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## The Republic of Macedonia: An Atypical Balkan Country

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# The Republic of Macedonia: An Atypical Balkan Country

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## **Abstract**

Geographically and historically, the Republic of Macedonia is part of the Balkans, a region marked by conflict and tension. The centuries that it stood amidst civilizations and empires have enriched this corner of Europe with traditions and cultures. Despite their originality and creativity, however, the nations of the Balkans have never succeeded to stand on their own feet either economically or politically.

## ESSAYS

### THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: AN ATYPICAL BALKAN COUNTRY

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#### INTRODUCTION

Geographically and historically, the Republic of Macedonia is part of the Balkans, a region marked by conflict and tension. The centuries that it stood amidst civilizations and empires have enriched this corner of Europe with traditions and cultures. Despite their originality and creativity, however, the nations of the Balkans have never succeeded to stand on their own feet either economically or politically. They have always been under pressure, conquered by the stronger powers, and, as a result, permanently forced to fulfill the strategic decisions made by far-away capitals. During this struggle, most of all, they have been victims of their own acts. Their nationalism and the ideas of "greater nation-states" made them ideological bodies that have not performed their basic task, to build up their own autonomous societies with independent state creations and institutions. Without strong national and state individuality, without socially established objective systems of rational valorization and proceeding, they have been going over the edge of their own and their neighbors' existence.

After the Second World War, the Balkans acted as a buffer zone and dividing line among the Eastern and the Western alliances. Within frames of Tito's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ("S.F.R.Y."), in an environment different from either political community, the country known today as the Republic of Macedonia was established and developed. It is situated in the southern part of Europe, in the heart of the Balkan peninsula. As such, it is on the crossroad of the East-West and the North-South corridors, a crossroad where political, economic, cultural, and communicational influences are flowing and merging.

In the last decade, the Balkans have been subjected to the

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drama caused by the dissolution of the former S.F.R.Y. and the complex problems of post-communism and European bi-polarity. Accordingly, the Balkans today are the key issue for building a consistent and efficient model of European peace and security—a model that will have as a basic precondition a consistent respect of the Dayton Peace Agreement principles and the opening of the true process of the Europeanization on the Balkans.<sup>1</sup>

The Republic of Macedonia proclaimed its independence in September 1991, following the dissolution of the former S.F.R.Y. Guided by the experience and wisdom of its President Gligorov,<sup>2</sup> it peacefully and legitimately gained its independence by way of a Referendum and a new Constitution, thus showing that at the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is possible to become independent without bloodshed. This act was possible primarily because of the Republic of Macedonia's refusal to take part in the war that was waged in other parts of the former S.F.R.Y. Also, the Republic of Macedonia proclaimed its independence within its existing borders, as internationally established borders.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, not only did Macedonia opt against the policies of territorial aspirations, forceful changing of borders and ethnic cleansing, but it has also demonstrated that such policies are the cause of conflicts and wars in the ethnically intermixed Balkans. In the past, the Republic of Macedonia was frequently a victim of such power struggles for domination over the Balkans, which exhausted the previous nation-states and enabled them to keep step with European progress. Bearing this in mind, in such typically Balkan surroundings, the Republic of Macedonia wrote in its Constitution that it has no territorial claims towards any neighbor.<sup>4</sup> It has also committed itself to follow strictly the principles of territorial integrity, political independence, and the resolution of problems by way of peaceful means and dialogue on

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1. U.S. Dep't of State, A General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nov. 21, 1995, *reprinted in* 36 I.L.M. 75 (1996).

2. Miro Gligorov has been President of the Republic of Macedonia since its independence. Kevin Done & Kerin Hope, *Survival Against All the Odds*, FIN. TIMES, Nov. 15, 1996, at 1.

3. MACEDONIAN CONST. amend. I (1). The Macedonian Constitution proclaims, "[t]he Republic of Macedonia has no territorial claims against neighboring states." *Id.*; see CONSTITUTIONS OF THE WORLD: MACEDONIA (Gisbert H. Flanz, ed. 1995) (providing unofficial translation of Macedonian Constitution).

4. *Id.*

the basis of equality, mutual respect, and noninterference in the internal matters of other states.

During the process of its international recognition, membership in the United Nations was of significant importance for the Republic of Macedonia, due to the fact that the United Nations had acknowledged the right of the Macedonian people to self-determination, independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Today, the Republic of Macedonia has established diplomatic relations with more than eighty countries in the world, including all of the Balkan states. In an effort to integrate into European security, the republic of Macedonia has become a full member of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ("OSCE"), and the Partnership for Peace, and intends for future association in the European Union and full membership in North-Atlantic Treaty Organization ("NATO").

