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Aleksandar Spasenovski

THREE DECADES OF FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY: MACEDONIAN LESSONS

POLITICAL THOUGHT



INTRODUCTION

The beginning of each new decade is also marked by the anniversaries associated with the independence of today's North Macedonia¹.

If 1990 is the year when the processes of democratic transition and political pluralism begin and intensify², and 1991 is the year when the country's independence process began³, then 1992 is the year when the process of creating and consolidating the key attributes of the already established sovereign and independent state - the Republic of Macedonia - started.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, 30 years later, in 2022, we celebrate two important anniversaries related to one of the most important elements of Macedonian statehood:

First, 30 years since the establishment of the country's foreign policy;

Second, 30 years since the establishment of the country's defense policy.

With the adoption of the Declaration on International Recognition of the Republic of Macedonia⁴, at the beginning of 1992, the process of establishing bilateral relations of our country began, first with Bulgaria⁵, then with Slovenia⁶ and with Croatia⁷. With the recognition by FR Germany⁸, however, this process gains additional intensity⁹.

In 1992, when the process of international recognition of the state began, the foundations of the defense were laid. Thus, after the adoption of the Constitution of our country¹⁰ according to which "the defence of the Republic is regulated by a law adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of Representatives ", in 1992 the Parliament adopted the Law on Defense¹¹.

Taking into account the previously mentioned, the paper: "30 years of foreign policy and defense of North Macedonia" has a double purpose:

¹ This paper contains selected findings that are part of the publication "30 years of foreign and defense policy", published by the "Konrad Adenauer" Foundation, in September 2022, URL: https://bit.ly/3TbMKrE.

² See Aleksandar Spasenovski, Vasko Naumovski and Jovan Andonovski "30 years of independence", Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Institute for Social Research MK-91, September 2021.

³ Watch documentary film: "30 years of statehood, the Constitution-foundation of the future", Konrad Adenauer Foundation Skopje, November 2021. URL: https://bit.ly/3VKKIV51.

⁴ Declaration on international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, No.: 08-5099, 19.12.1991.

⁵ Diplomatic relations with Bulgaria were established on January 15, 1992.

⁶ Diplomatic relations with Slovenia were established on March 17, 1992.

⁷ Diplomatic relations with Croatia were established on 30.3.1992.

⁸ Diplomatic relations with FR Germany were established on 16.12.1993.

⁹ More on the history of Macedonian-German relations in: Vasko Naumovski, Aleksandar Spasenovski, Jovan Andonovski "Republic of Macedonia and Federal Republic of Germany - 25 years of diplomatic relations", Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Institute for Social Research MK-91, October 2018.

¹⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", g.: XLVII, no.: 52, Skopje, 1991, p: 805-815.

¹¹ Defense Law, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No.: 8, Skopje, 1992.

First, to shed additional light on the key issues related to the conduct of foreign policy and the defense of our country and

Second, to investigate the citizens' perceptions regarding the process of independence in foreign relations and defense in these 30 years, as well as the expectations in these areas in the following decades.

Based on the obtained data, at the very end, specific conclusions are presented that stem from the previously analyzed segments.

1. ANALYSIS

The processes of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM) gaining independence through separation from the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) began in 1990.

The political authorities at the time, following the developments in the other republics of the federal Yugoslavia, took appropriate steps that corresponded to the nature of the circumstances that were constantly deteriorating. Thus, in the summer and autumn of 1990, the republic's institutions made a series of key decisions that opened the way for Macedonian independence by constructing the new constitutional-legal system, resting od principles opposite to the until then socialist-federal ones.

On September 20, 1990, the Assembly of SRM adopted 25 amendments to the Constitution thus implementing the first changes in the constitutional-legal system¹². The monopoly of the ruling SKJ party is abolished (amendment LXVII), the delegate system is replaced by a parliamentary system (amendment LXXIV), a government is constructed instead of the executive council (amendment LXXVI), and the position of president of the Republic is established instead of the presidency of SRM (amendment LXXV).

Based on the mentioned changes, on September 24, 1990, the president of the legislature announced the first democratic multi-party elections, held on November 11 of the same year, and the Assembly in this composition was constituted on January 8, 1991.

Furthermore, on January 27, 1991, the deputies elected the first democratic president of the Republic, Kiro Gligorov, and on March 20, 1991, the first democratic expert government headed by Nikola Klyusev was elected.

¹² Decision on Promulgation of Amendments LVII - LXXXI to the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Year: XLVI, No.: 28, Skopje, 21.9.1990, p.: 506 -511.

In this way, the foundations of the new democratic system of state government organization were laid.

