INTER-ETHNIC REPRESENTATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

This article tries to explore the reasons behind a newly-emerged inter-ethnic division, which seems to be motivated more by external than by internal factors. In this quest, the object of analysis in this paper is foreign policy, the knot which links inter-ethnic relations with foreign disputes that North Macedonia faces. In pursuing this aim the article begins by exploring the foreign policy developments since the state's independence in 1991 to the present day. It pays special attention to the inter-ethnic preferences over the foreign policy orientation, in particular towards its Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. And more importantly, it analyzes the inter-ethnic participation and involvement in foreign policy making, including its approach towards the bilateral open disputes with neighboring states. The article draws conclusions on inter-ethnic participation in foreign policy and the impact it produces both externally and internally, based on the findings which derive from qualitative data gathered in the period of 2017-2018.

Keywords: foreign policy, inter-ethnic, international integrations, bilateral open disputes, North Macedonia

Introduction

"Albanians will join NATO and the EU, with or without the Macedonians", stated a senior official of the biggest Albanian party in Macedonia, the Democratic Union for Integration, in 2009 (Radio Free Europe, 2009). This statement caused a huge stir in the public opinion, followed by reactions and counter-reactions between the Macedonian and Albanian communities. Similar statements followed soon by other public figures, raising concerns about a new inter-ethnic division, which didn't seem to be caused neither by the constitutional structure nor by power-sharing issues, but rather by the EU and NATO integration prospects. In line with this assumption, Pendarovski (2012) states that "in the post-Bucharest period, the strategic goal that previously had served to enhance the internal cohesion, [now] provided ground for inter-ethnic division…Until recently, it was beyond belief that the main division line should be the timetable for the Euro-Atlantic integrations" (p.85).

This article tries to explore the reasons behind a newly-emerged inter-ethnic division, which seems to be motivated more by external than by internal factors. In this quest, the object of analysis in this paper is foreign policy, the knot which links inter-ethnic relations with foreign disputes that North Macedonia faces. In pursuing this aim the article begins by exploring the foreign policy developments since the state's independence in 1991 to the present day. It pays

special attention to the inter-ethnic preferences over the foreign policy orientation, in particular towards its Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. And more importantly, it analyzes the inter-ethnic participation and involvement in foreign policy making, including its approach towards the bilateral open disputes with neighboring states. In other words, the paper aims to find out whether foreign policy is ethnically dominated in North Macedonia and whether such domination influences the foreign policy performance towards its objectives and challenges.

The paper is partly exploratory in nature, as besides being guided by the research aims formulated into the above questions, is mostly led and structured by the attitudes of the interview subjects, who represent individuals with knowledge and influence in the areas of foreign policy and inter-ethnic issues. The methodology chosen for data gathering is thus qualitative and relies on in-depth interviews with purposefully selected participants based on prior research and subjective judgment of the researcher. The findings are then analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. Most of the data derive from the period between 2017 and 2018, collected for the purpose of the author's dissertational thesis. The article, hence, relies and uses partially the data in trying to explore the issues raised above.

The following section provides an overview of the context within which North Macedonia's foreign policy developed alongside its consolidation as a multiethnic, democratic, and politically pluralistic state. Consequently, the focus narrows upon the ethnic participation in foreign policy, the reflection of such participation upon foreign policy's choices and behavior, especially in dealing with external open disputes, as well as its effect on the inter-ethnic relations.

Foreign policy developments since 1991

As Macedonia parted from the Yugoslav federation, it also left behind the communist-Marxist ideology, re-orienting itself towards Europe and the occident. But its path towards this new strategic orientation is characterized by ambiguities, oscillations, and many challenges. The first foreign policy formulations were made on a document adopted by the then Republic of Macedonia's Parliament, ten days after the declaration of independence. This document stressed the alignment of North Macedonia with key United Nations' resolutions, while emphasizing that the strategic interest for the country was joining the European integration process (Sokalski, 2003). However, the Law on Foreign Affairs, which was supposed to define specifically the objectives and principles of the Republic of North Macedonia's foreign policy, would not be adopted until a decade later.

