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**THE USE OF COMMUNICATION METHODS
AND TOOLS IN THE DISPUTE BETWEEN
MACEDONIA AND GREECE**

Abstract

Since the day when the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence and left the community of the Federative Republic of the Yugoslavia, it was confront with the issue imposed by its neighbouring country – the Republic of Greece – about preserving its name, identity, language, culture and tradition. This constricted the country in terms of democratic development, in joining international organizations and especially in becoming a member of the security system of NATO and integration in the European Union. From the very beginning, the Republic of Greece has shown a long-term unvarying strategy when it comes to the Macedonian issue in general as seen in the request to use a single name for all purposes (*erga omnes*). On the other hand, the Republic of Macedonia has shown to be frailer, more vulnerable and undoubtedly far less skilful in finding a way to use the tools for communication with the public for their own benefit. Simply knowing the methods, tools and systems of communication is not enough and until recently there was no desire to learn how to properly use them, especially when it came to successful communication with the international community. Opposite to the Macedonian passive policy, the Republic of Greece and its proactive role, particularly in using the methods of communication with the public, lobbyists and lobby groups, skilfully using spin techniques, particularly with the international community and using communication tools such as press conferences, press releases, statements, briefings, press tours - thus being a step ahead in this extremely sensitive and especially important question of survival and the future of our state.

Keywords: communication, tools, public relations, international community, media

INTRODUCTION

The dispute between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece, which has been going on for over two decades, involves the name issue as a constantly recurrent obstacle to establishing relations between the two countries. There have been, however, oscillation periods – when relations were particularly unfavourable, take for instance the introduction of the embargo (1994) by Greece, or the period during NATO's Summit (2008) in Bucharest, when Macedonia was to become a member of this security system. But, as accession did not take place – this was a period when a kind of isolation and distancing from the international relevant factor commenced. After Bucharest, the political elite of the time initiated a process, which in some national and international public circles became known as a process of antiquation, which led to increased antagonizing of the relations between Greece and Macedonia. In any case, this dispute is deeply rooted in the past, it is multi-layered and the context is wider both regionally and historically. The aim with this paper is to focus on recent history, with an emphasis on the period from 1990 to 2000, first and foremost because I, as a journalist, analyst and chronicler of that period, have been able to personally keep track of all relevant political events, including the developments between Macedonia and Greece. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia and the declaration of independence on September 8th, 1991, Greece immediately started disputing the name, due to the existence of a northern province in Greece with that same name. On December 2nd, 1991, President Kiro Gligorov sent a letter to all heads of states and to all governments, requesting that the independence of Macedonia is recognized (press release from the Cabinet of the President 1991). The Government of Greece was the only one to officially deny the request and according to the information provided by the International Group for Minority Rights, the statement of declination was defined and published in October of that year. When the Republic of Bulgaria (1991) recognized Macedonia as an independent and sovereign country, Greece immediately declared its disapproval by reiterating the 'absolute stand that Greece will never recognize the country while it maintains the historically Greek name Macedonia,' (Mironski 1991). In the meanwhile, the country was recognized by Turkey, Croatia and Slovenia, however in the international arena Macedonia was losing with the aggressive and omnipresent Greek diplomacy, which won a crucial battle at the Summit in Lisbon on June 26-27 1992 for non-use of the word Macedonia. That was the time of the harshest politics of the European Community (note from the author: now Union) since declaring independence to present day. The country was placed in an extremely difficult position, not being allowed to use the word Macedonia and not allowed to apply for membership in the UN until it received the required European

support. At the Summit, a so called Lisbon Declaration was adopted (the Chair was the Portuguese Minister of Exterior Joao de Deus Pinheiro) and the Declaration sided with the Greek insistence, leaving Macedonia an option to choose a name for internal and a name for external use. The Government had an emergency session on June 28th 1992 at which it decided to deny the part of the Declaration of the European Council, stating as follows: ‘by expressing an undivided opinion of the public, they point out that only the people of the Republic of Macedonia have the right to decide about their own name’ (Government of the Republic of Macedonia press release 1992). An emergency session was held at Parliament, where a Declaration was adopted to refute the condition stipulated in the Lisbon Declaration, which conditioned the recognizing of the country with a name change (Gligorov 2001 : 29). Not only did Greece undertake strong diplomatic activities against Macedonia, they also performed direct pressure with increased military presence along the Macedonian border, and with Greek aircraft flying over Macedonia, invading its air territory (Ministry of Defense 1992). By putting in a lot of effort, different methodologies and approaches, means and tools of communication, both at home and internationally, Greece succeeded in winning many battles in this irrational dispute, despite the irrefutable fact that up to 1988 the name Macedonia was never used in Greece. The tension in the relations between the two countries did ease in 1995, with the help of an Interim Agreement which contained provisions for Macedonia not to be obstructed in the process of international integrations under the temporary reference (FYROM) - name the country become member into the UN on April 8th 1993 (Mironski 1995).

