



Denko Maleski

The Macedonian safety dilemma

How can it be that the primary concern of Macedonian politics is not, as in most other European countries, economic and democratic development, but fear of annihilation? The causes for this "Macedonian safety dilemma" are not primarily external, but internal, writes Denko Maleski. Antagonistic groups - some insisting on Macedonia's "Bulgarian history", others (pro-Serbian) stressing the "Macedonian present", and others still concerned with Alexander the Great and the "antique Macedonia" - cultivate the fear. There cannot be any real political peace in Macedonia until these groups, through dialogue, decide to put an end to the animosities.

Postwar unification successfully resolved Europe's safety dilemma. Liberated from fear for their own survival, a result of uncertainty about their neighbours' intentions, the primary task of the nations of the European Union today has become economic and democratic development. Why is this not also the primary task of Macedonian politics? I have been seeking the answer to this question for almost fifteen years, and have come to the conclusion that our safety dilemma is not solely external, but above all internal.

The fear of annihilation by the opponent is the reason for the battle, ongoing now for fifteen years, between the group that insists on "the Bulgarian past" and the group that insists on the "Macedonian present". Whether "pro-Bulgarian" or "pro-Serbian", the behaviour of these groups recalls the era of secret Macedonian revolutionary organizations. Uncoordinated, and without feeling that they owe the public any explanation, these adversaries conduct internal and foreign politics according to their doctrine. This behaviour, however, makes the safety dilemma even more acute. It is rooted in the fear of the opponent's intentions, namely: will the opponent take the nation on a course that will signify one's own destruction?

Meanwhile, animosity between Macedonian political fractions will continue to cause a safety dilemma on the part of Albanians living in Macedonia: namely, whether to direct part of their energy towards the unity of the Macedonian state, or all of their energy towards the pan-Albanian unity. So far, the dilemma has been resolved insofar that one Albanian political group speaks in favour of "integration" and the other in favour of "disintegration". Both groups, however, seem to agree that on territories where Albanians live in the Balkans, there should be an identical flag flying on the pole and identical monuments of Skenderbeg.¹

A third group, for the second time in Macedonia's short history of independence, propels us by force back into antique Macedonia. This is done outside any democratic procedure — though for our own sake, of course. The

first time it was with the symbol of Vergina,² today, it is with the name of the national airport: Alexander the Great. This group is a product of the worldly experience that states: when a country is being negated, it is because it is not seen as a "real nation". This is either because it is, supposedly, a branch of some foreign power, or because it has not existed long enough.

The answer is to claim that contemporary Macedonian nation has its roots in antique Macedonia. There is some kind of logic in this approach: acting rationally among (nationalistic) madmen is a foolish thing to do. However, in mitigating the conflict between the "Bulgarians" and the "Serbs", the "antique Macedonians" persist in deepening the safety dilemma: by pushing the country into direct conflict with probably the biggest nationalists in the world: the Greeks.

Macedonian politics is caught in this triangle. Yet, there is a fourth group in Macedonian politics that can be named supranational or international. It is composed of wealthy charlatans of a worldly disposition, who, skilfully and with incredible ease, insert themselves into this triangle. To them, the safety dilemma means following the domestic political scene from a secure distance and with a single goal: "successful positioning". With a mixture of paternalism and servility, they initiate new politicians into the secrets of the world politics, encouraging them not to be afraid of the glare of the international arena. These "old boys" of ours, part of the worldwide "network of old boys", teach their protégés that international politics is even more corrupt than domestic politics. While it is not easy to survive there, they say, the tricks they have learned during the course of their career are a guarantee for success. Macedonia will become the centre of the world! True, these charlatans will never become the pride and joy of their own people, but that is okay with them — it is not the people they are primarily concerned with. It is sufficient that they become the pride of the government, whatever it may be, because their safety dilemma is a very personal one.

Let's go back to the triangle of Bulgarians, Serbs, and antique Macedonians. One logical conclusion would be that there cannot be true political peace in Macedonia until these groups, through dialogue, decide to put an end to the animosity. The Macedonian safety dilemma would be resolved if they observed the past with eyes full of understanding and forgiveness. Yes, the reconciliation is in their eyes.

Unfortunately, there will be no reconciliation. If there were, the whole point of these politicians' existence would disappear. Should the hatred stop, they would have to become normal representatives of normal people in a democratic setting. That is why hatred, this precious tradition of ours, must be nurtured: hatred towards the "forger from Nebregovo", hatred towards the "killer of Macedonians from Stip", hatred towards the "communists", hatred towards the "Bulgaria lovers", hatred towards the " Arnauts"...

The Macedonian safety dilemma springs from heads. And so must the solution.

¹ Gyergy Kastrioti Skenderberg: Albanian Christian military leader against the Ottomans in the fifteenth century and Albanian national hero.

² Vergina: A town in Greek Macedonia. In 1977, what were thought to be the remains of Alexander the Great's father Philip II were found in Vergina. The coffin bore the symbol of a star or sun, which the newly independent Macedonia used on its flag in 1991. Greece saw this as a claim on Greek territories, and the symbol was later dropped.

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