The newly independent North Macedonia decided to pursue the unidirectional orientation of the other, former Yugoslav countries, proclaiming the agenda for the country's double integration into NATO and the EU. But in the regional context, North Macedonia established a specific foreign policy doctrine, based on 'equidistant' from the neighbors. According to the supporters of this cautious foreign policy approach, the country was obliged to maintain an 'equidistant' from its neighbors, in order to preserve inter-ethnic relations, as an internal factor of stability, and join Euro-Atlantic structures, as an external factor of stability. However, under new circumstances, and especially as a result of the EU's condition on North Macedonia to work on

resolving issues with the biggest minority internally, as well on solving the issues with Greece and Bulgaria externally, North Macedonia abandoned the equidistance as an inadequate foreign policy approach.

Meanwhile the Republic of North Macedonia was progressing towards membership into EU and NATO. In 2000, it signed the Stabilization and Association agreement with the EU, gaining a special status called "potential candidate". Soon after the 2001 conflict, in 2004, North Macedonia submitted to Brussels its candidacy. In 2005 it gained the candidate status by the European Council. Similarly, the country was progressing towards NATO membership. In 2002 was founded the fundamental trilateral initiative between North Macedonia, Albania, and Croatia. This initiative, which later transformed into the Adriatic Charter, aimed at founding a quadrangle in the Balkan's region, which would bring these countries closer to the security umbrella of NATO. The Republic of North Macedonia continued to show its commitment to NATO by sending military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. But, according to Pendarovksi (2012), NATO, besides being a military alliance, in which realm North Macedonia had advanced remarkably, it was also an organization which promoted stability through economic progress, social cohesion, and consolidated democracy. In this aspect, North Macedonia was lagging behind.

Regardless of the advancement made in the Euro-Atlantic agenda, the open disputes North Macedonia had with its neighbors, but especially with Greece, brought the integration dynamics to a stall point. In the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, North Macedonia's bid for membership was turned down. The declaration at NATO's Summit was unique in character, as it recognized that North Macedonia had fulfilled the criteria set by the Alliance, yet the latter couldn't grant the country membership due to Greece's opposition. The diplomatic endeavors to get North Macedonia into NATO under its provisional name (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) failed as well, despite such an option being foreseen in the Interim Accord of 1995. The dispute with Greece obstructed the EU integration process as well. Although in 2009 North Macedonia received a positive recommendation by the Commission to begin accession talks, the EU officials promptly declared that the country's further progress towards the EU depended greatly on the resolution of the disputes with its neighbors, especially with Greece (BBC, 2014).

The obstruction of the Euro-Atlantic agenda caused a profound disappointment internally. Although from 2009 to 2015 the country continued to make some less significant movements towards the EU[29] and NATO, its pace slowed down dramatically. Furthermore, Macedonian officials even marked an 'undeclared' retreat from the EU and NATO agenda, indirectly arguing that accepting a compromise for the name dispute with Greece, is too high of a 'national' price that isn't worth paying (Pendarovski 2012, Koneska 2014).

The Republic of North Macedonia's foreign policy seemed to take a new approach in 2017. Coming out of a long political crisis, the newly established government focused on the open foreign policy issues. Its first steps were made in the direction of improving the relations with the

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[29]After Greece's opposition to the start of the negotiations between the EU and the Republic of North Macedonia, the EC devised a special mechanism, the High Level Accession Dialogue, in order to maintain the pace of reforms and implementation of the NPAA. This instrument however was not a substitution for the negotiation process.

neighbors, which had become the main obstacle to the country's international integration. In August 2017, the state signed a Friendship Accord with Bulgaria, an agreement aiming to terminate the lingering disputes between the two, over the Macedonian language and history.

Besides mending their bilateral relationship, this agreement was perceived as a positive step which might help North Macedonia in its bid to join NATO and EU. This act was followed by another move, with the purpose of resolving the long-term dispute with Greece. In 2018, North Macedonia and Greece signed an agreement in the Prespa setting, a lake region from which the Prespa Agreement (PA) takes its name, by the Macedonian and Greek Foreign Ministers, Dimitrov and Kotzias, respectively. The Prespa Agreement involved constitutional changes, among which, the most important one was the change of the country's constitutional name from the Republic of Macedonia into the Republic of North Macedonia. Both these proactive foreign policy approaches are considered as efficient ways of not only closing bilateral disputes but also in unblocking the Euro-Atlantic integration process. Indeed, once Greece withdrew its veto in spring 2020, North Macedonia became a member of NATO.

