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UDC: 341.71(497.7)

**DIPLOMACIA E MAQEDONISË SË VERIUT**

**ДИПЛОМАТИЈА НА СЕВЕРНА МАКЕДОНИЈА**

**THE NORTH MACEDONIAN DIPLOMACY**

**Abstract**

North Macedonia, a land rich in history and cultural heritage, has long been at the crossroads of empires and civilizations. Located in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, this small country has played a significant role in the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Europe. Diplomacy has been a crucial tool for North Macedonia, especially as it navigates its position among larger, more powerful neighbors. The country's ability to maintain its sovereignty, secure international recognition, and pursue its national interests has been deeply intertwined with its diplomatic endeavors. This essay explores the history, challenges, and successes of North Macedonian diplomacy, from its ancient roots to its modern-day strategies, while also examining the future prospects of this small but strategically important nation.

*Keywords: Diplomacy, North Macedonia, Balkans, History, Relations, Minority, etc.*

**1. Historical Context of North Macedonian Diplomacy**

The origins of Macedonian diplomacy can be traced back to ancient times when the Kingdom of ancient Macedonia rose to prominence under the leadership of Philip II and his son, Alexander the Great. During this period, diplomacy was a vital tool in expanding the

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ancient Macedonian empire and forging alliances. Alexander the Great, through a combination of military might and diplomatic acumen, established one of the largest empires in history, spreading Greek culture and influence across three continents. His diplomatic efforts, such as his marriage alliances with Persian nobility and his respect for local customs in conquered territories, were pivotal in maintaining control over such a vast and diverse empire.<sup>2</sup>

The Macedonian approach to diplomacy had lasting effects on the Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions. Alexander's conquests brought Hellenistic culture to new regions, influencing the Roman Empire and even later empires that followed. Macedonian diplomacy set a precedent in several ways:

**Influence on Roman and Byzantine Diplomacy:** The Roman Empire adopted aspects of Macedonian diplomacy, particularly in terms of integrating conquered peoples<sup>3</sup>. The Romans learned from Macedonian methods of securing loyalty through cultural respect and the establishment of administrative centers.

**Cultural Exchange and Hellenization:** Macedonian diplomacy, especially under Alexander, promoted a level of cultural exchange that had rarely been seen in the ancient world. The spread of Hellenistic culture created a shared cultural and intellectual foundation, which facilitated diplomatic relations and trade among various regions long after the fall of the Macedonian Empire.

**Foundation for Modern Diplomacy:** Many diplomatic principles practiced by Philip and Alexander—alliances through marriage, respect for local customs, and psychological warfare—are still present in modern diplomacy. The idea of cultural diplomacy, where a state promotes its culture to build influence abroad, has its roots in the Hellenistic practices established by Macedonian rulers.

### *Diplomatic Tactics and Strategies of Philip II*

Philip II pioneered a diplomatic approach that blended warfare and negotiations to create alliances. He adopted several strategies that would later be mirrored by other ancient empires, such as:

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<sup>2</sup> Errington R.M. (1993), *A history of Macedonia (Hellenistic Culture and Society)*

<sup>3</sup> Buxhovi, J. (2019), *Maqedonia: Nga antika deri te koha jonë*, Jalifat Publishing

**Marriage Alliances:** Philip married multiple times, each time forging alliances with neighboring states or powerful leaders. For instance, his marriage to Olympias, a princess from Epirus, not only consolidated his power but also produced Alexander, a future conqueror. These alliances helped him secure peace on certain fronts and enabled him to focus on expanding his influence southward into Greece.<sup>4</sup>

**Use of Bribery and Corruption:** Philip skillfully employed bribes to win over Greek politicians and leaders. This allowed him to gain influence in Greek cities without extensive bloodshed, as he could secure cooperation from within by supporting favorable leaders and factions.

**Political Leverage and Psychological Tactics:** Philip used psychological warfare by promoting the idea of a unified Greek front against Persia. Through propaganda, he spread the notion that he was a champion of Greek unity, which made his influence more palatable to the Greeks.

**Hostage Exchanges and Oaths of Loyalty:** Philip practiced the ancient tradition of exchanging hostages to secure the loyalty of his allies. By having key figures in his court, he could ensure cooperation from various leaders who would otherwise be inclined to act independently.

