Abstract

The process of creating the Macedonian state begins with the disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and the Referendum for Independence on September 8, 1991. As a geographically integral part of the Western Balkans, the Macedonian state was exposed to challenges of a different nature. Since the day of the declaration of independence, the country has been facing with certain issues that in the past period have proven to have the potential to cause serious internal political and security crises. Today, the dilemma is whether after full NATO membership we can hope for a more secure future from a political, and at the same time from a security and economic point of view, or still the challenges, primarily interethnic relations, remain as such. In that regard, the potential for the existence of hybrid threats that the Macedonian state could face as a NATO member should be considered. The perception and forecasts for the future of the Republic of North Macedonia are different. Through this paper we will try to answer some of the questions and challenges that the state would face in the coming period. In particular, in this paper we will present the possible positive changes that may occur in the country, but at the same time we will address the potential risks with which the state is facing, relating to the change of political i.e. state governance of the country as a consequence of a possible new interethnic conflict.

Keywords: Macedonian statehood, Interethnic relations, Security challenges, Hybrid threats, NATO

1. INTRODUCTION

With the fall of socialism and the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia disintegrated. In the 1980s, after Tito’s death, Yugoslavia plunged into a severe economic crisis, which soon led to the rise of nationalism in the Federation’s republican subjects, including the issue of the status of Kosovo’s and the rising rate of inflation, unemployment, high indebtedness, etc. Regarding the economic development of the republics in the federation, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia remains far economically poorer than, for example, the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, although the number of inhabitants and the territory are almost the same. The Socialist Republic of Macedonia mainly supplies the Yugoslav Federation with agricultural products, tobacco, cigarettes, fruits and textile products, and most of the products as final product are processed in other parts of the Federation. On September 8th 1991, the Macedonian state gained its independence. The young country encountered a number of problems, in the north
Yugoslavia which is at war in Croatia and Bosnia, the embargo from Greece in 1993 from which the Macedonian state suffers great economic losses, the name dispute with Greece, admission to the UN, etc. The recent history of the Macedonian state is facing an ethnic conflict in 2001, which will later result in the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Furthermore, in 2018, the Prespa Agreement was signed, with which the Republic of Macedonia changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia, which shall be used erga omnes, further, Pursuant to the Agreement, the nationality of the Second Party shall be Macedonian / citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia, the country codes for license plates from MK have been changed to NMK or NM. Today, the Macedonian state is facing many challenges regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impacts on the society, as well as many security challenges which will be discussed in this paper.

2. THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE MACEDONIAN STATE

On January 25th 1991, at a Parliamentary session, the MPs adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, which expresses the sovereignty (...) in accordance with the constitutional provisions for independence and territorial integrity of the Macedonian state, as well as the right of the Macedonian people of self-determination. This Declaration will be the basis for the adoption of the first democratic Constitution. 1

On September 8th 1991, Macedonian citizens declared in a referendum that they wanted to live in an independent and sovereign state of Macedonia. On the referendum question "Are you for an independent and sovereign state of Macedonia, with the right to enter a future union of sovereign states of Yugoslavia" 95.26% of voters voted for an independent state of Macedonia, and only 3.50% against, while invalid were 1.20%. 2

The next important step in building the Macedonian state was the adoption of the Constitution of a sovereign and independent Macedonian state on November 17th 1991. According to the Constitution, Macedonia is a republic with a parliamentary democracy, with the division of state power into legislative, executive and judicial. The preamble of the constitution proclaims that "Macedonia is constituted as a national state of the Macedonian people which ensures full civil equality and permanent coexistence of the Macedonian people with Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia." (Ортаковски 1996:328).

On March 11th 1992, according to the agreement, the newly formed Army of the Republic of Macedonia, with a previously adopted defense law, translated the border control, and shortly afterwards took over the entire border with the garrisons. By April 15th of the same year, the Yugoslav People's Army was leaving Macedonia. (Мирчев 2013:266).

