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5. Foreign affairs

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

According to the Program for work of the Government, the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia for the current period was devoted to five strategic priorities: The NATO membership, starting negotiations with the EU and membership in the EU, liberalization (abolishing) the visas for the Macedonian citizens, overcoming the dispute created by Greece, and which is related to the name and strengthening the economic and public diplomacy.

Further to the membership in NATO—After the successful completion of the 10th cycle of the Action plan for membership, the Republic of Macedonia started the 11th cycle of the Action plan for membership in NATO. Thus, the Republic of Macedonia became a country that has done the longest preparations for membership in the alliance in the history of NATO.

In the reporting period, the Republic of Macedonia continued the reforms in the defense sector through continuation with the transformation of the Ministry of Defense, restructuring of the Army, modernization of the education system and training, continuation of the contribution in the international operations, intensifying the international cooperation, reforming the health system of the army, increasing the appropriate and just representation of members of the communities and contribution to the European security and defense policy.

By the end of 2009, several strategic documents were projected to be adopted—the Strategy for Defense, Long-term Plan for Development of the Defense (2009-2018) and a new Law on Service in the Army, as well as a new Law on Defense in the course of 2010. The new Law on Service in the Army is in a parliamentary procedure, and the Strategy for Defense is in a phase of approval by the President of the Republic of Macedonia. Within the closing date of this report there was not any information on the dynamics and fulfillment of those determined objectives.

The Republic of Macedonia continued with the participation in the army missions of NATO and EU. According to the standards and recommendations of NATO in 2010 the contribution is increased for about 50% in ISAF-Afghanistan, the participation in the mission in the EU-ALTEA continues and also the preparations for participation in the Fight Group of the European Union in 2012, as well as in the UN mission, UNIFIL in Lebanon. The Republic of Macedonia through the Coordinative Center for Support of KFOR (KFOR-HNSCC) continues to provide logistic support of the NATO operation in Kosovo-KFOR. According to the plans for participation in the international missions for 2010, the Republic of Macedonia shall contribute to the efforts of the international community for stabilization, security and development of Afghanistan with about 250 representatives of the ARM (which will make Macedonia reach participation of 4% out of the total forces, i.e. it shall be the 5th contributor with regard to the number of population.

Through the substantial participation in the operations undertaken by NATO, the Republic of Macedonia continues its contribution in the world peace keeping and security, however at the same time it sends clear signals for its consistency and support in NATO processes and reforms that are continuously implemented. In that direction, the Republic of Macedonia should continuously put greater efforts in the development of the distributive abilities of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM). The financing of the defense is within 2 percent of the GDP until now. For the 2010 because of the great pressure of the economic crisis, the projected percent decreased to 1.65 percent of the GDP.

In the area of Euro-integrations, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia at the very beginning of 2009 established three key priorities concerning the European agenda, such as: (1) fulfilling the benchmarks set by the European Commission for the start of the negotiations for membership, (2) completing the process of visa liberalization and (3) accreditation of the national institutions for managing the instrument for pre-accession aid of the EU. All these priorities were mainly fulfilled, whereupon a solid political dialogue and was demonstrated and a consensus when discussing about the euro-integrations of the Republic of Macedonia. According to all of the indicators, one can conclude that the Republic of Macedonia in the course of the previous year achieved solid progress in the realization of the set objectives at the beginning of the year.

After receiving the Report from the European Commission for the progress of the Republic of Macedonia for 2009 and the recommendation for the start of negotiations for membership of the country in the European Union, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia approached towards determining the remarks noted in the Report with the aim of their full overcoming. The adoption of the Action Plan and its monitoring within December 2009 had the aim of ensuring continuation in the reform processes, especially in the realization of the priorities of the Partnership for Accession until the end of the revision of the National program on approximation of the legislation of the Republic of Macedonia to the EU legislation (NPAA) for 2010. NPAA defines the dynamics of adopting the EU legislation for 2010 and sets the strategic directions in the process of European integration, the application of the EU policies, reforms, structures, resources and deadlines that should be realized with the aim that the Republic of Macedonia fulfills the required conditions. In 2010, 100 laws from the European agenda are foreseen to be adopted.