Following the death of Alexander, ancient Macedonia's influence waned, and the region eventually fell under Roman and later Ottoman rule.<sup>5</sup> The long centuries of Ottoman domination significantly limited the scope of Macedonian diplomacy, as the region was incorporated into the broader diplomatic framework of the Ottoman Empire. However, the spirit of resistance and the desire for autonomy persisted among the Macedonian people, laying the groundwork for future diplomatic efforts in the quest for national sovereignty.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of national movements across the Balkans. North Macedonia became a battleground for competing nationalisms, with Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia all laying claims to the territory.<sup>6</sup> The region's complex ethnic and religious composition further complicated diplomatic efforts. The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and World War I reshaped the borders of Southeast

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<sup>4</sup> Idib.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Marolov D, (2013), *Republic of Macedonia Foreign Policy: Diplomacy in the middle of the Balkans*

Europe, with North Macedonia being divided among neighboring states. It was not until the aftermath of World War II, with the formation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, that the Socialist Republic of North Macedonia was established, albeit within a federal framework.

## **2. Diplomatic Challenges in the 20th Century**

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s presented both an opportunity and a challenge for North Macedonia. On September 8, 1991, Macedonia declared its independence, becoming one of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup> However, the road to international recognition was fraught with difficulties, particularly due to the name dispute with Greece. Greece objected to the use of the name "Macedonia," arguing that it implied territorial claims over its northern province of the same name. This disagreement delayed North Macedonia's admission to international organizations and strained its relations with its southern neighbor.

In the early years of independence, North Macedonia's diplomatic efforts were primarily focused on gaining recognition from the international community. The country was admitted to the United Nations in 1993 under the provisional name "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM). Despite this compromise, the name issue continued to dominate North Macedonia's diplomatic agenda, hindering its aspirations for European Union (EU) and NATO membership.

Relations with other neighboring countries also posed challenges for Macedonian diplomacy. While North Macedonia managed to establish diplomatic relations with Albania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, historical grievances and minority issues often complicated these relationships. For instance, Bulgaria was one of the first countries to recognize North Macedonia's independence but refused to acknowledge the existence of a distinct Macedonian ethnicity and language, considering them as variations of Bulgarian.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, North Macedonia worked diligently to build its diplomatic presence on the global stage. It sought membership in international organizations and actively participated in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Sokalksi H.J. (2003), *An ounce of prevention: Macedonia and the UN experience in the preventive diplomacy*

regional initiatives aimed at promoting stability and cooperation in the Balkans. The country's diplomatic efforts were also directed at managing internal challenges, particularly the ethnic tensions between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority. The Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed in 2001 following an armed conflict between the government and Albanian insurgents, was a key diplomatic achievement that laid the foundation for peace and stability in the country.

### **3. The Name Dispute and the Prespa Agreement**

The name dispute with Greece remained the most significant diplomatic challenge for North Macedonia for over two decades. The issue not only affected bilateral relations but also blocked North Macedonia's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union. Despite numerous rounds of negotiations, the two countries were unable to reach a mutually acceptable solution for many years. The impasse continued to strain North Macedonia's diplomatic relations with Greece and limited its integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.<sup>9</sup>

The turning point came in 2018 with the signing of the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece. This landmark agreement, named after the border region where it was signed, marked the culmination of years of diplomatic efforts to resolve the name dispute. Under the terms of the agreement, North Macedonia agreed to change its official name from Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia, while Greece agreed to lift its veto on North Macedonia's NATO and EU membership bids. The agreement was hailed as a significant diplomatic success and a model for resolving international disputes through dialogue and compromise.

