

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FYROM

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I make two points regarding U.S. intervention in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

- U.S. intervention in FYROM in the last 15 years has undermined American interests in the region. It pursued *short-term* interests at the expense of *long-term* objectives.
- The main problem in FYROM is not the name but inter-ethnic relations. In fact, the name may exacerbate them. Resolving the name issue in a way that is contrary to Greek sensitivities undermines *domestic* and *regional* stability.

POINT 1. U.S. interests in FYROM consist of domestic stability, democracy and regional stability. Past U.S. intervention has undermined those interests. Here is how.

- A. During the dialogue between Greece and FYROM (1993-95), Washington introduced American troops there in 1993.

Reason: to prevent ethnic conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina from spilling to the south.

Reality: Politicians in Skopje openly talked about Washington's endorsement of their statehood and consequent irredentism against Greece and Bulgaria. American policy makers did nothing to discourage or correct Skopje's impression.

Result: Skopje's government became more nationalistic, more antagonistic not only against its neighbors (Greece, Albania, and Bulgaria), but also against its own minorities (Albanians, Bulgarians, etc). The short-term preservation of Gligorov's government was pursued at the expense of long-term *regional* stability.

- B. During the brutal suppression of Albanian universities (1995).

Reason: to shore up the fledgling Slav-dominated government.

Reality: Slavs were radicalized against Albanians, but Albanians also became very embittered against the Slavs. Individual Albanian politicians and intellectuals were imprisoned and beaten.

Result: The short-term preservation of Gligorov's government came at the expense of *domestic stability*.

- C. During the civil war (2001). The brutality of the Slav majority through successive governments and Washington's inability to pressure Skopje to address Albanian grievances led to open conflict and civil war.

Reason: inattention to Albanian long-term grievances.

Reality: FYROM is stitched together only by external force. It will fail on its own. The Slav majority has not accepted Ohrid Agreement (2001) in its totality. Prime Minister at the time, L. Georgievski, actually came out against the agreement.

Result: The Slavs are divided. The Albanians are aggrieved and now armed.

- D. During the recognition of FYROM by the U.S. government as Republic of Macedonia (2004).

Reason: to support reforms and promote domestic stability.

Reality: It exacerbates inter-ethnic relations.

Result: It antagonizes Greece, *does not* promote domestic stability, and fosters regional instability. To understand why, we need to look at the heart of the problem in FYROM.

POINT 2. What is the essence of the problem in FYROM? The source of instability is mainly poor inter-ethnic relations. Minorities (Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks, Serbs, Gypsies, etc.) constitute about one-third of the population. The Albanians in particular are the largest minority, roughly one-third. They are aggrieved, armed, and dangerous. Their demands are as follows.

- A. Albanians have consistently complained since independence in 1991 that they have fewer rights now than they did under communist Yugoslavia. This fact suggests that there is little democracy now, despite pretenses to the contrary. Indeed, Albanians did not participate in the referendum in 1991 that declared independence precisely to make this point. They indirectly do not consider the current government in Skopje to be legitimate.
- B. They have few educational possibilities in their own language. Other minorities cannot even hope for that.

- C. There is general discrimination, corruption, and rampant poverty under the current regime.
- D. Albanians have little voice over their own affairs. There is little local autonomy and Albanian participation in government.
- E. There is little mention of Albanians or other ethnic minorities in Skopje's history books. In fact, Prime Minister Georgievski and many of the Slav majority consider the Albanians to be guests in that country. Other minorities, such as Greeks and Bulgarians, are belittled and their contributions to the region's rich history ignored or twisted to suit Slav nationalistic objectives. This point helps explain why the term Macedonia is currently used in an ethno-national way. The term has left most minorities, primarily the Albanians, indifferent at best and antagonistic at worst. Last time this happened in the region was during the civil war in Bosnia with catastrophic results. If there are ethnic Macedonians, then the name of the country as Macedonia *does not* reflect the multi-ethnic composition of the state. It leaves out at least one-third of the population. If there are no ethnic Macedonians in FYROM, why are the Slavs making a big fuss about the identity of the state and refuse to adopt a name for the country that represents *all* peoples better?
- F. Albanians, Bulgarians and Greeks agree for different reasons that the term Macedonia is artificial. It does not describe its people accurately.

The referendum in FYROM in November 2004 failed. It called for a repeal of the recently enacted reforms granting autonomy to various local governments. Part of the Ohrid Agreement in 2001, the reforms aimed to pacify the restive Albanian population in FYROM. However, the referendum failed not because citizens thought the reforms were a good idea, but because of a technicality. Not enough citizens showed up to vote to make the referendum constitutionally binding. In fact, opinion polls up to that time consistently showed the majority of the population favoring a repeal of the reforms. The government in Skopje and foreign governments, including the U.S. government, openly encouraged voters to stay at home. So citizens did what they were told; they did nothing. However, one cannot solve explosive inter-ethnic relations by doing nothing. The problems still remain as acute as ever.

- The Slavs are fractious; some are vehemently opposed to granting more rights to minorities.
- Albanians are suspicious. Are the rights recently granted temporary? Will they have to fight for them again?

Recognition of FYROM as Macedonia by the Bush administration has brought a temporary domestic truce but not domestic stability. Moreover, it has fostered regional instability. Recognition not only has not served but also actively undermined U.S. interests in the region.

It is time to repeal the recognition under the name Macedonia and encourage the various aggrieved parties in FYROM to find long-term solutions not only through greater inter-ethnic cooperation but also through greater cooperation with neighboring countries.