The relations between Macedonia and Greece are in the focus of the domestic, regional and international public with periods of stagnation, especially in the period following the Summit in Bucharest, as well as in the period when project ‘Skopje 2014’ took place which included statues and symbols from the reign of Alexander the Great. This made Greece to declare Macedonia’s actions as nationalist and irredentist, touching on matters from their territory, which caused the country’s worldwide reputation to deteriorate. Even back then, the Macedonian counterpart was not able to explain their actions (regardless whether they were justified or not), nor were they able to present them from a global cultural aspect or justify them to the public. Once again it was proven that the political elite is incapable of communicating with the public in a timely, adequate and transparent way, let alone communicate with the international public – where they lost the already fragile position they once held. This issue further contributed to the country’s exceptionally difficult state of insecurity, uncertainty and dependence. From the very onset of this battle to protect the plans, strategies and goals they had set, Greece showed extraordinary skills and success in using all kinds of

communication tools, remarkable skills in implementing international diplomatic activities, turning defeats in victories for themselves by using all kinds of tools, methods, lobby groups and spin techniques that are typical for public relations. On the other hand, the Republic of Macedonia showed that it has a fickle strategy, with no clearly defined red lines, it showed insecurity or a great propensity to irritate, and it became evident that it is much less apt in finding ways to use tools for communication with the public in a way that is beneficial to her. Actually, the exact opposite happened even in a situation when law and justice were on her side, as was the case with the Hague verdict dated December 5th 2011, hence the Republic of Macedonia, at least so far, is well on its way to becoming the losing party. This is a result of not having a consistent national strategy from the beginning of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the lack of unity, to which all political entities and governments pleaded – however they were never able or willing to provide when it came to national matters of vital importance for the survival of the country and its people. What is even more important is that the basic rule of national strategies – addressing all stakeholders in the ‘same tone’ on some important issues for internal and external public – is not applied.

FOREIGN MEDIA REPORTING ABOUT THE GREEK EMBARGO TOWARDS MACEDONIA

On February 16th, Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu announced the decision of the Greek government to block transport to and through the port in Thessaloniki, only making an exception for emergency humanitarian aid. The Government, at the same time, decided to close down the General Consulate of Greece in Skopje (www.macedonian/heritage.com), which meant the beginning of a new chapter in the relations also burdened by an economic crisis. The Macedonian Government called an urgent meeting, and Macedonian media warned that the actions taken by Greece can lead to regional destabilization. Greek Prime Minister Papandreu stated that he was “‘forced’ to take such measures” because Macedonia “continues with its provocations and increased irredentism.” (Mironski 1994). Macedonia responded to this harsh reaction of the Greek government by an announcement declaring that the decision from Athens is contrary to the documents of the Conference on Security and Co-operation of Europe (author’s note: CSCE, later on OSCE) and of international law. (Press release of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1994)

International media often reported statements, facts or simply made a mention of the dispute, however they practically did not produce any analytical texts that

