



NORTH MACEDONIA AND EUROPEAN SECURITY CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Security science, like never before, is faced with serious challenges that transcend previously established paradigms. Paradigms and institutional models for security have historical continuity. They have changed. Security is inextricably linked to the state and its organization, organs and functions. Contemporary debates about security have expanded to the social and political spheres. Our country has been on the path towards the EU for many years, and during that period numerous changes and reforms of the security system have been achieved. Most of these changes have had a European character. The Macedonian security system, since the country's independence, has been going through a process of continuous reforms aimed at the democratization of the security system and hence may have an impact on the sustainable functioning of the entire social system. European security is a strategic goal of our country and hence, it can contribute to building a modern security system that will be ready to respond to contemporary security challenges. The military intelligence system needs to follow European trends and harmonize with modern European regulations, and thus can influence positive development directions. The defense system is in function of achieving the highest state goals in this area and its Europeanization can contribute to strengthening the integrity and credibility of the national defense system as a whole. The issue of Macedonia's security and the security situation in the Balkans, as a security entity, have always occupied a significant part of the geopolitical picture in Europe. The dynamics of security developments in the Republic of Macedonia, especially in the period following its independence, arise from the relations between different ethnic communities and political factors, internally, and the influence of neighboring countries, the USA, powerful EU countries, and the EU as a whole, externally.

Key words: *Security system, European security, reform, paradigm.*

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Introduction

The Republic of North Macedonia is facing new security risks and threats. In September 2025, they received concrete expression in the term hybrid threats. There is no doubt that this catalog of current security challenges is experiencing a security renaissance in a negative trend. The analysis of these current situations is of particular importance for countries of the type of new democracies, where democratic development was actually preceded by the process of abandoning the authoritarian and one-party system with all its attributes. In the case of our country, it is characteristic that this process did not go easily because the remnants of the abandoned system still had influence from certain centers of power.

From today's perspective, it can be said that the initial security reforms were only a change in the facade of security, while within the structure for many years there were individuals who served other interests that had no contact points with vital national interests. As long as their latent influence lasted, the security system faced scandals such as illegal wiretapping and surveillance of individuals and political parties. These negative processes have largely contributed to slowing down the space for security reforms with European characteristics. This year, too, we are witnessing new suspicions and accusations of abuse of the security services for narrow party interests. The lessons of the past were not lessons in overcoming these diseases that metastasized a fundamental part of the social system - security. The human factor in every part of the social system is crucial for its successful and smooth functioning. Investing in this factor is not always properly understood. Namely, external influences are present and adversely affect the functioning of the security system, regardless of whether it is intelligence or counterintelligence services. The most subtle form of this influence is the party approach, which leads to strict control of the recruitment process in security and police institutions. However, this influence appears in an even more radical form through the confrontation with the security personnel immediately after the change of government. Then the well-known phenomenon of distribution of unsuitable security personnel from one workplace to another, from one institution to another, and so on indefinitely, occurs. Therefore, this purely partisan approach could be placed in the catalog of one of the security risks. It is undeniable that every security risk and threat has its own external form and that they should be analyzed separately and together in order to enable the construction of a security strategy to prevent them.

Regulatory framework - a guarantee of the successful functioning of the security system

Paradigms and institutional models of security have historical continuity. They changed. Security is inextricably linked with the state and its organization, organs and function. Contemporary debates about security have spread to the social and political spheres. Although, when the term security is mentioned, it is primarily associated with the inner peace and peaceful life of citizens, i.e. as freedom from threats, it also refers to the state of defense against external enemies and threats to sovereignty. Thus,



the central interest of the term security is the state, which can be threatened by internal turmoil, economic and social disruption, especially in communities that lack a sense of threatened identity and social cohesion.²⁹³

"The normative framework that defines the competences, organizational structure and functioning of the security sector in general is characterized by the existence of a special legal regime inherent in the special character of the institutions that by their nature belong to this sector."²⁹⁴ There are laws for the public or state security sector, such as: Law on Internal Affairs, Law on Police, Law on National Security Agency, Law on Intelligence Agency, as well as laws and by-laws for key and other state security institutions.

