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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MACEDONIA IN THE WAITING ROOM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: BETRAYED HOPES.

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Abstract

After gaining its independence from Yugoslavia the European perspective of the Republic of Macedonia looked promising. Macedonia was the first in the region to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement but has not yet entered into accession negotiations. Among the obstacles is the unresolved name dispute with Greece. Greece conditions EU accession of the Republic of Macedonia at the expense of its constitutional name. Does the EU step over its core values of justice, freedom and human rights, precisely in the case of Macedonia?

Macedonia has received eight recommendations to access negotiations, but a date has not been precised yet. Should Macedonia, which geographically and culturally belongs to the European Union, seek an alternative, or persevere in its declared course towards integration into the European Union?

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Introduction:-

Is the European Union (EU) unique? There is no similar example of economic integration. Due to inclusions of new member-countries, the EU market expanded: what used to be a 90 million market, has now become a joined single market of 450 million people. The Europeans though, besides the economic benefits, tend to enjoy the political freedom more.

Europeans, living more than 50 years in a continent without borders, have a different experience from the people in the Western Balkans. To pass the Greek border Macedonians are asked to fill out a form, and are denied to use their official passports with the imprinted words "Republic of Macedonia" on the cover. Europeans fail to understand this dynamic, as free movement restriction even between old adversaries (ex. France and Germany), is nowadays unacceptable. The modern EU is a carefully selected community of twenty-eight members which replaced the former European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of six countries. It represents a cosmopolitan formation of nations with a Kantian view on the world as a peaceful field for collaboration but opposes Hobbes' model of American hegemony which claims inciting conflicts achieve progress (Calleo DP, 2009: 149). This rivalry between the EU and USA primarily stems from economic interests and the tendency to distance Russia from the European markets and borders.

As times change, Europe neither desires nor is capable of managing more wars (ex. The Break up of Yugoslavia and subsequent wars). Moreover, Brexit significantly impacts the EU mutual defense and economic policy. The Balkan remains the field where key players defend their interests and incite multiethnic impatience which leads to

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destabilization. This is particularly pronounced in Macedonia where the (public) display of Macedonianism is perceived as nationalism and chauvinism.

Macedonia's neighboring countries, which are already either part of the EU or NATO, deny everything about the Macedonian identity: some of them the language, others the nation, thirds the territory or the church. In such conditions, the Balkan countries that are not members of the EU and NATO and create essential strategies to join the Union and the Alliance, need to question the precise form of required reforms. One of the main orientations of EU is the guarantee for peace. However, it seems this is wanted only within its borders. Consecutively, the Balkans, and especially Macedonia, might need to redefine the strategic goals.

Strategic commitment to join the EU and NATO: Period of expectations but also disappointments:

Ever since Macedonia's independence in 1991, all political parties with no exception have supported the idea of the country joining the EU and NATO. In addition to the numerous internal issues, the name dispute with Greece represents a major obstacle for Macedonia's association. The mutual misunderstandings are not present only within the last 26 years but are part of Macedonia's tragic history that form the core of the Macedonian genetic code.

The Macedonian question was the most difficult, complicated and the longest-lasting problem which both the Ottoman Empire and the Western world faced, in the period between the Berlin Congress and First World war. The problem appeared during West's efforts to accomplish its interest in the Balkans, while the neighboring countries attempted to govern Macedonia. The fight for the Macedonian territory was fought with full energy and resources and in all regions. Thus, Greece obtained the Aegean part of Macedonia (34 356 km²), Serbia gained the Vardar area (25 342 km²), Bulgaria attained the Pirin area (6 798 km²), and Albania procured 1 115 km² of Macedonian territory. With the Macedonian partition with the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913, Macedonia altered from central and most important part of the Balkans to peripheral and provincial portion of the peninsula. Almost a century later, in 2008, the treaty proved to be sort of a doomed city for Macedonia when Greece vetoed Macedonia's entry into NATO.

