

Being Blacklisted by the USA: The Western Balkan's Trap

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The Macedonian public (or I should say, a vast majority of it) is troubled and upset by the news from the White House.

Joe Biden's Executive Order Blocking Property and Suspending Entry Into the United States of Certain Persons Contributing to the Destabilizing Situation in the Western Balkans accompanied by Notice on the Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to the Western Balkans was issued on 8 June 2021.

At this moment I am not aware of the reactions in the other Western Balkan countries, but the bottom line is that this is much ado about nothing (new)!

The key point is that the pawn states get occasionally surprised by something that is far from being unimportant but has been present all along; actually, occasionally they awake from the delusion of national independence and popular sovereignty.

For a short while - and then get back to sleepwalking.

The bare fact is that the executive order has been updated in the last 20 years. There is nothing novel, except that the new agreements, the brainchildren of the US corridors of powers, get listed along with the Dayton Agreement, the Kumanovo Agreement, and the Ohrid Framework Agreement. These are the agreements mediated by Washington D.C. with more or less assistance by Brussels, which allegedly 'resolved' the bloody conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia and 'stabilized the region', which is of national interest and even important for the national security of the USA.

The Macedonian public (still traumatized by the forceful name change of 2018/2019 due to the agreement concluded between Skopje and Athens) reacts to the implicit threat that any dissent against the Prespa Agreement (as well as the 2001 Ohrid Framework agreement) would be seen as a hostile act against the US and would be treated accordingly.

The Executive Order states that inter alia it targets

“actors engaged in a violation of, or an act that has obstructed or threatened the implementation of, any regional security, peace, cooperation, or mutual recognition agreement or framework or accountability mechanism related to the Western Balkans beyond previous E.O.s, to include the Prespa Agreement...”

In short, the USA is ‘concerned’ about the possible destabilization of the region.

In one of my recent scholarly articles, I explained the geopolitics of the Prespa Agreement (PA), and why it destabilizes the country and the region rather than promotes peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

The PA served the US (and NATO) interests in the context of the multipolar micro-system in the Balkan region but has severely harmed the national (and even vital) interests of the small Macedonian state. Who cares about the academic views, after all? However, many of my colleagues and friends got concerned that from now on they will not be allowed to criticize the PA and the Ohrid Framework Agreement (that introduced a power-sharing system between the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians and thus turned the country into a consociational political arrangement that is as ineffective and corrupted as the Dayton Bosnia still is). It struck me at a moment that this interpretation of an old and revamped Executive order may serve as an excuse for further self-censorship and silence in academia. My response to them is the following:

Not that those in the fortress Kale (i.e. the US Embassy in Skopje) and their servants have not taken notice of my public dissent since long ago and are aware of exactly who I am and what (I) cannot do – but still, there is an urge to tell them publicly that I do not care about the executive orders of their president (I don’t give a damn) but I do care about their deeds.

My very existence, my voice, the constant use of the words Macedonia&Macedonians (never Northern) is (for now) my only way of resisting against the neo-colonial master.

By the way, this text was originally written in Macedonian and is going to be published as my regular newspaper column (as long as there is no censorship or pressure on the editor) but I thought it was not enough. So here it is in English too, to make myself even clearer to the thought police. My criticism is also neither a new one nor concerns only the US policy towards my country. I have been outspoken against *Pax Americana* both at home and abroad for years, but since 2018 I am especially proud of myself whenever I manage to publish or speak about Macedonia, stubbornly repeating the (old) constitutional name to the awe of the Greek and Western public.

All the fuss over Biden’s supposedly ‘new order’, which would punish anyone who directly or indirectly opposed the Ohrid and Prespa Accords, is not only exaggerated but it benefits the establishment and its media and civilian satellites, who get the wind at their backs boasting that Washington stands by them and that they are on the right side of history. Prime Minister Zaev even put it explicitly:

“The US – the most perfect democracy in the world sent a most serious message to all defectors and faultfinders.”