RECOGNITION AND UN MEMBERSHIP

1 Историја на парламентаризмот во Македонија. Parliamentary Institute of RM (2014), Available at: https://www.sobranie.mk/content/%D0%9F%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%BF%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8%20%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BC%20%D0%9F%D0%9F%D0%BC%D0%BC%20%D0%9F%D0%BC%20%D0%9F.pdf (Accessed on 05.03.2021) pp. 3

Shortly after the declaration of independence, the recognition of the Macedonian state by several countries began. Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonia's independence. However, UN membership remains uncertain due to the dispute with Greece over the name of the state of Macedonia.

On April 7th, 1993, the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 817, recommending that the UN General Assembly admitted Macedonia to UN membership under the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. On April 8th, 1993, the Macedonian state was admitted to the UN under the reference Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In 1995, after the signing of the Interim Accord between the Hellenic Republic and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia at the UN, Macedonia changed its national flag and the Constitution.

On October 9th, 1995, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia ratified the Interim Agreement between Macedonia and Greece. (...) On October 15th, 1995, the Greek embargo on Macedonia was lifted and the Macedonian-Greek border was opened for trade of goods and transit of people. (Маролов, Митев 2016:201)

3. FUTURE SECURITY CHALLENGES AND HYBRID THREATS

After the entry of the Republic of North Macedonia into NATO, the public "began to live" with a feeling that causes a state of guaranteed security and safety, as well as a position that guarantees the country and ensures its survival in terms of security. In particular, joining NATO was and is perceived as a position that is a lasting guarantee for the protection of sovereignty and integrity. The general conclusion was that NATO membership alone is sufficient to ensure security, stability, economic, and ultimately socio-cultural progress.

Whether this position of comfort is justified and whether there are processes and conditions that today or in the future could disrupt the position of national security harmony, is a legitimate question. The attempt to offer an answer to the previous question, i.e., a dilemma, should be sought through the analysis of certain historical processes that have taken place in the past. The answer to the question should confirm or deny whether any other NATO member states throughout history have faced certain security challenges, what their appearance was and what steps have been taken to address them.

In the context of the above-stated, we should try to note the most important reasons that have or would have the potential to cause a security crisis in Macedonia. In that direction, with our attempt to present and analyze the reasons with the greatest potential, we should reach a position to define their capacity to endanger national security, which endangerment would go to the extent that institutions will not be able to prevent, properly manage, and control its harmful consequences.
4. ETHNIC TENSIONS AS A FUTURE SECURITY CHALLENGE

When we talk about potential security challenges that Macedonia would face in the future, we do not accidentally imply to note examples from the past which clearly show that NATO membership is not and can not be a guarantee of "absolute security and stability". The greatest proof of the above is the operation "Attila"\(^3\), which was an example of a military conflict between two NATO member states. We have listed Operation Attila as the sole purpose of relativizing claims and thinking that NATO membership is an absolute guarantee of stability and security.

The Macedonian state after the declaration of its independence faced a number of problems and challenges that were of different nature. Namely, throughout the independent history, the country had challenges that were in the field of economy, i.e., ensuring economic existence at the macro level (one of the biggest challenges was the period under Greek embargo), then the transition from social to private capital, the development of interethnic relations in an independent and sovereign state, the military conflict in the country, the Framework Agreement, decentralization and the new territorial division of the country, etc. Through all the previously mentioned periods and socio-political processes, the state somehow managed to find ways and mechanisms to respond to the challenges and to define certain solutions. We should emphasize that not all solutions have proven or are proving to be final in the process of solving the problems for which they were adopted as such.

