

The Destabilization of Macedonia? Greater Albania and the Process of “Kosovization”

By [Dr. Vladislav B. Sotirović](#)
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The last open armed conflict in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – FYROM (former Socialist Republic of Macedonia as one of six federal republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) is just an expected continuation of constant tensions between the ethnic Albanians and the Macedonian Slavs during the last quarter of century.[i] However, these tensions are time to time transformed into the open armed conflicts of the Albanian extremists, usually coming from Kosovo, with the Macedonian security forces.

The most notable conflict incidents in Macedonia after the Kosovo War in 1998–1999, when the Kosovo Albanians started to export Kosovo revolution to Macedonia, up to 2015 are recorded in 2001 that was ended by the EU/USA sponsored Ohrid Agreement, in 2007 when on November 7th, Macedonian special police forces liquidated six armed Albanians from the neighboring Kosovo on the Shara Mt. in the North Macedonia – the region known from 1991 as the most nationalistic and separatist Albanian area at the Balkans after Kosovo and in 2008 after the parliamentary elections in June.



In the 2007 case, for instance, police found a large amount of hidden arms and ammunition on one location at the Shara Mt. (brought from Kosovo). The Balkan political analysts are kin to speculate that what is happening in Macedonia after 1999 is just a continuation of the export of the 1998-99 Kosovo revolution. 1998–1999. It basically means that Macedonia is scheduled by the Kosovo Albanian “revolutionaries” (i.e., by the political leadership of the Kosovo Liberation Army–the KLA) to be the next Balkan country which will experience a “Kosovo syndrome” that was successfully finished by the proclamation of the Kosovo independence in February 2008. It is as well as assumed that Montenegro is going to be the third Balkan country infected by the process of Kosovization.

The pre-1991 “Macedonian Question”

Macedonia always was the crossroad of the Balkans having a vital strategic position at the peninsula. The geostrategic importance of Macedonia was probably expressed the best by the German kanzellar Otto von Bismarck: “Those who control the valley of the River Vardar are the masters of the Balkans”.^[ii]

A whole historic-geographic territory of Macedonia was formerly part of the Ottoman Empire from 1371 to 1912. Macedonia was the first Yugoslav land to be occupied by the Ottomans and the last one to be liberated from the Ottoman yoke. Before the Ottoman lordship, Macedonia was governed by the Byzantine Empire, Bulgaria and Serbia. A Bulgarian

sponsored the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (the IMRO) was established in 1893 in Thessaloniki with the ultimate political goal to include whole Macedonia into Bulgaria. After the Balkans Wars of 1912–1913 a territory of historic-geographic Macedonia was partitioned between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. During WWI Macedonia became a scene of fierce fighting between the Central Powers and the Entente (the Macedonian front). Allied forces landed at Thessaloniki in October 1915 to be soon accompanied with approximately 150.000 Serbian soldiers who escaped from the occupied Serbia. In September 1918 under the French General Franchet d'Esperey, a joint British, French and Serbian army advanced against Bulgaria and soon liberated Serbia.[iii]

After the WWI the Treaty of Neuilly confirmed the Vardar Macedonia as a part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while the Aegean Macedonia with Thessaloniki remained the Greek and the Pirin Macedonia the Bulgarian. In the 1920s a large population movement transformed the ethnic composition of the population of the historic-geographic Macedonia. The crucial exchange of population occurred after the Treaty of Lausanne as some 350.000 Muslims from Macedonia were exchanged with Turkey by around 1.200.000 ethnic Greeks from Anatolia. In the interwar time a Bulgarian sponsored IMRO terrorism activity increased in the Yugoslav Macedonia seeking to destabilize the country in order to finally annex Macedonia into Bulgaria.[iv] After 1945 the Vardar Macedonia became a socialist republic within the Yugoslav federation with recognized a separate Macedonian nationality, Macedonian language and alphabet which was standardized for the first time in history. Up to 1991 the Yugoslav authorities fostered Macedonian self-identity and nationalism at the expense of the Serb and Bulgarian national interests.[v] Therefore, for the very reason to keep a territorial integrity of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, her Albanian minority was not granted a status of an autonomous province like the Kosovo Albanians in Serbia who had, according to the last Yugoslav constitution in 1974, their own president, government, assembly, police, university and academy of sciences – a state within the state.