Nonetheless, the same efficiency is not so evident in Bulgaria's case. In fact, soon after the signed agreement, the rhetoric between the two countries' authorities began to roughen, reaching its deterioration peak in March 2020, when North Macedonia was celebrating the green light of the EU Council of Ministers to start accession talks. Bulgaria's reaction towards this event was a threat to veto North Macedonia's integration into the EU, arguing that there was lack of progress in the work of the Joint Commission. Adopting a so called "Framework position", Bulgaria attached to the Council of Minister's decision a separate statement, which, "among other things, insisted on scrapping references to the Macedonian language and to the existence of an ethnic Macedonian minority in Bulgaria" (Maksimovic, 2020). Considering the blockade which lingers to the present day, we may argue that the open dispute with Bulgaria may act as a tougher conditioning factor on North Macedonia's EU integration than that with Greece.

Foreign policy's actors and institutions

North Macedonia's foreign policy's making, during its early years of independence, is characterized by difficulties which were not only a consequence of a lack of capacities for building the latter, as foreign policy had been exclusively under the domain of the federative institutions (of Yugoslavia), but also a consequence of a transformation of political institutions from socialistic to democratic and pluralistic ones. With independence, North Macedonia's foreign policy endured two transformations: one pertained to the actors/institutions with foreign policy competencies and the other to the foreign policy orientation. Regarding independent North Macedonia's foreign policy actors/institutions, they fall mainly into the executive branch of the state power-division.

Within this branch, the two main institutions responsible for foreign policy making are the President of the state and the Government (Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs). Konseka (2014) argues that the division of foreign policy competencies between the President and Government are not so clear cut. Rather they have been determined by the personal charisma and leadership skills of the individuals holding either one of these functions. Koneska argues that the

first decade of Macedonia's foreign policy was dominated mainly by the President, Kiro Gligorov, either as a result of inertia, as foreign policy had been dominated by the President office in Yugoslavia, or as a result of Gligorov's personal charisma, complemented with his long experience in international relations and foreign policy.

The transition of foreign policy making from the President to the Government occurred as a result of the evolution of the political system from semi-presidential to a more classical parliamentary system. This evolution, according to Koneska (2014), occurred also as a result of the 2001 constitutional changes which strengthened the government's role, i.e. ethnic coalition government, in policy decision making, including foreign policy. These developments caused the shrinking of the President's role in favor of an expanded Government's role. Furthermore, the integration process into the EU entailed long processes of legislation and policy harmonization with the EU acquis, that were to be carried out by the government (ministerial cabinets such as the Secretariat for European Affairs), civil servants, and agencies. This process, thus, gave the government an upper hand over foreign policy making.

The transition of foreign policy domination from the President to the Government, Koneska (2014) argues, allowed greater space for political parties and social groups' influence over the foreign policy objectives. However, the political parties' influence over foreign policy strategic objectives, according to Koneska (2014), has been quite limited, as none of the most significant political parties have projected distinct foreign policy objectives from EU and NATO integration, regional cooperation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. These objectives have enjoyed an all-party consensus on foreign policy since 1991. The main political parties, though reflecting a consensus regarding Macedonia's EU and NATO objectives, show slight differences regarding the resolution of the external issues which block(ed) these integrations. Thus, whereas SDSM, DUI, and AA hold almost similar position regarding the approach to bilateral issues, expressing support to the chosen method of resolving these issues (by signing bilateral agreement with Greece and Bulgaria and undertaking consequent constitutional changes such as the name of the state), VMRO holds a slightly different approach. It stresses that its "priority will be to stop and hinder all future initiatives that have been launched after the national humiliations for the expansion, deepening and personal interpretation of the agreements signed by Zaev and Dimitrov." It continues to present its approach towards mitigating and neutralizing the negative effects of these agreements "through a scientific approach and preparation of scientifically based analyzes" (VMRO-DPMNE electoral program 2020, p.207-209).

Koneska (2014) argues that besides the political parties, the influence of other social actors in foreign policy decision-making has been minimal. She even includes the Parliament in the list of institutions/actors which minimally affect foreign policy. Instead of being the place where foreign policy decisions are discussed, it has become a place which 'rubber stamps' the executive's decisions. According to this author, there hasn't been a case when the Parliament has voted against a government's foreign policy decision.

