expresses the belief that the project of a multiethnic society is feasible (a nod to the delicate situations in Bosnia and Kosovo). With the OFA, Macedonia presents a rare European case of a multicultural society, where religions, languages and traditions have intertwined since the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in the 14th century. By raising the status of the Albanian minority, the OFA sought to move away from the old conception of ethnicity as the basis for identity, and towards a civic state of constituent peoples. This change was most conspicuous in the amendment to the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which set the tone of reforms by redefining Macedonia as a state of all people and not just the ethnic Macedonians.

Putting aside the various, conflicting interpretations of the causes for the 2001 events, the conflict can be framed in terms of the inadequacy of the political institutions in Macedonia to accommodate the demographic reality of the country and prevent coalition crystallization along ethnic lines. Reflecting on the background and causes of 2001, Violeta Petroska-Beska and Mirjana Najcevska write:

“Roughly speaking, ethnic Macedonians constitute two-thirds of the population of the country, ethnic Albanians account for one-quarter,

¹⁹ Ulf BRUNNBAUER, “The Implementation of the Ohrid Agreement: Ethnic Macedonian Resentments.” *Journal on the Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*. Issue I, 2002. <http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/download/Focus1-2002Brunnbauer.pdf>, 17-18.

and a mix of ethnic Turks, Roma, Serbs, and others make up the rest. The Macedonian and Albanian communities had led peaceful but increasingly separate lives under Yugoslav rule, with ethnic Macedonians becoming increasingly urbanized and dominating the public-sector workforce, while ethnic Albanians suffered from low levels of education and employment and tended to remain in the impoverished countryside. The new republic's constitution promised Albanians and other nationalities "full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people", but the structural inequalities between the ethnic groups persisted, fueling Albanian resentment. On the Macedonian side, many people suspected the Albanian community of rampant criminality and of disloyalty to the new state – disloyalty that ranged from tax evasion to secessionist and irredentist plots.²⁰

The major reason for this turn of events was the general disarray of the transitional process, international tensions and a deplorable economic situation. The 2001 conflict found Macedonia in a state of deficient transition from a socialist system to a liberal-democratic parliamentary system. Though every government of independent Macedonia, included one of the two major Albanian political parties, alienation between the ethnic groups grew persistently since 1991. Politicians were unable, though not necessarily unwilling, to address minority grievances in an adequate manner. This was primarily due to the convoluted transition period, marred by financial Ponzi schemes, shady privatization processes and political scandals. Bank failures and pyramid schemes in the 1990s cost many people their whole life savings, while the closures of the state owned enterprises left thousands of people jobless. The economy was weak and prospects for growth or capital inflow were not forthcoming. A CIA estimate illustrates the state of the post-1991 Macedonian economy:

“At independence in September 1991, Macedonia was the least developed of the Yugoslav republics, producing a mere 5% of the total fe-

²⁰ Violeta PETROSKA-BESKA and Mirjana NAJCEVSKA, *Macedonia: Understanding History, Preventing Future Conflict*. (Washington D.C.: Special Report no.115, United States Institute for Peace, 2004). www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr115.html. Accessed, February 1, 2008.

deral output of goods and services. The collapse of Yugoslavia ended transfer payments from the central government and eliminated advantages from inclusion in a de facto free trade area. An absence of infrastructure, UN sanctions on the downsized Yugoslavia, and a Greek economic embargo over a dispute about the country's constitutional name and flag hindered economic growth until 1996. GDP subsequently rose each year through 2000. However, the leadership's commitment to economic reform, free trade, and regional integration was undermined by the ethnic Albanian insurgency of 2001. The economy shrank 4.5% because of decreased trade, intermittent border closures, increased deficit spending on security needs, and investor uncertainty. Growth barely recovered in 2002 to 0.9% [...]"²¹