In the attempt to determine the potential security challenges that Macedonian state faces, the primacy in terms of capacity, potential and likelihood to be the cause of a new security crisis in our country, are interethnic relations. After the end of the military conflict in 2001 and the adoption of the Framework Agreement in August of the same year, a climate of collective thinking was created. This went in the direction that the Framework Agreement and its implementation should mean and contribute to the resolution of all open issues, integration of the Albanian national minority in the state system and improvement of the relations between Macedonians and Albanians, which were significantly disturbed as a result of the military conflict. However, given the fact that social processes are a kind of dynamic situation, we should emphasize that today, twenty years after the adoption of the Framework Agreement, in the Republic of North Macedonia there are still open issues that concern and "disturb" the national passions between Macedonians and Albanians. The best proof that these unresolved, or in the opinion of the political representatives of the Albanians in Macedonia have not been realized as provided by the Framework Agreement, is their participation, signing and defending the so-called public discourse - The Tirana platform, a concept that was the cause of a serious public debate in our country. (Маролов, Стојановски. 2017:865).

The questions that arose basically refer to the need for the existence of that so-called Tirana platform, the danger of its existence, the fact that Albanian politicians insist on it in the process of realization of the political processes in Macedonia, etc. Interethnic relations in Macedonia can be analyzed from different aspects. Will the approach to that analysis be from a position to assess the economic situation, then the socio-cultural differences between

\(^3\)Operation Attila represents the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in July 1974, through which Turkey managed to occupy 40% of Cyprus territory. During the military conflict between the Turkish Cypriots (supported by Turkey) and the Greek Cypriots (supported by Greece), which lasted from July 20 to August 18, 1974, NATO as a military alliance faced for the first time a situation in which that two members of the Alliance are at war with each other. See more at: Erickson, J. Edward, Uyar, Mesut..Phase line Attila: The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974. Marine Corps University Press Quantico, Virginia, 2020.
the communities, and ultimately the political positions of the two dominant ethnic communities in our country, in each of the above areas can be found some open question of one of the communities that has the potential to provoke interethnic tensions that may have certain security implications.

On top of the serious social problems, which are a product of a weak economy, the interethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians will be put to a great test. (..) It is only a matter of time before the dangerous game of mutual accusations between Macedonians and Albanians begins, the same one that is played between parties of the same ethnic group that are more interested in what keeps them in power and in mutual destruction than in welfare of the state and its citizens. (Малески, 2012:493).

The political relations between the main political entities in the Macedonian and Albanian bloc deserve further consideration and analysis. We emphasize the importance of the political processes for the simple reason that in the recent past, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the main political parties did not refrain from (mis) inter-ethnic relations in the direction, i.e., with the sole purpose of achieving certain political ambitions. (Petrevski, 2020:206-207)

The political discourse in the Republic of North Macedonia alone can be seen as a potential generator of security crises or conditions that could have serious consequences for the future of our country. Political parties, and thus political representatives in the past thirty years of Macedonian statehood have built a culture of behavior whose main feature is the low or insufficient level of personal (moral) responsibility.

Another phenomenon that deserves to be mentioned, and which refers to the political relations among the ethnic communities in the Republic of North Macedonia is accountable to politicians. Most of the former, but also current political officials, from all levels of government, have built a system with its main value contained in the tendency to prove responsibility before the party bodies, i.e., personally in front of the party leader4. In order to achieve a degree of greater objectivity, it is good to mention the fact that the ethnic division of political parties is in some way a product of the first Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia since 1991, i.e., since the process of its adoption, as well as the very moment of its adoption. If the approach to the adoption of the Constitution then was different or from this time distance we would say more inclusive for the Albanians as a minority as well as for their political representatives from that time, today maybe the Macedonian state would develop in a way that political entities would not address only the ethnic group to which they belong. An important issue that is also part of the spectrum of political issues, i.e., political relations in Macedonia is also the census. Basically, the situation is paradoxical why a statistical operation such as the census should attract so much public attention in general, and especially among political actors or political entities as such. There are several answers to this question, but perhaps the most concise is the answer that goes in the direction of proving that the political situation in the country depends on the statistical operation.