In the meantime, on January 25, 1991, the representatives of the citizens in the Parliament passed the "Declaration for Sovereignty of Macedonia"¹³, which, in Article 1, expresses sovereignty in accordance with the constitutional determinations for independence and territorial integrity of the Macedonian state, as well as the right of the Macedonian a people to self-determination including the right to secede.

Furthermore, on June 7, 1991, constitutional amendment LXXXII was adopted, which omitted the term "socialist" from the name of SRM"¹⁴. In this sense, on May 7, 1991, the President of the State submitted to the deputies a proposal for the adoption of a new democratic constitution which was voted on November 17, 1991, preceded by the independence referendum of September 8, 1991 and the "Declaration on the occasion of the plebiscite expressed will of the citizens for a sovereign and independent state of Macedonia", adopted at the session of the Assembly on September 17, 1991¹⁵.

This way the new constitutional-legal system of today's North Macedonia as a democratic and independent state was completed.

Finally, on December 19, 1991, with the adoption of the "Declaration on International Recognition of the Republic of Macedonia", the process of international recognition of the already created state began.

The declaration of international recognition consists of five points and it was signed by the then president of the Assembly, Stojan Andov. In it, the MPs demand that "the Republic of Macedonia, which is a sovereign and independent state, be recognized internationally", while stating that the state accepts the criteria in this sense of the Council of Ministers of the European Community from 17.12.1991, as well as the draft document of the Conference for Yugoslavia in Hague, at the same time stating that the country supports the efforts of the United Nations (UN) for a peaceful resolution of the Yugoslav crisis.

After the adoption of this document, the then Republic of Macedonia began to establish diplomatic relations and to establish relations of closer cooperation with states and with other entities of international relations. The first country that recognized the independence of our country was the Republic of Bulgaria on January 15, 1992, followed by the recognition of Slovenia on March 17, 1992 and Croatia on March 30, 1992. Today,

¹³ Declaration of Sovereignty of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, No.: 08-220-1.

¹⁴ Decision on the Proclamation of Amendments LXXXII to LXXXV to the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, year: XLVII, no.: 27, Skopje, 11.6.1991. n.: 357.

¹⁵ Declaration on the occasion of the plebiscite expressed will of the citizens for a sovereign and independent Macedonian state of Macedonia, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, no.: 08-3786, 17.9.1991.

the Republic of North Macedonia, as a member of NATO and a country negotiating for membership in the EU, has established diplomatic relations and is building a dynamic foreign policy with more than 190 countries in the world¹⁶.

In 1992, when the process of international recognition of the state began, the foundations of the defense were also laid. Thus, after the adoption of the Constitution according to which "the defense of the Republic is governed by a law adopted with a two-thirds majority of votes from the total number of deputies", in 1992 the Parliament passed the Law on Defense¹⁷.

The Defense Law of 1992 consists of 135 articles divided into 11 chapters and according to it, the defense of the Republic aims to ensure the independence and territorial integrity of the country, and it is carried out by citizens, state administration bodies and the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM)¹⁸. Apart from the afore mentioned, this law is characterized by Article 3 and Article 7, providing for military service of all adult male citizens for a period of 9 months.¹⁹.

The foreign and defense policy of North Macedonia for the past 30 years has been characterized by certainty, stability and predictability.

2. PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

For the purposes of this paper, a comprehensive public opinion survey was conducted at the end of August 2022.

The sample size is chosen in accordance with the needs of the research. In this case, 1111 respondents are included, keeping the general ratio in terms of basic demographic characteristics (gender, age over 18 years, ethnicity, profession and education), while respecting the appropriate geographical balance.

The research aims to reveal citizens' perceptions regarding the process of independence, the successes and failures of North Macedonia in the external and defense fields in the past three decades, as well as the expectations in these areas in the years to come.

¹⁶ More about bilateral relations on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia www.mfa.gov.mk.

¹⁷ Defense Law, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", No.: 8, op.cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

2.1. General assessments of foreign policy and defense

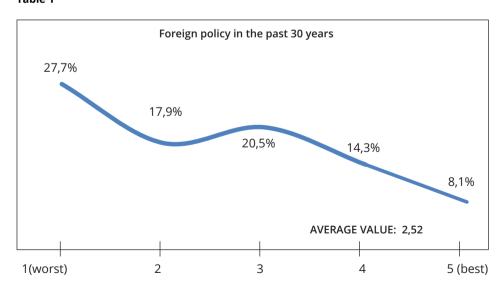
The questions in the first part can be divided into two groups, where in the first group the respondents give their assessment from 1 to 5 on the conduct of foreign policy, as well as on the performance of the Army over the past 30 years (see table 1 and table 2).