The Republic of Macedonia's surpassing of its historical state of being "a bone of contention" confirms its becoming an active key to peace in the South of the Balkans. This newly found role is possible:

- An independent and sovereign Republic of Macedonia put an end to the historical aspirations of the Republic of Macedonia's neighbors towards its territory and people;
- The Republic of Macedonia opted for active policy of good-neighborliness on the principles of positive equidistance;
- The Republic of Macedonia opted for political dialogue and peaceful means for resolving the outstanding issues with all our neighbors;
- As a country in transition, the Republic of Macedonia implemented fast and radical reforms leading towards a market economy;
- The Republic of Macedonia opted and started building a modern European legal state and civil society;
- Inter-ethnic understanding and tolerance and the fulfillment of the rights of the national minorities represent the foundations of the Republic of Macedonia's internal stability and democratic development, which has singled the

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5. The United Nations accepted the right of the Macedonian people to self-determination, independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty by accepting the Republic of Macedonia as a member of the United Nations on April 8, 1993.

Republic of Macedonia out as an atypical example of Balkan behavior;

- The Republic of Macedonia firmly orients its foreign policy towards the Euro-Atlantic option;
- The Republic of Macedonia promoted the option of the Europeanization of the Balkans and its integration into Europe.

### I. *INTER-ETHNIC UNDERSTANDING AND TOLERANCE*

The Republic of Macedonia is devoting special attention to the advancement, protection, and respect of human rights. In an extremely hard situation in the Balkans, we have managed to make the respect of human rights a constant priority of democratic institutions and practice in our state, a fact confirmed in a number of reports by international monitors.<sup>6</sup> The process of creating and implementing the Government's policy on human rights promotion and protection is fully transparent, both to the domestic and to the international public.

In accordance with its commitment to the full respect and promotion of human rights, the Republic of Macedonia is a party to all fundamental U.N. conventions on human rights protection. On a regional level, the Republic of Macedonia has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>7</sup> and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.<sup>8</sup> The Republic of Macedonia has signed and observes all relevant OSCE documents, founding its policy upon these significant political principles. The standards of these international instruments have already been incorporated in the national legislation, and their implementation is among our top priorities.

In this process, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, aware of the need for fostering and respecting diversity as a fundamental factor for the internal stability of the state, has

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6. Council of European Permanent Assembly. 4 May 1995, Report AS – BUR – Macedonia (1995) – Sir John Freeland, Judge of European Court of Human Rights, and Mr. Gankur Jerundsson, member of Commission on Human Rights. Letter of the Special Rapporteur Ms. Elizabeth Rehn to the Chairman of the 53 Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, 3 April 1997; U.S. State Department Country Report on Human Rights Prachie 1986.

7. European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Nov. 4, 1950, 213 U.N.T.S. 221.

8. Council of Europe, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 34 I.L.M. 351 (1995).

been paying special attention to the protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. There is a multi-decade tradition in the Republic of Macedonia of enjoying a considerable part of the minority rights corps, and so the transition period has been used to promote the process of compatibility of our legislation and practice with the international standards in this sphere.

Consequently, there is a clear and comprehensive legal framework regulating the protection of minority rights. The special treatment of minorities has been foreseen at the constitutional level, and all minorities have equal treatment and enjoy equal rights. The constitutional provisions dealing with minority rights protection provide for further legal elaboration.<sup>9</sup> It should be pointed out in this context that standards included in our national legislation fully correspond to the international standards for the protection of national minorities and, even go beyond intended standards in specific areas, such as education and local self-administration.

In addition to advancing the legal framework, there is also a clear policy of affirmative action that we are creating and implementing, with an aim to facilitate the full realization of the foreseen solutions and to improve the integration of the minorities in all spheres of social life. Pursuant to that aim, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia recently passed the "Declaration on the Promotion of Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Spirit of Tolerance, Dialogue, Mutual Respect and Confidence".<sup>10</sup> Even more important than the adoption of this Declaration, however, is the fact that ethnic extremism rests on the margins of our society and does not have the support of the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. We hope that the exteremists will remain on the margins of our society.

## II. *PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY: A KEY FOR PEACE AND SECURITY*

In order to preserve peace and security in the region, in 1992 the Republic of Macedonia requested the U.N. Security Council to establish a mission with a mandate to prevent the spil-

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9. See Macedonia Const. Arts. 2, 7-9, 16, 19-20, 44-45, 48, 50, 54, 78, 110 (setting forth Macedonia's rules governing minority rights protection).

10. Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 13 of Mar. 21, 1997.

lover of the conflict present in the region and to allow enough time for strengthening of the country's defense capability. This is not a classic example of "U.N. troops presence", but rather a "preventive deployment", the first U.N. mission of this kind sent in an area where there is no war. Furthermore, the mission, known as UNPREDEP, is not only a successful example of preventive diplomacy, but at the same time it is an example of good cooperation between U.S. and Nordic troops and a model of cooperation between the U.N. troops and the local population. All this has been accomplished without a single loss of life.

