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## **DEFENCE REFORM AND PUBLIC OPINION IN MACEDONIA**

When choosing the topic for this conference the author had in mind the title of the panel “Defence Reform Consequences on Society, State and Social Structures” and consequently the public opinion on the defence reform in Macedonia, as an important input in the political context within the country regarding the defence restructuring. For Macedonia, going through transitional processes, establishing a public sphere (civil society sector), and at the same time democratizing the state and the society, it is of primary importance that the public is informed and supports the state (Parliament and Government) policies on security questions. The Euro-Atlantic integrative processes are also part of this topic, NATO integration dominating in this area as most tangible in recent years. The security situation in the country, having passed through the 2001 conflict phase, is very much related to the general attitude of the society in regard to these issues. In this way, the author coming from the research Institute made a selection of some of the questions from various studies to show what the public attitude towards defence reforms and NATO integration is.

In this paper five concrete questions will be discussed that very much concern the Macedonian society referring to what is the public attitude towards defence reforms. Do the citizens support and in what percentage do various social groups within the country support the reform. The Centre for Ethnic and Security Issues at the Institute for Sociological Political and Juridical Research in years has been following the public attitudes in security, defence and ethnic questions. In this paper will be presented just couple of questions that show what the public attitude is and what different social groups think about these important questions for the Macedonian society. Some of the general trends and differences

in opinions concerning chosen questions for this purpose will be analyzed in the explanations.

### Question 1

Do you support the program of the Ministry of Defence for conducting the reforms in the Macedonian defence?

Table 1

<b>2003 March</b> <sup>213</sup>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
Yes	57.30	61.00	44.10	74.80	40.20	55.10	26.10
No	12.80	15.10	7.00	7.30	35.70	4.40	13.00
Not familiar	30.00	23.90	48.90	18.00	24.10	40.40	60.90

Table 2

<b>2004 January</b>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
Yes	54.00	54.80	46.40	71.50	37.60	56.50	37.30
No	15.40	17.40	10.90	5.40	29.40	10.50	13.70
Not familiar	30.60	27.80	42.70	23.10	33.00	33.10	49.00

The presented data refers to the average results and the independent variables as ethnic background and political party affiliation. Other statistic differences on the side of the independent variables are insignificant. Maybe worth noticing are only the higher percentages in favour of the ministry policy on the side of male population, urban people and the citizens with completed secondary and university education.

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<sup>213</sup> The independent variable on the political party affiliations (the voters) were among the most significant parties of which here are presented only four (current government coalition SDSM-DUI, and former government coalition VMRO-DPMNE – DPA; SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE and DPA are signatories of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, while DUI is founded by the former NLA): SDSM – Social-Democrat Union of Macedonia, VMRO-DPMNE – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, DUI – Democratic Union for Integration and DPA – Democratic Party of Albanians.

Three important conclusions can be made straightforward concerning the first question, used in March 2003 and January 2004 poll. First, that the general public supports the policy of the Ministry of Defence for conducting the reforms in 54-57 per cent. Even though around 30 per cent of the population is not familiar with the policy, it does not mean that they would not support it (very frequent indicator in high political questions). Only 12-15 per cent do not support it. Second, in the March 2003 - January 2004 period the percentage decreased slightly by 3 per cent, due to the fatigue of the general public from the reform discourse and the current problems within the country (economic problems, corruption and crime issues). Third, the decrease of 3 per cent is due to a lower percentage of the Macedonian support vis-à-vis the increase on the Albanian side (DUI voters), also, due to the promptness of the activities to incorporate Albanians in defence structures (according to official data the increase is from 2% in 2002 up to 10% in 2004 in different defence structures – NCOs and professional soldiers quotas are reached very fast, while for the officers meeting the quota will take time bearing in mind longer education process). Understandably, while the biggest Macedonian coalition party voters, SDSM, are much above the average percentage (in favor of Government policy), the biggest Macedonian opposition party voters, VMRO-DPMNE, are much below the average percentage (DPA voters also), meaning that they do support the policy in lower figures (endless position-opposition struggle).

**In general, we can assume that the wider public accepts the policy of the Ministry of Defence.**

#### **Question 2**

Do you support the decrease of the number of employees in the Army and the Ministry of Defence for conducting the reforms in order to achieve more efficient defence?

Table 3

<b>2003 March</b>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
Yes	41.30	37.20	56.30	46.70	32.10	64.70	50.00
Partly	28.70	31.90	17.00	30.60	31.30	14.00	23.90
No	16.30	19.50	5.60	15.80	27.70	6.60	6.50
Not familiar	13.70	11.50	21.10	6.90	8.90	14.70	19.60

Table 4

<b>2004 January</b>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
Yes	35.70	29.60	55.80	43.70	20.10	54.80	62.70
Partly	30.30	34.10	19.10	32.90	29.90	16.90	15.70
No	23.80	28.60	7.50	17.60	40.20	5.60	13.70
Not familiar	10.30	7.70	17.60	5.80	9.80	22.60	7.80

The presented data also refers to the average results and the independent variables as ethnic background and political parties affiliation. Other statistic differences on the side of the independent variables are insignificant.