The Macedonian state has not conducted a census since 2002, when based on the received data, the state tried to manage the processes. After the census, the first serious challenge the country faced was the decentralization process. Through the adoption of the Law on Territorial Organization in 2004 based on the provisions contained in the Law, a process of reducing the number of municipalities5 started. The reduction of the number of

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4See more at: https://makfax.com.mk/makedonija/205432/
5See more at: Law on Territorial Organization of Local Self-Government in the Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 55/04, 12 / 05.98 / 08,106 / 08.
municipalities was carried out in such a way that the authorities in the country decided to join the merger of certain settlements with others and thus delineated the new territorial organization. The adoption of this Law was preceded by a referendum, which was initiated by collecting 150,000 signatures. However, the referendum was not successful, and the referendum question failed to mobilize a sufficient number of voters who would declare that they support it, i.e., they want to remain in the territorial organization of the country provided and determined previously in the Law on Territorial Division of the Republic of Macedonia.

The conducting of the referendum and later the adoption of the Law on Territorial Organization of Local Self-Government in the Republic of Macedonia were processes that were followed by a number of political skirmishes and various political combinatorics. The unsuccessful referendum for the then government meant an open position and an opportunity to approach the process of passing a new Law on Territorial Organization of Local Self-Government. With the entry into force of the new Law, the situation has changed significantly. Namely, certain urban areas where Macedonians dominated before the adoption of the law, suddenly found themselves in a situation not to be in the majority. This was the case with the towns of Tetovo, Kicevo, Struga, Debar and Gostivar. Losing the primacy as the most numerous community on the other hand meant leading to a situation in the future, the election of a new mayor or councilors in certain municipalities to directly depend on the votes of Albanians. The reason why we used this digression which refers to the consequences of the last census in Macedonia, in fact, is the attempt to predict the processes that would follow the maintenance of the announced census to be held in September 2021. Depending on the state of the data that will be obtained, we can expect the emergence of certain policies that will go in the direction of "bringing back to life" the policies for federal government. Macedonian authorities and political representatives of the two largest communities in the country should be extremely careful and not allow the country to enter a situation that will again cause a new intolerance of the Macedonian-Albanian relationship, a position that in the long run no one can control and manage properly. Exactly such a situation can be the reason for new "controlled security incidents" that would aim to contribute to justifying the arguments that the state system in the country should and must undergo some change and that multiethnic processes failed in their proper and sufficient implementation to prevent such processes.

5. HYBRID THREATS AS A FUTURE SECURITY CHALLENGE

The term hybrid war is gaining more importance in the political circles and the media after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The current war in Syria, as well as the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, are also considered hybrid warfare. Until recently, for the term hybrid war, in our professional literature the term special war was used (as a set of psychological-propaganda, intelligence-subversive, terrorist, economic) taken by one or more countries against another country or countries, in order to destabilize, interference in the internal affairs of the state as well as interference in political, economic interests, causing riots and crises, inciting national, religious hatred and intolerance, etc.

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7 See more at: Law on Territorial Division of the Republic of Macedonia and Determination of the Areas of the Units of Local Self-Government, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 49/96.
8 See more at Vuckovic N. Prilog pojmovnom odredjenju sintagme "Hibridni rat" Available at: http://repozitorijum.diplomacy.bg.ac.rs/191/1/hr_tematski_zbornik_2_1555574872-12-28.pdf Accessed: 10.04.2021
Hybrid warfare is the basis for detecting and articulating hybrid risks and creating hybrid threats to a country’s security in order to influence its weaknesses and enable the realization of its own interests, without (or with the minimal) use of direct military power. The concept of hybrid warfare sums up a combination of conventional, unconventional, terrorist, criminal, psychological, economic, energy and other instruments for destabilizing states. (Митровић 2017:336).