Thus, "the specific difference between these and other state institutions is that the former are authorized to apply and use force on behalf of the state."²⁹⁵ "From a legal point of view, a special legal regime is built through special or special laws (*lex specialis*), in such a way that legal solutions that deviate from the general legal regime, i.e. from that established by general laws (*legi generali*), appear different. When this is not the case, then the rules of general law are applied (*lex specialis derogate legi generali*). To make things more interesting, when some services, for example in the police, have special legal regulations (combating organized crime or terrorism), then we reach a new level of specificity, to something that can be conditionally called *lex specialisimus*. Then a special regime is applied, then a special and finally a general regime. The peculiarities of the normative concept of security are especially evident in the functioning of the police, which in European continental law is presented as the "police of the ruler", while in Anglo-Saxon law it is the "police of the people". Accordingly, in the first legal system there is more specificity (*lex specialis*) in the regulation of the apparatus of state power, while in the second the aim is to bring that apparatus, as far as possible, under the general legal regime (*lex generalis*), that is, to deviate as little as possible from customary law and to apply it again, as much and wherever possible, as to individuals - private law."²⁹⁶

The relationship between the analyzed parts of the security sector is also characteristic of the institutional design. "Institutions that belong to the security sector of the Republic of North Macedonia within the system of separation of powers can be conditionally divided according to the following criteria: a) performing tasks in the field of defense and security, having special authorizations and credentials for performing activities and b) performing security management and democratic control over the security sector."²⁹⁷

The boundaries between the public and private security sectors are viewed through the following dimensions:

- Sectoral dimension – looks at the relationship of a certain organization with the state and the market;

²⁹³ Đurovski M., *Osnovi bezbednosti*, Skoplje, 2021, 13.

²⁹⁴ Kozarev A., *Kontrola i nadzor sektora bezbednosti u Republici Makedoniji*, Skoplje, 2012, str. 53.

²⁹⁵ Timolthy E., „Security sector reform in transforming societies: Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro“, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, 23.

²⁹⁶ Milosavljević B., „Ustavni status sektora bezbednosti i aparata sile u Srbiji nakon usvajanja Ustava iz 2006. godine“, Fakultet političkih nauka u Beogradu, 2007, 9.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 58.



- Spatial dimension – considers the space (public, private, hybrid) in which the organization operates;
- Legal dimension – examines the legal power and authority of employees;
- Functional dimension – analyzes which function and which competences the organization implements;
- Geographical dimension – looks at the levels (local, national, regional, international) at which these police bodies are organized.²⁹⁸

According to Slaveski, the main idea of building and transforming the security system of the Republic of Macedonia, which is a segment of the country's political system, was to implement the process of full democratization of the country. This process is directly related to "good governance" and is crucial for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country.

North Macedonian security system and European challenges

Safety science, as never before, faces serious challenges that go beyond previously established paradigms. Paradigms and institutional models for security have historical continuity. They changed. Security is inextricably linked with the state and its organization, organs and function. Contemporary debates about security have spread to the social and political spheres. Our country has been on the road to the EU for many years, and during that period numerous changes and reforms of the security system were implemented. Most of those changes were of a European character. Since the country's independence, the Macedonian security system has been undergoing a process of continuous reforms aimed at the democratization of the security system and therefore can have an impact on the sustainable functioning of the entire social system. European security is a strategic goal of our country and therefore can contribute to the construction of a modern security system that will be ready to respond to modern security challenges. The military intelligence system must follow European trends and harmonize with modern European regulations and thus can influence positive directions of development. The defense system is in the function of achieving the highest state goals in this area and its Europeanization can contribute to strengthening the integrity and credibility of the national defense system as a whole. The security issue of Macedonia and the security situation in the Balkans, as a security entity, have always occupied a significant part of the geopolitical picture in Europe. The dynamics of security events in the Republic of Macedonia, especially in the period after its independence, derives from the relationship between different ethnic communities and political factors, on the internal level, and the influence of neighboring countries, the USA, powerful countries in the EU and the EU as a whole, on the external level.

