

The International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies IFIMES from Ljubljana, Slovenia, regularly analyzes developments in the Middle East, the Balkans and around the world. IFIMES has analyzed the current political situation in the Republic of North Macedonia in the context of the latest deliberation of the European Council on the date of beginning of the accession talks between the country and the EU. We bring the most important and interesting parts of the extensive analysis.

2021 North Macedonia: Is EU heading towards its next historical mistake?

Since the fall of the VMRO-DPMNE regime and the **Nikola Gruevski - Saso Mijalkov** duo, the Republic of North Macedonia has made historical steps forward in its national and social-political development.

Upon their arrival to power, Prime Minister **Zoran Zaev** and the Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) had to face the problems of inherited crime and corruption, which were present in all pores of life. Zoran Zaev pursued the policy of having “zero” problems with the neighbouring countries. As a result, North Macedonia and Bulgaria signed the treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation. Later, on 17 June 2018, North Macedonia signed an agreement with Greece (“Prespa Agreement”) on modification of the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia. After that, the Republic of North Macedonia became a full-fledged member of NATO on 27 March 2020. The law on the use of languages, which promotes use of languages of other ethnic communities, was adopted. This provided for fulfilment of the all the key goals set by the new Macedonian government headed by Prime Minister Zaev- except one. Specifically, the opening of accession talks with the EU. In the meantime, North Macedonia achieved another major foreign-policy milestone- chairmanship of the OSCE in 2023.

Bulgaria and Greece act “in sync” against North Macedonia

It was expected that with the resolution of the dispute with Greece regarding the constitutional name of the country all the impediments to further progress of the country had been overcome. However, Bulgaria devised new reasons for a dispute and the Bulgarian parliament adopted conclusions implying in the form of an official request to the EU that the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia should be blocked until all the “disputable” issues related to the Macedonian language and identity are resolved. It was expected that during the German chairmanship of the EU the issue of the blocking of the start of accession talks will be resolved, as so far the practice has been that member countries resolve their disputes and outstanding issues bilaterally, while the process of accession to the EU develops in parallel and unimpededly.

According to the analysts, ever since the Republic of Macedonia gained its independence in 1991, Bulgaria and Greece as its neighbours have been acting as a “well-tuned” tandem. Namely, they use the model of assigned roles to activate and generate their requests, set conditions and block Macedonia. The conduct of Bulgaria and Greece towards Macedonia reminds of the conduct of Serbia and Croatia towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the two countries consecutively produce problems, set out different forms of conditions and put pressure on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Secret intelligence operation “Knight’s move”

North Macedonia is at a geopolitical crossroads, which is why it is important to ensure lasting peace and enduring stability of the country, both in regional and international context. Because of its geopolitical and geostrategic position, North Macedonia is a crossroads of regional and international crime. As a result, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the security-intelligence

agencies are undertaking enormous efforts to suppress crime and corruption on and through its territory.

Analysts warn about the secret intelligence operation, dubbed by international circles as “Knight’s move” (“Roesselsprung”). Namely, the ultimate goal of the operation is the return of Nikola Gruevski to North Macedonia and toppling of the current government. That is why intensive activities aimed at destabilisation of the state through continuous production of numerous affairs are underway. The intelligence services have detected and located more than 160 media portals which produce numerous fake news and affairs in order to create chaos and discredit first of all Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, but also the Minister of Internal Affairs **Oliver Spasovski**. They are brought in connection with the Adinamic Media, a company administering websites supportive of the VMRO-DPMNE opposition party. The Adinamic Media Company is connected with the Hungarian public broadcasting network Magyar Televizio (MTV), which supports the leading Fidesz party headed by Prime Minister **Viktor Orbán**.

At the political level attempts are being made to block the functioning of institutions. In example, the VMRO-DPMNE opposition party had filed more than 2,000 amendments to the Law on Service in the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, in such a way undermining also the NATO system. The proposal of the law on award of Macedonian citizenship on the basis of statements of just three witnesses is rather dubious. Namely, it is not in line with international standards and can lead to an administrative change of the ethnic landscape and generation of new tensions.

The “*non-papers*” launched by close associates of Nikola Gruevski also contribute to creation of an ambience of chaos.

Furthermore, the attacks on the Minister of Internal Affairs Oliver Spasovski will be intensified, because he had detected and dismantled the networks of specific foreign intelligence services on the territory of North Macedonia, which is why the attacks against him are conceived as a kind of revenge for his successful actions. Bulgaria, Hungary and some other countries will have to withdraw their intelligence networks from North Macedonia implement their cooperation in the intelligence area in line with the signed agreements. A point of concern is the fact that key security challenges and threats to North Macedonia come from the countries that are NATO members, just like North Macedonia.

