

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

from the forum

"Republic of Macedonia Expecting Invitation for NATO Membership"

organized by

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

Skopje, 12.12.2007

The forum was attended by many representatives from the governmental and non governmental sector and international organizations and institutions, as well as by a significant number of association members. The event began with welcoming remarks by Prof. Stojan Kuzev, president of the association and by Mr. Zoran Petrov, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs (sponsor of the event.), Introductory presentations were given by Mr. Marko Spirkovski, MFA representative and an association member, and by Prof. Fritz Rathemaher, of the European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch Partenkirchen. Following the presentations, a rich and fruitful discussion ensued concerning the criteria that aspirant countries need to fulfill for NATO membership and the results the Republic of Macedonia has achieved in that area. The salient points of the discussion are set forth below.

Reforms in Macedonia in fulfillment of Alliance criteria:

The Republic of Macedonia (RM) is facing an historical opportunity to receive an invitation for NATO membership. There can be no excuses, either from the Macedonian or from the Alliance side, if the anticipated invitation does not materialize. It is therefore appropriate that we ask how RM is meeting the challenges of its bid for membership and what results RM can point to in order to bolster its candidacy.

Countries aspiring to NATO membership are expected to achieve certain political and economic goals. This means solving all international, ethnic or territorial disputes in a peaceful manner. Further, aspirant nations must demonstrate support for the rule of law and respect for human rights, in addition to promoting stability and prosperity through economic freedom and social justice.

On the issue of solving *territorial disputes in a peaceful manner*, it is worth noting that RM does not have any unsolved disputes with Albania or Bulgaria. Rather, relations with these countries are progressing smoothly.

Where Serbia is concerned, the alliance has noted that Macedonia's relations with that country are strained by the unresolved issue of the future status of Kosovo and by the reluctance of the Serbian Orthodox Church to recognize the Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, this is not viewed as negative by NATO because RM does not bear the responsibility for these unresolved issues, and, in fact, shows a willingness to cooperate.

RM maintains good relations with Kosovo and has aligned itself with NATO and EU policy on the future status of Kosovo. The issue of delineating the border between RM and Serbia (Kosovo) remains technical in nature and will be resolved when the final status of Kosovo is determined. Therefore, it is recommended that RM maintain "close contacts with the Kosovo administration at all levels."

In RM's relationship with Greece, "the name issue remains dominant;" however, economic relations with Greece are developing in a positive direction. The Alliance has made it clear that it would be pleased to see a "mutually acceptable and timely resolution of the name issue". However, it is emphasized that RM's name is not a criterion for NATO membership. RM's proactive role in this dispute (proposal for signing a declaration of good neighborly relations and for establishing a bilateral commission on history textbooks, as well as the proposal for more frequent meetings at the highest

levels) is an argument which enhances the positions of the Macedonian side and helps to develop neighborly relations and overcome the dispute.

As for inter-ethnic relationships in the country, since the conflict in 2001, implementation of the Framework Agreement (FA) has been the gauge of political stability in the country. The government of RM continues to focus on commensurate representation of ethnic minorities in state institutions and on the process of decentralization. The Alliance recommends that we continue with the practical implementation of FA, although it is suggested that more effort be made to "ensure the quality of minority candidates for high level positions." The selection of candidates, the Alliance urges, should be transparent and non-partisan.

RM is advised to continue to implement the FA, giving particular attention to the section which deals with the "usage of the Albanian language and implementation of laws on the use of ethnic symbols."

On the question of decentralization, the Alliance points out that it will be a challenge to "secure the cooperation of all mayors, regardless of their ethnic affiliation". Overall, the Alliance is pleased with the "*protection of ethnic minorities and the protection and respect for human rights*", although improving the conditions in prisons will require major reform.

As for the *rule of law*, the considerable progress made in judicial reforms has been welcomed. However, we are urged to continue to devote appropriate attention to "enhancing the independence, efficiency and capacities of the judiciary". The first challenge for the legal system will be to try the four sensitive "Hague cases" in the courts of RM. We will be expected to clear up the cases of irregularities connected with the last parliamentary elections. In addition, the new election law, which is before parliament right now, should only be adopted after a broad consensus is achieved.

Passage of the Law on Police will set the stage for a new challenge: selection by municipal councils of the 38 station commanders. Furthermore, it is recommended that RM draw on international assistance for effective control over the whole length of its borders.

On the fight against corruption, the government of RM receives high marks for its commitment to this issue and the results it has achieved (RM is ranked 84th on the index of perceived corruption, a significant improvement over the previous year, when it was ranked 105th). Still, it is noted that the fight against corruption will remain a "major challenge" and it is important that cases of corruption be successfully resolved without political or any other kind of influence.