It’s indeed hard to understand the short memory syndrome even with smart people: this executive order is 20 years old! It’s only being renewed (updated) along with the new

American successes that need to be protected. It's both deplorable and ridiculous to consider the Dayton, Kumanovo, Ohrid, and now Prespa agreements as issues of US national security – but it's nothing new. I would not be surprised if the next executive order include the so-called Bulgarian agreement that is currently re-negotiated between Skopje and Sofia in a way to completely de-Macedonianize anything that has been missed in the other two agreements. (It would not be a surprise if the annex is renamed into Dojran Agreement, thus all natural lakes' names will be well-used for labeling the international arrangements of the Macedonian protectorate.

The Executive Order's references to anti-corruption is a circus is to die of laughter: one would think they got really concerned at the White House for crime and corruption in the region (since, there is no political and other corruption in the US House of Cards at all, trust me). Without the so-called 'Balkan methods' (as the then EU Enlargement Commissioner Hahn called them in October 2018) there would not have been a constitutional change in Macedonia at all! The entire endeavor of crisis management, state building and 'therapeutic governance' introduced by Washington (with the help of Brussels) is based exactly on selection and bringing on power suitable 'Balkan princes' (who have no clue who was Machiavelli). All they need is to be cooperative and obedient to Western interests. In their free time, they can run various dirty businesses, marijuana and hard drugs, sell out all natural resources, make deals with the urban mafia, etc. – as long as they guarantee stabilitocracy in the state and the region, i.e. in the Western sphere of interest.

Stabilitocracy is just a new academic expression of an old phenomenon – of vassalage for the sake of the status quo that is in favor of the colonial master. Apart from the political establishment composed of mainly injudicious and greedy characters, the operation has already yielded results where mind, reason, academic freedom and/or intellectual dissent are expected. A brilliant columnist (Igor Radev) described extremely well the phenomenon of our 'brown sahibs', and their mission to establish and cultivate Western cultural hegemony, which is more powerful than overt physical/military occupation. This is a direct attack on the collective mind of a nation and on individuals: the ultimate result is the 'captive mind', usually linked known to the communist dictatorships. To be a 'dangerous element' or a black sheep on a blacklist of dictatorships, Eastern or Western, is an honor for anyone who sticks to himself/herself and his/her integrity, whom power neither can blind nor corrupt.

Some of us have been talking for a long time about the neocolonial vise we are stuck in, which we are often not even aware of because it is veiled in a package of wishful thinking of progress, Western values, integration etc. Here one will hardly find at least ten prominent people who will dare say they are against Macedonia's membership in NATO and the EU. Even if among them there is someone who is against the military alliance (for various reasons), the criticism against the corporate and imperial EU will stand in his/her throat.

Until we admit that we are slaves, we will not even know how to start fighting for freedom – or what to do with it! Biden's order (previously enacted and changed by each of his predecessors) is merely the example of the 'cowboy way' of dealing with potential adversaries. Of course, we who only write and speak are insignificant and unimportant for the power corners: they know that our influence is still limited or timid. If by any chance our voice is heard wider or articulated politically, other disciplinary measures will follow, for which not issuing a US visa will be a joke. We are dealing here with a ruthless Lord of the Rings: Assange, Manning and Snowden are the best illustrations of what is happening to those who speak the truth to power.

What should we learn from such a powerful and continuous insistence on the implementation of the Ohrid and Prespa Agreements, raised to the level of the Holy Scriptures, by the White House? First of all, it means that there is nothing left of our national sovereignty!

We are an empty shell, nominally a state, and de facto a protectorate. The key of the 'eternal clause' for non-change of the Constitution (i.e. the basic social contract) is in their hands and a single letter cannot be altered without their blessing.

The experience teaches us that they give amen only when it is in their own interest, even if it assumes paying dearly with further de-Macedonianization. Let me remind that the Ohrid Agreement was originally drafted in English by American experts, it was never ratified by the parliament or supported on a referendum. It was cast into constitutional amendments in November 2001 under duress from within and from abroad. It can hardly be named a constitution – it's a manifest of a continuous capitulation and self-denial).