Three important conclusions can be made in a row for the second question as well. First, that the general public supports the decrease of the number of employees in the defence as a policy of the Ministry of Defence for conducting the reforms in 35-41 per cent. This is more convincing if we subsume the answers 'Yes' and 'Partly yes'. Then the support will rise up to 66-70 per cent. That would mean even higher percentage than the previous question as a support for reforms in the defence. Second, here the 'Not familiar' answer is much lower due to the fact that the question tackles and interferes with two different interests. On the Macedonian side it means that the national defence will be more weak in figures and a number of them will lose their jobs, while on the Albanian side it means that the lower the number of defence structure is

the lower is the fear of the Army interfering in the ‘domestic affairs’ – interethnic issues. This question touches the ‘national (ethnic) concerns’, for different reasons for Macedonians and Albanians, and the percentage of ‘Not familiar’ is understandably much lower. Again the answer ‘No’ is rising from 16 to 23 as the reforms are entering the implementation phase.

Even if the Macedonians think that the Albanians will take their places, still it is important to mention that whatever number of the Macedonians will lose their jobs the Albanians will have to have their equitable participation. Third, from the above mentioned reasons (oppositional attitude, ethnic issues concerns) the VMRO-DPMNE political party voters do support the Government policy in lower percentage, from 27% in March 2003 up to 40% in January 2004. In the same time the support from the Albanian parties, DUI and DPA, is increasingly higher for the Government policy in decreasing the total numbers (Ministry of Defence and Army).

**In general, the decreasing number of employees in the Army and the Ministry of Defence for the purpose of better efficiency is slightly less accepted than the general defence reform policy.**

### **Question 3**

What will the Defence of the Republic of Macedonia gain by reducing the conscript service time and the professionalization of the Army, according to your personal view?

Table 5

<b>2003 March</b>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
More efficient defence system	23.80	25.80	16.30	28.40	17.90	16.90	17.40
Adjustment to NATO standards	17.00	16.90	14.80	23.30	11.60	19.90	6.50
Finance savings	40.20	40.70	40.70	40.10	42.90	42.60	50.00
Not gain anything	11.90	11.30	14.80	5.70	22.30	10.30	17.40
Not familiar	7.10	5.30	13.30	2.50	5.40	10.30	8.70

Getting deeper into the question of the reforms and the correlation with the society, besides the question of decreasing the number of employees in the defence, as we saw the differences on ethnic and political party affiliation variables, in March 2003 we asked the question on what the defence will gain by reducing the conscript service and professionalization of the Army. The time was when the Ministry of Defence announced that the conscript service time would be reduced from 9 to 6 month, and that the professionalization of the Army will speed up. Here we offered the qualitative answers in order to be more precise on the public attitude. And, not surprisingly to domestic analysts, though a big surprise for the outsiders familiar with the political spectrum and ethnic divisions of the society, the answers were unequivocally in favor of 'Finance savings'. No statistical differences on any independent variable. The public attitude concerning reforms is in favor of finance savings most probably in relations to the unemployment and the poverty figures within the country, related to the low living standards of the population in general. And with very low percentage of 'Not familiar' answers.

**The general conclusion is that the Macedonian society is burdened with bad economic situation, with high percentage of unemployment**

**and poverty, and that the resources should be redistributed in other areas, meaning that expensive defence system is not affordable.**

The Center for Ethnic and Security Issues did many researches on different aspects in relation to NATO. Still, the most interesting question is whether citizens would like Macedonia to become a NATO member, which has been asked regularly in last couple of years. It is interesting to compare 2001, when the conflict occurred, and 2004, the year when the Adriatic group countries (Macedonia, Albania and Croatia) are serious candidates for NATO membership. As we can see from the exhibit data, the Macedonians dropped in second part of 2001 and the percentage decreased on 53.2. Even in this period Macedonians saw the NATO membership as important for the country's future strategy with qualified majority. The percentage of Albanians stayed at high level all the time. The differences are a result of the perception of NATO involvement in the Macedonian crisis, seen through the prism that the Macedonians thought that NATO (Americans) acted in favor of Albanians, opinion shared in great deal on the Albanian side.

#### **Question 4**

Would you like Macedonia to become a NATO member?

