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FYROM in the context of American policy (1995-2001)

In the wake of Tito's break with Stalin (1948) and the economic embargo imposed on Yugoslavia by the Cominform, the country's economic survival depended on the various forms of economic aid provided by the USA. American pressure on Greece in 1950 to restore full diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, ignoring the problems caused by the country's use of the name "Macedonia" for its southernmost state, was due at least in part to the need for American military support for Yugoslavia and the shipment of military matériel from Thessaloniki. Despite the weakening of the 1953 Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation signed at Ankara between Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey and the 1954 Balkan Pact binding the three countries into an alliance of political co-operation and mutual assistance, despite Yugoslavia's categorical refusal to join NATO and Marshal Tito's adoption of a non-aligned, third-world "anti-imperialistic" foreign policy in the early 1960s, American aid continued. US President Jimmy Carter's emphasis on the violation of human rights by the Communist regimes after the Helsinki Conference (1975) did not include Yugoslavia. American politics paid little attention to, for example, the Albanian uprising in Kosovo in 1981 and the Albanian question in Yugoslavia in general.

After 1986, however, political developments in Eastern Europe meant that Yugoslavia no longer had the same geopolitical importance for the US, which turned towards Hungary and Poland. The flood of American aid dried to a trickle, worsening the country's economic crisis. America called upon the Yugoslav government to implement reforms (democratization, free economy, human rights), while reiterating its commitment to the country's unity, independence and territorial integrity.

The US, occupied in the first half of 1991 with affairs in the Gulf and in Iraq, appeared hesitant to encourage Croatia and Slovenia to declare

their independence. But since the progressive dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation appeared irreversible, American policy changed accordingly. Based on the principle of fixed borders and a balance of power, American policy focused on preventing the emergence of a Greater Serbia from the ruins of the Federation, something that the Serbs had already achieved on the military level. The developments in Krajina and Bosnia in the summer of 1995, which led to the signing of the Dayton Agreement, were typical.

During the war in Yugoslavia, FYROM saw in the United States a significant factor for the preservation of its stability and integrity, and expressed its gratitude for the despatch of 300 American soldiers to Skopje. When the Albanians in Skopje asked for recognition as a constitutional nation on a par with the Slav-Macedonians, seeking participation in the administration, the police and the army and recognition of the parity of the Albanian language and the University of Tetovo, Washington called upon Tirana to exert its influence upon the Albanian parties in FYROM to prevent episodes, and adopted a position against the creation of parallel state structures in the western, Albanian-speaking, districts of the country. The US also played a catalytic role in the conclusion of the Interim Agreement between Greece and FYROM in September 1995.

By the autumn of 1998, in view of NATO's planned intervention in Kosovo, the American factor was exercising considerable influence in the shaping of FYROM's domestic and foreign policy. The American goal at that time was to contain the Kosovo crisis and prevent it from spreading to Skopje, and to achieve that end they judged that certain concessions to the Albanians were necessary. Despite the fact that Georgievski's VMRO-DPMNE alliance and Tupurkovski's Democratic Alternative party had secured an absolute majority in the second round of voting in the general elections of November 1998, Xhaferi's Albanian party was included in the government coalition. Pressed by the Americans, FYROM recognized Taiwan in January 1999 so that China would veto the extension of the UN military mission in FYROM, which would mean that that they could be replaced by NATO forces in view of its planned operations in Kosovo. And that is exactly what happened. The inclusion of Xhaferi's party in the government marked the beginning of a series of concessions to the Albanians. A Ministry of Local

Government was created and given to an Albanian, and the powers of the mayors were increased. For the first time since 1991 the position of chief of police was given to an Albanian. As for the University of Tetovo, the government coalition reached an agreement with the European Union that it should operate in the interim as a private institution under the aegis of the EU.

