

NEWCOMERS NO MORE?

Contemporary NATO and the Future of the Enlargement from the Perspective of “Post-Cold War” Members

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Macedonian Membership of NATO: From a Clear Perspective to an Uncertain Anticipation

The enlargement of NATO is an active and complex process that is very important both for the integrity of the European security area and the transatlantic link. The incomplete integration of the Balkans into the NATO system of collective defence leaves Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia outside NATO as partners, and not full NATO members. The reasons for this are quite different for each country: subjective (sometimes internal, political turmoil and the slow process of fulfilling NATO requirements), but also objective, like the Alliance's internal lack of cohesion regarding the policy of NATO enlargement. The "big players" in NATO are looking to engage in further NATO enlargement in the Balkans, but the enlargement is also affected by other new security challenges. Some of these challenges affect the achievement of those goals in line with NATO's strategy of NATO's three core tasks (collective security, crises management and partnership).

In the case of Macedonia, NATO membership is an important part of the Macedonian national security strategy and is included in the agenda of all relevant political parties. Macedonians overall strongly support membership in NATO. Public support for Macedonian membership in NATO has varied in the past, due mostly to the events which marked the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 and the lack of a NATO mechanism to find a solution to overcome the deadlock, but it has never dropped under 70% since 2006.

This paper uses empirical data from several Macedonian state institutions, domestic and foreign agencies and (from other sources) researching public support for NATO membership conducted in the period between 2005 and 2014. Based on the conclusions and outcomes of a specially targeted research study focusing on the Ministry of Defense and the army, the paper explains the NATO membership perceptions of the employees. Generally, membership of NATO is seen as the most appropriate way to preserve security and stability in Macedonia, a way to attract economic investment in Macedonia and, as a consequence, increasing the population's living standards. In addition, membership is seen as conducive to decreasing corruption and organized crime, ethnic tensions and political instability. This paper also incorporates the attitudes of the security system's employees, (predominately the Army of the Republic of Macedonia), who have a greater vested interest in the opportunities and possibilities of working inside the Alliance, as a full NATO member state.

Relations between Macedonia and NATO

Along with the changes in world politics that have happened after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union at the beginning of nineties, the world's security paradigm has substantially changed. Federal states either split (Czechoslovakia), or imploded (Yugoslavia) and new states were created, some of them gaining independence for the very first time in their history (Macedonia and Kosovo). These newly-constituted states had to restructure their political systems and economies, and also had to deal with both internal and external security challenges. In those circumstances, the European Union was the "promised land" and the direction to take in order to develop into a democratic and free market society. At the same time, NATO was the only viable option for filling in the security vacuum for many states, especially for the newly-constituted small states with security risks inside, or just outside their borders. The phrase "Euro-Atlantic integration" became the mantra of politicians in the post-Cold War states.

In those years NATO itself was going through a change trying to get over Lord Ismay's maxim "Keeping the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down". NATO was engaged for the first time in its history outside the traditional North Atlantic area of the member states (in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The new NATO Strategic Concept of 1991 departed from being a carefully prepared document for deterrence and defence, and became an open public document for the first time, containing many elements of public diplomacy. A set of partnerships with non-NATO states started: the North Atlantic Cooperation Council¹ (NACC) was created in December 1991 (succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council [EAPC] in 1997). Finally, the Partnership for Peace programme created in January 1994 was also serving the purpose of preparing some of the partner states and their armed forces for potential NATO accession. The transformation of NATO was complete: NATO found a new "raison d'être" in the enlargement process.

The Republic of Macedonia gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, without bloodshed or a civil war. From the very beginning, accession to the European Union and NATO were set as clear objectives. In November 1993 the

¹ The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was established by the Allies on 20 December 1991 as a forum for dialogue and cooperation with NATO's former Warsaw Pact adversaries. The 11 former Soviet republics of the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States were invited to participate in the NACC. Georgia and Azerbaijan joined the NACC in 1992 along with Albania, and the Central Asian republics soon followed suit. *The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC)*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 20 October 2011, [www.nato.int], access: 14 August 2014].