Regarding the preparation for start of negotiations with the EU, during the analyzed period started the creation of the expert teams, and MFA, together with the Secretariat for European Affairs worked on the completion of the structures required for a successful conduct of this process. In that sense, the Mission of the Republic of Macedonia in Brussels should be immediately strengthened with experts for each negotiation chapter. Of a key importance shall be how much the government institutions will use the experiences of the other countries, and how much they are going to rely on the national experts in the academic and non-governmental circles. The unpreparedness of the Macedonian administration can risk that strategically important process for the Republic of Macedonia.

Certain aspects of the cooperation with the EU, such as the structured political dialogue, cooperation on the field of foreign, security and defense policy, the inter-sector cooperation, were conducted with a continuous dynamics in the previous quarter as well.

One of the most important foreign and key program aims of the Government was a complete liberalization of the visa regime with the countries from the Schengen zone, for which efforts were made in the determined deadlines for fulfilling the main technical criteria. The Council of Ministers for Justice and Foreign Affairs of the member-states of the EU adopted a decision for abolishing the Schengen visa-barrier for Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia and instead of entering into force as of 1 January 2010, it was enforced on 19 December 2009. Thus, the European Schengen area with 28 countries (25 member-states of the EU except for United Kingdom and Ireland, and also three more countries Norway, Switzerland and Iceland), five hundred millions of citizens and a territory of 4.3 millions of square kilometers became available for the Macedonian citizens without visas.

The cooperation in the regional initiatives is an important element of the foreign policy of the country. The Republic of Macedonia continues to proactively participate in the Process of Cooperation in the SEE (PCSEE), the Council for Regional Cooperation (CRC), the Central-European Initiative (CEI), and the Regional SECI Center in Bucharest. In addition to these regional initiatives, Macedonia was an active participant in other forms of cooperation as well between the countries from the region, especially in the context of the euro-integration.

On the plan of the multilateral activities, the biggest foreign-political engagement in the Republic of Macedonia in 2010 shall be the Presidency with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from May until November. The priorities of the Macedonian Presidency with the Council of Europe shall be the fight against corruption, the reform of the European Court of Human Rights through the increase of the efficiency of the judiciary and education of the judges on a national level, integrating the national minorities into the European societies, promotion of the position of the Roma people, protection of the cultural heritage and religion dimension of the inter-cultural dialogue, as well as more active inclusion in the political and democratic development of the countries from South-eastern Europe. For all these themes, conferences shall be organized in Macedonia.

Regarding the name issue negotiations that the Republic of Macedonia conducts with Greece under the patronage of the United Nations, a big step has been done in the reporting period. Namely, after the end of the elections in Greece and the formation of the new Government, the contacts were intensified between the governments of the Republic of Macedonia and Greece, thus giving a new spirit on the negotiation process itself, in the sense of renewal of the negotiations for the name issue under the patronage of the United Nations.

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

In the previous period, a substantial attention was paid to the build of a highly-quality and professional diplomatic-consular personnel. In that direction, the first phase in the creation of the Diplomatic Academy within MFA was implemented by the introduction of a personal system of diplomatic education. However, the second phase which involves beginning of a scientific-research activity of the diplomatic academy within MFA after the example of the already affirmed diplomatic academies and

institutes regionally and world wide, is still not started. Moreover, the purchase or building of objects for the diplomatic-consular missions in the Republic of Macedonia, as a process which was planned, but stopped because of the financial crisis and the decreased budget. Beginning from the bilateral relations and the importance of Norway as a member in NATO, the opening of an Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia was projected for 2009, however because of financial reasons it was postponed for 2010.