The post-1991 “Macedonian Question”

During the violent destruction of ex-Yugoslavia, in November 1991 the Socialist Republic of Macedonia proclaimed independence that was firstly recognized by Bulgaria. However, Bulgaria never recognized a separate Macedonian language and ethnicity as for Bulgarians up to today all Macedonian Slavs are ethnolinguistic Bulgarians.[vi] Of course, when Skopje decided to declare independence, the Macedonians decided at the same time to deal alone with the Albanian nationalism and separatism in Macedonia without help by the Serbs.

The government in Skopje believed that the West will protect a territorial integrity of Macedonia and therefore yet in 1991 NATO's troops were invited to be deployed in this newly proclaimed independent state which became internationally recognized in 1993 but with a provisional state's name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – a unique case in world history. Nevertheless, a new Macedonian constitution, a constitutional state's name (the Republic of Macedonia) and the state's symbols created immediately extremely tense and hostile relationships with a neighboring Greece as Skopje developed rival (and unjust) claims to the ethnohistorical heritage of the ancient Macedonians and the Kingdom of Macedonia.[vii] Greece and the FYROM recognized each other five years after the Macedonian official proclamation of independence when Greece lifted economic blockade against the FYROM as well.

However, the crucial challenge to the post-1991 “Macedonian Question” is coming from the

ethnic breakdown of the country and historical background of interethnic relations between the Macedonian Slavs and the Macedonian Albanians. The later are the biggest and most nationalistic ethnic minority in the FYROM composing today about 30% of total population. Their number increased during the Kosovo War in 1998–1999, especially during the NATO’s “a prominent example of unauthorized humanitarian intervention”[viii] against Serbia and Montenegro, as the Kosovo Albanians, formally as the refugees, came to Macedonia followed by their compatriots from Albania – a country out of any warfare at that time. Majority of those Albanian “refugees”[ix] in fact never returned back to their homeland. Inter-ethnic tensions between the Macedonian Slavs and the Macedonian Albanians soon became increased due to both worsening economic situation and the uncompromised Albanian nationalism as an effect of the exported “Kosovo syndrome”.

The “Kosovo syndrome”

The export of the Kosovo revolution after 1999 as a direct outcome of the “Kosovo syndrome” to neighboring Macedonia is in direct connection with much serious regional problem of creation of a Greater Albania from 1878 up today. After June 1999 when the NATO’s troops occupied and divided Kosovo into five occupation zones, transforming this region into their colony,[x] West Macedonia became a stronghold for the rebel Albanian terrorist forces which in fact came from Kosovo.

The Macedonian Albanian separatism backed by the KLA paramilitary troops in the area of Tetovo, Kumanovo and Gostivar in the North-West Macedonia became directly encouraged by the fact that neighboring Kosovo Albanians finally succeeded to separate Kosovo from the rest of Serbia with direct NATO’s and EU military and diplomatic support. The same or very similar scenario was drawn now and for the West Macedonia with Skopje as a capital of the Albanian independent state of the *Republic of Ilirida* – a state proclaimed by the local Albanian nationalists twice after the destruction of ex-Yugoslavia: in 1992 and in September 2014. Of course, an ultimate goal is pan-Albanian unification with Tirana as a capital of a Greater Albania as it was during the WWII. Here it has to be stressed that between Kosovo, West Macedonia and Albania in fact there is no cross-border checking as it is formally controlled by the Albanians themselves, if it is controlled at all. Therefore, in practice a Greater Albania already exists. Furthermore, the traffic connections between Tirana and Prishtina are planned to be radically improved as the Kosovo Albanian government recently agreed with the government of Albania to connect their two capitals with a modern highway probably financially sponsored by the western economies.