During the period of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia, FYROM accepted some 400,000 refugees from Kosovo and afforded facilities to the NATO forces. However, the new situation that developed after the collapse of Serbian sovereignty in Kosovo and the failure to disarm the UÇK increased Skopje's fears that the crisis would spill over into FYROM. An offshoot of the UÇK was founded in Skopje as the "National Liberation Army" (UÇK = Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare), with Ali Ahmeti as its political spokesman. The February 2001 agreement between FYROM and Yugoslavia demarcating the border between the two countries served as a pretext for its taking action. The Albanians considered it inadmissible that they should be excluded from a boundary settlement that affected parts of Kosovo and interpreted this political move as a sign that for Skopje Kosovo was still part of Yugoslavia. After the overthrow of Milošević, there was a widespread fear among the Albanians that Kosovo would no longer be the international community's sole priority, but that it would focus instead on the reconstruction and democratization of Yugoslavia. Indeed, at the Balkan Conference in Zagreb in November 2000, little attention had been paid to Kosovo. The Albanians were also worried about the imminent return of the Yugoslav army to the neutral zone of Kosovo. Thus, armed conflict in FYROM would also serve to internationalize the Kosovo question. All the statements made by Albanian politicians and all the Albanian demonstrations in Skopje and Tetovo contained the same demand: *Independence for Kosovo and federalization of FYROM*.

The clashes began in March 2001 with the occupation of the village of Tanusevci, and spread to the district around Tetovo and the city itself. The Slav-Macedonian inhabitants of Tetovo and the western districts fled to Skopje and the Albanians to Kosovo, leaving Tetovo in the hands of the Albanian guerrillas. With demonstrations in the centre of Skopje and a symbolic occupation of the Parliament, the Slav-Macedonians demanded a dynamic response. In reprisal for Tetovo, para-

military nationalist organizations in FYROM burned Albanian-owned shops in Bitola in May, forcing its Albanian residents out of the city. The clashes acquired a religious as well as an ethnic character with the burning of mosques and churches, and the gap between the two sides widened. The Albanians threatened to carry the war into the city of Skopje itself, occupying the village of Aračinovo in March 2001 and holding it hostage until the end of June.

The fighting in FYROM raised a series of questions: 1) whether the crisis had been provoked by foreign power centres for political reasons; 2) why the government in Skopje had not responded more forcefully to the Albanian guerrillas; 3) what had the Albanians achieved with their military action and to what extent the survival of FYROM was now problematical.

In his account of his government's attitude towards the Albanians in the spring of 2001, Premier Ljubčo Georgievski revealed that his government had had timely warning from Yugoslav officers of the imminence of UÇK action in his country, but had paid little attention to these, hoping that NATO would avert the danger. Once the crisis had begun, the question was how to deal with it. Time was lost in debate as to the use of police and/or military forces, and there was dissension in government ranks as to whether a state of war should be declared, but it was primarily the hypocrisy of the international community that allowed the Albanians to appear as victors.

There can be no doubt that the Albanians successfully conducted a psychological war against the Slav-Macedonians, who had been taken by surprise. With Kosovo as a supply base and place of refuge, the Albanian guerrillas carried out a successful guerrilla war against the police forces in Skopje, and even attacked army units. Proclamation of a state of war was avoided for reasons of domestic and foreign policy: 40% of FYROM's armed forces were Albanians, and in case of war there was a danger that they would defect to the UÇK. Moreover, in case of war Arbën Xhaferi's party would most probably have left the government coalition. But it was chiefly NATO that prevented Skopje from declaring a state of war, evidently in the hope of keeping the crisis under control. KFOR's failure—whether from inability or lack of interest—to prevent Albanian guerrillas from moving into FYROM from Kosovo, together with the rejection of President Trajkovski's proposal for a neutral zone

between Kosovo and FYROM, strengthened the position of the Albanian guerrillas. Public opinion in Skopje was even more shocked, however, by revelations of active American involvement in arming and protecting the Albanian guerrillas. These forces were armed and trained by an American company called "Military Professional Resources Inc.," which collaborated closely with the Pentagon and in 1995 had armed and trained the Croatians for their operations in Krajina. The team leader in Kosovo was Richard Griffit, a retired American general who worked closely with Agim Çeku (their contacts stemming from the war in Croatia, when Çeku was fighting against the Serbs). Griffit had also undertaken to supply arms to FYROM's army, taking advantage of his acquaintanceship with General Jovan Andreevski, which dated from a time when the latter was in America for military training. It has been proved that Griffit played a double role, passing on to the Albanian guerrillas anything he learned from Andreevski about his army's operations.