The analysis of the results shows that the average rating of the respondents regarding the way the foreign policy of the country is conducted in the past three decades is 2.52, while for the behavior of the Army it is 3.37.

It is characteristic that there is no particular difference in the scores between the respondents through the prism of their ethnic origin, geographic origin or education.

The significantly higher evaluation of the respondents for the performance of the Army compared to the conduct of foreign policy can be attributed to the accession of North Macedonia to NATO, which represents the most significant three-decade long goal that is strongly supported by the majority of political parties in the country. Of course, the traditional support of the citizens to the security system of the state has its influence in relation to the results of both questions, which is confirmed in almost all public opinion surveys over the years until today²⁰.

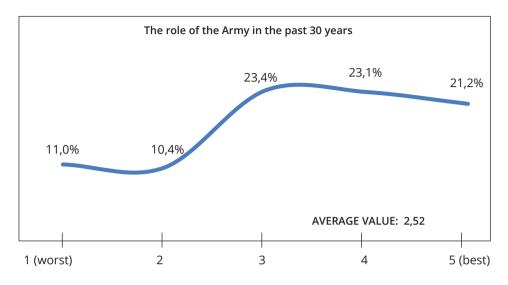
Table 121



²⁰ More information on this topic in the text: "Slightly visible, but with the greatest trust" in "Nova Makedonija", novamakedonijca.com.mk, August 2022.

²¹ The ratings presented in this and in all other tables of this type in this text represent personal perceptions of a specific group of respondents, compiled on the basis of established criteria for methodologically correct implementation of a public opinion survey.

Table 2



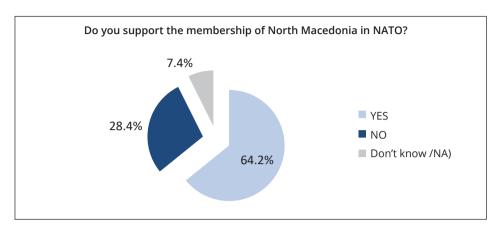
2.2. NATO and the European Union

The next segment of the research analyses the respondents' perceptions regarding the two most important foreign policy and defense goals.

A high 64.2% of the respondents support the membership of North Macedonia in NATO against 28.4% who oppose (see table 3), which represents a ratio of 2:1 in favor of the advocates of the country's integration in this defense alliance. In this sense, there are noticeable differences in the statements, mainly based on the ethnicity of the respondents. Thus, 90.1% of the members of the Albanian ethnic community support the membership of North Macedonia in NATO in contrast to the rest of the ethnic communities, where the support for this strategic goal of the state ranges between 55% and 65%, representing a difference of about 30%.²²

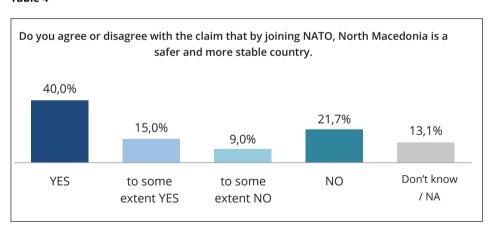
²² Regarding the ethnic stratification of the respondents, the membership of North Macedonia in NATO is supported by 56.3% of the Macedonian respondents, 90.1% of the Albanian respondents and 63.6% of the respondents who belong to other ethnic communities in the country.

Table 3



In addition to the previous question, cumulatively, a high 56.2% of respondents agree with the statement that North Macedonia is safer and more stable with NATO membership, compared to 30.7% who do not think so, representing a difference of 25.5% in favor of the first group. Just as for the previous question, in this case too, differences in the ratio of answers are observed based on the ethnicity of the respondents.

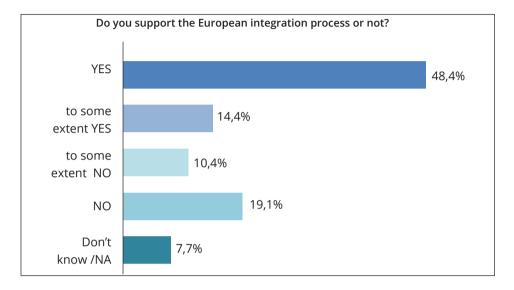
Table 4



European integration and membership in NATO are foreign policy goals that continuously have high support from the citizens. However, unlike the first decade of independence, the second and third decades are characterized by a continuous decrease in citizens' support for North Macedonia's EU membership. Thus, 48.4% of respondents give full support for the country's integration into the Union, while 14.4% give partial support (see table 5). In total, 62.8% of all respondents are in favor of one day North Macedonia being

part of the EU. Although this percentage is still very high, however, compared to the first two decades of independence, significant shifts in a negative direction are visible.