Perspectives

The “Macedonian Question” has always been at the heart of Balkan politics and of interest to the Great Powers. Macedonia – the small, landlocked territory of the South Balkans has been contested during the last 150 years by all of its four neighbors – Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania and Greece. A Socialist Yugoslavia of Josip Broz Tito claimed to have solved the “Macedonian Question” by the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia as a part of the Yugoslav Federation from 1945 to 1991. Nonetheless, the destruction of the second Yugoslavia in 1991 reopened the issue of the future of the territory of the Vardar Macedonia – a Serbian-Yugoslav part of a geographic-historic Macedonia given to the Kingdom of Serbia by the Bucharest Peace Treaty on August 10th, 1913.[xi] A successor “Republic of Macedonia” has been proclaimed as an independent state in November 1991 but it has not received immediately universal international recognition either of its formal

political independence or of its state-flag and state-name.

Basically, after 1991 up today there are three main problems in regard to the “Macedonian Question”:

1. Will Macedonian state’s territory be divided between the Slavic Macedonians and the ethnic Albanians (who are 30% of Macedonia’s population)?;
2. Will all members of the international community recognize the name of “Republic of Macedonia” (according to the Macedonian Constitution of 1991) or they will continue to call this country as it is today officially named by the UNO – the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (the FYROM); and
3. Will the FYROM have territorial claims on other parts of geographic-historic Macedonia included into Greece (the “Aegean Macedonia”) and Bulgaria (the “Pirin Macedonia”) after the Second Balkan War in 1913?

The Macedonian independence from 1991 created an extremely tense relationship with the Greek government, since Macedonia developed rival claims for ethnicity and statehood. This rivalry was epitomized in a dispute about the state’s name, as Greece objected to the use of Macedonia, whose historical heritage it claimed. These two countries eventually recognized each other in 1995, and the Greek economic blockade against Macedonia was lifted.

Nevertheless, the crucial problem in this country is that the ethnic make up of the FYROM continued to change as the Albanian refugees poured in from Kosovo and Albania increasing the size of the Albanian minority de facto to 30%.

Tensions were increased through the worsening economic situation, which escalated as a result of international sanctions and the war against its main trading partner – ex-Yugoslavia. As the situation in Kosovo escalated and war erupted in 1998–1999, Macedonia became an important stronghold for the moderate Albanian opposition from Kosovo, but also for the rebel KLA. Extremely encouraged by the recognition of the Albanian required rights in Kosovo from June 1999 by the West, the Albanian minority in the West Macedonia became more assertive and politically aggressive.

Following violent clashes in 2001 between the Macedonian police forces and the (Kosovo) Albanian rebels, NATO followed the plea of the pro-western Macedonian government and increased its presence in this South Balkan country. A higher scale of a civil war was narrowly avoided in 2001 when the Macedonian parliament in Skopje agreed, but under direct western (EU/US) pressure and blackmailing, great concessions granting linguistic and limited political autonomy to the Albanian minority in Macedonia.

In return, the KLA rebels in Macedonia (under the official name of the Albanian National Army – the ANA) agreed to give up their arms to NATO’s troops – a gesture that was done more for the TV screens as the main guns’ arsenal of the KLA was returned back to Kosovo to be activated in Macedonia once again on May 9–10th, 2015. This happened regardless of the presence of NATO’s peace-keeping troops in Macedonia which came in the early 1990s following the plea of the Macedonian government after violent clashes between the Macedonian police and Albanian rebels.

Conclusions

The “Macedonian Question” after the 2001 KLA rebellion in Macedonia primarily was

dependent on solving the “Kosovo Question”. In the other words, it was logically expected that in the case of “international” (i.e., the western) recognition of Kosovo and by the west sponsored quasi-independence after February 17th, 2008, the Albanians from the West FYROM (likely followed by their compatriots from the East Montenegro) will follow a Kosovo example of regional revolution for the sake of getting territorial-national independence with a final aim to be united with a motherland Albania as it was clearly noticed even in 1997 by the late Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and more recently in May 2015 confirmed by the PM of Albania, Edi Rama.

Now we are witnessing a process of practical realization of the Greater Albania project that was designed for the first time by the Albanian First Prizren League in 1878. Or better to say, we are today dealing with the revival of a Greater Albania created by Mussolini in 1941 – a real state that existed until the end of the WWII. A difference is only that the WWII Greater Albania was sponsored by the western nazifascism while a present-day Greater Albania is backed by the western self-proclaimed liberal democracies.