As already alluded in the CIA estimate, the situation was further exacerbated by external variables, primarily the role of Greece and the wider Balkan instability. Shortly after the peaceful exit from Yugoslavia, there were ongoing talks between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian politicians about settling the Albanian minority question, mediated by European diplomats. The will was there, but the means, at that stage, were not. The issues dealt with at the negotiations included education, the use of the Albanian language, national symbols and others – the very same issues that became the topic of discussion at Ohrid in 2001. The negotiations came to naught because of two reasons: first, because Greece's rabid opposition to the name of the Republic of Macedonia (i.e. the existence of the Macedonian nation), and second, the subsequent unwillingness of the European Community to recognize the country's official name. This cornered Macedonian politicians, as the nascent statehood of the country came under direct threat, and they became unwilling to take any steps which may have been perceived by the public as further steps towards the country's disintegration. Suddenly, the tentative agreements deemed impossible to implement in the political climate of the day. Minority rights reforms were picked up again only in 2001, after ethnic relations had been left to fester in deplorable political-economic conditions for almost a decade.

²¹ 2007 CIA World Handbook, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/mk.html#Econ.

Pacifying Macedonia

Though the major grievances of the ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia were addressed and full completion of the OFA is at hand, numerous challenges remain for the country. Macedonia's social capital is depleted, as distrust between the two ethnic groups with fresh memories from 2001 persists. "Macedonia's divided society is united around a single idea today – the idea of European integration."²² The EU seems to be aware of this reality and since 2001, in Macedonia, demonstrated the lessons learned from Bosnia and Kosovo about the essential requirement for a timely and comprehensive intervention.

For its constructiveness and hard work following the signing of the OFA, Macedonia was granted a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU. This was a significant "political gift" that set the country on a firm path to EU integration, reform, and long-term stability. It was a laudable move by Brussels that enabled political leaders in Skopje to take up the OFA and push forth the reforms necessary in the face of considerable opposition. The Macedonian leadership relentlessly pushed reforms forward with hopes that it would overcome the stereotype of instability and incompetence persistent in Brussels among EU member states. Reforms included the final legalization of the Albanian language university in Tetovo, use of Albanian in the National Assembly, recruitment of ethnic Albanians in the police and army to name but a few.²³

In 2003, two developments positively affected Macedonia. The first one took place, somewhat ironically, during the Greek presidency summit in Thessalonica, where Macedonia, and the region as a whole were reaffirmed a "European perspective."²⁴ "While the lack of any explicit time frame for the EU membership disappointed many [...] the European promise was at least repeated and extended [...]"²⁵ Secondly, there was the support provided by the EU Police Mission – *Proxima* – which helped smoothly imple-

²² Mirjana MALEVSKA, Denko MALEVSKI, *Macedonia's Road to the European Union* (New Balkan Politics: http://newbalkanpolitics.org.mk/political_essays/road2eu.html)

²³ POND, 178.

²⁴ EU-western Balkans Summit: Thessaloniki 21 June 2003.

²⁵ POND, 178.

ment police reform, successfully concluding its mandate two years later. Encouraged, both morally and politically, officials in Skopje proceeded to file for EU candidacy. Between 2003 and 2005, the country saw political upheaval due to the decentralization proposal and controversial presidential elections. During that time two Prime Ministers resigned, but the government kept to filling out the EC accession questionnaire within the tight deadline. Finally in February 2005, the 14,000-pages long response was submitted to Brussels. Filling the EU membership questionnaire amid the turmoil provoked by the resignation of the prime minister, the election of a new government, and the hotly debated referendum on the controversial issue of decentralization all showed that Macedonia's institutions could work – and achieve – results in extraordinary circumstances. By the end of 2005, the European Council accepted Macedonia's candidacy for membership, but it postponed concrete negotiations with Skopje indefinitely, pending the 'full discussion' of further enlargement among present EU members that the French insisted on."²⁶

Restarting Integration

Since 2005, integration efforts have stagnated as relations between the EU and Macedonia deteriorated. Two major factors have contributed to this process: the enlargement fatigue that had emerged from the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and in Ireland in 2008; and the recurrence of Greek-Macedonian antagonism, which culminated in Greece's veto of Macedonian NATO membership, at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008. The consequences of these developments are troubling and can unravel the achievements made to date.