Table 5



2.3. Relations with other countries

The next segment of the research analyses the bilateral relations of North Macedonia with other reference countries.

Respondents have the most positive impressions of the quality of North Macedonia's mutual relations with Turkey, with 71.6% positive ratings; with Serbia, with 68.6% positive ratings and with Germany, with 64.3% positive ratings (see table 6). The research also notes that a significant 37.7% of respondents positively evaluate the quality of Macedonian-Greek bilateral relations. Also, 58.5% of the respondents have a positive opinion about the bilateral relations of North Macedonia with the USA and 57% have the same attitude about the bilateral relations of our country with Albania.

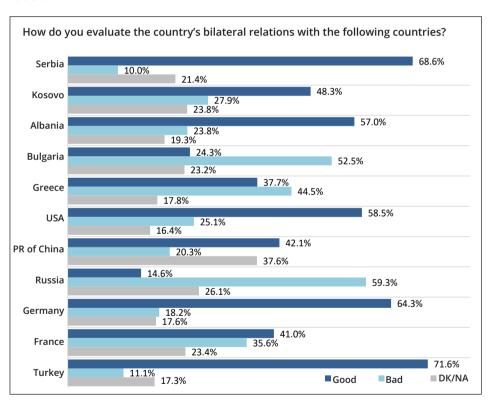
At the bottom of the scale are Russia and Bulgaria, for which 59.3% and 52.5% of respondents believe that they have bad bilateral relations with North Macedonia. The public opinion survey of 2021, which referred to the three decades since the establishment of North Macedonia's independence, the citizens' opinion on the character of our country's bilateral relations with Bulgaria and Russia was examined²³. Then, 17.3%

²³ See Aleksandar Spasenovski, Vasko Naumovski and Jovan Andonovski, "30 years of independence (Analysis and survey of public opinion)" Institute for Social Research "MK91" and Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2021...

of respondents rated North Macedonia's bilateral relations with Russia as bad, and 59.8% with Bulgaria. This means that, unlike 2021, in 2022 the negative opinion of the citizens towards Bulgaria is almost unchanged, and towards Russia it has visibly worsened. This situation in relation to respondents' opinions about Russia can be correlated with Russian aggression against Ukraine, also evident from the question in the penultimate segment of this analysis.

The analysis of the respondents' answers points to the conclusion that the perceptions of the quality of bilateral relations between our country and the mentioned countries are relatively permanent and without major fluctuations, with the exception of Greece as a positive example and Bulgaria and Russia as negative.

Table 6



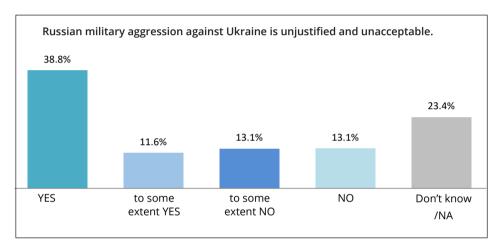
2.4. Current challenges

The next segment of the research covers two current issues in the field of foreign relations and defense.

2022

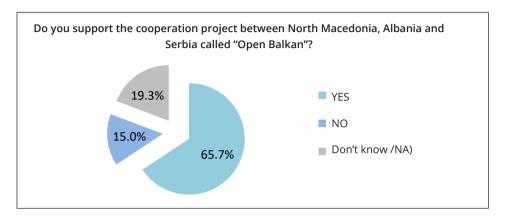
The first question presents the respondents' impressions regarding the current situation in Ukraine (see table 7). Thus, 50.4% of the respondents consider that the Russian military aggression against Ukraine is unjustified and unacceptable, while 26.2% consider that it is justified and acceptable, which represents a ratio of 2:1 in relation to the first group. The analysis of the results points to the conclusion that the respondents have approximately the same attitude regarding this topic as the citizens of other EU and NATO member states.

Table 7



The second question of this segment analyses the disposition of the respondents regarding the regional form of closer integration of North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia called "Open Balkan" (see table 17). Thus, 65.7% of respondents support the "Open Balkans" project, while 15% do not support it, which means that the number of respondents who support this form of closer cooperation between North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia is 50.7% higher. The reasons for the high support for this form of regional integration can be attributed to the high marks that citizens give to the bilateral relations of North Macedonia with each of the two countries individually. Of course, considering the opportunities for cooperation that are opened up by the realization of this trilateral project, surely this is also a significant reason for such a positive impression of the respondents.