Another important element of the rule of law is the building a "professional and impartial state administration". Everyone is aware that this cannot be achieved in the short term; however, the civil service must be depoliticized.

The government and the opposition should maintain the positive political climate which was created in recent months when many important decisions were taken. The goal should be to fulfill the remaining obligations before the summit in Bucharest.

The Alliance appreciates the contribution RM is making to regional cooperation in South East Europe (SEE), especially the leading role it has in chairing the SEDM process within the Adriatic Charter. The country is also actively involved in other international organizations and programs. Special appreciation is expressed for Macedonia's active support of the Partnership Action Plan (PARP) in the fight against terrorism.

Finally, RM reminds the Alliance that its accession to NATO will mean stabilization of the region.

The Alliance welcomes this year's 5% increase in Macedonia's gross national product (GNP); this is the biggest jump in GNP since independence. It enabled the economy to approach the results achieved before independence. (95% of the results achieved in 1998). However, it should be noted that the rate of unemployment is high and there is a lack of direct foreign investment. The Alliance expects, the government of RM to accelerate the implementation of economic reforms, giving particular attention to cutting unemployment and further improving the business climate. An internal

economic dynamic should be created so as to gain greater trust in the eyes of the international financing institutions. In that way, long term progress and economic stability will be secured.

Support for NATO membership among the political parties and the public is high (consistently around 90%). Such high support is undoubtedly contributing to Macedonian aspirations for NATO membership, although it appears that the public is still not aware what NATO membership means and what benefits and commitments are entailed. Therefore, the government should mount a campaign to explain this to the people.

Regarding defense and military issues, the Alliance requires aspiring countries to be capable of contributing to the joint defense and to future NATO missions. Therefore, in 2002 RM began participating in NATO missions, sending two staff officers to Afghanistan. Today there are about 250 ARM members serving in missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon. So far, more than 1000 personnel have participated in these missions. In addition, RM in its role as host nation, assists the NATO mission in Kosovo. This represents a major transformation in the defense system of the country. Formerly a nation that had to seek NATO's help in solving its own security problems, RM has now become an active participant in the efforts of the key international players (NATO, EU, UN and USA) to bring stability to the world's crisis regions.

Although the Alliance assessment regarding defense and military issues is positive, there are certain challenges to overcome. Chief among them is adoption of a new national security strategy and upgrading of the nation's defense strategy, thus completing the framework for Macedonia's security and defense policy. After several postponements, it is expected that these documents will be adopted in June 2008. Here, it should be emphasized that the updating of these documents should be an ongoing activity, in accordance with changes in the security environment, and that these issues should not be allowed to burden the reform agenda for an extended period of time.

RM will be expected to improve coordination throughout the crisis management system, which will be under the direction of the newly established Crisis Management Center. Exercises planned for this year will provide an opportunity to test all elements of the system.

The end of 2007 saw completion of the final phase of the implantation of the Dynamic Plan for Transformation of the Army, as envisaged in the Strategic Defense Review (SDR) that was adopted in 2004. The Ministry of Defense drafted ministerial guidelines (July 2007) and a long term plan for improving the defense system (2008-2009). Together these provided the framework and direction for further development of defense capacities. In these ambitious documents, it is envisaged that the armed forces will participate in the whole spectrum of military operations, ranging from peace-support operations to high-intensity military operations. In line with that, it is expected that by 2018, 40% of the armed forces will be deployable abroad, with 8% to be engaged in missions. By 2010, the armed forces must be ready to deploy one infantry battalion with a minimum of 500 troops in a NATO-led operation. By 2014, this capacity needs to increase to a battalion combat group with a minimum of 1000 troops for a period of 6 months. The armed forces should be capable of taking part simultaneously in three long-term operations. By 2014, the armed forces should have 90% of its estimated requirement in manpower and equipment. (Plans call for 7700 active-duty personnel and 1500 reserves.) Also, by 2010, the army is expected to prepare one infantry company for NATO NRF forces. Another urgent item on the agenda (by the end of 2008) is the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and General Staff (GS) of ARM reorganization plan. The aim is to enhance efficiency, to decentralize functions, to improve management, to enhance planning capacities and to eliminate overlapping the functions among the MOD, GS of ARM and Joint Operational Command (JOC). In addition there needs to be continued modernization of the army's capabilities as well as settlement of questions concerning the monitoring of airspace and linkage with the corresponding capacities of the Alliance. Decisions also need to be made on issues relating to the patrolling of the nation's airspace.