The present Macedonian borders were set in 1946 when the Republic of Macedonia became part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. After the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, it requested an official recognition under its constitutional name in the United Nations based on the report from the Badinter majority. Greece, however, objected on several points: the country's constitution, the flag, and the constitutional name. To prevent the recognition of Macedonia, Greece as part of the European Community pressured the remaining member countries to support the Greek interests. Greece main argument was the Lisbon declaration, which prohibits any type of territorial pretensions towards Greece, enemy propaganda and the use of the term "Macedonia" by the Republic of Macedonia.

On 8th of September 1991, Macedonia held a Referendum where the citizens had the right to vote for independence and sovereignty or to remain within the borders of Yugoslavia. Over 95.5% of the 75.8% turnout voters on the Referendum voted for the independence of the Republic Macedonia (Kasapović M, 2010).

All ex-Yu countries, including Macedonia, renounced any potential territorial pretensions towards their neighboring countries on 23th of December 1991. Macedonia adjusted the Constitution and incorporated several amendments accordingly whereby declared no territorial pretensions and guaranteed non-interference with the internal policy and rights of any nation.

However, the Greek diplomacy became activated in the endeavors to prove that there is no other Macedonia besides the Greek northern geographic region. Both sides were and still are under strong diplomatic pressure to find a compromise, but this did not prevent Macedonia to apply for admission to the United Nations and to be granted one on 7th of April 1993 by the United Nations Security Council with the Resolution 817 (Security Council Resolutions (1993) which states:

The reference "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" is a temporary reference and it will be used until the name dispute is solved

The term is a reference, not a name, and presents a neutral point of view in the argument. The United Nations have no jurisdiction to finalize the name of the country.

The term is to be used within the United Nations only, and it is not binding to any other organizations. The term does not imply that the Republic of Macedonia has any relations to Former Yugoslavia whatsoever.

Also, Greece rejected the listing of the Republic of Macedonia in the official address book of the UN under the letter M. It requested that Macedonia is listed under F (for Former). As a result, Macedonia is now listed under the letter T as "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)." The admission to the UN caused internal problems in Macedonia as well. The parliament supported the temporary reference FYROM as a prerequisite for admission to the UN. 30 voted for, 28 voted against and 13 abstained.

The dilemma whether the UN entrance could have been done differently is still present, even more so because of the statement of the president at the time – Kiro Gligorov – who claimed that the temporary name would be used for two months only. Unfortunately, even the countries which have recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name use the FYROM reference internationally until today.

The Interim Accord between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Greece:

On 16th of February 1994, Republic of Greece led by the prime minister at the time – Andreas Papandreu, placed a full embargo on the Republic of Macedonia, closing its borders for transfer of goods and movement of people. The Republic of Greece justified this decision by claiming that its northern neighbor refuses to change its name, flag and Constitution. Greece further suggested that the neighboring country has territorial pretensions towards Greece's northern provinces. The Macedonian flag at the time was the sun with sixteen rays (Kutlesh Star). This sun among the Greeks is known as the Vergina Sun and they accept it as their undeniable cultural heritage (Jeffries I, 2003: 240)

To overcome the problem with the name and to remove the embargo that was causing substantial financial damage to Macedonia which was unable to use Thessaloniki's harbor as a trading point, in 1995 the Interim Accord for normalization of the relations between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Greece was signed [3]. (Interim Accord, 1995)

On 5th of September 1995, it was simultaneously announced both in Athens and Washington that a specific Macedonian-Greek contract would be signed in New York. On 12th of September, Cyrus Vance – the mediator at the time – suggested a new version of the Interim Accord with the names of the involved parties as "The First and the Second side" in which Macedonia was the "Second side." The following day – 13th of September – the ministers for external affairs at the time, Stevo Crvenkovski from Macedonia and Karlos Papoulias from Greece, met in New York to synchronize their stands on the matter. They signed the "Settlement for the normalization of the relations between Macedonia and Greece" (a.k.a. Interim Accord) the same day, with Greece as the "First side" and Macedonia as the "Second side."

