CROSSING THE BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND PEACEBUILDING IN MACEDONIA

ข้ามผ่านกระแสธารอันผันผวน: สหภาพยุโรปกับการสร้างสันติภาพในมาซิโดเนีย

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses how peace building in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has been implemented with a particular focus on the role of the European Union (EU). A general guiding question is, what are the impacts of the European Union's condition for becoming its member on the peace building in Macedonia? The question further leads to answering how such impacts influence Macedonia's politics in terms of the interethnic relations. We argue that the EU has generated positive impacts on the peace building process in Macedonia via setting up the political system characterized by racial management as a viable post-ethnic political project leading to being a peaceful and democratic state. The EU, moreover, can exert leverage on the implementation of such a project by attaching certain conditions to the success of reforms outlined by the Ohrid Framework Agreement and by heavily providing assistance mainly through development programs. However, albeit the EU's remarkable success, there are certain side effects from such EU-led reforms, namely the intensification of the dichotomous division between the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, thereby redoubling the exclusiveness of ethnic identity of each party. Other ethnic minorities such as the ethnic Turks and the ethnic Serbs receive less attention and have relatively limited space to address their grievances and interests which eventually slow down the peace building project in Macedonia.

KEYWORDS : Macedonia, Peace building, EU Condition, Racial management political model

บทคัดย่อ

บทความเรื่องนี้สะท้อนให้ทราบถึงการดำเนินการสร้างสันติภาพหลังความขัดแย้งในประเทศมาซิโดเนียเน้นพิจารณาที่บทบาทของสหภาพยุโรป มุ่งตอบคำถาม อะไรคือผลกระทบของเงื่อนไขการเข้าเป็นสมาชิกสหภาพยุโรปต่อการสร้างสันติภาพในประเทศมาซิโดเนียและคำถามนี้ก็นำมาสู่การตอบคำถามว่าผลกระทบเหล่านี้ส่งผลต่อการเมืองในแง่ของความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์อย่างไร เนื้อหาได้แสดงให้เห็นว่าสหภาพยุโรปประสบความสำเร็จในการสร้างผลกระทบเชิงบวกต่อกระบวนการสร้าง

สันติภาพผ่านการวางระบบการเมืองให้มีลักษณะของการบริหารเชื้อชาติในฐานะโครงการทางการเมืองหลังความขัดแย้งทางชาติพันธุ์ที่จะนำไปสู่รัฐที่สันติสุขและเป็นประชาธิปไตย นอกจากนี้ยังส่งอิทธิพลต่อการสร้างสันติภาพโดยการผูกมัดเงื่อนไขจำนวนหนึ่งกับความสำเร็จในการดำเนินการปฏิรูปภายใต้กรอบของข้อตกลงโอริดและให้ความช่วยเหลือจำนวนมากผ่านโครงการการพัฒนาต่างๆ อย่างไรก็ตาม แม้ว่าสหภาพยุโรปจะประสบความสำเร็จอย่างยิ่ง ผลข้างเคียงของการปฏิรูปดังกล่าวนำมาซึ่งการแบ่งแยกเป็นสองขั้วที่เข้มข้นขึ้นระหว่างชาวมาซิโดเนียและชาวมาซิโดเนียที่มีเชื้อสายอัลเบเนีย ทำให้แต่ละฝ่ายรักษาลักษณะเฉพาะตัวของอัตลักษณ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ของตน ส่งผลให้กลุ่มชาติพันธุ์อื่นๆ เช่น กลุ่มชาติพันธุ์เติร์กและเซิร์บ มีพื้นที่ในการนำเสนอประเด็นและความต้องการของตนน้อยลงและทำให้กระบวนการพิจารณาเข้าเป็นสมาชิกสหภาพยุโรปล่าช้ามากขึ้น

คำสำคัญ : มาซิโดเนีย การสร้างสันติภาพ เงื่อนไขในการเข้าเป็นสมาชิกสหภาพยุโรป โมเดลการเมืองแบบการบริหารเชื้อชาติ