The modest number of about 1000 military personnel deployed along the north and the west borders of the country, represents a clear message from the international community regarding its interest for the stability of the region and the integrity of the country. As former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry stated, "[a]s preventive medicine creates the conditions that support health, making diseases less likely and surgery unnecessary, so preventive diplomacy creates the conditions that support peace, making war less likely and deterrence unnecessary".<sup>11</sup>

Another very important aspect of UNPREDEP is that it highlights the strategic importance of Macedonia and the need to retain it as an island of peace and stability in a troubled part of the world. At the same time the lessons learned from the Republic of Macedonia's experience can be applied elsewhere. This is the reason why we have initiated the idea of establishing an International Center for preventive Diplomacy in Skopje. We hope that this idea will meet the support and assistance of the United Nations and the OSCE, because it is in the interest of peace and cooperation on the Balkans.

### III. *GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS AMONG BALKAN COUNTRIES*

The face of the Balkans today is changing. The Balkans need peace, cooperation, and understanding between countries and nations. The cooperation and good neighborly relations with all our neighbors is the basic principle and aim of our foreign policy. We consider the good-neighborly relations among

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11. William Perry, *Defense in an Age of Hope*, FOREIGN AFF., Nov./Dec. 1996, at 54.



Balkan countries as a precondition for avoiding new crises and wars. As its practical contribution towards this endeavor, the Republic of Macedonia initiated resolutions for good-neighborly relations and prevention of violent disintegration of states during the Forty-eighth, Fiftieth, and Fifty-first U.N. General Assemblies.<sup>12</sup> The objectives of these resolutions are to create stable zones of peace and cooperation in the Balkans up to the year 2000. The development of good neighborly relations is the most vital element in the Balkans. This idea must be encouraged and supported by the international community. We have also initiated the idea to host a forum on the Europeanization of the Balkans and the Advancement of Good-Neighborliness. We proposed that a comparative study be conducted on the position of the national minorities on the Balkans. Our proposal has already met the support of relevant OSCE bodies, and it is one that can truly contribute to the advancement of mutual respect and trust between the Balkan countries and peoples.

At the same time, the Republic of Macedonia supports all initiatives for stability and cooperation in South-East Europe such as forums oriented towards improving communication and economic, cultural, and other cooperation in the region. This cooperation, however, should not look for institutionalization of some new forms for regional integration and association. Each country in the region has its own problems and perspectives, some of them with radically different approaches towards the issues of democratization, privatization, and human rights. Consequently, the approach to the international organizations and integration has to be in accordance with the achieved standards.

#### IV. *POLITICAL DIALOGUE—A WAY TO SOLVE POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE ISSUES*

The Republic of Macedonia resolved a major and potentially explosive issue via political dialogue. Ever since our independence, Greece has made serious objections to our name, our flag, and some provisions in our Constitution.<sup>13</sup> As a means for

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12. In 48th Sess., No. 48/84B, in 50th Sess. 50/80/B, and in 51st No. 51/55 on "Maintenance of International Peace and Security – Prevention of Violent Disintegration of States." (all of these were co-sponsored by other nations).

13. Steve Vogel, *Greek Blockade, U.N. Embargo Threaten Macedonia's Future*, WASH. Post, May 25, 1994, at A19.

pressure, Greece imposed two economic embargoes on the Republic of Macedonia, and tried to prevent other countries from normalizing relations with Macedonia.<sup>14</sup> The intensive negotiations via a U.N. mediator have resulted with an agreement on the flag and the Constitution. We still have discussions regarding the differences over the name of the Republic of Macedonia.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, political and economic relations with Greece have improved significantly. This is yet another example of the Republic of Macedonia resolving problems peacefully, rather than through the barrel of the gun.

#### V. *EUROPEAN AFFILIATION OF THE BALKANS*

The Balkans are not a European region simply because of their geographic location. Today there is a new political structure and reality on the Balkans. Greece is a member of the European Union and NATO. Turkey is getting ready for integration with the European Union and is a member of NATO. The Republic of Macedonia and Slovenia have clearly corroborated their European orientation, with economic and democratic reforms that are well under way and clear and peaceful position and orientation, for association with the European Union and NATO. Croatia shares the same aspirations. The European aspirations of Albania are clear, although this country still faces major economic and social problems, and reforms are dragging behind. Bulgaria is also a typical country in transition. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, following the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, has yet to secure economic consolidation and access to international institutions and organizations. Bosnia and Herzegovina need reconstruction to salvage the consequences of the devastation of war and to reestablish basic living and working conditions. All of these issues are major topics for discussion on the agendas of the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe, once again confirming the political and factual European affiliation of the Balkans.