As a result of the temporary settlement on 5th of October 1995, during a period when the public was occupied with the attempted assassination of the President of the Republic at the time – Kiro Gligorov, The Parliament of Republic of Macedonia voted for a Constitutional change by the Interim Accord. Macedonia changed its flag and furthermore weakened its position in the dispute with Greece (Gligorov K, 2001).

On 15th of October, the embargo ceased, and the Macedonian-Greek border opened for movement of peoples and goods.

The inclusion of a mediator in solving the naming dispute between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Greece:

As the naming dispute between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Greece became widely recognized, the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General Cyrus Vance served as the first assigned mediator and chaired the negotiation talks. On 23th of December 1999, he resigned due to personal reasons. His successor, Matthew Nimetz, is still the current UN Special Representative for the Macedonian-Greek dispute in the General Secretariat. His more significant suggestions came in 2005 and 2008, but due to different reasons, both sides did not accept them. The naming proposals will not be elaborated here.

Apart from the naming dispute, Macedonia experienced an armed insurgency in 2001. The conflict began when the ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia attacked the security forces, demanding more minority rights and ended in

August 2001 with the signing of The Ohrid Framework Agreement (in Macedonia known as Ramkoven Agreement). The Ohrid Framework stimulated second intervention in the Constitution by equating all ethnical groups in the country.

The alleged non-realization of the agreement is open for interpretation even today. A standing discussion is whether the entire territory of Macedonia should be bi-lingual, as opposed to only the local units where the Albanian minority is above 20% as stated in the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Contrary to the Albanian beliefs, the Macedonians perceive the Agreement as imposed and extorted.

The candidate status of Republic of Macedonia for entering the EU:

All political parties in the independent Republic of Macedonia acknowledged the EU and NATO accession as a national strategic goal and underlined its benefits in all their political campaigns. Unsurprisingly, EU accession was almost entirely supported by the population. However, this trend has since declined, especially after Great Britain announced withdrawal from the EU, indirectly influencing the political atmosphere in Macedonia.

The Republic of Macedonia established diplomatic relations with the EU in December 1995 and thus legitimized itself as one of the collaborating partners and faithful allies to the EU. The country further strengthened the ties with the EU in three stages. It initially sealed the Cooperation Agreement in 1997, later signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2001, and finally obtained a country-candidate status in 2005. This elevated status of the European integration politically recognized the improvement and accomplished reforms for open and democratic society. The European Commission recommended that accession negotiations be opened for the eighth time in 2017, confirming the progress in the EU integration process. Despite these developments, a starting date for accession negotiations has not been set yet (Goals and Priorities, 2018).

The Greek Veto on the Bucharest Summit:

Greece answered Macedonia's strenuous effort to establish itself on the global scene with an amplified international political pressure. As Macedonia obtained the country-candidate status in the EU, Greece intensified the propaganda to veto Macedonia's accession to NATO. Despite the diplomat's hard work towards a suitable compromise, it was nevertheless expected that Greece would block Macedonia accession to NATO and EU under its constitutional name. During the NATO Summit in Bucharest on 3th of April 2008, Greece blocked the invitation for Macedonia to join NATO, although Macedonia fulfilled the requirements and enjoyed the open support of the United States of America.

The Greek Prime minister Constantine Alexander Karamanlis (commonly known as Kostas Karamanlis) personally gave the last Greek suggestion for solving the naming dispute at the time - as the last chance for Macedonia to avoid the Greek Veto. The suggested name was "Republic of Skopje (Macedonia)," but the Macedonian delegates rejected it.

Macedonia responded with an appeal to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Hague on 17th of November 2008. Macedonia's most cogent argument was that "*Greece by objecting to the admission of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to NATO, has breached its obligation under Article 11, paragraph 1, of Interim Accord of 13 September 1995*". On 5th of December 2011, the ICJ declared Greece's obstruction of Macedonia's application to join NATO as unlawful, violating Article 11 of the Interim Accord (142-20111205-JUD-01-00-BI.pdf, 2011).