Macedonian Parliament voted in favour of a decision to join NATO,² articulating previous public discourses and overall public opinion. Macedonia previously was not a part of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and joined the Partnership for Peace programme in November 1995. The following year Macedonia became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. The first and the second enlargement of NATO in 1999 and 2004 omitted Macedonia. During the NATO summit in Prague in 2002 when formal invitations were sent to most members of the “Vilnius” group³ for NATO membership, an initiative for a closer cooperation between Albania, Croatia and Macedonia was created - the Adriatic group. The Adriatic Charter was signed in May 2003 in Tirana, under the aegis of the United States.

The defence strategy of the Republic of Macedonia, in line with the National Security Strategy, is already adjusted to future NATO membership. It is clearly stated that the defence policy of the Republic of Macedonia fully accepts the principles, goals and responsibilities of the NATO Strategic Concept and it is consistent with the duties and obligations of NATO and European Union membership.⁴ Furthermore, it is of vital national interest to integrate within NATO, the European Union and to actively participate in other forums of international cooperation. Finally, since the Republic of Macedonia is part of the Euro-Atlantic region, the security of Macedonia is an integral part of the NATO region and global security, political and military integration into NATO is “a strategic goal for the country”.⁵

The most important obstacle preventing Macedonia from membership, but also at the same time the Alliance from consensus, is the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece. On 5 December, 2011, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, delivered its judgment in the

² *Stenografski beleški od 68-ta sednica na Sobranieto na Republika Makedonija* [Shorthand notes of the 68th session of Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia], Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, 4 November 1993, [www.sobranie.mk, access: 18 August 2014]; and *Registar za 1993 godina* [Register for 1993], “Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia”, January 1994, [www.slvesnik.com.mk, access: 9 September 2014].

³ The Vilnius group was created in May 2000 by the NATO candidate countries Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia (joined in 2001), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. It had regular high level meetings and it achieved strengthened practical cooperation and exchange of information as well as practical and political support to NATO in strengthening European security and stability. In 2002 an invitation for membership in NATO was sent to Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. *Vilnius group*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2014, [www.mfa.gov.lv, access: 10 September 2014].

⁴ *Strategija za odbrana na Republika Makedonija* [Defense Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia], “Official gazette of the Republic of Macedonia”, No. 30, Year LXVI, 1 March 2010, p. 3, [www.slvesnik.com.mk, access: 13 September 2014].

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

case concerning the Application of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995 between Macedonia and Greece.⁶ Macedonia claimed that its NATO candidacy was considered at the Bucharest Summit on 2 and 3 April 2008, but that it was not invited to begin talks on accession to the organization. Also, Macedonia claimed that with that Greece violated the interim's provision⁷ and prevented Macedonia from NATO membership. The judgment was in favour of Macedonia.

After the NATO summit in Wales (2014), Macedonia is again outside NATO, despite its long-standing contribution to NATO operations in ISAF (International Security Assistance Force)⁸ and its active role in regional cooperation. It was stated in the summit declaration that Macedonia can "join the Alliance as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached within the framework of the UN".⁹

Review and analysis of public support for NATO membership

Macedonia's membership in NATO is a key objective of the political agendas of almost all influential political parties in the country. The need for Macedonian membership in NATO is also supported by the majority of the general public and is a part of a widely agreed consensus.

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contained in the Annual National Programmes¹⁰ for NATO membership (whose submission is part of NATO's Membership Action Plan), public support for NATO membership is permanently affirmative and has never been below 70%.

The level of public support for NATO membership grew steadily during the nineties, from 60% in 1995, 47% in 2001, and 53.7% in 2005 up to 89% in 2006.¹¹

⁶ *Interim Accord between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, "UN Peacemaker", 13 September 1995, [www.peacemaker.un.org], access: 14 September 2014]; *Application of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995 (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia v. Greece): Judgment of 5 December 2011*, International Court of Justice, 5 September 2011, p. 644, [www.icj-cij.org], access: 14 September 2014].

⁷ *Interim Accord between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, "UN Peacemaker", 13 September 1995, [www.peacemaker.un.org], access: 14 September 2014].

⁸ The contribution started with only two staff officers in 2002, increasing to 152 soldiers (one mechanized infantry company and several staff officers and members of OMLT) in 2014.

⁹ *Wales Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 5 September 2014, [www.nato.int], access: 14 September 2014].

¹⁰ First Annual National Programs for NATO membership was submitted in 1999.