In the period to come the process of completely fulfilling the Macedonian embassies is left to be completed, especially in the key countries for Macedonia, with defense (army) attachés. In many of the countries the equipping with the basic representatives is not completely completed, in the sense of a first, second and third secretary. That additionally affected the capacity of the Macedonian diplomacy and the intensity of the diplomatic activity for promotion of the strategic interests of the Republic of Macedonia.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2009 planned a project for the creation of a web-site for uniting the Macedonian DCM (www.missions.gov.mk), however, it is not completely finished, nor in use by the end of this report.

Regarding the work of the Ministry of Defense, it is left to be realized the planned for equipping and modernization, and restructuring of the ARM, as well as to achieve appropriate and just ethnical and gender representation in the professional structure of the Ministry and ARM.

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

The effects caused by the world economic and financial crisis had their impact on the perception of the process of enlargement as well, which opened many doubts whether the Union facing its own problems has the capacity to continue the process of enlargement. Aware of all the challenges, the Republic of Macedonia with commitment and a lot of work managed to realize two key processes-receiving recommendation for negotiations and liberalization of the visa regime. However, the challenges of the economic crisis remain for the 2010.

In the area of defense, the budget of ARM should be bigger for at least a half, in order Macedonia to continue fulfilling the criteria for membership in NATO. One of the criteria for Macedonia from an aspiring country to become a full member of NATO is for the defense to take up between 2.1 and 2.6 percent of GDP. According to those criteria, the budget for 2010, instead 103 millions of euros, should be between 140 and 160 millions of euros. One should be careful not to endanger the NATO membership by not fulfilling those basic criteria.

In the area of managing the human resources in defense and army of the Republic of Macedonia, a long-term challenge will be attracting and keeping a quality personnel, achieving appropriate and just ethnical and gender representation. It is recommended that MD and ARM should continue implement and promote that sector with additional trainings and profiling or even re-qualification of the civil and army personnel. In that sense, the system of education and training is quite positively, which is mostly presented

through the work of the Military Academy, which after 4 years started work with the newest study programs and the highest standards.

As a first and immediate priority for 2010 in the area of euro-integrations was the planned receiving of date for the start of negotiations with the Union in 2010 and especially in the period of the Spanish Presidency. What is a key challenge for the Republic of Macedonia for this year is the (non) implementation of the recommendation of the European Commission for the start of the membership negotiations. The Republic of Macedonia should be aware of the risks and challenges that the Spanish Kingdom is facing in this six-month period, having in mind the risk for implementation of the Lisbon Treaty and the creations of the necessary structures in function of the newly established institutions-President of the European Council and a High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. Macedonia should foresee that, but in the same time it should put additional efforts for deepening of the reform processes within the Partnership for Accession and not to give up from the protection of its own interests and objectives for which a general national and political consensus exists-start of negotiations for membership in the Union.

During the six-month Presidency with the Council of Europe from May until November, the Republic of Macedonia is in charge of a big responsibility, and first and foremost a more intensive cooperation with the other international organizations as well, which are partners of the Council of Europe (OSCE, EU and UN), whereas, RM shall be the voice of the organization regarding the relevant political questions. It can be expected that the attention of the political public in Europe and beyond shall be on Macedonia. Here, the risk for the readiness of the Republic of Macedonia can be seen for that serious task, which is mostly noticeable in the capacity of the administration and coordination of the institutions. Having in mind the connection of the inter-governmental and parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe, of a big importance for the Presidency and successful foreign-political promotion shall be the cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of RM and the Assembly of RM and with the parliamentary delegation that represents the Republic of Macedonia in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The Republic of Macedonia should prepare the administration for that task and to use that time period for which a bigger promotion and increasing of the support given by the member-states is possible.

The name is still the sole brake in the process of Euro-Atlantic integrations. For the start of the negotiations, both NATO and the European Commission were clear-the reform potential is strong, Macedonia fulfilled all of the benchmarks, however what remains is the dispute with the south neighbor. The negotiations regarding the name continue and both sides are expected to cooperate and contribute to finding a jointly acceptable solution. The potential risks are identified in the effects of the economic crisis that embraced Greece, its position and willingness for negotiations, behavior of the Greek Government in front of the EU, and in the manner of conducting negotiations as well.