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MACEDONIA

Macedonia, officially called as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, is a landlocked republic in the Western Balkans with a population of approximately two-million people. The country has two dominant ethnic groups, namely ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians (Maleska, 2010). It is, nonetheless, important to note that Macedonia also has other sizable ethnic minorities such as Turks, Romani and Serbs (Macnamara, 2012). In the wake of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, a series of ethnic-related wars took place in all former republics of Yugoslavia except for Macedonia. Despite surrounded by neighbors being at war, newly independent Macedonia was able to avert horrendously violent ethnic conflicts and maintain a relatively stable state-and nation-building process in its early years. It seems at first that Macedonia's story, albeit being a multiethnic state, was a remarkable case of peaceful post-communist transition to a democratic state and market economy in the region (Ripiloski, 2011). Unlike other former Yugoslav republics, Macedonia had seceded from Yugoslavia peacefully due considerably to the adeptness of its leaders and, in particular, the Macedonian President's request for a United Nations' peace operation in the country in 1992 (Björkdahl, 2006). As a result, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR-MC) was deployed to prevent conflict spillover from its neighbors. Aside from patrolling the borders, "the UN mission in Macedonia also engaged in various development initiatives, conflict resolution and integration issues" (Stamnes, 2004:168). With the presence of the United Nations, interethnic tensions between the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians had not escalated to a full-scale ethnic war (Sharma & Welsh, 2015). However, in 2001, an armed conflict between the militant Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian security forces erupted due partly to the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and largely to the already tense interethnic relation between the marginalized and underrepresented ethnic Albanians and the dominant ethnic Macedonians (Zahariadis, 2003). After nine months of confrontation, the conflict ended with the signing of internationally brokered Ohrid Framework Agreement which essentially enhanced political rights for the repressed ethnic Albanians and demanded that the insurgent group disarm. The agreement had three annexes which were considered its integral parts, namely constitutional

amendments, legislative modifications and implementation and confidence-building measures (OSCE, 2017). In short, the Ohrid Framework Agreement sketched out policy guidelines for the Macedonian government to follow and required legislative reforms. Furthermore, it introduced consociationalism, the power-sharing model of governance in a multiethnic state. In this respect, the Ohrid Framework Agreement tremendously impacted the direction of peacebuilding in Macedonia. Currently, interethnic tensions in Macedonia remain visible, but the potential escalation which will derail peacebuilding is rather low (BIRN, 2017).

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Before proceeding, it is of great importance to explore and define the relevant terms in this study. In this paper, the term peacebuilding is used in accordance with the definition provided by the United Nation's Agenda For Peace (1992). According to the document, peacebuilding is defined as "an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (United Nations, 1992). The primary political goal of peacebuilding is thus to install democracy. A key assumption at the heart of peacebuilding is that "violent social conflict has complex and multiple causes that are rooted in the political, economic, and social structures of society" (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009: 172). Having acknowledged such a principle, the EU assists Macedonia in establishing peace infrastructure through reform packages ranging from constitutional to local administration reforms (European External Action Service, 2016). For the EU, the introduction of multilayered and multidimensional reforms is seen as a viable option in tackling highly complex characteristics of violent social conflict.

Second, the Ohrid Framework Agreement espouses not only the concept but also the practices of human security. Kaldor (2007: 182) proposes that "human security is about the security of individuals and communities rather than the security of states, and it combines both human rights and human development". In this respect, the Ohrid Framework Agreement emphasizes the linkage between security and human development. Accordingly, the appreciable manifestations are a wide array of humanitarian and developmental projects initiated in Macedonia, thus arguably paving a way for a legitimate intervention in conflict prevention (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). Hence, through the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Macedonia has been receiving both financial and technical assistance from the Western allies especially from the European Union (EU). In this respect, peacebuilding in Macedonia is accompanied by several development programs heavily financed by the EU (European External Action Service, 2016).

Third, the benefits the EU delivers to Macedonia are accompanied by certain conditions. The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement has therefore been monitored, at times closely and actively, by the EU through conditionality. The concept of conditionality can be understood as "a strategy which an international organization reacts to the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of its conditions by granting or withholding rewards but does not engage in the coercion or large-scale support of non-compliant states" (Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2003: 496). Accordingly, the EU deals with peacebuilding in Macedonia essentially by imposing conditionality. It is not only because of the EU's role as a peacemaker in Macedonia since the negotiation of the Agreement, but also Macedonia's status as a candidate for

European Union membership. Therefore, the success or failure of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement has become an indicator which the EU takes into consideration in the accession process. Put differently, the Agreement is incorporated in the conditions which Macedonia has to fulfill in order to be granted the European Union member status.

PEACEBUILDING IN MACEDONIA

Having elucidated the theoretical framework within which this essay operates, in what follows, we have identified three major impacts of the EU's conditionality on the peacebuilding process in Macedonia.