The inclusion of the Ohrid Agreement into the preamble in 2019 was just a 'cherry on the top of the American pie.' The annual reports or executive orders that come from the West are meant to guarantee the existence of the deeply divided binational state – as long as it suits the colonial master. Actually, the previous US Ambassador had already prepared the ground for an alleged dialogue over the possible federalization of the country, which is a step short of its final separation along ethnic lines. All proposals for a new Constituent Assembly that would draft a normal, civic constitutional text, are just cries of some courageous people who have probably decided that traveling to the West is not a priority in their lives.

The Prespa Agreement is a bit of a tragicomic story bearing in mind its content. It seems as if the US national interest was to resolve the dispute over who Alexander the Great belonged to and who are 'real' Macedonians.

The deal was allegedly concluded between representatives of two sovereign states in a form of a bilateral treaty in which the United States allegedly had no influence (I discussed the matter with my Greek colleague Alexis Heraclides, who recently published a book on the Macedonian issue, but he remained convinced there was no American interference or arm-twisting). The executive orders speak differently.

Furthermore, neither the document was written by the representatives of the Macedonian and Greek sides, nor was it agreed through direct negotiations as the official narrative goes. It was an enforced document, the brainchild of the Western corridors of power, and this is still is a project that must not fail. We still remember how the agreement was introduced in the Constitution: against the will of the people expressed on the 2018 referendum, against the constitutional procedure, by bribing and intimidating MPs, etc.

Any intellectual flashes that come from some of our most brilliant people who have preserved the power to *imagine* a better Macedonia, and to suggest visions and strategies, and even call us that it is time to wake up – are encouraging individual acts. In an atmosphere where Biden's 'order' is the wind at the back to the duplicitous and inept government, the loyal civil sector, and even the academic credentials that come from my colleagues, any such public appearance is and will be tantamount to personal heroism. But the question is, can we change something collectively, together? This is a rhetorical question, of course.

Even these we are symbolically rebelling against will not mind if we stand for democratic processes, human rights, non-discrimination, international integration, the fight against corruption (which must not take its toll when it comes to ruling elites and the pandemic of inequality) – as long as our plans are not too radical (i.e. do not get to the root of things). The root of the problem is not only in our incompetence but also in the fact that we are an occupied territory with a people that are not yet ready for self-sacrifice, powerless and stripped out of its identity, humiliated and frightened.

Fear, conformism and opportunism are dangerous matters – a cancerous wound for every libertarian mind. I see it in my immediate environment when in a closed meeting among a dozen colleagues, the head of the department persistently talks about North Macedonia (I do not know if she is afraid of being betrayed by someone that she is politically incorrect or because she benefits from cooperation). It is reminiscent of scenes familiar with Stalinism, Orwell's 1984, the 1948 Informbureau aftermath – afraid of each other, people chose self-censorship. Nothing new, right? The only novelty is that this pressure now comes from the West.

How to move on from here? Only by keeping the embers smoldering and not letting them completely extinguish. By adding fuel, protecting them from strong winds, and nurturing a rebellious spirit, even in small circles. Things need to be seen in a perspective, not from today to tomorrow. I may not experience change, but I believe it's inevitable.

One of my most brilliant and bravest friends, Jan Oberg recently told me:

“Whatever we do, Biljana, we are wasting time trying to save the US/NATO/EU (from themselves) and our role in it. TFF and I are independent to do what is exciting, gives hope and where mutual listening and learning is possible. It is no longer within the West. Therefore, there is also no alternative future for the West but decline and then fall. Tragic!! A slow suicide – where co-existence, win-win with China and everybody else would be perfectly possible.”

I agree with him – Macedonia is just one pawn on the table of ‘saving the West’.

The West has lost its way the moment it trampled on the postulates of the Enlightenment and everything in which it allegedly represents.

Is there anything progressive and benevolent in a power that amputates parts of a small nation and does not allow it to cry?

This treatment is not exclusive for Macedonia, of course. If the West does not bomb you, then it silences you and scares/cancels you with executive orders.

In the meantime, the world still has four sides and is rapidly changing. We in the Balkans remain blind staring at the setting sun while the East rises, in every way – from cultural to political and economic.

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