Nor was it by chance that, after perhaps the sole and impressive victory of the FYROM forces at Araçinovo, where at the end of June 2001 the Albanian guerrillas were essentially encircled and ready to surrender, that American forces rushed in from Kosovo, let the Albanians out of the trap and escorted them—with their arms—to the Kosovo border. Among the 400 or so Albanian guerrillas were 17 American trainers, and their equipment was all American. Public revelation of this American involvement would have damaged America's position irretrievably.

American intervention in the question of FYROM's military preparations for facing the Albanian guerrillas was more obvious. Skopje had turned primarily to Russia and the Ukraine for assistance. Pilots from FYROM began to train in the Ukraine, which also supplied the country with 4 SU-25 aircraft and 4 MI-24 gunship helicopters. Military assistance began to flow in from Yugoslavia as well, after an agreement was signed between Belgrade and Skopje in the summer. But NATO vetoed military aid from the Ukraine, and Lord Robertson, paying a visit to Kiev, asked the Ukrainian government to halt military aid to FYROM. Bulgaria, too, was asked by NATO to stop providing military assistance to FYROM. Obviously, the outcome NATO wanted was not a crushing defeat for the Albanian guerrillas, but a controlled equilibrium until a political solution could be found.

FYROM was in the middle of its worst political crisis since 1944. The crisis of May 2001 led to the formation of a government of "National Unity" to assume collective responsibility in dealing with the situation. The Slav-Macedonians were gripped by a war psychosis, while the mood was fiercely anti-NATO and the political situation at an impasse. Lord Robertson and Javier de Solana paid frequent visits to Skopje, but this did nothing to defuse the crisis. Early in June 2001 the President of the Academy of Skopje, Efremov, proposed as a solution to the Albanian problem an exchange of territory and populations with Albania: the western, Albanian-speaking districts of FYROM would be incorporated into Albania, the Albanians of the cities of Skopje and Kumanovo would move to Albanian-speaking regions, and in exchange the Slav-speaking regions of Albania near Prespa, plus the city of Po-gradec, would be ceded to FYROM. At about this same time *Nova Makedonija* newspaper published a map under a headline calling for resolution of the Macedonian Question as well, with the surrender to FYROM of the Bulgarian part of Macedonia and the western part of Greek Macedonia. The resulting uproar led to the resignation of the President of the Academy and the firing of the editor of *Nova Makedonija*, but the point had been made: any border changes in a region like the Balkans could spark a chain reaction. It was an echo of the proposals that had been made by Kissinger and Lord Owen for the convocation of a new Congress of Berlin, with the participation of the Balkan states, to redraw the borders in the region on the basis of the dismemberment of Bosnia, the partition of Kosovo, the sharing out of FYROM between Bulgaria and Albania, the incorporation of Northern Transylvania into the Ukraine and the independence of Montenegro but leaving a Serbian corridor to the Adriatic.

One question that has often been asked is why the Americans were so tolerant of the Albanians, despite proven links between Albanian guerrillas and drug and arms trafficking and the presence of Mujahidin in the ranks of the UÇK. Although a fully documented answer cannot yet be given, in the case of FYROM there are indications that the USA, which was basically interested in stability but not before it had secured a framework for control of the region, until which time it would tolerate a controlled instability, wanted a solution to the Albanian problem in FYROM that favoured the Albanians, principally on account of the

construction of Corridor 8. Apart from Italy, which has a vested interest in a link between the Adriatic and the Black Sea, the proposed Corridor 8 is of primary importance to the Albanian-Macedonian-Bulgarian Oil Pipeline (AMBO), an American-sponsored enterprise that would serve to reduce American dependence on OPEC oil. The two primary factors behind the upgrading of the position of the Albanians in the Balkans thus seem to have been energy and establishing a balance against the Slavs.