Our country is an important and valuable partner of the European Union in the field of peace, security and defense, as well as an active participant as a third country in the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union (CSDP). The signing of the Partnership for Security and Defense in 2024 is a reflection of the excellent and

²⁹⁸ Jones T., Newburn T., Private security and public policing, Oxford University press, New York, 1998 y, p. 203-205.



continuous cooperation between the European Union and Macedonia and is a key step towards closer cooperation in a wide range of security issues, for the benefit of the citizens of the European Union and Macedonia, and also represents an important element of Macedonia's efforts to integrate into the European Union. The new instrument, among other things, covers the areas of cooperation in crisis management, support to Ukraine, prevention of hybrid threats, cyber issues, capacity building and training, the fight against terrorism and external aspects of integrated border management, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade points out.²⁹⁹

The partnership between our country and the European Union, which was built over the years from independence to today and in the future, represents a solid foundation for building a security system in the Republic of Macedonia compatible with the European Union and European values. Our citizens have continuously expressed their support for the process of European integration and at no time has this orientation been questioned. Therefore, the challenge is to identify the need for harmonization of our legal security system and its approximation as a whole. This need was identified on March 5 and 6, 2024 in Skopje during the 18th meeting of the Stabilization and Association Subcommittee for Justice, Freedom and Security between the European Commission and North Macedonia.

Our country was the chairman in 2023, which strictly respects the basic principles and values of the OSCE. The organization focused on Ukraine, that is, human security in times of regional and global insecurity and instability. There is a natural and strong relationship between the EU and the OSCE, as well as all member states of the Organization, which is a favorable space for joint work and fulfillment of joint obligations. There is no basis for compromises that would jeopardize the basic documents and decisions adopted by consensus of the OSCE. The biggest challenge remains Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

Recalling the assessment given in the Annual Report for 2023, the European Commission called on the authorities of North Macedonia to make continuous efforts to ensure the independence, professionalism, transparency and impartiality of the judiciary. In terms of border management, increased cooperation has been observed following the entry into force of the Status Agreement with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). The Commission welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Joint Action Plan for the fight against terrorism for the Western Balkans. The Commission pointed to the need to manage mixed migration flows taking into account security and humanitarian aspects and welcomed the good cooperation with Frontex and EUAA. Further efforts are needed to implement asylum procedures in accordance with the Common European Asylum System. However, when it comes to the Western Balkans, it is said to be a weak point in the European security architecture and ripe for potential Russian influence campaigns. A weak point in European architecture and a threat to the Kremlin is the Western Balkans.³⁰⁰

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³⁰⁰ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32226938.html>, 20.09.2025.



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New challenges

The academic community faces the question of the modern architecture of our country's security system in the context of European aspirations, but even more importantly as a member of NATO! There is no doubt that our national security system must follow modern trends in European security and develop in that direction. The European path has been strongly traced through the decades that have passed since independence until today, but also in the future. For these reasons, it is very important to shape the contours of future security strategies and concepts that enable reaching European standards in many respects. These value criteria are crucial for the European perception of our security, for raising indicators related to professionalization and respect for human freedoms and rights. In short: respect for the rule of law in the field of security and defense, which includes intelligence and counterintelligence activities with all its subjects. For example, the Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defense 2023-2024. it was developed at a time when everything that was considered impossible to happen in the context of the security of the European continent became a reality. Conventional warfare, disrespect for the international legal order and the sovereignty of states through Russian aggression against Ukraine show that our democracies, our values and principles - the rule of law, freedom and equality - are fragile and that we must constantly be careful, so that our way of life today is also a way of life tomorrow. The conflict in Ukraine also shows the other side of modern warfare – the power and speed of penetration of misinformation that knows no borders or limitations. Disinformation has the ability to instill fear and panic, reduce the credibility of the country's institutions, and instill doubt among citizens in the functionality of the state. One of those segments is the new Concept for creating a system for dealing with misinformation in the Ministry, using the resources we have, but through even stronger networking and coordination of all actors in the field of strategic communications. An important part of that concept, in addition to public relations, is the Regional Center for Public Relations, our NATO - partner center for which, together with NATO, we have big plans and a clear vision of development. This Center, in addition to its preventive function within the system for dealing with disinformation, will undergo the so-called institutional accreditation of NATO in order to function as a NATO school for public relations. This center and the complete strategic communications system of the Ministry represent another capacity with which the Republic of North Macedonia can contribute to NATO's collective security.³⁰¹