would go into the essence of the problem or would clarify why it is so difficult and unacceptable for Macedonia to change its name, which is one item in a list of demands for not using the adjective Macedonian. Nonetheless, some reactions of non-Greek press to the dispute between Greece and Macedonia were not as cautious as the reactions of international diplomats and they contained open criticism directed at the Greek stand. This was especially present during the Greek embargo, when sympathies for Macedonia were probably highest. Many commentators 'took a negative stand' towards the Greek embargo, like the London *Times* who wrote a long and detailed introductory article (February 21st, 1994), claiming that the Greek act is 'a violation of the Rome Agreement, the Maastricht Agreement, the UN Charter, Resolutions of the General Assembly of UN, the Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 and of basic moral norms that dictate civilized international relations'. *The Times* underlined that at the Council of Europe Summit, held in Edinburgh in December 1992, Greece undertook to ensure that there are 'regular and adequately implemented oil procurements' delivered to Macedonia. The embargo is an obvious violation of this obligation. The paper emphasized that Macedonia did not commit illegal actions in any way, and the Greek obsession with the name problem and the issue of the flag cannot be considered as legitimate, according to any legal, moral or political provision. (Shkaric et al., 2008 : 201). The same source quoted Britain's *The Spectator*, which has a small circulation, however it is extremely influential, which pointed out that the actions of the Greek government to 'continue with their revenge' against little Macedonia - are an 'interesting mix of farce, tragedy, theatre of cruelty and theatre of absurdity'. The paper that is traditionally considered as close to Britain's right-wing parties, the so-called Tories, *The Daily Telegraph*, reported on February 19th, 1994 that the Greek presidency of the European Community is turning into a 'inappropriate and dangerous farce'. *The Chicago Tribune* asked 'Would Mexico threaten a trade embargo against USA in order to force New Mexico to change its name? Would the British complain to the high circles forming global opinion because a part of their shoreline towards the Atlantic has chosen to be named New England?' They concluded that there is very little logic in Greece's arguments and that on top of it all is the claim that unrestricted recognition of Macedonia will lead to instability in the Balkans cannot be taken seriously, while Greece continues to ignore UN's sanctions against Serbia. The paper showed suspicion in the demands of Greece and Serbia for Macedonia's independence not to be recognized by the rest of the world – Why does the rest of the world listen to them? German press was also unanimous in their estimate that Greek politics towards Macedonia 'has nothing in common with responsible politics', that it disrupts the 'unity of the EU', that it spreads paranoia on the Balkans and that Greece is 'playing with fire'.

Having in mind the above, i.e. what was written by the world's leading media outlets when the country was faced with a complete border block from its southern neighbour, analysis is needed to find the reasons why Macedonia lost the battle from an international perspective.

USING COMMUNICATION METHODS AND TOOLS IN CRISES SITUATION

In order to be able to build an affirmative perception of the country worldwide, to create a positive image and to send a message that will be believable and convincing enough so the country may gain support, communication techniques and tools must be adequately and successfully implemented.

Case study – the NATO Summit in Bucharest

One typical example is the period leading up to and following the NATO Summit in Bucharest. At that time, all relevant political parties and their leaders in Macedonia met at a joint meeting of leaders, held in the Club for Members of Parliament. The outcome was that they agreed on principle that the proposal Republic of Macedonia (Skopje) should be accepted, which was a decision announced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time – Antonio Miloshoski (Mironski 2008). However, the accusations they made among each other regarding the state of the country, especially the name dispute and the lack of a solution for it, continued, and they were made in front of the public eye, which resulted in differing statements made by the government and the opposition.

Thus, the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE organized secret diplomacy activities and lobbied for the country to find a compromise with Greece before the Summit in Bucharest and insisted on a referendum in case a solution is made possible, while President Branko Crvenkovski, who was a member of the opposition of the time, i.e. a member of the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), criticized the Government, saying that they are not seeking a solution, not making any compromises and that they are making reckless decisions that irritate Greece, such as the decision to rename the airport in Skopje from 'Petrovec' to 'Alexander the Great'. The accusations between them continued through the media and unfortunately, as was the case many times in the past, they were very detrimental for the state. From the perspective of the theory of PR and crisis management, a few scenarios would have been possible in that time, which would have to have been previously planned and adequately managed.

What would be a Response to the Challenge (example):

The task, i.e. the *goal* of the Prime Minister and the President, i.e. the authorities, is to inform the public that NATO's decision is unfair, that Macedonia did everything in its power to get to a different decision and to restore the trust from the public. The statements, i.e. the messages that will be sent should be identical in terms of content, i.e. the same values should be upheld and the public should be won over with a joint effort.

Target audience

The target audience that the Prime Minister, government officials, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the President of the country should have addressed, in this case, is huge – it is both the domestic and international public. The domestic audience also includes the significant number of representatives of the ethnic Albanian community, who are not as sensitive to the name issue as it is a priority for them to become part of the European Union and NATO. The international community is not comprised just by the general public it also includes relevant authorities and heads of states and governments.

