

THE IMPACT OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES, ON PEACE, STABILITY AND DEFENCE REFORMS IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND THE REGION

Bekim Maksuti¹

¹Faculty of Law, University of Tetova

Abstract

Both the Republic of North Macedonia and the countries of the region, i.e. the Western Balkans, almost all the successes in terms of contemporary and western values have achieved thanks to the tireless and unreserved commitment of the US. In this regard we certainly should mention the Albanian cause in general, especially in countries where Albanians live. All politics and democratic efforts of an overseas country such as the United States is, are and continue to be a guarantee that these countries even though have passed through the most cruel storms of time, such as that of various empires, barbaric communist and socialist regimes and up to unscrupulous interests of the East, have a brighter future for future generations. The United States has helped countries in the region in institutional, legal, political, economic and especially military aspect. I would like to mention the last one which has brought benefits in different areas of security which at the same time represents the key element of state-building, protection of national values that can be directly linked to the economic prosperity.

Keywords: *USA, Western Balkans, Rep. of Macedonia, Albanians, economy, security, military aid*

The political and expert public shares a general opinion and understanding that the United States is the key factor for peace, security and stability in Europe, including the Western Balkan region. The US has substantially invested in achieving peace, security and stability in all countries of the Western Balkans, including the Republic of North Macedonia. It is done through bilateral engagement, NATO, regional initiatives and partnership with the EU, the UN and other countries and organizations. Allow me to briefly speak about the opportunities and achievements in our cooperation with the US.

First of all, I would like to point out to the beginnings of the cooperation between the Republic of North Macedonia and the United States. In that context, I will first underscore the establishment of the diplomatic relations with the United States dating from September 13, 1995, while the recognition of our country by its Constitutional name by the United States followed on November 4, 2004. The United States opened a Liaison Office in Skopje, which was upgraded into an Embassy in March 1996, whereas the Liaison Office of the Republic of North Macedonia in Washington D.C. was opened in May 1994 and upgraded into an Embassy in September 1995.

The bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries is characterized by an open and continuous political dialogue and fruitful cooperation in many important domains such as defense, culture, education, science etc. In its relations with the United States, our country continues to foster the strategic partnership, to exchange views and positions on issues of national and common

interests, particularly in the defense sector and as part of the cooperation within the Global Coalition for fight against terrorism. I would like to emphasize that this partnership has helped the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia not only in strengthening its capacities and training for participation in NATO missions, but also in terms of structuring the military in line with NATO standards. The benefits and support that we have in our cooperation with the US are of great importance for the Republic of North Macedonia. Furthermore, I must underline that one of the most important strategic documents between the Republic of North Macedonia and the US is the signing of the Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation. This Declaration was signed in Washington D.C. on May 7, 2008. The Declaration underlines the commitment to enhancing the trade and economic relations as well as the possibility for intensifying the relations between the US and Macedonia by promoting cultural and educational exchanges. The signing of the Declaration followed the Greek veto at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. Due to the failure to obtain Macedonia's membership in the Alliance, a proposal was made to sign a Declaration by which the United States would guarantee Macedonia's security; however, that cannot be a substitute for NATO membership. I would like to cite only a small excerpt of the text of the Declaration that reads:

“The United States of America and the Republic of North Macedonia are determined to expand and deepen the close partnership between the two countries based upon common goals, interests, and values.

The two countries wish to enhance their strategic relationship through intensified consultation and cooperation in the areas of security, people-to-people ties, and commerce.

The United States and Macedonia reaffirm their support for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, the purposes and principles of the UN charter, and a unitary, multiethnic Macedonia within its existing borders.

Macedonia and the United States note that a democratic, secure and prosperous Macedonia, with friendly and constructive relations with its neighbors and as an active participant in regional and international economic, political and security fora, is vital to peace and stability in Southeast Europe”.