First, the EU regards the Ohrid Framework Agreement as the cornerstone in promoting human security in Macedonia in that it underscores the protection of human rights particularly cultural and minority rights. As a matter of fact, "the representatives of international organizations even consider the Agreement as a solution to the interethnic conflict in Macedonia" (Risser & Paes, 2003: 189). Therefore, the EU, together with the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) who act as external peacebuilding actors, also actively encourages the reforms to satisfy the Ohrid Framework Agreement. However, such reforms depend considerably upon the EU's financial support, thus making Macedonia comply with the EU's way of doing things. Put differently, it could be argued, the implementation of peacebuilding process in Macedonia has to abide by the EU's core values including respect for human rights and democracy. Neufeldt (2016) also points out that "funding mechanisms used to disburse monies provide international actors with a vehicle to shape norms in peacebuilding interventions". The EU's peacebuilding norms, which appear in the Ohrid Framework Agreement, thereby encourage the Macedonian elites, in general, to conform to those norms. This certainly enhances democracy and glues ethnic cleavages because complying with the EU norms entails more secure environment (Mitropolitski, 2013). For instance, in order to safeguard minority rights stated in the Ohrid Framework Agreement, a law extending the official use of the Albanian language across the country has recently been proposed (Marusic, 2017). Notwithstanding positive changes contributed by the EU, doing so institutionalises the role of external actors in moderating interethnic tensions and steers the direction of reforms from above. In particular, the EU which is currently the most powerful and significant actor is considered a legitimate facilitator who can employ conditionality to prevent potential conflict escalation. In other words, the EU has become an essential part of the peacebuilding efforts in Macedonia. Therefore, the EU has come up with several complementary foreign and security policies to deal with Macedonia and other non-EU Western Balkan states such as the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and the already decommissioned Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stability (CARDS) programme. Modanu (2008) underscores the success of the EU's twin track approach to peacebuilding which is the strategy that combines hard power (e.g., peacekeeping troops) with soft power (e.g., EU enlargement eastwards). In this regard, the EU has outlined a peacebuilding roadmap in Macedonia which provides political support and economic incentives. Doing so effectively leads Macedonian elites in the conflicting party to cooperate and launch reform projects. Even though the EU presence can effectively mitigate interethnic tensions and help to maintain

reform momentum, there is a serious concern arising. The EU's extensive involvement in the process of peacebuilding makes Macedonia dependent too much upon the external actor. In other words, the peacebuilding process has been greatly influenced by the EU in a top-down direction, thereby opening doors for external intervention and unavoidably weakening the changing forces from below. Furthermore, the EU's assistance as such reinforces the dependent relationship between the European center and the periphery in that Macedonia's economy, in particular, is determined, to a considerable extent, by the market forces at work in the EU member states, thereby rendering it vulnerable to external economic pressures. This makes ethnic elites in Macedonia receptive to the EU's recommendation rather than engage more with local people in a bottom-up manner. Furthermore, the funds the EU provides can be misused as Cicero (2013: 211) argues that "very often funds are allocated to arbitrarily pre-selected beneficiary organizations, and only a very few state institutions distribute funds through open calls to tender".

All in all, the EU's generous financial and technical assistance accelerate peacebuilding reforms in Macedonia. However, such assistance does not necessarily contribute to the more successful implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. On the contrary, the allocation of EU resources to almost all of the important governmental bodies as well as civil societies in Macedonia reinforces the EU's role in the peacebuilding process. This, of necessity, makes Macedonia rely extensively upon the external peacebuilding actor and engages less with domestic actors.

Second, as demonstrated above, the EU has been constantly scrutinizing the progress of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in order to evaluate how successful peacebuilding has been done. The EU officially communicates its recommendations and, to the lesser extent, demands through the European Commission's report. In the 2016 Report, it states that more transparency and inclusiveness are needed in implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement (European Commission, 2016). It is vital to point out that the previous reports did follow up the peacebuilding process and provide similar recommendations. In this respect, the reports show that despite significant progress, there are certain shortcomings stymieing the restoration of peace to the society. The major problem remains the up-and-down relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. The EU considers that certain setbacks have resulted from the unresolved conflicts amongst political leaders regardless of which ethnicity they are a member of and lack of trust between people with different ethnicity (European Commission, 2016). Therefore, the solution the Ohrid Framework Agreement provides is to install a power-sharing form of political arrangement in Macedonia based on the idea of consociationalism. Bieber & Keil (2009) emphasize that "power-sharing is an integral part of the peacebuilding strategy and it buttresses peaceful conflict resolution". Following this peacebuilding logic, the EU, as well as OSCE, urges Macedonia to establish power-sharing institutions and infrastructure which will ease the tensions between ethnic groups. As a result, power-sharing governance was introduced and a mutually agreeable formal agreement was implemented to ensure inclusive environment and facilitate cooperation between conflicting parties. This brings about institutional reforms based on the Ohrid Framework Agreement at every level of the society (Risteska & Daskalovski,