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

Regarding the main strategic priorities of the Republic of Macedonia, it is recommended that the Government of RM actualize and emphasize the issue of quick integration of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO, both in the function of continuous realization of the operations in which Macedonia participates with own forces and strengthening of the regional security. The emphasize of the unsustainable situation which has arose after the Bucharest Summit should continue-a candidate which has fulfilled all the conditions for membership, one which gave and is continuously giving a substantial support in the efforts of the alliance, in the Region and worldwide, is unjustly kept in front of its door. But, in the mean time, the intensity of the reforms and the transformation of the Macedonian system for defense following the standards of one member-state of NATO should not be made slower.

The start of negotiations for membership in the European Union should be top foreign-political priority of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in the current year. Thus, the strengthened dynamics should be continued, the reforms determined in compliance with the revised National program on approximation of the legislation of the Republic of Macedonia to the EU legislation, with the aim of promoting the level of fulfilling the criteria for membership in the EU, as well as the proactive approach of seeking for solution for overcoming the bilateral dispute with Greece concerning the constitutional name. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia should demonstrate that it has political and administrative capacity to start the process of accession negotiations. Waiting the start of negotiations, intensive work should be done in establishing the national structures of this crucial question. In this period it is necessary to strengthen the capacity of the administration and to carefully establish the specific negotiating structures who will intensively prepare themselves for the beginning of the negotiation process. Also, the whole expert public should be involved in the process. According the assessments, Macedonia will need about 1.500 experts from different areas in the negotiations, who according to the experiences so far will last at least four years. Although the country is under the pressure of the world economic crisis, Macedonia should not save resources for this crucial area of strategic determinations of the Republic of Macedonia.

The indicator for visa liberalization was a positive experience for the state institutions, which showed that the Republic of Macedonia has the capacity for fulfilling complicated technical demands in the process of euro-integration. As well, that is an indicator that the Republic of Macedonia can successfully manage the challenges brought about by the process of accession negotiations with the EU. The abolishing of visas is a big and practical benefit which shall provide greater mobility, exchange of ideas, improvement of the cooperation in all of the spheres of the social living and will catalyze the process of euroeization of the Macedonian society, shall contribute to the deepening of the contacts of the citizens with the neighboring countries, which will open new possibilities for cooperation and business activity. In addition it is expected to improve the relations with the neighboring countries, thus the attention should be paid to the common interests and investments and the common European future and overcoming of the left-overs from the past.

Within the relations with the neighbors, the Republic of Macedonia should strive, besides the traditional promotion of the political, economic and cultural relations, to stimulate initiatives for improving the infrastructure-road, railway and energetic. So far, the cooperation on the field of trafficking of people, organized crime, money laundering is on a quite satisfying level.

Regarding the dispute over the name issue with the Republic of Greece, the demonstration of a complete commitment of the Republic of Macedonia concerning this issue should be continued for its solving as soon as possible with joint constructiveness and flexibility, in the spirit of the European cooperation and good neighbour relations. The contacts on every state level need to be intensified with the representatives of the Greek Government, thus manifesting warming and starting an honest dialogue in front of the whole international public. The Government of RM should build a strategy about the possible further blocking of the process for delivering a decision for date for the start of the negotiations. Steps should be taken for a positive, active presence in the process of negotiations and the whole administrative potential to be activated (particularly the representatives outside of Macedonia) in the direction of a complete informing of the European and world elite about the essence of the dispute with Greece, as well as emphasizing that the bilateral disputes should not be used for conditioning the progress of another country, but to follow the principles of meritocracy.

The foreign policy in the Republic of Macedonia is still burdened with the internal-political processes. It should be quality strengthened for which purpose an eventual creation of all internal preconditions should be done, and above all, the national consensus of the manner of achieving the priorities of the Macedonian foreign policy, as well as the means for its successful achievement, by decreasing the effects of the internal inter-party disputes and building and promoting unity in the representation of the Macedonian foreign-political priorities. In that direction, the meetings and discussions between the political actors from different political parties should be intensified.