

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

from the forum

***“The Republic of Macedonia and NATO and EU membership:
Results, Expectations and Perspectives,”***

organized by

**The Association of Macedonian Alumni of the
“George C. Marshall” European Center for Security Studies**

The forum began with introductory remarks from Dr. Detlef Pul, professor at the Center for European Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and from Dr. Stojan Slaveski, member of the Association of Macedonian Alumni of the European Center for Security Studies. Following the introductory remarks a fruitful discussion ensued, the conclusions of which are given below.

The Republic of Macedonia's determination to seek EuroAtlantic integration is backed by a general consensus among the country's political parties and is broadly supported by public opinion. However, there is some concern regarding the status of the reform program that the country has undertaken to implement in its bid for EuroAtlantic integration. Regardless of the efforts made by the government and the positive assessments given by NATO and the EU, much remains to be done on the domestic front. The road the country is following is the right one, but the pace of progress has slackened.

However, NATO and the EU are facing numerous internal problems and are themselves undergoing a process of transformation. Hence the enlargement issue is not currently the prime concern of either organization. While the Republic of Macedonia cannot directly influence events in NATO or the EU, it should nonetheless monitor developments closely and avoid becoming a hostage to internal conflicts within the two organizations. With this goal in mind, Macedonia needs to seek allies among the NATO and EU member-countries. These would lobby on our behalf and champion our application for membership in the two institutions.

To hasten achievement of our goal of membership in the Alliance and the Union, the following steps, among others, need to be taken:

First, the pace of reform should be accelerated. Now that we have the status of "NATO member aspirant" and "EU member candidate," the doors for our membership in these organizations are wide open. Whether we will achieve our goal sooner rather than later will depend on how successful we are in our reform efforts. We should abandon the attitude that the integration process will ultimately be smoother sailing if we hold off for a while on pushing for full membership. On the contrary, the day when Macedonia accedes to NATO or EU membership is the day when the serious work begins. This applies in particular to the task of fulfilling the obligations that come with membership, especially NATO's collective defense missions. However, emphasis should be placed on those reforms which are related to EU membership.

Second, during the next NATO summit in 2006, when the transformation of NATO will be debated, the Republic of Macedonia should request that the final communiqué include a commitment to discuss the enlargement issue at the 2008 summit. That, in fact, is what the countries of the Vilnius Group were given at the 1999 Washington summit – and we were not given at the Istanbul summit in 2004. Specifically, in the Final Declaration of the Washington summit it was emphasized that the next summit, at which enlargement would be discussed, would be held no later than 2002. Which is what happened. Support for our position comes in a statement given to Radio Free Europe by the new American ambassador to NATO, Victoria Newland. In it, the U.S. envoy says that the spring 2008 summit will be devoted to the question of enlargement of the alliance. This has recently been confirmed by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer during his meeting in Vienna with the Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schäussel.

Third, work should continue at the regional level, but NATO and the EU should be asked to evaluate our progress separately. We are faced with a dilemma: Does Macedonia stand a better chance of being accepted into Europe if it forms part of a group – as was the case with the Visegrad and Vilnius groups – or should we go it alone? The so-called "regatta principle" or separate start of negotiations has been applied by EU in the case of Croatia and Turkey. This means that the country would be evaluated individually, based on its individual achievements.

So far as the EU is concerned, the advantage is that decisions are adopted at summits which take place at least twice a year, whereas in NATO summits are held only once every two to three years. However, the Republic of Macedonia should not allow itself to become a hostage to any regional developments.

Fourth, the Republic of Macedonia should secure a strategic partner for NATO and EU membership. The strategic partnership with the USA has yielded positive results: recognition of our constitutional name and assistance with defense reforms; however, we should be aware that we do not represent the chief focus of American interests. They are a superpower with numerous commitments, whereas we are a small nation; hence it is only realistic that we not expect the Americans to give our concerns their highest priority. Strategic partners should therefore be sought among the European great powers (the United Kingdom, Germany, France), as well as in the region (Turkey, Slovenia) and among neighboring states that are interested in maintaining stability in the Balkans (Bulgaria, Greece). We need a country that will throw its weight behind us, the way Austria did for Croatia and Greece did for Cyprus. Furthermore, all contacts at the bilateral level should be used to lobby for our membership in these organizations.

Fifth, the Republic of Macedonia needs to convince the European public that the EU needs Macedonia. In short, we have to sell the "Macedonian story." This is a task not only for our diplomats but for every Macedonian citizen who has contacts with people from abroad. Simply put, we need to accentuate the positive values that our country stands for. In line with that, the Ministry of External Affairs is to be commended for its work in drafting the document entitled "Nine

reasons why Macedonia deserves a place in the project called United Europe." There are certainly more than nine reasons why we should be part of the EuroAtlantic family, and all of them need to be communicated and constantly reiterated.

Sixth – and this is probably the most important thing we need in order to reach our goal – we must have perseverance and faith in ourselves. It is important for everyone to recognize that there is no other alternative, and that the very process of cooperation, transformation, internal reform, fulfillment of the criteria and standards for EuroAtlantic integration will make our country stronger and more secure. Therefore, the maximum of concentration needs to be applied to this process. The future of Macedonia and its security, stability and prosperity depend *above all* on ourselves. The more steadfast we are in our efforts to change our way of thinking, to become more tolerant towards each other and to cherish our mutuality, to embrace the European pattern of behavior, the quicker and less painful it will be for us to become a part of the EuroAtlantic family.

Finally, we would like to mention that in 2006 the association plans to organize expert forums and round-table discussions, covering issues that are of key importance to the prosperity of the Republic of Macedonia. In line with that, we anticipate support from those state institutions that are most closely involved in EuroAtlantic integration.

Skopje, 30.01.2006