Public opinion also produces certain influence over Macedonia's foreign policy. Koneska (2014) argues that major foreign policy objectives, established by the government, have been in

compliance with the public opinion's stance. Hence, establishing NATO and EU integration as one of the main foreign policy objectives, has enjoyed a high support by public opinion, which has remained relatively constant, since the 90s. This support is based on several polls conducted by relevant institutions. As an illustration, according to an IRI poll conducted on August 28, 2018, the overall support of North Macedonia's citizens for joining EU is 83% while for joining NATO is 77%. Another poll, conducted by Damjanovski (IDSCS and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2020, p.8) also indicates a continuous high support for joining the EU from 2014-2018 with percentages ranging from 72 to 80.

Inter-ethnic representation in foreign policy

In Buzan's terms (1991), North Macedonia appears to fall into the so called *imperial states*, in which more than one full nation co-exist and where the dominant nation is in a continuous battle with other nations in efforts to preserve its control over the state. The aim of this paper is to find out whether such struggle is evident also within the field of foreign policy. In Koneska's opinion (2014) the 2001 constitutional changes in North Macedonia, allowed the infiltration of the ethnic component in policy decision-making, including foreign policy. Although such an ethnic competition over policy decision-making didn't reflect as much on foreign policy objectives, it still reflected on the instruments and methods chosen to achieve those objectives. Thus, the implication of the ethnic component in policy making, may have caused an increase of ethno-nationalism in all policy areas, including foreign policy. The external blockades as a consequence of external contestations of the national/state identity, have helped enhance further the ethnic/national identity component, caused initially by internal developments. Koneska (2014) argues that under VMRO-s leadership, a foreign policy focused on boosting Macedonian national identity, caused a strain in the domestic inter-ethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians. Nevertheless, the author argues that despite these strains, the "Albanian politicians have played a constructive role in foreign policy and in particular in the name dispute with Greece, supporting Macedonian efforts to keep the country's constitutional name – Republic of Macedonia – unchanged." (p.104). Such a statement, however, seems partially reliable, considering some foreign policy initiatives undertaken by the Albanian political factor in effort to find a mutual resolution to the contest and unblock the Euro-Atlantic integration process. In such a context, several questions arise: how can we evaluate the ethnic Albanians' involvement in foreign policy? Has such involvement been constant or varying during thirty years of independence? How does the inter-ethnic element influence foreign policy goals and challenges? The following section tries to provide some insights into the raised questions, based on the perception of relevant foreign policy experts and politicians, organized and analyzed according to the thematic analysis approach.

Foreign policy, a monopoly of a single ethnic group

The gathered data on North Macedonia's foreign policy has brought to the surface an ethnic domination over foreign policy making. The ethnic domination of foreign policy is portrayed to influence both foreign policy's performance in relation to the external open disputes as well as to the fulfillment of the state's strategic objectives. The data has given rise to a theme which brings into the surface several similarities and distinctions among the respondents. The dominant point of argumentation, around which most respondents agree, is a distanced or a lesser role played by the Albanian political factor in the foreign policy realm, especially in relation to the bilateral open issues. Different political representatives, academicians, and opinion makers, both ethnic Macedonians and Albanians come together around this argument. Some illustrations of such stances are provided below:

"*I don't think that the [Albanian] political parties in government have had an impact on foreign policy, in any way*"

"*And that was the weakness of Macedonian foreign policy, not to have ethnic Albanians fully being represented in forging and implementing foreign policy…*"

Although the majority of respondents agree on a somewhat withdrawn role of Albanians from foreign policy, they differ when they elaborate on the reasons behind it. Thus, the respondents' opinions may be divided into two categories in relation to the reasons for the Albanians' distance from foreign policy. Some respondents describe it as a voluntary retreat of Albanians from foreign policy making and implementation. Others describe it as an imposed retreat by the majority ethnic group.

The respondents who argue about a voluntary withdrawal, point out several reasons. The first reason is the preoccupation of the Albanian ethnic group with the internal struggle for enhancing their collective ethnic rights. The second reason is the lesser identification of Albanians with the state. And the third reason is the nature of external pressures on foreign policy, which affect the identity of a single ethnic group (i.e. of Macedonians) rather than that of a common society. Interpretations from two respondents who reason about a self-withdrawal of the Albanian political factor from foreign policy are as follows: an ethnic Albanian politician points out to reasons such as a higher interest of Albanian parties for political support, which they aim to mobilize by playing patriotically and leading internal politics, hence neglecting foreign policy as unimportant for immediate political points. He also argues that such behavior of the Albanian political factor has led to a perception by ethnic Macedonians about Albanians' focus only on their internal collective rights. An ethnic Macedonian politician points out the third reason, namely to the nature of the external pressures and their relation to Albanians' marginalized role in foreign policy. He posits that Albanians, aware of the fact that external pressures do not affect the elements of their ethnic identity but rather of the Macedonians, have held a voluntary distance, leaving room to ethnic Macedonians for resolving the issues that affect them the most and thus avoiding being misunderstood.

