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5. FOREIGN AFFAIRS

This was the first reporting period in the foreign policy field which was of key importance for the diplomacy of the Republic of Macedonia. Proper representation of the country in the world, safeguarding its vital national interests, protection of interests of citizens and their national identity, as well as proper promotion of achievements of the country in all fields, were part of the primary goals and tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as projected in the Work Program of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. EU and NATO membership remains strategic commitments of the country, as key segments of the foreign policy. The goals set in the Government Work Plan are ambitious and require investment of exceptional efforts and clear course for their implementation. Implementation of these goals and tasks are of high importance and seek additional caution concerning risks that might come out, and, at the same time, all existing resources should be extraordinarily engaged.

5.1. Planned and implemented activities of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in the reporting period

Pursuant to the 2008-2012 Government Work Plan, the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia will be committed to five strategic priorities:

- NATO membership,
- Start of negotiations with EU and EU accession,
- Visa liberalization (abolition) for nationals of the Republic of Macedonia,
- Overcoming the name issue created by Greece, and
- Promotion and enhancing economic and public diplomacy.

NATO membership – Although after completion of the 10th NATO MAP (Membership Action Plan) Cycle Macedonia did meet the criteria to be invited to join NATO, still no invitation was officially extended to the country at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit. Nevertheless, Macedonia did continue its reforms in the defense sector, by proceeding with the transformation of the Ministry of Defense, army restructuring, education system modernization and training, keeping up the contribution in international operations, intensification of international cooperation, military health care system reform, increasing the equitable and fair representation of non-majority ethnic communities, and contributing to the European Security and Defense Policy. It should be mentioned that in the analyzed period there were increased intensity in international relations of the Ministry of Defense, numerous bilateral meetings of the Minister of Defense, attendance at multilateral meetings and summits, organizing and sharing international conferences, as well as visits by Macedonian peacekeepers to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is recommended to further intensify this international cooperation and contacts with international partners and allies, and, to pay special attention to participation in regional multilateral organizations and meetings. This

is the only way to clearly articulate Macedonian position, progress, and interest in the world. In addition, it is of outmost importance to assign Macedonian military attaches at Macedonian embassies in countries that are important for Macedonia.

The Republic of Macedonia continues to make contribution to the peacekeeping missions of NATO, EU, and UN. Macedonia contributes with its own military personnel in ISAF-Afghanistan (since 2002), Iraqi Freedom (June 2003 – December 2008), ALTHEA-Bosnia and Herzegovina (since May 2007), UNIFIL-Lebanon (since May 2007). Macedonia additionally provides logistical support to KFOR-Kosovo (since July 2007). The start of the monitoring period was marked also by higher contribution to the ISAF mission for about 25% when compared to the one in 2008. Namely, the Macedonian Government made decision this year to increase the number of Macedonian peacekeepers in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan for 44%; i.e., with two platoons that will act together with the Vermont National Guard from USA. By means of significant participation in operations led by NATO, the Republic of Macedonia continues to make contributions to the preservation of the global peace and security; Macedonia meanwhile also continues to send clear signals about its consistency and support to the NATO processes and reforms that are conducted continuously.

It is very important that Macedonia adheres to the road of cooperation, improvement, and intensification of its military reforms, in order not to lose the potential that implied the risk to stop after the disappointment from not being invited to join NATO at the Bucharest Summit. The reporting period also noted the start of the reconstruction activities and modernization of the Krivolak regional army training ground for conducting real-time army drills before deployment and real-time training, identical to those found in the countries where Macedonian peacekeepers are present as part of international peacekeeping operations. It is very important that the modernization of Krivolak be made in full compliance with the NATO standards, thus eventually making Krivolak become regional army training ground for our regional partners and NATO countries. With regard to education and professional staffing, the Ministry of Defense decided to reopen the Military Academy in Skopje (the last graduation class was in 2006). This was the outcome of the Ministry need for new officers in the army. It is important to underline that experiences of the NATO countries were used in drafting the curricula; the so-called Bologna Declaration will be used in the implementation of the teaching and educational process, which in turn will also involve military academy professors from NATO countries. This will help modernize and properly staff the army personnel. However, some solution also must be provided for already graduated officers, by their retraining or profiling.