The change of power relations between the existing actors, as well as the emergence of new actors, contribute to the emergence of another phenomenon, which in today’s way of life and in everyday political processes has a great (in certain situations also decisive) influence. Namely, it is about the increased influence of public opinion and the incredibly fast flow of information that affects its creation at a distance of thousands of kilometers⁹.

The use of the term hybrid war or hybrid threat is gaining importance due to the fact that the political representatives in our country are seriously exploiting it, and ultimately "vulgarizing" its use. Often, the political representatives in Macedonia, when the country faces a certain security challenge, can come out with a statement that this situation is the result of a certain hybrid attack by a third force, i.e., a country¹⁰.

Thereby, a part of the Macedonian political elite, whether they are representatives of the Government or the opposition and whether they are from the Macedonian or Albanian political bloc, enter into a discussion and try to speak the truth, defining it according to their criteria and standards, do not refrain from stigmatizing the political enemy and often pretend that their position is the absolute truth, while the opposite side uses "fake news" as a means of manipulating and acting on the public.

The danger that the Macedonian state faces is identical to the danger that every other country in the world faces. Basically, this situation is a result of the redefining of the power relations between the existing actors - states and the emergence of new actors, transnational corporations, NGOs, terrorists, global insurgents, organized crime networks, mafia cartels and other atypical structures. (Popovska, 2019:36)

If we talk and accept the opinion that hybrid wars are a new type of war or the so-called new wars, then we need to list the key differences between the new wars and the old ones (classic wars). Namely, according to Mary Caldar, there are four key differences: actors, goals, methods of warfare and forms of funding. (Kaldor 2012:423)

The fact that the Republic of North Macedonia is part of the global processes is a sufficient reason or condition for our country to be exposed to hybrid threats. The question that is legitimate in this context is how and in what form one can expect the application of a certain hybrid threat in the Republic of North Macedonia. If the old (classical) wars were fought for i.e., from ideological and geopolitical interests, then the modern or new wars where the hybrid war as such belongs are fought for completely different interests and goals. New wars are fought in the name of identity (ethnic, religious or tribal). (Popovska 2019:42)

In this framework of ethnic and religious conflicts, the greatest potential should be sought when it comes to the future threat to the Republic of North Macedonia from a hybrid war. Ethnic and religious conflicts as a potential hybrid threat which the country faces, are

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actually part of the spectrum of identity issues that have recently become very relevant in our country. This is especially the case when it comes to ethnic issues, which for the most part have often been (mis)used in recent times by various political actors, not only from the domestic political scene, but also to certain neighboring countries. The identity issues or the threat that we can absolve as a hybrid for the Republic of North Macedonia also comes from the activities of certain NGOs\textsuperscript{11} which are related to other countries (mostly from the immediate neighborhood of the Macedonian state) and which act in order to actualize or problematize the identity bases of the Macedonian people and its history\textsuperscript{12}.

In addition to the work of NGOs, in direction of achieving a certain impact in our country, our security infrastructure, i.e., our security services and the overall potential that we have as a country, we should be aware of achieving a certain impact on some foreign country through religion i.e., through representatives of certain religious communities. Religion can easily be used as a tool to achieve certain (political) goals and as a method for ideological indoctrination of the population which at some point is a "legitimate goal"\textsuperscript{13}.

6. CONCLUSION

From the content of the paper, as well as from our approach regarding the issues that are absolved in it, we want to note several conclusions regarding certain issues. First, NATO as a military-political alliance has its role in the process of building the democratic capacities of a country, but at the same time NATO does not have the appropriate mechanisms to act to prevent certain internal political tensions caused by certain issues of ethnic or national, ultimately also religious character. There is a need to raise the level of the political culture and responsibility of the holders of political office in the country. Greater efficiency of the called institutions in the field of the security sector is needed in order to increase the possibilities and potentials for prevention of hybrid threats from third countries. We also consider it important that the conduct of the census as a statistical operation is at the moment when all the necessary conditions for it are met, as well as at the moment when a political consensus is reached on this issue.


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