¹¹ T. Gocevski, *Realnost i perspektivi [Reality and Perspectives]*, [in:] T. Gocevski (ed.), *Republika Makedonija pomegu samitot vo Riga i členstvoto vo NATO [Republic of Macedonia between Riga Summit and NATO]*, Ministry of Defense: Skopje 2007, p. 23.

The main reason for the steady growth in support for NATO membership is due to the overall wide multi-ethnic and political support.

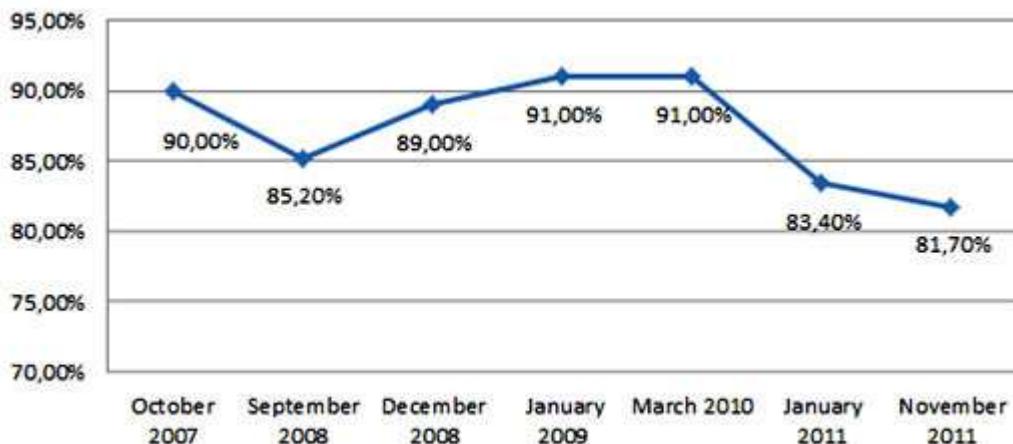


Figure 1: Public support for membership of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO¹²

Public support ranged between 92% and 90% before the NATO Bucharest Summit (April 2008) and between 85.2% and 89% soon after the summit - a moment that was perceived as the key stage for Macedonia's membership campaign in NATO. The NATO summit held in Bucharest represents a key moment of disappointment for the citizens and official authorities in the Republic of Macedonia due to NATO member states lack of consensus for Macedonian membership in the Alliance, perceived as a rejection or veto in Macedonia. Applying for NATO membership was and is taking place concurrently with an application for membership in the European Union and under similar circumstances. These two processes are influenced by many processes and milestones. Macedonian citizens are well

¹² K. Rękawek, *The Western Balkans and the Alliance: All Is Not Well on NATO's Southern Flank?*, "PISM Policy Paper", Vol. 14 (62), June 2013, p. 5; M. Jovanovski, *Mediumite i javnoto mislenje vo potkrepa na NATO* [The media and public opinion in support of NATO], 15 October 2010, [www.dw.de], access: 10 September 2010], P. R., *Golema podrška za vlez vo NATO, no ne po cena na imeto* [Great support for NATO membership, but without a change of the name], "Utrinski vesnik", 18 September 2008, [www.utrinski.mk], access: 10 September 2014]; *Macedonia elects new President, Mayors, and Municipal Councils*, The International Republican Institute, 16 April 2009, [www.iri.org], access: 10 September 2014]; *Vladata i VMRO - DPMNE imaat ubedliva poddrška od gragjanite* [Government and VMRO - DPMNE have a convincing support of the citizens], "Dnevnik", 4 November 2011, [www.dnevnik.mk], access: 10 September 2014]; *Vo Makedonija ima konstantna poddrška za vlez vo NATO* [In Macedonia there is constant support for NATO], "VOA", 5 March 2010, [www.m.mk.voanews.com], access: 11 September 2014].

aware that NATO membership criteria are less complex than those demanded for European Union membership.

Most of the criteria are related to the reforms and development required in the security sector, predominately in the Ministry of Defense and the army. Macedonia fulfilled all these necessary conditions and was ready for membership in 2008.