The court accepted two of the three suing demands of Macedonia (Interim accord, 1995) by stating the following:

In its Judgement, which is final, without appeal and binding on the Parties the court

1. Finds by fourteen votes to two, that it has jurisdiction to entertain the application by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 17.11.2008 and that this Application is admissible;
2. Finds, by fifteen votes to one, that the Hellenic Republic, by objecting to the admission of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to NATO, has breached its obligation under Article 11, paragraph 1, of Interim Accord of 13 September 1995
3. Rejects, by fifteen votes to one, all other submissions made by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The court verdict historically elaborated the naming dispute from its beginning to the day Macedonia sued Greece. Article 21, paragraph 2 of the Interim Accord states: "*every difference or misunderstanding that will arise between*

the two concerned sides in regards the interpretation of this Interim Accord can be taken to the International Court of Justice, except for Article 5, paragraph 1” (142-20111205-JUD-01-00-BI.pdf, 2011).

The verdict from Hague was not binding for either country which gained Macedonia nothing more than the moral satisfaction of having a verdict which supported its stance. The ICJ's decision was beneficial for Macedonia but failed to bring a resolution to the dispute with Greece any closer.

While the lengthy naming dispute has prevented Macedonia from joining NATO and EU, additional reasons also add to the unsuccessful integration of the country to the organizations, which are not the scope of this article. The political component of Macedonia will have to find creative, but often challenging, solutions to remain on the strategic course of joining the EU and NATO. Politically brave steps will require gaining a positive public opinion, and prevent extorted and rushed settlements, particularly unfavorable to the Macedonian population.

Macedonia on a crossroad:-

The long years of crisis and negations decreased the enthusiasm of the Macedonian citizens for EU and NATO. Brexit, the refugee crisis, and the firm attitude and firm opinions of many prominent EU politicians and country leaders, question the EU future and its willingness to welcome the countries from the West Balkan. Consequently, the Euroscepticism and Anti-Western politics solidify among the influential political leaders, which must prompt Macedonia to reevaluate its strategic goal towards the EU, and perhaps seek an alternative.

As concerns over the Balkan Euroscepticism rise, Brussels must soon offer the Western Balkan a clear strategy, not just a vague and general support. The announcement that the EU will not expand at least until 2019 opens a vast space of uncertainty in the Western Balkan which, Brussels does not underestimate or ignore either:

We want to offer the countries of the Western Balkan a European perspective. Now, when I said at the beginning of my term of office that there would be no new accessions before 2019, that was a sentence that created confusion in the Balkans. But we are still debating and negotiate accession with the countries of the WB which is the most complicated region in Europe, and we need to contribute to its relaunch and to give those countries all the care that they need. - emphasized Juncker on 15th of March 2017 in the European Parliament in Strasbourg (EC Audiovisual Service – Video, 2017).

The EU Accession Perspective of the Western Balkan was addressed again during the Western Balkans Six Prime Ministers Meeting in Sarajevo on 17th of March 2017. In a joint statement, the participants informed that the Western Balkan countries *should stand by their solemn commitment to further support each other on their respective European paths rather than obstruct it* while leveraging on the revived attention of the EU for the region (Joint Statement - Western Balkans Six Prime Ministers meeting | European Commission, 2017).

During this time Spiegel, also emphasized the effect of Brexit on the overall political climate on the Western Balkan, suggesting that the right-wing populism rose as the EU deprioritized the EU Accession of the region. Reuters cited diplomats who indicated that such policies might cause EU its influence on the Western Balkan, an area with multi-ethnic tensions, corruption, and an increased tendency towards authoritarian ruling (Opinion: After Brexit Vote Fears Balkan States Will Be Forgotten - SPIEGEL ONLINE, 2017)

Some western politicians on the other hand, claimed that Russia used this situation to its advantage to create local partings and escalate the tensions. (Boris Johnson slams Vladimir Putin for 'organising coups in the Western Balkans' and says Russia 'is up to all sorts of no good' in Eastern Europe, 2017).