The Prespa Agreement had far-reaching implications for North Macedonian diplomacy. Firstly, it paved the way for North Macedonia's accession to NATO, which was finalized in March 2020. This marked a major milestone in the country's diplomatic history, as NATO membership had been a long-standing strategic goal. Secondly, the agreement opened the door for the resumption of EU accession talks, although progress on this front has been slow due to other challenges, including Bulgaria's veto over historical and linguistic disputes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Danforth L.M. (1997) *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic nationalism in the transnational world*

<sup>10</sup> Neofotistos V.P. (2022) *Macedonia and Identity politics after the Prespa Agreement*, Routledge

The Prespa Agreement was met with mixed reactions within North Macedonia. While many viewed it as a necessary step for the country's future, others criticized it as a concession that undermined national identity. The agreement also faced opposition in Greece, where nationalist groups protested the recognition of a Macedonian identity, even under the modified name. Nevertheless, the successful negotiation and implementation of the Prespa Agreement demonstrated the importance of diplomacy in achieving national objectives, even in the face of complex and emotionally charged issues.

#### **4. Modern Macedonian Diplomacy**

In the years following the Prespa Agreement, North Macedonia has continued to pursue an active and strategic diplomatic agenda. The country's accession to NATO has significantly enhanced its security and international standing, providing a strong foundation for its foreign policy. As a member of NATO, North Macedonia has aligned itself with the broader Euro-Atlantic community, contributing to regional stability and participating in collective defense initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

North Macedonia's relationship with the European Union remains a central focus of its diplomacy. While the country was granted EU candidate status in 2005, progress towards full membership has been slow. The EU's enlargement process has faced numerous challenges, including the reluctance of some member states to admit new members, as well as bilateral disputes with neighboring Bulgaria. North Macedonia's diplomats have had to navigate these obstacles, balancing the need to maintain good relations with EU member states while also addressing domestic concerns about the pace of European integration.

In addition to its Euro-Atlantic ambitions, North Macedonia has sought to strengthen its diplomatic ties with other countries around the world. The country has established embassies and consulates in key global cities, and its diplomats have been active in promoting economic, cultural, and political cooperation with a wide range of partners. In recent years, North Macedonia has also played a more active role in regional organizations, such as the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and the Central European Initiative (CEI), where it has worked to promote regional stability and cooperation.

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<sup>11</sup> Marolov D. (2023) *Macedonian Foreign Policy: From disintegration to integration*

One of the key challenges for modern Northern Macedonian diplomacy has been managing the delicate balance between national identity and international integration. The Prespa Agreement, while resolving the name dispute with Greece, has not completely silenced debates about national identity, both within North Macedonia and among its neighbors. Bulgarian demands for concessions on historical and linguistic issues have further complicated North Macedonia's EU accession process. These challenges highlight the ongoing importance of diplomacy in addressing sensitive issues related to identity, history, and national sovereignty.<sup>12</sup>

### **5. The Future of Macedonian Diplomacy**

Looking ahead, the future of North Macedonian diplomacy will likely be shaped by the country's ongoing efforts to achieve full EU membership, maintain regional stability, and navigate the complex dynamics of national identity and international relations. North Macedonia's strategic location in the Balkans, combined with its membership in NATO, positions it as an important player in regional security and cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

To succeed in these endeavors, North Macedonia will need to continue to invest in its diplomatic corps, strengthen its alliances, and engage in proactive diplomacy at both the regional and global levels. The country's diplomats will need to be adept at navigating the challenges posed by regional disputes, while also promoting North Macedonia's interests on the global stage. As the country continues to pursue its Euro-Atlantic ambitions, it will be important for its leaders to maintain a focus on diplomacy as a key tool for achieving national goals.

### **Conclusion**

Macedonian diplomacy, from its ancient roots to its modern-day challenges, has played a crucial role in shaping the country's history and its place in the world. The ability of Macedonian leaders and diplomats to navigate complex and often contentious issues has been critical to the country's survival and success. The Prespa Agreement, in particular, stands as a testament to the power of diplomacy in resolving

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<sup>12</sup> Mesihovic L.R. (2021), *North Macedonia's soft diplomacy*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

<sup>13</sup> Тутне, А. (2005) *Македонија во првата декада*. Скопје.

long-standing disputes and opening new pathways for international cooperation.

As North Macedonia continues to face the challenges of the 21st century, diplomacy will remain a vital tool for securing its future. Whether in its relations with neighboring countries, its efforts to join the European Union, or its contributions to regional stability, Macedonian diplomacy will be essential in achieving the country's national objectives. In a world that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent, the importance of effective diplomacy cannot be overstated, especially for a small nation like North Macedonia that seeks to make its mark on the global stage.

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