With the help of new computer and communication technologies, expanded mass air transportation services and instant electronic banking services, illegal products and services can be offered anywhere in the world. Second, it is important to understand that the impact of globalization is not the same everywhere in the world. For example, many countries that depend on agricultural exports today were severely affected by falling prices when their economies globalized. Organized crime in the new globalized economy can buy raw materials (coca leaves, opium pods, etc.) more cheaply and sell the finished product (cocaine and heroin) to the wealthy population at higher prices

³⁰¹ Ministarstvo odbrane, Komunikaciona strategija 2023-2024, Skopje, 2023, str. 3-4.



and in larger quantities than ever before.³⁰² More precisely, in other words, "in some ways, globalization helps to increase human security, for example, with certain disincentives for war, improved humanitarian aid, new employment opportunities, and greater cultural pluralism." On the other hand, globalization, in other ways, contributes to the prolongation or even deepening of military conflicts, environmental degradation, epidemics, poverty, financial crisis, unemployment, exploitation of workers, cultural destruction and social disintegration.³⁰³

The issue of Macedonia's security and the security situation in the Balkans, as a security entity, has always occupied a significant part of the geopolitical picture in Europe. The dynamics of security events in the Republic of Macedonia, especially in the period after its independence, derives from the relationship between different ethnic communities and political factors, on the internal level, and the influence of neighboring countries, the USA, powerful countries in the EU and the EU as a whole, on the external level. The influence of external factors proved to be particularly crucial in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country, as a unique process that has lasted for more than two decades and has strong implications for the country's security. During this period, Macedonia felt in the best possible way the effects arising from the diversity of interests of the more powerful powers in Europe and the EU as a political entity. This process has been going on since the moment when the Republic of Macedonia gained independence from the former Yugoslavia, intensified the process of international recognition of the state and maintained the intensity and exceeded the conditions of the usual processes of Euro-Atlantic integration. In such circumstances, the Republic of Macedonia found itself in a situation to redefine the concept of security in conditions where in Europe the tendencies towards a wider unification of European states in the spirit of affirmation of European values and preservation of peace and stability and in activities for regional and wider (transatlantic) cooperation and economic development are more than clear. As a result of these events, the national concept of security was correlated with European security integrations, but also with integrations in general, which refers to all segments of social life.

Conclision

Issues of European security have always attracted the attention of the academic and professional public. National and international library databases have an impressive number of professional and scientific papers, analyzes that express their scientific and applied attitude towards this issue. The Macedonian security system, since the independence of the state, has been undergoing a process of continuous reforms aimed at the democratization of the security system and therefore can have an impact on the sustainable functioning of the entire social system. European security is a strategic goal of our country and therefore can contribute to the construction of a modern security system that will be ready to respond to modern security challenges. The military intelligence system must follow European trends and harmonize with modern European regulations and thus can influence positive directions of

³⁰² Lajman, D.M., Poter, V.G., Organizovani kriminal, četvrto izdanje, Magor, Skopje, 2009, 7-8.

³⁰³ Art Šolte, J., Globalizacija: Kritički uvod, drugo izdanje, Academic Press, Skopje, 2008, 33.



development. The defense system is in the function of achieving the highest state goals in this area and its Europeanization can contribute to strengthening the integrity and credibility of the national defense system as a whole.

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