Table 6

	<b>2001 May</b>		<b>2001 October</b>		<b>2003 March</b>		<b>2004 January</b>	
	<b>Mac.</b>	<b>Alb.</b>	<b>Mac.</b>	<b>Alb.</b>	<b>Mac.</b>	<b>Alb.</b>	<b>Mac.</b>	<b>Alb.</b>
Yes	62.5	78.0	53.2	84.0	58.7	84.1	67.0	88.8
No	20.2	3.6	33.0	7.5	24.4	7.0	16.9	1.1
Not know	17.4	18.4	13.7	8.3	16.9	8.9	16.2	10.1

Table 7

<b>2003 March</b>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
Yes	63.80	58.70	84.10	73.50	48.20	89.00	76.10
No	20.90	24.40	7.00	15.10	31.30	5.10	13.00
No familiar	15.30	16.90	8.90	11.40	20.50	5.90	10.90

Table 8

<b>2004 January</b>	General	Macedonian	Albanian	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE	DUI	DPA
Yes	72.10	67.00	88.80	74.20	59.30	88.70	92.20
No	13.30	16.90	1.10	11.90	24.20	1.60	3.90
No familiar	14.70	16.20	10.10	13.90	16.50	9.70	3.90

In the last two public opinion polls (Table 7 and Table 8) we also compared the political party affiliation, and it is interesting to compare both data, from March 2003 and January 2004.

Macedonian public is very much for the country to become a member of NATO. First, the general result is rising from 64 per cent in March 2003 to 72 per cent in January 2004. Second, the Albanians are steadily with higher per cent, and the Macedonians 'grow' from 53 per cent in October 2001, 59 per cent in March 2003 to 67 per cent in January 2004. Third, the only political party affiliates that are lower than the average are the VMRO-DPMNE voters, which have 48 per cent in March 2003 and increased on 59 per cent in January 2004.

**The conclusion is that the general Macedonian public is in favor of becoming a NATO member, rising in figures in the last couple of years and reaching 72 per cent in January 2004. This kind of high support can be justified with the attitude that Macedonia and**



**NATO in 2004 are together in ‘business’, for peace, stability and prosperity for the country and the region.**

The last question tries to shed light on the issue of the benefits of Macedonian society of becoming a NATO member, seen through the citizen’s opinion.

### **Question 5**

What Macedonia will gain with the NATO membership?

Table 9

<b>2003 March</b>	Gener al	Macedonian	Albanian
Protection of sovereignty	29.8	29.7	32.2
Guarantee against other state attack	21.6	20.2	27.8
Guarantee against inter-ethnic conflict	12.7	9.3	24.8
Enhanced Army equipment	9.5	9.7	7.0
Will not gain anything	21.1	26.8	1.5
Do not know	5.3	4.3	6.7

Table 10

<b>2004 January</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Macedonian</b>	<b>Albanian</b>
Protection of sovereignty	34.9	36.8	27.0
Guarantee against other state attack	16.5	18.7	9.7
Guarantee against inter-ethnic conflict	14.7	8.7	34.5
Enhanced Army equipment	10.5	9.4	13.9
Enhanced Army standard	6.0	6.4	4.5
Will not gain anything	11.3	14.9	1.1
Other category	0.9	1.2	0.0
Do not know	3.2	4.0	9.4

The answers shed light on couple of relations. First, far most often answer is that the NATO membership will protect the territory and the sovereignty of the country with 30 per cent in March 2003 up to 35 per cent in January 2004. The answers increased on the Macedonian citizens' side by 7 per cent and decreased among Albanians by 5 per cent. Second, among Albanians an important shift happened in the second and the third answer. While in March 2003 Albanians ranked the guarantee against attack from other state on second place with 28 per cent, this number in January 2004 dropped down on only 10 per cent. In addition, while in March 2003 Albanians ranked the guarantee that inter-ethnic conflicts will not happen on third place with 25 per cent, this number increased to 35 per cent in January 2004. In total, the Macedonians see NATO membership as protection of its sovereignty and guarantee against attack from other state, the Albanians in Macedonia see NATO membership as guarantee that the interethnic conflicts will not happen. Third, important shift in Macedonian attitude is the positive incline towards 'gaining' from NATO membership, in a way that the 'Not gain anything' number dropped from 27 per cent in March 2003 to 15 per cent in January 2004. Macedonians more and

more see NATO as a positive category related to the state policy towards full membership.

**In general, the Macedonian public thinks that the country will gain something by becoming a member of NATO, mostly in protection of the territory and the sovereignty, guarantee against other state attack, with one difference in the ranking of answers on Albanian side as a guarantee that the interethnic conflicts will not happen.**

As a conclusion of this bundle of questions, concerning defence reforms and NATO accession integration process, we can assume that in Macedonia:

1. The policy of the Ministry of Defence is accepted by the wider public;
2. The decreasing number of employees in the Army and the Ministry of Defence for more efficient functioning is slightly less accepted, but still positive;
3. The general public thinks that the finance savings is important in defence reforms, and that the resources should be redistributed in other areas – economy prosperity;
4. The general Macedonian public is in favor of Macedonia becoming a NATO member, rising in figures in last couple of years and reaching 72 per cent in January 2004;
5. The general public think that by becoming a NATO member the state will gain better protection of the national territory and the sovereignty.

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