Over the last five years, enquiries about Macedonia's progress towards NATO membership have rarely been conducted by official government agencies or bodies;¹³ it is NGOs and various foreign and domestic research agencies that have conducted them. For example, the last two Annual National Programmes for NATO membership¹⁴ did not contain data concerning the level of public support except for the statement that the political parties have a wide consensus for NATO and European Union integration. Additionally, since there is a wide perception among the population that the only way to become a NATO and European Union member is by changing the country's constitutional name, research agencies in the last three to four years have connected the membership of NATO (and European Union) support with the additional condition of changing the name. In multi-ethnic Macedonian society, the reasons for the support for NATO membership among the Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians (the biggest ethnic minority in the country) are very different.

The results of a research study in 2010 show that on the question of what is more important, the name of the country or NATO and European Union membership, 66.5% opted for the name, and 26.2% chose membership of NATO and the European Union. When the results are separated according to the ethnic origin of the interviewees, the results are drastically different: 82.1% of ethnic Macedonians questioned chose the name before membership of NATO and the European Union, only 18.1% of Macedonian Albanians prioritized the name, while 77.8% chose membership of NATO and the European Union instead. A further survey in 2014¹⁵ showed that 77% of ethnic Macedonians would support NATO and European Union membership if there was no concession about the name, and 75% of Macedonian Albanians opted for NATO and European Union membership regardless of whether there was a need for a concession in the name dispute. Finally, a research study in 2014 shows that the support for membership dropped

¹³ The last research on this topic was done in 2009 according to officials from the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁴ *Annual National Programme for NATO Membership of the Republic of Macedonia (2013 - 2014)*, Government of the Republic of Macedonia: Skopje 2013, p. 10; *Annual National Programme for NATO Membership of the Republic of Macedonia (2012 - 2013)*, Government of the Republic of Macedonia: Skopje 2012, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Makedoncite sakaat vo EU i NATO so nepromeneto ime!* [Macedonians want the EU and NATO with unchanged name!], "Press24", 23 May 2014, [www.press24.mk], access: 10 September 2014].

to around 70%, but it is still greater than most of the countries that became members after the fall of the Berlin wall.¹⁶

Internally, the uncertainty of NATO accession has been reflected in several areas of society and in the political scene. The deadlock is a key element between the position of the government and the opposition political parties; it is seen as an obstacle to improving inter-ethnic relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians and has implications for the security and stability of the state. Even more, in the past six years (2008 - 2014) the accession to NATO and the European Union has become entangled and burdened with additional bilateral issues with neighbouring states - most of whom are members of NATO. Some of the disputed issues can be traced back more than 100 years into the past and involve the identity of the Macedonian people, the unique nature of their history, the supposed irredentism and so on, and that could also be interpreted as a wish-list of countries with vested interests. These difficulties are not compatible with the NATO treaty principles of the stability, well-being and the contribution to security of the Balkans as part of the North Atlantic area.

Public opinion is slowly changing, and support for NATO membership is in slow decline. This is perhaps connected to the consequences of the NATO Bucharest Summit rather than to a shift in Macedonian international political goals. In the last 20 years Macedonia failed to acquire a true European strategic partner with a capacity to finalize the membership process,¹⁷ and NATO itself has been unable to come up with a mechanism to solve or overcome the conditions created by the bilateral dispute(s), even in the light of the obvious changes of the unipolar world order. Leaving Macedonia outside NATO does not mean that the security vacuum will be filled by other global players' political presences (Russia or China), but it is certainly to their benefit for Macedonia to be outside NATO while their economic presence in the country is slowly growing.¹⁸ Macedonia failed to collect a dividend

¹⁶ A. Zilberman, S. Webber, *Public Attitudes toward NATO Membership in Aspirant Countries*, [in:] M. Vlachova (ed.), *The Public Image of Defence and the Military in Central and Eastern Europe*, DCAF and CCMR: Geneva 2003.

¹⁷ R. Rajkovčevski, *Gradenje bezbednosna politika: Slučajot na Republika Makedonija [Security Policy Building: The Case of the Republic of Macedonia]*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung - Macedonia Office & Faculty of Security: Skopje 2013, pp. 202-206.