2011). For instance, with the assistance mainly from OSCE, the new police recruitment procedure has been modified to ensure that the number of ethnic Macedonian and Albanian cadets represent the composition of the country's population. Moreover, this successfully brings cadets from different ethnicities to learn to accept and work with each other (Dikici, 2007).

However, in the Macedonian political landscape, most of the political issues gravitate around the interethnic relation which has continually appeared on the priority list of the political agenda. This inevitably drags the EU's attention to potential escalation when any political conflict takes place. When taking peace-building efforts into consideration, the EU tends to see it through the prism of an interethnic relation between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. So, the consociational institutional arrangement, championed by the EU, mostly accommodates the interests of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Otherwise stated, consociational governance which is created for all ethnicities has been refocused on the peaceful cohabitation between the two largest ethnic groups at the expense of other ethnic minorities in Macedonia (Macnamara, 2012). Other ethnic groups barely have a political space to address their interests and grievances as Macnamara (2012: 347) accentuates that albeit being one of the largest ethnic groups in Macedonia, "state institutions refuse to recognize the Slavic Muslims as a separate entity". They have to align themselves with either ethnic Macedonians or ethnic Albanians so as to gain more political access. Although there are political parties representing ethnic minorities such as the Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia (DPSM) and the Turkish Democratic Party, their roles are restrained by the political struggle between the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian parties. However, it is important to re-emphasize that Macedonia's constitution conspicuously aims to establish a multi-ethnic state rather than a bi-ethnic state. On the contrary, in practice, other ethnic groups obtain limited attention (Macnamara, 2012).

Hence, peacebuilding is drastically ethnicized and conditioned by the relationship between the political leaders of the two ethnic groups. Moreover, this leads to the ethnicization of the EU accession process. In other words, in order to successfully reach the goal the EU has set, ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political elites, who seem to share a common goal of achieving European Union membership, have to balance their ethnic agendas and the EU aspirations so as to maintain the relatively peaceful, albeit uneasy and separate, coexistence. Therefore, "despite its interethnic tensions, Macedonia has attempted to present itself as an island of interethnic peace and co-existence in the region" (Björkdahl, 2006: 221). Since 1992, ethnic Albanian parties have participated in the government even though they never obtained high-profile minister positions. Thus, ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian parties will form a government together in order to ensure that the government gains support from people of both ethnic groups. In 2008, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) even formed a coalition with the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI) which consists of former insurgent group members (Seroka, 2016). However, it can also be interpreted that the presence of ethnic Albanians as a coalition in the government is just a symbolic action which does not necessarily bring about true cooperation and sincere recognition of each other. Displaying peaceful coexistence to the EU is thus considered to be one of the most significant

strategic moves those ethnic elites must entertain. Nevertheless, Abdullai & Sinari (2012) highlight that "mistrust amongst ethnic elites and, of necessity, lack of cooperation amongst them contribute to the stagnation in narrowing the ethnic division". Furthermore, there is an intra-ethnic conflict within ethnic elite circles. Peshkopia (2015: 57) even notes that "studying the Macedonian crisis is tantamount to studying the dynamics of the affairs of political elites within each of the major ethnic groups". For instance, the VMRO-DPMNE, which subscribes to Macedonian nationalist ideology, acrimoniously criticized another ethnic Macedonian party – the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) when it formed a government with ethnic Albanian parties (Risser & Christian-Paes, 2003). In this respect, on the one hand, the genuine cross-cutting cooperation between ethnic elites in peacebuilding is still missing. On the other hand, the Commission's reports reaffirm the fact that "the EU is monitoring the implementation of Ohrid Framework Agreement by linking it to the overall enlargement strategy" (Mavromatidis, 2010: 53). Therefore, in spite of having undergone extensive reforms according to the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Macedonian politics is still deeply divided along the Macedonian-Albanian ethnic line. Tognela (2012: 61) points out, for instance, that "the conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians remains prevalent in the daily use of language, with Macedonians calling Albanians *shiptari*, which is a derogatory term". Moreover, the European Commission's Progress Report on Macedonia highlights that "separation along ethnic lines in schools and incidents of interethnic violence in secondary schools have continued" (European Commission, 2014: 48).