After a foot race for the preamble of the constitution, the final formulation reads: "The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian people, as well as citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Serbian people, the Romany people, the Bosniac people [...]". In order to avoid equating the terms "Macedonian people" and "Albanian people", the preferred formula was "part of the Albanian people" accompanied by a recital of all the other national groups, again as parts of a people. It was evidently Skopje's intent to interpret the term "part of the Albanian people" as recognition of a minority; but nothing alters the spirit of the agreement, which is essentially an upgrading of the political role of the Albanians and their parity with the Slav-Macedonians. In order to impose this formula President Trajkovski was obliged to concede a generous amnesty to the Albanian guerrillas. There was no modification of the Ochrid Agreement on the equivalence of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, and article 19 of the constitution states that "the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, the Jewish Community and other Religious communities and groups are separate from the state and equal before the law". These constitutional modifications were voted on 16 November 2001, and the Ochrid Agreement thus received Parliamentary ratification.

Premier Georgievski attributed the crisis into which his country had fallen to foreign power centres abroad, and not simply to the Albanians in FYROM. More than that, under the influence of September 11th and in the light of revelations about America's earlier relations with Osama bin Laden, he did not hesitate to tell [Washington's Balkan envoy] James Purdue that the USA fomented terrorism.

There can be no doubt that the gap between the Slav-Macedonians and the Albanians has widened. The western districts of FYROM are

going the way of Kosovo, and what the Albanians want in the long term is not integration but secession. According to recent surveys, the new reality that has taken shape in Kosovo and FYROM has increased the number of Albanians who want a Greater Albania. It is also significant that the Albanian parties in FYROM refused to sign a joint declaration with the Slav-Macedonian parties in which the latter condemned the Kosovar Parliament's decision challenging the demarcation of the Kosovo-FYROM border. The possibility of border change in the Balkans is no longer taboo in American circles. In June 2002 Steven Mayer, former deputy chief of the Balkan division of the CIA, stressed the need for a redrawing of borders in the Balkans in order to create more homogeneous states for the stability of the region, essentially repeating what Lord Owen, and Kissinger before him, had earlier said. American policy, as everyone knows, changes with circumstances. But redrawing borders would disturb balances and create new problems. The policy of the European Union tends not towards the creation of new states but towards regionalism: prevention of the independence of Montenegro, integration of Kosovo as a third component in the union of Serbia and Montenegro, preservation of the unitary character of FYROM. So far America has not declared itself in favour of the break-up of FYROM. But the repercussions in that country from the events in Kosovo are clear. This is why FYROM, which tends to be more pro-American in its policy than pro-Europe, wants to join NATO before the Kosovo question is finally settled.

But apart from anything else, there can be no stability in the Balkans without an economic upturn. The European Union's Stability Pact has not so far borne the expected fruit, since it lacks a specific strategy for the reconstruction of the Balkans. What the Balkans need is a new Marshall Plan. If the future of the Balkans lies with the European Union, then Europe has to map out a specific policy for the Balkans and to commit itself more substantially to the region's economic reconstruction. Modernization and economic stability unquestionably contribute to reducing ethnic tensions. A multi-polar world guarantees stability in international relations.

Dnevnik-Utrinski, *Vesnik-Nova Makedonija* (FYROM newspapers); *Start* (Skopje periodical, organ of the Social Democratic Union) and in the international literature: 1) Stephan Lipsius, "Die neue UÇK in Makedonien und die politische Entwicklung in Kosovo", *Südost-Europa* 1-2 (2001) 1-16; 2) Ulf Brunnbauer, "Historischer Kompromiß oder Bürgerkrieg? Makedonien sucht Antworten auf den albanischen Extremismus", *Südost-Europa* 4-6 (2001) 159-189; 3) *Idem.*, "Doch ein historischer Kompromiß? Perspektiven und Probleme der Verfassungsreform in Makedonien", *Südost-Europa* 7-9 (2001) 346-367; 4) Stephan Lipsius, "Wer ist die AKSH in Makedonien?", *Südost-Europa* 10-12 (2001) 472-487; 5) Slobodan Casule, "The current situation in Macedonia and the region of Southeast Europe", *Südosteuropa-Mitteilungen* 3 (2002) 5-14; 6) Svetomir Skarik, *Pravoto, Silata i Mirot. Makedonia i Kosovo*, Skopje 2002.