The other group of respondents considers the distance of the Albanian political factor as an imposed will by the majority ethnic group. These respondents argue that ethnic Macedonians,

as a majority ethnic group, possess the greatest share of power. Consequently, in regard to foreign policy issues, they have deliberately marginalized Albanians, either by not giving them any relevant foreign policy portfolio or by not including them in any vital process of the country's foreign policy. This position is shared by both ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. The quotations by an ethnic Albanian respondent and by an ethnic Macedonian respondent, illustrate the same essence of thinking in regard to the imposed marginal role of the Albanian political factor in foreign policy.

"That's why I am saying that we haven't self-withdrawn, but we've never had any offer from any government to be included with our proposals, ideas, concepts, projects about overcoming the issue. Thus, the withdrawn role of the Albanians has been imposed by Macedonians since we cannot go and negotiate without a prior authorization or mandate…"

"Ethnic Macedonians have been at the head of all vital processes in Macedonia for many many years at least in the first decade of our independence, up to the Ohrid Framework Agreement, after the conflict. And they (ethnic Macedonians) have not been quite happy to see ethnic Albanians being around or especially to see ethnic Albanians being in the key decision makers' role. So, they have not invited Albanians…"

As seen from the illustrations above, there is a unified stance of respondents regarding the marginalized role of Albanians in Macedonia's foreign policy, at least up until the recent decade. The division between them appears when they elaborate on the reasons behind it. But this division is not characterized neither by political affiliation nor by ethnic belonging. In both groups there are Albanian and Macedonian respondents, of different political parties or apolitical, who support the first or the second pattern of thought.

There is another division among respondents that is revealed through this theme. The second division is about a recent greater involvement of the Albanian political factor in resolving the foreign policy issues, especially in the resolution of the name dispute with Greece. The first group of respondents maintain the stance that a greater participation of the Albanian political factor in foreign policy issues is righteous and structured. Some illustrations of such stance are provided below:

"...in my opinion, the last one and half year, I see more active and to some extent aggressive involvement of representatives of the government from the Albanian political party…"

"I think the recent greater initiatives for inclusion of the Albanian community occurred after the transfer of the government last year (2017), especially through the initiative for including representatives from the Albanian community in the negotiations… the Vice-Prime Minister for Euro Integrations [ethnic Albanian]*, visited Greece several times in the past period, and was included in the negotiations, as a mediator for softening positions and sharing our positions with Greece…"*

The second group of respondents thinks differently about a recent greater involvement of the Albanian political factor in foreign policy issues. They argue that Albanian politicians many times have engaged into foreign policy issues beyond their institutional authorization. Respondents refer to several cases of incoordination between the Albanian political factor and the Macedonian

official standing, on crucial issues such as the name issue. Several respondents explain such behavior as a result of a greater urge on the Albanian side for unblocking the Euro-Atlantic agenda, as the latter is a top priority in their political agendas. Such urge, according to respondents, has led to self-initiated diplomatic actions of political figures with no foreign policy portfolio or competence. The consequences, according to them, are mistrust between coalition partners and consequently between ethnic groups. These arguments are illustrated by a quote extracted from an interview:

"…I think there is an urge on the Albanian side, and it is more proactive but less structured. There are a lot of things that people do individually… For example, an Albanian politician going to a prayer breakfast in Washington, and scheduling himself a meeting with Mathew Nimitz! And this politician is a Member of Parliament, has no competence in foreign policy, but is meeting the mediator on the name issue and saying 'I would give him ideas how to solve the name issue'. And this raises a lot of issues: was this coordinated, by whom, what kind of messages are delivered..."