¹⁸ In the first eight months, Macedonia-Russia trade exchange reached a total of 75 million USD [www.macedoniaonline.eu, access: 14 September 2014]. Macedonia took a loan from Chinese Export Import [EXIM] Bank at a value of 582 million EUR to build two important sections of the state highway. *Pratenciteodlučja - so kredit od Kina ke se gradatavtopatite Skopje - Štip-Kicevo - Ohrid* [MPs decided - with a loan from China to build highway Skopje-Stip and Kicevo-Ohrid], "Faktor", 25 October 2013, [www.faktor.mk, access: 11 September 2014]; *Staven kamen temelnik na avtopatot Kicevo-Ohrid* [Placed cornerstone of Highway Kicevo-Ohrid], "Public Enterprise for State Roads", 22 February 2014, [www.roads.org.mk, access: 11 September 2014]; *Se menuva slikata za makedonskite patišta! [Changing image of the Macedonian roads!]*, "Lider", 29 July 2014, [www.lider.mk, access: 11 September, 2014].

from cooperation with NATO in the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and participation in ISAF.¹⁹ Hence, the decrease in public support is a result of the emergence of a bitterness related to Macedonia being outside NATO.

Practitioners' point of view

The perceptions of the “practitioners”, mostly the MoD and the army, regarding the gains for the country, the army and themselves in NATO are a little bit different from those of the general population. This is due to possibilities for close cooperation with their counterparts in NATO-led missions, NATO/Partnership for Peace training and overall the military-political cooperation at different levels where the Republic of Macedonia is already participating.

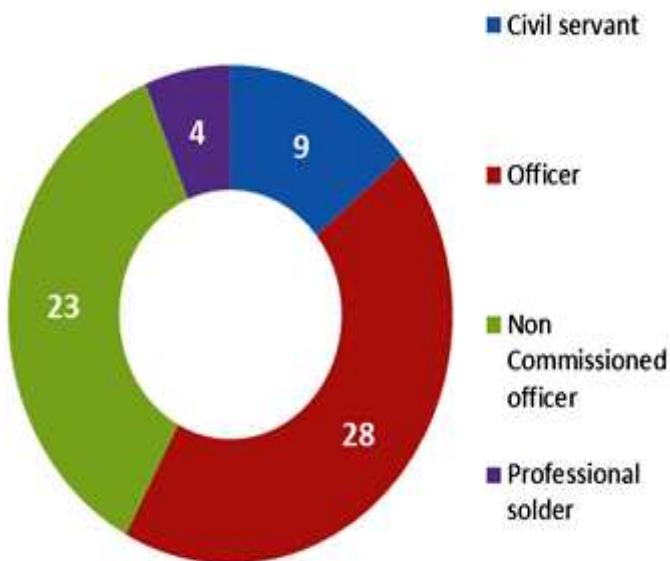


Figure 2: Category of employees from the MoD and the army participating in the research

The research conducted for the purpose of this paper included 64 participants/employees of the Ministry of Defense and army.²⁰

¹⁹ Within its capacities, the Republic of Macedonia has contributed with the deployment of around 3% of its military personnel in NATO-led mission (ISAF) and will continue to do so in the “Resolute Support” NATO mission in Afghanistan.

²⁰The e-questionnaire was distributed via Google Drive to the participants and was published on Facebook. It contained an introduction part (with the purpose of the research and the paper as well as an explanation of how to complete the questionnaire).