All these ambitious plans and unresolved issues should be brought to closure in the coming period. Granted, we are not required to do that by the summit in Bucharest. However, it is important that we adhere to deadlines and demonstrate the ability to track changes in the defense environment and respond appropriately. Also, we should be aware that the MOD and GS of ARM. will not be able to carry out these plans unless they receive strong support from the government.

The Alliance requires that the defense budget of aspirant countries to be not less than the average of all member countries. (Currently this figure is about 2% of GNP). Resources allocated to defense in RM are projected to be 2.3% to 2.6% of GNP. However, allocation of these resources has not achieved NATO standards: 50% for personnel, 30% for operations and maintenance, 20% for modernization and equipment. (In 2006, costs for personnel were about 48.53%, for operations and maintenance 32.57% and for modernization and equipment 16.22%.) It is anticipated that in 2008 the defense budget will be fully compliant with NATO standards. Until now, RM has been using Warsaw Initiative funds and bilateral assistance from NATO countries to finance the activities of the PFP program. The costs of participation in the Iraq and Afghanistan operations have been covered partly by the domestic budget and partly by coalition partners. As a serious candidate for membership in the Alliance, we have begun to relinquish this assistance, wishing to be seen as a credible partner that can meet its obligations on its own. In line with that, the government of RM anticipates spending an additional 170 million denars in 2008 to support ARM participation in peace-keeping operations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Alliance is reforming its policies and carrying out internal changes, in a bid to maintain its position in a rapidly evolving world. Its policy of *An alliance with extended interests* is reflected in promotion of the Partnership for Peace Program. At the same time, the Alliance has limited its commitments by refusing to provide security guarantees. This shows that NATO is not sure about its own future. If the Alliance does not proceed cautiously, there are a number of delicate situations in the Balkans and the Near East that the wrong policy and a lack of sensitivity could aggravate rather than ameliorate.

Our country is a candidate for NATO membership, an alliance of states that provides a joint defense against an external threat – which directly covers only the military-political aspects of the defense of member-countries. It also establishes conditions for implementing the economic dimension and to a certain extent the social one but, due to the very nature of the organization, does not satisfy the needs of the ecological dimension. For this reason, the Alliance is not and cannot be an all-encompassing defense umbrella for any country. And most importantly, NATO membership will not solve all of the country's security problems. The Alliance is primarily a military-political organization directed towards external threats, whereas in our view the internal stability of the country is considerably more important.

Additionally, defense should receive more emphasis in the security policy of the Republic of Macedonia, thus creating a factor of credibility that will provide the *military* component of our national security. A key plank in our security policy is the creation of armed forces capable of responding to threats effectively and appropriately and preserving our territorial integrity and sovereignty, thus lending credibility to the nation's defense capacities. Training and education in the ARM should reflect existing threats to our national security and should draw on lessons learned during the 2001 crisis as well as on experience gained in peace-support operations. Participation in these operations enhances the interoperability of the Macedonian armed forces and their defense readiness. At the same time, the Republic of Macedonia shows that it can be not only a "consumer" of security but also a "creator" of it. Security policy must have two features: political engagement and military involvement.

In our opinion, there is no alternative for Macedonia except our integration into the EuroAtlantic structures. This integration will create the conditions for meeting all the requirements of our national security. The very process of cooperation, transformation, internal reforms, and satisfying the criteria of EuroAtlantic integration will make the country stronger and more secure. The future of the Republic of Macedonia and its security and stability depend above all on ourselves, that is the members of all the ethnic communities that live in the country. The only way to succeed is *to show mutual respect, and trust, to share the same goals, to learn from each other and by working together to turn conflicts from destructive into constructive ones*. In a world where there are different individuals and different ethnic groups, conflicts are normal. However, their transformation from negative

into positive ones requires much patience, much collective effort, and constructive learning, but most of all mutual trust and confidence. The more committed we are to changing our way of thinking, to being more tolerant of each other, to nurturing our unity, to accepting the European pattern of behavior, the faster and less painfully we shall become members of the EuroAtlantic family. But even then, not all the threats to our national security will disappear, for the simple reason that changes occur both inside and outside in our country.

Therefore, the security policy of the country must be global in its character and every threat to the national security – be it military, political, economic, social or ecological – must be carefully evaluated. On the other hand, all aspects of security policy, especially the social aspect, must be subjected to continuous review, and the most appropriate solutions must constantly be sought. The world we are living in is a world of continuous change and only good and timely solutions can provide perspective to the national security of the Republic of Macedonia.

The Association of Macedonian Alumni of the “George C. Marshall” European Center for Security Studies will continue to follow Macedonia's advance towards EuroAtlantic integration and hopes that its observations and suggestions will contribute to making that journey more successful.

Skopje, 04.03.2008