The conversion of former military barracks and bases into apartment and office buildings marked the commencement of the project called 'Former Military Barracks for New Development'. This involves of ceding the premises of former military barracks in Debar, Ohrid, Bitola, Dojran, Gevgelija, and Strumica. Part of the premises in the main military base in Skopje 'Ilinden' and of the barracks in Skopje Municipality of Aerodrom will be also ceded. The intention is to convert the former military barracks into education and culture institutions, business centers, etc. This involves ceding of an area of hundreds of hectares which will additionally used as construction land for new buildings, schools, homes and day-care centers for the aged, shopping centers, business and community centers, etc. Greater part of the military barracks' area have been included in the general

town plans as gray zones; however, in the future by preparing new and detailed town plans, these areas will be converted and adapted to the wishes and intentions of future investors. It will be very important in the future to see that proper procedure be used in making selection and decisions to the end users of these construction land areas and ultimately have transparent implementation of these procedures; it will be very important also to see what real benefits would be brought to the local and community development by the entire process.

In the field of European integration processes, the Republic of Macedonia made significant engagements in the reporting period and worked towards progress and implementation of all required criteria given by the EU as conditions that have to be met in order to get invitation to join the EU; they are better known as the Eight Benchmarks set forth by the EC (European Commission) in March 2008. In March 2009, the European Parliament (EP) adopted the Resolution on the progress of the Republic of Macedonia and demanded that the process of setting a date for the start of the negotiations for the EU membership be speeded up.

In 2009, the Republic of Macedonia sent its special representative to the EU headquarters. This is of great importance for realization of successful coordination with the Macedonian Mission in the EU and so gives a clear sign for the dedication of the Macedonian Government to the European integration processes. This action helps strengthen the capacities of the Republic of Macedonia in this very crucial period, which in turn would bring about better results taking in consideration the need for greater and continuing Macedonian presence in the EU.

One of the most important issues and of the key program goals of the Government was to have full liberalization of the visa regime with the countries of the Schengen zone; to this end, best efforts were made to meet the main technical criteria in the shortest deadline possible. On 15 July 2009, the Republic of Macedonia finally was given the go-ahead for the visa liberalization. The EC gave recommendations to abolish visas for Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro as of 1 January 2010. The visa liberalization process for the Western Balkans is fully supported by the EU. Therefore, it remains for the ministers of the interior of the EU member states to make the final decision. According to most considerations, no surprises should be expected in this context, whereby the Republic of Macedonia will be able finally to eliminate the visa barrier; certainly, a high risk factor is the possibility for Greece to show its disagreement.

As part of the consular services, the Macedonian diplomatic and consular missions have started, as of January 2009, issuing visas for foreign nationals and travel papers for Macedonian nationals through the Visa Center. This center uses a new system thus increasing significantly the level of issuance of visas pursuant to ICAO international and European standards. In context of the European integration processes, it should be noted that in the reporting period the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has undertaken and carried out most of the obligations or benchmarks for the EU membership. There is evidence of greater intensity in the diplomatic activities of the Government, various ministries, as well as of the President of the Republic of Macedonia, raising the capacity of the Macedonian diplomatic and consular missions, and, increased participation in the NATO-led peacekeeping missions. Many agreements on bilateral cooperation have been concluded; diplomatic relations have been established with countries that recognized us under our constitutional name. Thus, the number of countries

that recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name was raised to 127 out of the UN 192 member states.

Relations with neighboring countries. – Some special changes in the relations with the neighboring countries have not been evidenced, except for establishing diplomatic relations with Kosovo. During the reporting period, one could note fluctuations in the attitude of Macedonia towards the neighboring countries, and of the neighboring countries towards Macedonia. One should especially note the various changes in the positions of the Republic of Bulgaria in supporting Macedonia in the European institutions depending on the daily political situation context, as well as those of Serbia, which depending on the Macedonian relations with Kosovo warms or cools its relations with Macedonia. On its part, the Republic of Macedonia should design a long-term strategy on relations with its neighboring countries and should remain consistent with it; however, by this strategy a clear message will be given about the constructiveness, peacefulness, and priority of the good-neighborly relations and regional cooperation, for the prosperity of the entire region. Certainly, in this context the national interests and care for Macedonian expatriates should not be left out.

After finishing the expert work of the Joint technical commission for full borderline demarcation, the Governments of the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo managed to conclude the long-expected Agreement on physical demarcation of the borderline between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo. The agreement was ratified by parliaments of both states. The borderline demarcation represents a new basis for the regional stability. By this, the Republic of Macedonia has practically become the only country in the region to have fully demarcated borderlines with its neighboring countries. By finishing the borderline demarcation process and establishing diplomatic relations with Kosovo, the Republic of Macedonia has given major contribution in the promotion of security, stability, and cooperation in the region and beyond. A remark in this context would be that even this process was marked by controversy. Namely, the Macedonian side, on its part, had made an ad hoc session of its Parliament, while one of the parties in the Parliament filed a request to the Constitutional Court to assess the constitutionality of this agreement, since this party claims the agreement is unconstitutional because it violates Art. 74 of the Constitution on grounds that the said agreement does not involve border demarcation but rather change of the borderline. The debates on this agreement are still going on.