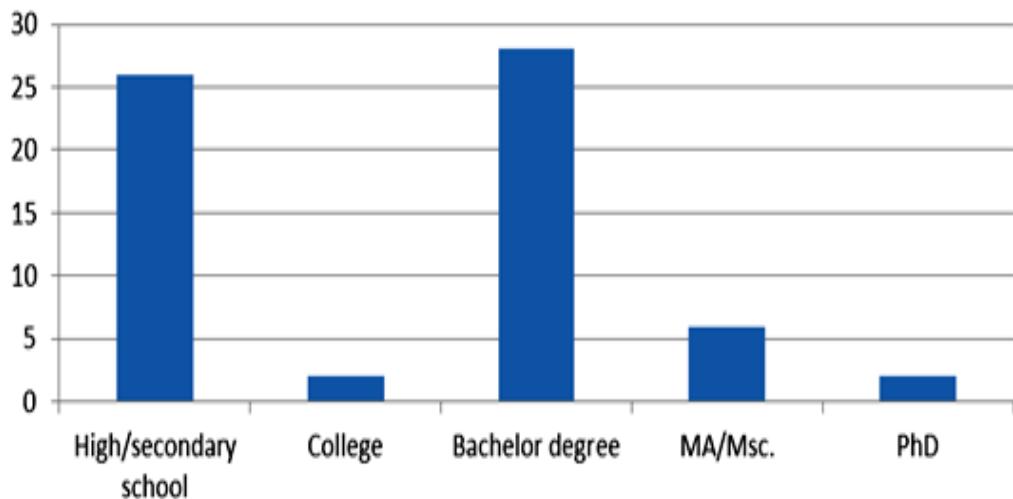


Figure 3: Education structure of interviewees

Most of the interviewees (89.1% or 57) think that the Republic of Macedonia should be a NATO member. Of these, 92.9% (or 26) of the officers and 82.6% (or 19) of the non-commissioned officers, 94.9% (or 37) of the employees with 11 to 20 years effective length of service believe that the Republic of Macedonia should be a NATO member and there is unanimous support from interviewees who have served two or three missions abroad (100%).

Almost a third of the interviewees (32.8%) think that the name dispute, as the main precondition for NATO membership, has no implication on the security and stability of the Republic of Macedonia.

In answer to the question: “What are the benefits for the country from NATO integration?”, 37.5% of all participants in the research chose increasing the security and internal stability of the country, 25% think that it is the increase in living standards, i.e., increasing investments and decreasing unemployment, and 20.3% think that in that way Macedonia will achieve durable security. A very small number chose decreasing corruption and organized crime, ethnic tensions or political instability (1.6% - 3.1%). These responses suggest that most of the practitioners see NATO membership primarily as a security and economic benefit for the country, but not as an instant remedy for the current difficulties in Macedonian society.

Category of employees within the MoD and the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM):	8. What are the country's benefits of NATO membership?								
	Economic benefits, increase of living standard, i.e. increasing in the investments and decreasing organized crime.	Decreasing corruption and organized crime.	Decreasing ethnic tensions.	Decreasing political instability.	Increasing the security and internal stability of the country.	Achieving durable security of the country.	No opinion.	Total	
Civil servant	3 33.3%	1 11.1%	0 0%	0 0%	2 22.2%	1 11.1%	2 22.2%	9 100.0%	
Officer	6 21.4%	0 .0%	2 7.1%	1 3.6%	14 50.0%	4 14.3%	1 3.6%	28 100.0%	
Non-commissioned officer	6 26.1%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	7 30.4%	7 30.4%	3 13.0%	23 100.0%	
Professional soldier	1 25.0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 25.0%	1 25.0%	1 25.0%	0 0%	4 100.0%	
Total	16 25.0%	1 1.6%	2 3.1%	2 3.1%	24 37.5%	13 20.3%	6 9.4%	64 100.0%	

Table 1: What are the country's benefits from NATO membership?

Almost half of the officers (46.4%) and non-commissioned officers (56.5%) believed that increasing the living standards of Ministry of Defense and the Army of the Republic of Macedonia personnel in line with the NATO standards as the most significant benefit for them from NATO membership. The same number of officers (46.4%) stated that the opportunity to work in NATO HQs as their best personal benefit, while non-commissioned officers chose three options equally (with 26.1%):

- Possibilities for participation in NATO-led operations;
- Possibilities to work in NATO HQs;

- Possibilities to participate in different NATO programmes at different levels (more than the Partnership for Peace levels).

The conclusion is that the officers, based on their experience participating in missions, training events and courses, and all the opportunities to work together with their NATO colleagues, focus their ambitions on managerial or leadership positions in HQs and see themselves as competent and skilful enough to work side by side with their NATO countries' counterparts.

With respect to the interviewees' length of service, the largest group (60.9%) has 11 - 20 years of service. This group of all categories (civilians, officers, NCOs and soldiers) thinks that:

- Increasing the security and internal stability of the country is the biggest benefit for the country of NATO membership (43.6%);
- 51.3% of them think that increasing the living standards of Ministry of Defense and the Army of the Republic of Macedonia personnel in line with NATO standards is the main benefit for the MoD and the army;
- A third of them thought that the possibility of working in NATO HQs was their personal benefit from NATO membership.