What is characteristic about the first and second group of respondents in regard to a greater involvement of the Albanian political factor in recent years is the division along ethnic lines. The first group, which portrays Albanian's involvement in resolving foreign policy issues as positive, consists of both Macedonian and Albanian respondents. The second group, however, which denounces the Albanian's uncoordinated behavior, are all ethnic Macedonian respondents. Here, again, the ethnic bias causes the two ethnic groups to hold opposite views in regard to ethnic participation in foreign policy issues.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis above provides insights into the inter-ethnic foreign policy structure. It describes the positions of both ethnic groups within foreign policy in relation to the disputable issues with neighbors. It also reveals the stances of both ethnic groups, regarding the adequacy of the role and behavior of both ethnic groups in resolving foreign policy matters. These stances are characterized by certain divisions along ethnic lines, as analyzed above. The elaboration reveals tendencies of dichotomy and division between ethnically different coalition parties, in the realm of foreign policy. It portrays how foreign policy is not a unified field of policy, but an area of inter-ethnic clashes. The nature of external pressures plays a certain role over the inter-ethnic role and position in foreign policy. As the data indicate, if external pressures, in the form of bilateral contests, wouldn't have any effect over the foreign policy objectives of the state, the ethnic Albanian community would remain indifferent or would play only a marginal role in their resolution. When it becomes obvious that external pressures are the main inhibitors of North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic perspective, the Albanians not only engage in an enhanced manner in foreign policy, but also begin to demonstrate dichotomous actions from the Macedonians. The motives behind such a dichotomy lie both in the nature of these bilateral disputes which target only ethnic Macedonian identity elements, and in the ethnically perceived need for international security. In absence of a national (state) identity, both ethnic communities struggle for preserving their ethnic wellbeing. This struggle causes them to develop diverse foreign policy objectives and

grow separate from one another. Macedonians dread that the external pressures could be a factor which would weaken their ethnic identity. Albanians, on the other hand, do not feel any risk to their ethnic identity which could be caused by the bilateral contests. However, they fear being isolated from western oriented integration prospects by deviating foreign policy objectives towards closer relations with eastern powers. Such ethnic perceptions cause the two ethnic groups to build two different approaches towards the external pressures in foreign policy.

Paradoxically, foreign policy in North Macedonia plays both a unifying and a dividing role between the two major ethnic groups. Regardless of a unified position of ethnic Macedonians and Albanians in regard to the strategic objectives of foreign policy, i.e. NATO and EU integration, the proportional inter-ethnic representation in foreign policy has been undermined for the most part of North Macedonia's existing period. Such an approach has allowed the domination of foreign policy by the majority ethnic group. In regard to the foreign policy objectives, namely of Euro-Atlantic integration, the Albanian ethnic group, although an integral part of the government, has been able to demonstrate its support only declaratively. This is due to the fact that up until the recent decade, the Albanian political factor has not been structurally involved in any relevant foreign policy portfolios. As to the bilateral disputes, which in turn block the Euro-Atlantic integration processes, the Albanian political factor, enjoying no institutional position in foreign policy, has played a minor role. Considering these contests as identity disputes, the Macedonian political factor has appropriated the process of dealing with bilateral disputes, leaving the Albanian factor completely marginalized. However, the built-up frustration by the lingering blockades on the state's international integrations, has recently pushed the Albanian political factor to undertake a separate and perhaps uncoordinated diplomatic offensive, in efforts to move out of the status-quo slump. These offensives, as the data indicates, have not always been welcomed by the Macedonian political factor, casting doubts on the motives and goals behind such moves.

Although there is some truth in regarding the bilateral disputes as ethnic in nature, the conditioning effect they produce over North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration, render them issues which threaten the overall state interest. As such, these contests affect the strategic interest of other ethnic groups as well, including that of the Albanians, who consistently support EU integration as their top priority. Considering the lingering detrimental effect the bilateral contests produce over the state's international integration objectives, the Albanian political factor sees its intensified involvement in foreign policy as imperative. As the data indicate, a higher inter-ethnic involvement in foreign policy produces certain impact both internally and externally. Whereas, uncoordinated foreign policy actions may lead to inter-ethnic mistrust, coordinated and institutionalized foreign policy actions may produce a completely opposite effect. An active inter-ethnic involvement, reflected in a consensual foreign policy approach would result not only as advantageous but also as indispensable. Such an internal political approach, which indiscriminately accounts for all affected parties, would certainly be more efficient in its attempts to unblock the current and future stalemates in foreign policy. Furthermore, an inter-ethnic foreign policy approach may be more efficient in re-establishing the current foreign policy disputes as bilateral processes whose resolution efforts would be pursued independently of the state's

international integration agenda. In carrying out this mission effectively, the current trend of Albanian's increased participation in foreign policy should be reflected not only in form but also in essence, manifested in objective and representative foreign policy of all ethnic groups living in the country.

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