

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN MACEDONIA

1. Questions posed

Three aspects of the crisis in Macedonia shall be the theme of this paper:

- o What kind of significance for the region and Europe as a whole does the conflict in Macedonia have?
- o How successful was the crisis management by the EU and NATO up to November 2001? Did they succeed in limiting the conflict and developing possible solutions?
- o What factors limit crisis management?

2. The dual challenge of security policy for international crisis management

The stabilising of Macedonia by the peaceful solution of the inter-ethnic conflict between the Slav Macedonians and the Albanian population sets a dual security political challenge for the EU and NATO as central actors of international conflict management in South-Eastern Europe:

Firstly, the success or the failure of Western conflict management in Macedonia has repercussions for stability in the whole south-eastern area of Europe. If the inter-ethnic conflict were to worsen to a civil war à la Bosnia the realisation of the goals of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe would be endangered. Especially the goal of initiating an economic integration process in the western Balkans, which is closely lined to the Stability Pact, can only be achieved if the Macedonian state is stable.

A destabilising of Macedonia would not only hinder the attainment of the goals of the Stability Pact, but could also cause antagonisms between Macedonia and its neighbours to arise or be renewed. One must remember that the existence of an independent Slav-Macedonian identity was hardly beyond dispute amongst Macedonia's neighbours in the first years of its independence. Except for Albania all neighbours questioned the validity of the Macedonian state and/or the Macedonian nation after Macedonia had left the Yugoslavian federation. Serbia recognised the Macedonian nation, but not the state, Bulgaria proceeded to do the exact opposite and Greece did not recognise either. The relationship of Macedonia to its neighbours (especially to Greece) has certainly normalised since the middle of the Nineties and could certainly be called amicable. Notwithstanding this, the ghost of the so-called "Macedonian question" could be resurrected if Macedonia were to destabilise.

Secondly, the success or failure of international crisis management in Macedonia has repercussions for the course of the European integration process as well as the emerging security political structure of the EU. The representatives of the EU themselves state that the peace-making and stabilising of South-Eastern Europe is the most important test for the European Security and Defence Policy to date. A failure of European politicians in Macedonia would therefore be a step back in the efforts to formulate a common EU-security policy.

3. Prevention, the missed opportunity, but improved crisis management

The Western crisis management in the interethnic conflict in Macedonia up to date can be characterised as follows: An opportunity to prevent was missed again, but the crisis management has improved (in comparison with other, earlier, conflicts in the Balkans).

Concerning the missed opportunity of prevention one has to state that the international community had underestimated the inter-ethnic conflict potential in this country. They thought that the situation in Macedonia was stable compared to the situation in Kosovo and southern Serbia. The impression amongst the EU member states was that if one supported reform measures within Macedonia one did not have to care about an interethnic balancing act between Slav Macedonians and Albanians very much. Both the largest Slav-Macedonian party VMRO and the largest Albanian party PDSH contributed to the forming of this erroneous impression. After they had built a common government in the autumn of 1998 both parties gave the impression to the international community and to their own population that, with the forming of this government, the inter-ethnic balance was safe.

In the months before the crisis erupted quite a few acute early warning-signs were overlooked as well. An important example are the massive smuggling operations of arms in the geographic triangle of Kosovo – southern Serbia – northern Macedonia. KFOR was partially responsible for it occurring, because it failed to patrol the border area adequately. From the summer of 2000 at the latest there were reports of Albanians being armed in Macedonian border villages. Even EU-internal warnings of a widening of Albanian guerrilla activities to Macedonia at the start of February 2001 did not lead to a resolute response by the EU member states. Those necessary political measures which were instated after the fights had broken out in spring amongst signs of difficulty should have been instated earlier. This is especially true of the Macedonian all-party-talks about a reform of the state. Whether an early start of these political measures would have prevented the armed conflict is questionable, but the danger of destabilising Macedonia would have been reduced.

The crisis management of the EU and NATO emissaries after the armed conflict had erupted can be said to have been a positive one (which, in turn, cannot be said of the conflict prevention measures). The West had reacted to the outbreak of the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina with “a great perplexity”, but clear goals were formulated in the case of Macedonia soon after the fighting had erupted:

- o To prevent the spreading of the fights from the rural areas to the multi-ethnic cities and thereby to prevent a civil war.
- o To prevent a declaration of a state of war by the Macedonian government.
- o To achieve a stable cease-fire.
- o By using political and economical pressure the parties to the conflict should have been convinced of agreeing to a peace settlement plan, which would have restored the inter-ethnic balance. It was agreed not to appease the concepts of the radical forces on either side by concessions to them. The Albanian concept is to demand a federalisation of Macedonia along ethnic criteria. The Macedonian concept, on the other hand, is to demand the sustaining of a centralist state in which the Albanian people (about 30% of the total population) would keep its status as a mere minority. The peace plan of the international mediators pays attention to the multi-ethnic structure of Macedonia (in contrast to the above mentioned ethno-nationalist concepts) by strengthening the competence of local government as well as assuring the proportional representation of Albanians in national administration and the Police while simultaneously stressing the

civic principle in Macedonia's Constitution and preserving the territorial integrity of the state.