The basic moral not to be overlooked is that strengthening of peace and security of the Balkans must start with new Balkan reality; the former S.F.R.Y. has dissolved. The newly emerged

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14. *Id.* The Greek embargo was imposed on February 26, 1994. *Id.*

15. *The Balkans Crisis Notebook*, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTRAR, Sept. 14, 1995, at A11.

and internationally recognized countries are independent and sovereign states with internationally established borders. All former members of the Yugoslav Federation bear equal rights to legal continuity and succession to the former S.F.R.Y. Any new experiments of imposing or forcefully creating some new state entity in this region is impossible. Thus, we believe that it is high time to stop using the term "former Yugoslavia" as concept in the future international relations and documents because such an entity does not exist. If this fact is disregarded, then all other plans and actions may prove to be counterproductive.

The only solution is to support the independence of these countries and their speedy inclusion in the European economic, political, and military integration. A major contribution to that end will be the full implementation of the Dayton Accords, the successful development of the democratic process in all of these nations, and the advancement and the protection of human and minority rights. This is the only way that the European powder keg, the Balkans, can truly grow from a mere geographic European region into a stable and secure region of Europe.

The tragic experiences of the war in Bosnia and the lack of trust and isolation of the region are overwhelmingly grave, yet they are useful. Europe and the world have paid a high price for this war and wider tensions in the regions. This is why the model of peace and cooperation on the Balkans must be founded on principles that pervert revival of the old causes of conflicts. It needs to be founded on the ideas of and to respect that:

- A new political structure has been created on the Balkans; the basic guarantee for the peace is the respect of the independence of the newly emerged countries, the inviolability of the internationally recognized borders, and the respect of their full international status;
- The development of equitable relations and cooperation between these countries, on the principles of open borders for the free flow of people, goods and ideas, full economic cooperation, and respect of the rights of national minorities, are the key factor for peace on the ethnically intermixed Balkans;
- Any new model of forceful regrouping, or isolating regionalism for these countries may be a cause for new misunderstandings and conflicts;
- The process of Europeanization of the Balkans is also of mutual interest of a developed Europe. Any new ghet-

toization of this region can negatively impact pan-European peace and cooperation.

It has been said that the Balkans create more history than they can endure. Problems are deep rooted, some conflicts for generations, others for centuries. I believe, however, that identifying and dealing with problems in their early stage is one of the means to maintain peace. The Balkans are one of the key issues that will test not only the future of common European security architecture and defense policy, but also the strategy of the common European home.

#### VI. *THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA'S PLACE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY*

Despite numerous obstacles blocking our way to achieving our political will and preference, the Republic of Macedonia finally has gained its deserved place in the international community because of the disturbed situation in the region and inconsistent policy of the international community.

In its foreign policy, the Republic of Macedonia devotes special interest to European security, stressing the importance of the collective security systems; in particular considering itself being a part of them—not only as a consumer, but also as a generator of security. We are fully orientated to become a member of NATO. Geographically, the Republic of Macedonia belongs to the region of Southern Balkans, as part of a broader region of the Mediterranean area, which according to our opinion should have priority in the enlargement of NATO. This region has particular importance for stability in Europe with respect to the Middle East countries—some of which are sources of terrorist threats, especially through the export of Islamic fundamentalism. On the other hand, this region, burdened with the current crisis, is a constant threat for stability in Europe. The enlargement of NATO with some of the countries of this region, which are points of stability therein, will represent a process of stabilization of the region as a whole. Herewith, I would like to point out that the Republic of Macedonia, placed in a surrounding of instability, is a country that generates security. Consequently, it is necessary that this positive example be considered in its full value in the process of the enlargement of NATO. There is a wide political and social consensus in the country for joining

NATO, considering the Alliance as a key factor of collective stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. The country has fully accepted the envisaged aims and principles of NATO enlargement and has already implemented a large part of them.

At the same time, we are looking forward to the signing of the Co-operation Agreement with the European Union, and to the period following that, which will mark the beginning of the process for our association with the European Union. The implementation of the reforms for full transition towards market economy that are the foundation for achieving prompt economic development and long-term prosperity, associating with the European Union, and the strengthening of the economic cooperation particularly with our neighbors and other developed countries, are the basic priorities of our economy.

Currently, we are entering a new, higher phase of the process of economic transition of the country. This phase could be called an economic turning point, a period when our economy should have open approach and cooperation with the European economy. It is inevitable that the on going trend of liberalization and globalization of the world and the European economy is correctly directed in our region as well. This will prevent the marginalization of smaller and weaker economies in transition, where we belong.

This year, our candidature for non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council for the period 1998 to 1999 has been given special place and priority in our foreign policy. In the following years, the Balkans will still remain in the focus of interest of the United Nations. The Republic of Macedonia, as a country with a peaceful orientation, while at the same time being a Balkan country, can highly contribute to the implementation of the U.N. aims on the Balkans, peace and prosperity.