The Republic of North Macedonia also recognizes and reaffirms the US support for reform and strengthening of the Armed Forces of Macedonia. I would like to underline the cooperation programs with the United States that expand the relations between the two countries and increase the support of our country. One of the programs, the **FMF** (Foreign Military Fund) is a fund granted by the US Government to partner countries for acquisition of equipment and services from the US in view of promoting the defense capabilities of the partner countries. To date, the Republic of North Macedonia has received over 115 million dollars through the FMF for acquisition of equipment and services from the United States for MOD and ARM needs. The programs also include **GPOI** (Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative). The aim of this initiative is to raise the level of preparedness of the US partner countries for deployment in peacekeeping operations and peace missions under UN auspices. The benefit arising from the **IMET** program relates to the

educated members of the Ministry of Defense and the Army of Republic of North Macedonia, officers, NCOs and civilians on all levels, from basic to advanced specialized courses. Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), Coalition Readiness Support Program, Marshall Center - European Center for Security Studies and Military Liaison Program (Mil-to-Mil and SPP).

In terms of the cooperation between the two friendly countries, it is worth noting that on 15 April 2012, the Assembly of Vermont adopted by acclamation a Resolution on cooperation with Macedonia and army partnership between Vermont National Guard and the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Resolution recognizes Macedonia's participation in international missions and expresses appreciation for the joint efforts with Vermont aiming at peace, security and stability worldwide. The Resolution gives political support and importance on the engagement of the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia with the National Guard of Vermont in the international ISAF mission in Afghanistan. It is a valorization of the partnership with the ARM heretofore.

In November 2015, representatives of the Military Academy "General Mihajlo Apostolski" visited Norwich University in Vermont, USA. As a result of the visit, a Cooperation Agreement was signed as the basis for one semester schooling at Norwich University, USA.

I would further like to underscore the initiative for establishing a trilateral partnership between the Republic of North Macedonia, Vermont / USA and the Republic of Senegal, which was proposed by the United States during the Bilateral Defense Consultations between defense experts of the Republic of North Macedonia and the United States in 2013. Over the past years, the Republic of North Macedonia has had numerous meetings with Congressmen and Senators, as well as with current and former senior officials of the US administration and public opinion creators. On all meetings, the support of the Republic of North Macedonia to peace and security through participation in international peacekeeping missions is of great importance. The participation in international missions, such as Afghanistan, under the joint command of the United States is very significant for the ARM capacities in terms of improving its tactical readiness in accordance with NATO standards. The participation of the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia in the peacekeeping mission ISAF until 2015, and then in the "Resolute Support" mission proved its exceptional support of the global values of peace and democracy and on December 27, 2014 the first 20 ARM members were deployed within the American contingent at Camp Resolute Support Kabul.

The active participation and membership of the countries from the immediate neighborhood of the Republic of North Macedonia in international organizations, associations, forums and initiatives strengthen the bilateral and multilateral cooperation and contribute to the strengthening of confidence and security in the region.

In terms of the regional cooperation of the Republic of North Macedonia that is supported by the US, we must emphasize the **Cooperation in the defense area in A-3 / A-5 context** which began after the signing of the Charter of Partnership among the United States, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia in Tirana, on May 02, 2003, by the respective Foreign Ministers of the three countries. In January 2009, a Partnership Plan for implementation of the U.S. - Adriatic Charter was for the

first time harmonized in a new format, which included the new members of the group- Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Joint cooperation through strengthening of democratic reforms, respect for human rights, economic reform and the establishment of stability and security in the region lead to the realization of the shared vision for stability in SEE and their membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures. The decision to contribute in A5 format is consistent with the previous positive experiences from the cooperation of the countries in the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan, ISAF (Medical team - A3, the Military Police School).

We all know that the commitment of our country is directed towards Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of North Macedonia and NATO membership, as well as continued activities in view of achieving this strategic objective. The benefit from the cooperation with the United States is a key segment for the Republic of North Macedonia in achieving its integration into NATO and the EU. The US strongly supports the Republic Macedonia in achieving its strategic objective for NATO membership. Over the past 20 years, the Republic of North Macedonia has worked with great commitment on building Europe whole, free and at peace with Macedonia fully integrated into NATO and the EU. The US is ready to continue and intensify its cooperation with the Republic of North Macedonia in the field of security. In our relations with the US we continue to foster strategic partnership and we exchange views on issues of national and common interests.

Finally, I would like to point out that in terms of the great investment of the United States for the establishment and maintenance of peace and stability in the region, we want the cooperation with the United States to be even stronger. Hence arises the position of the Republic of North Macedonia to contribute to peace and stability regionally and globally. The United States has invested substantially in the region and the strategic partnership with the US is of particular importance both for the Republic of North Macedonia and the region of Western Balkans and the wider region of Southeast Europe.