In an interview with Ljube Dukoski, State Advisor for Policy, Planning and Finance in the Ministry of Defense, he explained his professional and personal view of the national and military gains from NATO membership. He believes that membership in NATO will enhance the citizen's trust in institutions, it will increase the perceived level of security and will open new possibilities for foreign investments. With security integration in NATO, a gradual integration in all spheres of society will follow, with security integration being paramount. The army will benefit from NATO membership with the enhancement and increased growth of national military capacities, including the process of learning (better military education), specialization and training.

The "compatibility" of national military capacities will be replaced with "interoperability", based on modernization and human resources development. The personal gains, from the perspective of the higher echelon of the professionals/practitioners of the Ministry of Defense and the army, mean that Macedonian representatives can be a part of NATO committees as well as an integral part of the Alliance decision making process and planning (within NATO entities), based on the criteria for the selection wider than the national ones (again, on a meritocratic basis). That means that in fulfilling the responsibilities of the state, there has to be a good selection of personnel, a special attention to education, equipping and

their training, and timely and periodic evaluation of the security and national interests as well as NATO requirements.

Conclusion

NATO membership for the Republic of Macedonia is considered paramount for the security of the country. However, one should not overstress the importance security over economic wellbeing and development, since there cannot be security without a good economy, just as there can be no economy at all without effective security in place. Right now, Macedonia is a NATO partner striving to be a NATO member. Macedonia holds a record of being engaged for years in Membership Action Plan as a preparation for membership. The wait has been too long.

The support for NATO membership in the country is quite high among the political parties and the general population. After the NATO Bucharest Summit (in 2009), the percentages started dropping, but there is still overall support among the population. A commonly held view is that the percentages will not drop below 50% and that maintaining the high level of support could not be a problem (as in the case of Croatia just before accession in 2008). However, if changing the name of the country is required for membership, it is unlikely that there will be public support, and there is statistical evidence to support this. The commonly held view is that in that case, Macedonia will be better off outside NATO. Even though politicians continue to repeat that there is no alternative to membership in NATO and the European Union, the current situation is an alternative: being a NATO partner instead of a NATO member.

The alternative situation of a partnership with Russia (or China) based on historical sentiment is unimaginable. In reality, with NATO members surrounding the country from the east, west and south (and the NATO presence in Kosovo, and the north - west of Macedonia), as well as the United States and Turkey as strategic partners, the perception is that Macedonian territorial integrity is not at stake. The security of Macedonia is in danger far more from extreme nationalism, ethnical and religious intolerance, international terrorism, organized crime and illegal weapons, as well as the unfinished system of the effective rule of law, corruption, an independent judicial system, unemployment and social disturbances. Cyber security and energy security are also a risk.

The perception of the way the international community implements the decision of the International Court of Justice has had a significant effect on the public support for NATO membership. The name dispute amplified the perception (among ethnic Macedonians) that Macedonia should not make any more concessions in the name dispute, even at the cost of NATO and European Union mem-

bership. The Macedonian Albanians, the biggest ethnic minority have a diametrically opposite opinion, leaving a possibility for a further division among the population in Macedonia, and even more, a possibility for future internal instability.

According to the results, the perception of the employees of the Ministry of Defense and the army is only a little bit different from the general population's perception. The support for NATO membership is very high (almost 90%, with 100% of personnel with two or three mission experiences), but although closely connected with the security of the country, almost a third of the interviewees think that the name dispute (being the main precondition for NATO membership), has no implications on the security and stability of the Republic of Macedonia. More than 58% found that the biggest benefit for the country is strictly the improvement of the security of the country. These perceptions are perceptions from a professional, credible force with experience from various missions (NATO-led, United Nations, European Union and the "coalition of the willing"), recognized as a valuable partner.

The army will continue to be a driving force of all the reform processes in the defence sector and in NATO integration, applying all the knowledge and lessons learned from the missions to the everyday work. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the international experience of the personnel, when they served as the best ambassadors of the country. Therefore, their level of support for NATO means that they have an understanding of how undivided the security of the country from the region and the Euro-Atlantic region (NATO) is.

Macedonian membership in NATO is uncertain at the moment; it is conditional with the solution of the name issue (between Macedonia and a NATO and EU member country) that looks indefinite at the moment. However, the country is dedicated and committed to membership in NATO and it is a valuable and respectable partner of NATO missions. From a Macedonian perspective, the objective is clear: NATO membership, but not at all costs.