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia, in the reporting period, decided to file application versus Greece before the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Macedonia claims that blocking Macedonian membership in NATO at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in the reporting period has severely violated the 1995 Interim Agreement between Macedonia and Greece. Pursuant to the decision of the Court dated 20 January 2009, the Republic of Macedonia submitted its Memorandum. Greece has been given a 6-month deadline (by 20 January 2010) to submit its Counter-Memorandum. The Court has left an open issue as to what procedure will be applied after that date and following consultation with the involved parties. According to the Rules of the Court, written submissions remain confidential until the eventual start of the main hearing.

Economic diplomacy. – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, in context of implementation of one of its strategic priorities – promotion of the country abroad and increasing FDI in Macedonia – plays great role also in the

promotion and coordination of the foreign economic policy and foreign economic activities. What is important for the Republic of Macedonia is to have further intensification and promotion of cooperation with the multilateral economic organizations and specialized agencies for financial and technical cooperation in order to better present the Republic of Macedonia. In supporting this is also the expansion of the network of honorary consuls of the Republic of Macedonia abroad. Likewise, the Republic of Macedonia has thus far sent many economic promoters abroad, who should intensify the international economic cooperation with the Republic of Macedonia. Their work has already been considered in the former chapters of this report. In the analyzed period, Agreement framework on cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the UN for the 2010-2015 period was signed ('UNDAF 2010-2015'). This framework was the outcome of the one-year cooperation, coordination, and harmonization between the Government agencies and the UN agencies resident in Macedonia. The framework provides for project support to the Republic of Macedonia in delivering the goals of the Millennium Development for sustainable development in the forthcoming period, in several fields such as: environment protection, local government, social protection, SME development, strengthening civil society, etc.

5.2. What remains to be implemented (not yet implemented or not yet finished) in the analyzed period

The process of European integration involves all Macedonian citizens; they should be informed about every important stage in the European integration processes and so be actively involved in debates about them. In order to inform the citizens about the pros and cons of the European integration processes, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the Communications strategy in order to carry out several information campaigns that will inform the general public about the obligations and advantages of being a member of the EU. This strategy was conducted in the last two years. However, in addition to information campaign, there is need also for other, more interactive models for informing and holding debates with the citizens, especially ones that will involve the civil society. Likewise, one should be careful and re-examine the economic sustainability and size of the budgetary funds spent for this. With regard to reconsideration of the economic viability of certain Government projects, one should also take in due consideration the efficiency of the Macedonian 'economic diplomats' in circumstances of financial crisis, not only concerning the Macedonian national budget but also in relation to the real possibilities of drawing FDI in circumstances in which presently the foreign companies do operate. According to the Program and the Strategic Plan of the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been provided to issue new biometric passports to the nationals of the Republic of Macedonia residing abroad, pursuant to the applicable laws and bylaws and in full coordination with the Ministry of the Interior. According to the said Strategic plan, this activity practically should have been put into operation during 2009; however, the project on mobile stations for taking biometric data and issuing biometric passports also through the diplomatic and consular mission of the Republic of Macedonia has not been practically commenced. Indeed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did announce for 2009 a project to make an additional Ministry web site (www.missions.gov.mk) intended only for the Macedonian diplomatic

and consular missions abroad to be found on one place. Needless to say, in these modern times, this is one of the most important means of communications for the promotion of the Macedonian interests, culture, and activities abroad; one should also note that it is of outmost importance to create this website as soon as possible and also to update and improve the contents of such planned website.

Pursuant to the Government Decision on provision of foreign currency for purchase or construction of buildings for the Macedonian diplomatic and consular missions abroad, several buildings were purchased in the September 2007-June 2008 period for this missions; however, this process, although planned for 2009 as well, has been stopped on grounds of the financial crisis and smaller budgetary funds.

Concerning the work of the Ministry of Defense, the transformation of the military health care system remains to be finished; equitable and fair ethnic representation in the Ministry of Defense and the army also should be completed.