Analysts believe that the center for the secret intelligence operation “Knight’s move” is in Budapest and that it involves some state leaders who are allies of Nikola Gruevski, predominantly from the European (radical) right-wing. The production of “non-papers” in function of the return of Nikola Gruevski to Macedonia and his reinstatement to power are connected with this, because the assessment is that Zoran Zaev and his tight parliamentary majority could be swiftly toppled if an ambience of chaos is created. A valid question to be asked is why the NATO alliance tolerates such activities of intelligence services of some of its member countries in North Macedonia, bearing in mind that they are not aimed just against national interests of a sovereign member state, but also against the interests of NATO itself.

Mijalkov-Kamcev duo attempted to flee and avoid imprisonment

Although he had been sentenced to two years of imprisonment Nikola Gruevski fled the country and found political protection with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (Fidesz). Individual prime ministers coming from the ranks of the European People's Party (EPP) also extended their support to Gruevski and are now working on his rehabilitation and return to North Macedonia, while the funds from Macedonia that had been plundered by Gruevski's regime are being invested in their respective countries. Therefore, various “non-papers” produced for that purpose are of no surprise.

Before the closing remarks were made in the trial, the Saso Mijalkov – **Orce Kamcev** duo sought an opportunity to be released, because they had established and financed a parallel system which they control and fully supervise. An analysis revealed that Mijalkov and Kamcev had control over the entire judicial and police system - except for prosecutors **Lenche Ristoska** and **Trajche Pelivanov** and the Minister of Foreign Affairs **Oliver Spasovski**. The three of them played a key

role in the protection of the constitutional-legal order and the police-judicial system in the country. According to the publicized public opinion poll, the most trusted institution in Macedonia is the Ministry of Internal Affairs (39.6%).

The IFIMES international institutes introduced monitoring of the Saso Mijalkov and Orce Kamcev cases and has already established that the public prosecutor for prosecution of organized crime and corruption **Vilma Ruskovska** had illegal contacts with Mijalkov and Kamcev. However, as in the end it was discovered that she had these contacts with them, Ruskovska had to request detention for Mijalkov and Kamcev. Saso Mijalkov's son also played a role in the pressuring and making of threats with respect to the work of institutions and holders of key functions. According to legal experts the 12-year sentence pronounced to Mijalkov is too mild.

Analysts believe that the Office of the Public Prosecutor of North Macedonia is the “cancer” of the judicial system in the country and that the Council of Public Prosecutors should initiate proceedings against prosecutors who had acted contrary to the law and prosecutorial ethics in Saso Mijalkov's case.

North Macedonia demonstrated capability to carry out changes and reforms

North Macedonia has demonstrated that it is able to carry out changes and reforms. This is the democratic-political identification legitimation of the current authorities. Membership in NATO is a testimony of the correctness of their actions.

Membership in NATO means security, stability and wellbeing. It strengthens the reliability and safety of the country for foreign investments. Membership in NATO is simultaneously a major step forward towards membership in the EU. This is the direct experience of all its new members, which were coopted after the end of the Cold War. Without membership in NATO, not one of 20 member countries would be as successful as it is today. Membership means participation in the decision-making process on key issues related to international politics. North Macedonia will no longer be a subject of debate on the agendas of international fora, because it now discusses issues together with other member countries and contributes to resolution of key international issues and challenges. This is a quantum step forward in the functioning of the state, which has become a full-fledged member of NATO. Therefore, the period after the Covid-19 pandemic should be used for comprehensive development and prosperity of North Macedonia.

EU deceives its public and makes a new historic mistake

The EU needs to fulfil the promise made to North Macedonia, which had met all the requirements set by the EU, and approve the beginning of accession talks, because the country should be given a chance to demonstrate its readiness and potentials in the negotiations process.

The Macedonian identity and language are unique and no interstate commission can change the Macedonian identity and language, or their perspective of history and historical figures, which is deeply rooted in the minds of the Macedonian people. There is a plethora of examples of different perspectives of history within the EU itself. The attempts and the allowing of the disputing of Macedonian identity and language in the XXI century by Bulgaria constitute a major defeat of the EU and its values. Attributing the blocking of the opening of accession talks between Macedonia and the EU to Bulgaria is just an excuse by the key EU countries and a deception of the public within the EU, which is aimed at blocking the path of North Macedonia, as well as the Western Balkans region, towards membership in the EU.

Analysts believe that it is necessary to rectify the historic mistake made during the German chairmanship of the EU and adopt a decision on the beginning of talks between North Macedonia and the EU. France also has a major responsibility in this issue, because it is seeking to use to the Bulgarian blockade to stop the process of enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans, which has a total population of 18 million, or less than half the population of Poland. Postponing the decision on commencement of talks can also mean “*departure*” of North Macedonia and other Western Balkan states to some other geopolitical and interest spheres.

The position of North Macedonia is very vulnerable, because the route of international crime and mafia go through this country and its territory is used as a range for showdowns among security-intelligence services. Therefore, the process of opening of talks on membership in the EU can be the key impetus for the stability of the country and the Western Balkans. Otherwise, the region could be lost for the EU for good. North Macedonia and the Western Balkans region need the assistance of US security-intelligence services to combat crime and corruption, just as after World War II various US agencies assisted Italy in its showdown with the mafia.

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