What is more, the EU's funds tend to move along the ethnically divisive line and are used by ethnic elites to garner political support. In this respect, it is clear that the EU's effort to install a consociational model of governance in Macedonia certainly leads to more inclusive politics. But, at the same time, it further reinforces the demarcating line which separates those with different ethnic affiliations. The pervasiveness of the ethnic division in Macedonian politics will, therefore, slow down the EU accession process.

All things considered, the EU's imposition of a consociational model of governance unintentionally sharpens the exclusive group identity of being ethnic Macedonian or ethnic Albanian since the power distribution is formally linked to ethnicity. Put another way, it is the politics of accentuating differences which they can live together without violently assaulting each other. Nevertheless, they remain separated and lack the will to integrate. This reality makes the EU hesitant to proceed further with the accession process (European Commission, 2016).

Third, it is crucial to posit peacebuilding in Macedonia in the broader peacebuilding project at the regional level because the configuration about Western Balkans as a part of the EU has been embedded in its eastern enlargement vision and strategy. The EU employs several policy instruments to "accelerate regional integration and it has become a cornerstone of the EU's policy framework for the western Balkans" (European Commission, 2005). The EU's endeavor to bring peace to the region can be seen as a part of Euro-region building in the Western Balkans. As the EU's immediate neighbor, political turmoil in the region can cause many a problem for the EU. The EU believes that regional integration will lead to peace consolidation and create trust between neighboring countries. The cooperation between Macedonia and Albania will, for instance, greatly decrease the interethnic

tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Hence, the EU seriously expects the region to become stable and peaceful if EU membership is to be granted. Employing conditionality and formulating complementary external policies (e.g., the South East European Cooperation Process Mechanism), the EU is remarkably successful in mitigating hostility between conflicting Balkan states (European Commission, 2005). The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, for instance, "successfully created a nascent security community in the region and it thus epitomizes the success of regional integration in terms of providing stability" (Vucetic, 2001). It is, moreover, worth noting that given the conflict-prone countries in the Western Balkans, having the EU as a regional peacemaker is crucial in stabilizing the potential escalations both amongst and within the countries.

However, the EU has encountered a number of challenges since conflicts in the Western Balkans involve territorial changes, war criminals, and political clout of extremist groups. Therefore, the EU has to empower local peacebuilding actors because they are critical to sustaining the regional cooperation momentum. In this respect, the EU urges Macedonia to actively participate in regional cooperation programs. Peacebuilding in Macedonia and regional integration of Western Balkans are therefore closely interlinked.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have demonstrated that the EU conditionality employed to monitor the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement brings about a more secure environment and helps to prevent further escalations. However, it unintentionally re-emphasizes the ethnic division between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. This effectively marginalizes other ethnic minorities in the country and reinforces fragmented interethnic relations. Moreover, the EU's focus on the Ohrid Framework Agreement makes the consociational model of governance a condition in the accession process. Therefore, Macedonia's accession process is intertwined with the results of the implementation of the Framework. However, it is important to remind that the EU's involvement in peacebuilding in Macedonia helps to stabilize interethnic tensions between the two largest ethnic groups to a considerable extent by providing support and incentives. This hints at the EU's capability to influence the political landscape in the candidate country. Nonetheless, it does institutionalize Macedonia's dependent relation with the EU. In the light of regional peacebuilding, Macedonia is posited in the EU's policies on the eastern enlargement which makes regional integration in the Western Balkans a factor in the peacebuilding process in Macedonia. Regarding the prospect of sustainable interethnic stability, despite the recent political crisis, the conflicts reflect political struggles between the ethnic elites of both parties rather than violent interethnic strife. However, the possibility of the re-ignition of violent ethnic conflict endures since the ethnic game is still employed to discredit the opponents. This, in turn, poses a challenge to the EU in that the Union must sustain the peacebuilding momentum which underpins its legitimacy as a peacemaker in the context of relatively fragile interethnic relation. The important lesson to be appreciated from the EU's role as such is that EU's conditionality has a potential to bring about peaceful changes. Nonetheless, the political will of the domestic actors to reconcile with each other must not be played down.

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