5.3. Evaluation of potential risks from (non)implementation or from (non)quality implementation of activities

The regional cooperation, as part of the global processes of integration has become condition and need, without which the positive progress would be unconceivable. This cooperation marks the processes of building greater security in international context and further promotion of the economic development in the region. In today's modern world, no country is able to realize its national interests by itself, without having well-grown cooperation with other countries and the feeling of existent interdependence at international level. Hence, in global integration processes, the countries are referred to finding collective mechanisms for dealing with the challenges, while many domestic issues are given international character. Concerning the visa liberalization, one can say that the Republic of Macedonia is on the right track; the country has fulfilled the required criteria and so has become regional leader. Potential question might be whether Macedonia would be assessed under the merit system (i.e., there would be recognition of Macedonia as regional leader and of its timely fulfillment of the standards) or the country would be forced 'to travel in a group', i.e., Macedonia, in spite of the achieved results, would have to wait for the other countries in the region to advance as a group. Additional risk would be noted if the Macedonian institutions decide that it would be enough to achieve the visa liberalization and to slow down the required reforms for the start of the negotiations with the EU. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that the visa liberalization, however long desired, certainly cannot be replacement for integration into the European system of values and free market. The name issue remains to be the only impediment in the European integration processes. Even the EC was very clear about the start of the negotiations: the Macedonian reform potential is very strong. Macedonia indeed fulfilled all benchmarks; however, what remains is the very name issue with the south neighboring country. In December 2009, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia will be on the agenda of the EU, which will then decide if there would be start of negotiations and if this would be conditioned by the solution of the name issue. The name issue negotiations continue; both sides remain dedicated and so it is expected that both sides would cooperate and contribute in reaching a mutually acceptable solution. Potential risks can be identified in the outcome of the forthcoming Greek elections, in the

conduct of the Greek Government in front of the EC just before the EC should make the decision, and even in the manner of conducting the negotiations.

5.4. Overall evaluation by the expert on implemented activities for the reporting period, with possible recommendations

Integration of Macedonia into the EU and NATO remains to be the major strategic commitment of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. At the same time, implementing of the assumed international obligations remains to be high on the agenda of the Macedonian diplomacy. Indeed, the Republic of Macedonia will have to demonstrate that it is prepared, in spite of the financial and foreign policy limitations, to dedicate sufficient time, resources, and energy to finish the already started reform engagements. Furthermore, Macedonia will have to invest much more in its human resources and additionally to promote itself as reliable partner on the international stage; this in turn will enable Macedonia to improve its positions and better to articulate its state interest. What is very important in this context to make progress is also to involve the NGO sector in the debates, i.e., the priorities of the country. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance the capacities of our diplomatic missions in the major countries and to pay higher attention to the training and activities of the Macedonian representatives abroad: ambassadors, consuls, economic and other promoters, since they represent and create the image of Macedonia abroad. The Macedonian diplomacy suffered because of late sending of diplomats and ambassadors in the diplomatic vacancies as outcome of disagreements about their appointments last year. The harmful consequences, although major efforts were made to mitigate them, can still produce their reverberations. Therefore, there is urgent need to properly staff and complete the Macedonian diplomatic network and to activate this network as soon as possible. In the meantime, care should be taken for the professional standards and to establish meritocracy in this field. As previously mentioned, positive steps have been undertaken in strengthening the capacity of the Macedonian diplomacy (defense, economic, consular). It is also recommended to follow this tendency by raising the budget of the Diplomatic Academy, providing professional international training, etc. However, one should also take due consideration of the importance of connecting and promotion via the electronic media outlets (Internet, interactive websites, etc.). The foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia continues to be burdened with domestic processes. This foreign policy needs to be qualitatively enhanced; to this end there is need to finally create all domestic preconditions, mostly a national consensus about the priorities of the Macedonian foreign policy, and to provide for resources for successful implementation of such policy – reduction of the influence of the domestic interparty disputes and building and promoting unity in the presentation of Macedonian foreign policy priorities. Of great importance in the reform process is not to carry out reforms under pressure and with very high pace, since there might appear risks of quality reduction, insufficient level of information and lack of general public debate among the experts, NGOs, and the citizens.

Macedonia should proceed with actions and policy by which Macedonia will show and prove that it wants to be a partner and ally to Greece. In case the Republic of Macedonia fails to be cautious in relation to its foreign policy and does not continue the activities of establishing good-neighborly relations, then the name issue could make the April 2008

scenario repeat itself. Namely, of utmost importance for the Republic of Macedonia is the preparedness that should be shown in the discussion and to manifest need to separate the name issue from the European integration processes. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia should proceed with the efforts and insisting that these two separate topics be considered separately. The risk in this field is again blockade, this time, in the European integration processes. Among other things, of greatest importance for the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is to continue strengthening the relations and ties with the foreign strategic partners and with other countries that share the value commitments which the Republic of Macedonia strives for. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia must in a very wise and concentrated manner work in the forthcoming months and quickly cope with the newly created circumstances, whatever they are, in order to remain consistent with its strategic determinations and goals.