The present Macedonian government of Nikola Gruevski (PM from 2006 and a leader of the VMRO-DPMNE) which has confronted the KLA, is punished (May 2015) by US-NATO for two reasons:

1. A Macedonian policy not to introduce sanctions against Russia.
2. A Macedonian wish to join Russia’s sponsored “Turkish Stream” of supplying Europe with the Siberian gas.

As the current Greek government is becoming closer to Russia, the Kosovization of Macedonia could be used against Greece, as a means to undermine the Greek pro-Russian policy. Namely, a summer holiday tourism is for Greece one of the most important incomes for the national budget per year. As a huge number of the European tourists are coming to Greece by the highway that is crossing Serbia, Macedonia and exactly the Kumanovo area it can be expected that in the case of conflict situation in the FYROM, the tourist industry in Greece will be affected.

1. European tourists travelling by land will have to cross conflict areas in Macedonia.
2. The conflict in Macedonia could spill over into Greece itself and most probably into Serbia.

Finally, the armed KLA rebellion in May 2015 against the state of Macedonia is used as a means to destabilize the government in Skopje in the form of a Colored Revolution, similar to Belgrade in October 2000. As in Serbia after October 2000, a new post-revolution Macedonian government sponsored by the West would be instrumental into transforming Macedonia into another client state of the post-Cold War NATO’s World Order. The success of the US-NATO plan very much depends on the role played by Russia.[xii]

Notes

[i] On this issue, see [L. Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World*, Princeton, 1995].

[ii] M. Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804–1999*, New York: Viking, 1999, 156.

[iii] On the Macedonian front, see [G. W. Price, *The Story of the Salonika Army*, London 1918].

[iv] On the terrorism by IMRO, see [A. Londres, *Terror in the Balkans*, London, 1935].

[v] On this issue, see [S. E. Palmer, R. King, *Yugoslav Communism and the Macedonian Question*, Connecticut, 1971].

[vi] On the question of ethnic background of the Macedonians, see [H. N. Brailsford, *Macedonia - Its Races and Their Future*, London, 1906; H. Poulton, *Who Are the Macedonians?*, London, 1995]. On the Bulgarian standpoint, see [*Macedonia: Documents and Material*, Sofia, 1974].

[vii] On the Greek point of view, see [N. K. Martis, *The Falsification of Macedonian History*, Athens, 1984]. The fact is that the ancient “Macedonians were located between the Thracians and the Greeks, inhabiting the fertile plains drained by the Vardar and Struma rivers. From antiquity to the present the question has been debated as to whether these early Macedonians were Greeks or barbarians” [L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958, 18]. However, the Macedonian kings and aristocracy have been the Greeks in language, culture and outlook who were inviting the Greeks of learning from Greek world to their courts. On the Macedonian point of view, see [S. Konechni, V. Georgieva, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje, 1998].

[viii] J. L. Holzgrefe, R. O. Keohane (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention. Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas*, Cambridge–New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 1. On the legal aspect of the humanitarian intervention, see [Ch. Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force. Fully Updated Second Edition*, Oxford–New York, Oxford University Press, 2004].

[ix] Majority of the Kosovo Albanian “refugees” during the Kosovo War 1998–1999 were not real refugees as they left their homes under the agreement with the KLA in order to show to the mainstream western mass media how the Serbian government is oppressive against the Kosovo ethnic Albanians.

[x] H. Hofbauer, *Eksperiment Kosovo: Povratak kolonijalizma*, Beograd: Albatros Plus, 2009.

[xi] B. Ђоровић, *Наше победе*, Београд: Култура, 1990, 82.

[xii] On the NATO, Balkans and Russia after 1991, see [V. B. Sotirović, “The NATO’s World Order, the Balkans and the Russian National Interest”, *International Journal of Politics & Law Research*, Vol. 3, № 1, Sciknow Publications Ltd., New York, NY, 2015]

GR editor’s note. We have made minor edits to this article. Due to staff constraints, we were not in a position to carry out a more cohesive editing of this article. mor edit this article.

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