The EU enlargement fatigue is a source of strategic insecurity in the region. The impact this uncertainty over if, and when the EU will include Macedonia and the other Western Balkan states has been considerable. Swedish foreign minister and expert on the Balkans, Carl Bildt, warned that if the EU's doors are closed to the remaining Balkan states it would "take away the guiding beacon which has guided the reform policies of the region for the past few years. Instead of the magnet of European integration, we

²⁶ POND, 185.

might well go back to seeing the policies of the region driven by the fears and prejudices of nationalism.”²⁷

As the integration environment got bleaker after 2005, the governments in both Skopje and Athens exchanged insults and accusations, attempting to demonize each other in order to sustain their respective political lives. Skopje, encouraged by the large number of countries that had recognized it internationally and enjoying full American support for NATO entry, felt emboldened to defend its name and identity. At the same time, the center-right government then led by Kostas Karamanlis sought to survive politically by accusing the Macedonians of provocation by remaining the Skopje airport *Alexander the Great*. In a reversal of policy, Karamanlis and his foreign policy “sledgehammer” Dora Bakoyannis announced that Greece will block Macedonia’s entry into NATO and the EU, pending a final resolution of the country’s name dispute. While this was in breach of the 1995 UN Interim agreement, Greece nonetheless lived up to its promise and Macedonia was banned from NATO. Even more significantly, Greece outright opposed the Slovenian presidency proposal to set a date for opening accession negotiations with Macedonia, making the name resolution a further requirement for EU membership. The most significant consequence of these events is that a long-standing bilateral dispute has been elevated to an international issue that became an additional accession requirement (to commensurate on the Copenhagen criteria, OFA implementation, and regional cooperation prerequisites). It therefore added to the already pessimistic attitude of both Brussels and Skopje about enlargement, painting a picture of the EU as intentionally evasive target, raising fears throughout the region about potential vetoes.

As the International Crisis Group keenly reminds in a report on Macedonia: “A crucial factor underpinning Ohrid was the promise of NATO and EU integrations, the key national goal behind which Macedonians and Albanians are united [...] if NATO and EU integration were to be delayed indefinitely over an issue which is of no concern for ethnic Albanians [the issue of the name of the Republic of Macedonia], it is questionable how long their patience will last.”²⁸ While there is no imminent risk of a violent conflict, strains lingers between the two major ethnic groups.

²⁷ Carl BILD, “On the Periphery of Europe”, *Internationale Politik* (Transatlantic Edition), Summer 2006, 27.

²⁸ ICG Report, 4.

Protracted uncertainty of integration and Macedonia's exclusion from NATO and the EU process will have consequences for the country and the region. Stalling integration will further exacerbate the already worrisome level of brain-drain, with even more young people seeking a better future elsewhere. It is worth noting that Macedonia has no viable economic alternative for growth than the EU. The Macedonian economy (not unlike those of Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro in particular) needs the common market for access to foreign investment by small and medium sized firms to sustain its economy and open markets for their exports. In light of Macedonia's EU candidate status the blue-ribbon Amato Commission on the Balkans wrote: "Although in theory Macedonia should not exist, it is actually a modest but significant success story. The country illustrates [the Commission's] thesis that a final and clear constitutional arrangement and the institutionalization of European perspectives are the two institutions that can work apparent miracles in the Balkans."²⁹

This process still needs to be made irreversible. Several actions should be taken in this direction. The Union must immediately open accession negotiations with Macedonia. The next step should be to set a date within the next three years for Macedonia's membership, on the condition of having fully adopted the *acquis*.

The issue of the name looms large over Macedonia's future, but also the region's stability. On this issue the EU and individual EU member states will have to assume an active role in bringing about a speedy and fair resolution of the name dispute, because it risks derailing the main strategy of both organizations for stabilizing Macedonia. As the International Crisis Group argues, "it would be folly to risk the real progress in bringing stability to Macedonia since the Ohrid Agreement by allowing the name dispute to hold up its Euro-Atlantic integration [...] The credibility of [NATO and the EU] is at stake. They should not allow it to fall victim to an intractable dispute involving one of their own members."³⁰ For their part, the EU should facilitate the UN process by actively pushing Athens to unblock Macedonia's integration in their respective organizations and positively respond to the country's concessions on the name.

²⁹ Blue Ribbon (POND).

³⁰ ICG Report, 5.

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