Finally, in his statement for Deutsche Welle on 17th of March 2017, shortly after the meeting in Sarajevo, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn, encouraged economic collaboration through a joined market of the countries, which could soon create 80 000 jobs (Johannes Hahn: "Eine Milliarde Euro für den Westbalkan", 2017)

These messages come when the Old Continent marks its 60th anniversary of the European Project, a period for reflection. In an attempt to reevaluate its success, to overcome challenges and set a course for development, the European Commission proposed five different scenarios for EU's development after Brexit (White Paper on the future of Europe, 2017)

Ana de Palacio, the former Spanish Minister of Foreign affairs, criticized this approach for its lack of analysis of the original reasons which lead to the EU polarization and its intra-organizational debacle (The end of the European supnation?, 2016)

Irrespective of which of these five scenarios it implements, the EU can mark six more decades only with an honest approach towards its citizens and especially the Western Balkan. Lack of authentic and transparent goals will diminish the EU presence and influence in this part of Europe. *The EU must be ready to make the Balkans its geopolitical priority and to shape the political conflict there as a struggle for or against Europe. If it does not do this, its influence in the region will soon fade*, as Ivan Krastev writes in his column for Financial Times (EU goes back to the future in the Balkans , 2017).

In this story of the traditional clash between the East and the West, the latter defends the Balkan from the growing influence of Russia and Turkey. Krastev further advocates that the Balkan will suffer socially-disruptive processes, repeatedly reinforced, without the impact of the EU. Some of these are *“The unresolved political crisis in Macedonia, a failed coup attempt in Montenegro and active discussion of an independence referendum in Republika Srpska, the Bosnian Serb entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggest what the future of the region could look like.”* He goes even further by suggesting that *neither the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Macedonia nor the thaw in Serbia-Kosovo relations should be taken for granted.*” (EU goes back to the future in the Balkans , 2017). Winners and losers will mark the prospective solutions for the security issues, where everything is at stake, including the territorial integrity of some countries. These anything but naïve conclusions indicate the presence of a security threat but also warn against it. Primarily alarming for Macedonia, which almost 100 years after its partition, cannot entirely dismiss hypothetical territorial aspirations of its neighbors.

As such, these warnings and alarms deserve a proper treatment. In what will be a test of the maturity of the country and the government, the political leaders will need to accept and implement them adequately.

Conclusion:-

The European Union is a host of 500 million inhabitants and is responsible for about one-fifth of the global economy. The idea of war among the European citizens is almost unimaginable, which makes the Union more desirable. The EU presence has returned a permanent peace on the continent, except the Western Balkan, where peace has not been one hundred percent established yet. Therefore, the remaining six countries from the region must join the EU, through accepting the EU postulates for intensive joined collaboration, which is the only way to prevent sharp internal disagreements. The leaders of all Balkan countries should recognize that the future of the region lies in its networking, mainly through investing in highways and railways. Macedonia, for instance, is best connected with Greece, but its economy suffers indeterminable damages at the smallest disturbance on the borders, such as strikes of the Greek agricultural workers. If a joined market existed, however, it would enhance peace establishment, and also prepare the region for EU accession.

Fourteen years ago in Thessaloniki, all Balkan countries were promised integration in the European family, but only Croatia completed the accession since then. The remaining countries struggle in the negotiating processes as the Union does not place the possible expansion high on its agenda, which is understandable considering other burning issues like Brexit, terrorism, and the refugee crisis. Only a declarative support does not suffice, as the Balkan is exhausted and started to behave irrationally to attract EU's attention_EU acts similarly though and shows interest in the region only in peace-threatening periods.

As the Western Balkan countries are indisputably a geographical part of the old continent, it is possible to maintain peace in the region, when they become part of the European cultural, trading, economic and political space. Finally, the people in the Balkans must change their mental attitude and welcome the exchange of opposed opinions as a way to find an optimal course of action for the future of their own countries.

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