The above mentioned goals of international conflict management were reached to a large degree by using political and economic pressure on the parties to the conflict: A civil war involving the population of the cities was avoided up to now; the number of deaths is rather small (roughly 100 at the end of September) if compared to the 10.000 to 15.000 deaths in Croatia and the 200.000 deaths resulting from the conflict in Bosnia; larger "massacres" have not occurred yet, even though both the Macedonian security forces and the Albanian UÇK stand accused of grave violations of human rights; the Albanian guerrilla force agreed to its disarmament after the most important Slav-Macedonian and Albanian political parties had signed a peace plan in mid-August, and it decided to disband itself (at least formally).

Three factors cause the international conflict management to be more effective in Macedonia than in earlier crises in South-Eastern Europe:

- o Firstly, there is now a regional stabilisation concept in place in the region (the Stability Pact) which contributes to the defusing of the conflict. The EU used the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement by Macedonia in April 2001 also as a foundation for the initiation of all-party-talks. The Slav-Macedonian politicians could justify their readiness to discuss reforms benefiting the Albanians via their own population by pointing out the interest of Macedonia in the European integration process.
- o Secondly, the EU has got (contrary to the situation during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as the Kosovo-conflict) the beginnings of a common security political structure and adequate instruments of crisis management. Apart from the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, there is the Standing Political and Security Committee where all the member states are represented and which prepares and executes the decisions of the foreign ministers in security matters. The analytical work should mostly be taken up by the Joint Situation Centre which was set up in early 2000, which is staffed both by military and civilian personnel. Mr. Solana himself has his own staff, the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit.
- o Thirdly, the conditions for successful international conflict management by the community of States in Macedonia were better than in the other conflicts in the Balkans. Contrary to the conflict in Kosovo, Macedonia had a long tradition of a culture of co-existence between Albanians and the Slav population. The parties of the respective ethnic groups were engaged in permanent dialogue.

4. Limits of international crisis management

Even though a regional stabilising concept and common policies by both the EU and NATO succeeded in checking the conflict in Macedonia, the limits of international crisis management are clear:

International conflict management can try to initiate confidence-building measures amongst the parties to a conflict, but if the parties do not want to execute a peaceful solution supported by political compromise there can be no sustainable stabilisation. In the case of Macedonia this is demonstrated by the fact that the peace plan of Ohrid, which provides for an improvement of the status of the Albanians in the areas of education and language as well as their proportional representation in national administration, was signed reluctantly by the Slav-Macedonian parties and is perceived as "Diktat"-peace of the West.

Furthermore (and also demonstrated by the Macedonian case), it is clear that it is difficult for international mediators to be accepted as “honest” and “impartial” broker in South-Eastern European society which is dominated by the categories of “friend” and “foe”. The Slav-Macedonian side accuses the EU of evoking anti-Macedonian and pro-Albanian policy thinking along the lines of “If you do not offer unambiguous support, you are my enemy!”. The NATO troops, stationed in Macedonia to protect EU and OSCE observers after they had collected UÇK weapons, are perceived by many Slav Macedonians as occupying force. Contrary to the overshooting negative perceptions of the Slav Macedonians the Albanian side, according to the classificatory scheme of either “friend” or “foe”, tends to think that the NATO troops are stationed in Macedonia exclusively to promote Albanian interests.

As in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina the link between stable surroundings and a successful conflict management is discernible in the development of the inter-ethnic conflict in Macedonia. If the neighbouring state is politically unstable or puts measures into place which favour one of the parties to the conflict, the chances for successful conflict management are reduced. In Bosnia-Herzegovina after the end of the war it was most of all the influence of Croatia led by Franjo Tudjman and Serbia under Slobodan Milošević which had a very negative effect on the peace process. The fragile inter-ethnic balance in Macedonia is influenced to a large degree by the political vacuum in Kosovo. A negative factor influencing the stability of Macedonia is the unclear status of this UN-protectorate, which, according to International Law, is still part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but which de facto has hardly any connection to Serbia. The longer the question of the status of Kosovo is unsolved and the greater the unhappiness of the Albanians in Kosovo, the larger the recruiting potential for extremist groups (which see the unification of all Albanians of the former Yugoslavia as the only solution to the “Albanian question”) will be.

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