Table 8

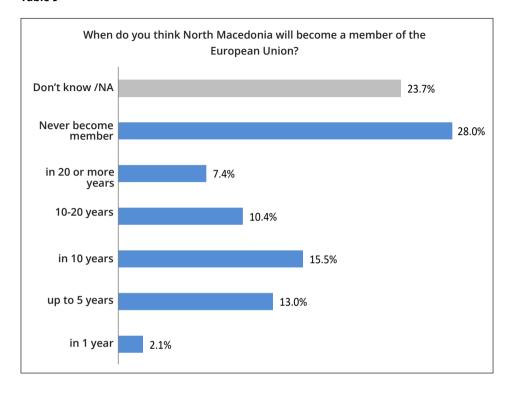


2.5. Expectations for the future

After the accession of North Macedonia to NATO, the remaining major foreign policy challenge for the country is integration into the EU, to which the last question is devoted (see table 9). Thus, when asked when you think North Macedonia will join the Union, 28% of the respondents stated that it will not happen, which is the largest group, while 23.7% expressed their pessimism through the answer that they do not know when it will happen, that is, that they have no answer. Opposite to these two groups are the more optimistic respondents. Namely, 7.4% stated that the country's membership in the EU will take place in 20 or more years, 10.4% in 10-20 years, 15.5% in 10 years and 13% of the respondents believe that North Macedonia will join the EU in 5 years .

From the responses of the respondents, a pronounced pessimism about the membership of North Macedonia in the EU is visible, as well as about the speed by which this strategic goal will be achieved. The pessimism of the citizens regarding the integration of North Macedonia in the EU does not arise from the character of the Union or from the dissatisfaction with the way it functions, but is the result of the continuous obstacles and stoppages that the country has had over the years, mainly as a result of bilateral problems. Thus, overcoming the bilateral obstacles and opening a clear perspective for the dynamic integration of North Macedonia without additional downtime, would most certainly result also in correcting the impressions of the citizens in a positive sense in relation to the Union itself, as well as in relation to the time of our membership.

Table 9



CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the conduct of the state's foreign policy and the professionalism of the Army over the past three decades, the average score of the respondents on a scale from 1 to 5 is 2.52, i.e. 3.37. The visibly higher rating for the Army compared to the conduct of foreign policy can be attributed to the accession of North Macedonia to NATO, which represents a significant three-decade goal of the state;

64.2% of the respondents support the membership of North Macedonia in NATO against 28.4% who oppose it, representing a ratio of 2:1 in favor of the supporters. Also, 56.2% of the respondents believe that with NATO membership, North Macedonia is safer and more stable;

62.8% of respondents are in favor of North Macedonia's membership in the EU. Although this percentage is still very high, clear negative trends are visible compared to the first two decades of independence;

Respondents have the most positive impressions of the quality of North Macedonia's mutual relations with Turkey, with 71.6% positive ratings; with Serbia, with 68.6% positive ratings and with Germany, with 64.3% positive ratings. A significant 37.7% of respondents positively evaluate the quality of Macedonian-Greek bilateral relations. Also, 58.5% of the respondents have a positive opinion about the bilateral relations of North Macedonia with the USA and 57% have the same position about the bilateral relations of our country with Albania. At the bottom of the scale, on the other hand, are Russia and Bulgaria, for which 59.3% and 52.5% of respondents believe that they have bad bilateral relations with North Macedonia;

50.4% of respondents believe that Russian military aggression against Ukraine is unjustified and unacceptable, while 26.2% believe that it is justified and acceptable, which represents a ratio of 2:1 compared to the first group;

65.7% of respondents support the "Open Balkans" project, while 15% do not support it, which means that the number of respondents who support this form of closer cooperation between North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia is 50.7% higher;

When asked when you think that North Macedonia will join the EU, 28% of the respondents stated that it will never happen, which is the largest group, while 23.7% expressed their pessimism through the answer that they do not know when it will happen, i.e. that they have no answer. Opposite these groups are the more optimistic respondents. Thus, 7.4% stated that the country's membership in the EU will happen in 20 or more years, 10.4% in 10-20 years, 15.5% in 10 years and 13% in 5 years. Deep pessimism about the membership of North Macedonia in the EU, as well as about the speed by which this strategic goal will be achieved, is visible from the answers of the respondents. Overcoming the bilateral obstacles and opening a clear perspective for the dynamic integration of North Macedonia without additional delays, will most certainly also result in correcting the impressions of the citizens in a positive sense regarding the Union itself, as well as in relation to the time of our country will become a member.

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