Message

The message would be that Macedonia and all of its governments and political elites have done everything in their power, since declaring independence up to today, to resolve the name dispute with its neighbouring country Greece. However, it is obvious that the problem lies with the counterpart – Greece, who does not wish to resolve the issue, i.e. wishes to resolve it in a dictating fashion - my way – no way. So, there will be no compromised, instead there will be a negation of the adjective Macedonian, which might involves the identity and the language and opens a new potential security and political conflict in the Balkans. Unfortunately, the state was leading passive, instead of a proactive politics. Hence, instead of proposing names and presenting opinions as to what would be acceptable for it, it reacted to Greece's active politics. In that way, it looked like Greece was the one that wants to solve the problem, and Macedonia was the non-constructive counterpart.

Tools

Several key tools should have been selected, so that the message is conveyed in a clear, precise and unequivocal way and that should have been done in Bucharest,

with the Prime Minister and the President making joint and identical statements. A press conference would have been required for the foreign press, so they are familiarized with the problems and entrapments that Macedonia has been facing for years. The Prime Minister and the President gave statements, while a press conference was held only by the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Prime Minister and the President should give their statements and may be joined or separate, the important thing is to reach out to the public with an absolutely identical standpoint, a stance that is not in the least different, which was not the case. At the same time, there was a need to be more present in the international public and to choose a relevant international media and make an interview, as is the case as of recent (2018), in terms of communicating with the international public.

Analysis of the replies – What was the new challenge?

Even when the ‘crisis’ is harrowing and has vast long-term consequences, as was the case with Bucharest all involved parties should address the public in a direct manner, with sincerity and they need to show regret and a firm attitude that – regardless of how bad things are – they still are not that bad, i.e. they will be able to deal successfully with the ramifications. That is why it is important to identify and foresee situations that may lead to crisis and corresponding plans and detailed preparations should be made, and when the time comes – depending on the situation – the most adequate tool of communication with the public should be used. The Macedonian delegation and the journalists who were in Bucharest were in shock and evidently very disappointed after the announcement of the news that Macedonia, despite the announcements, will not be made part of the Alliance. The delegation came back home two days early. Should things have gone that way? It is estimated that, in some situations – regardless of how difficult they are, the right thing to do is to stay and speak your mind – in this case stand against the injustice that was made to the country. Nevertheless, if no preparations have been made in advance, it is uncertain if the delegation would have had a chance to do so.

What was done correctly?

The tactics of immediate and transparent reactions, as was the positive behaviour of the President and of the Prime Minister of the state, who did not hide their disappointment and who showed empathy towards the public and who made statements, and most importantly, who behaved friendly to one another and ‘took the same side’, which is not a very typical and likely situation in Macedonian affairs.

What could have been done differently?

Macedonia could have decided to say farewell to NATO, to withdraw its soldiers from the peace missions throughout the world. This could have been announced at the joint press conference (held by the Prime Minister and President of the State) in Bucharest. Such moments of extremely important decisions with potentially incomprehensible negative consequences for the country, sometimes call for radical moves, like for instance an announcement that the negotiations are terminated, a statement saying Macedonia does not wish to be a member of NATO under circumstances of threats and precedents in the history of that organization. Such a move at that time would imply huge media coverage, interest in the country from all relevant international institutions and entities; however it can only be made in a well thought out and prepared scenario and with all political factors standing behind that decision. The moment for such a decision was at that time – after the Summit in Bucharest.

CONCLUSION

Macedonia strives to become a full Member of the European Union and of NATO, however – despite 27 years of independence and transitioning, it still faces numerous political, economic and social difficulties. The country missed the opportunity to create a strategy back in 1991 to represent and promote itself globally as best possible way. The government that is currently in position, mandated by SDSM and its coalition partners is taking accelerated steps towards removing the blockage of the processes of integration in NATO and EU, especially in the first months of 2018, which is a period of increased activities revolving around diplomacy and politics with the aim to resolve the dispute concerning the name of the country. Nonetheless, the conclusion remains that the system for communicating with the public and the opportunities provided by the tools, techniques and methods are insufficiently and inadequately used and utilized. The method of communicating and the system of building public relations are a part of present-day, which is dynamic and aggressive, full of challenges, requiring constant public presence and meticulous building of an appropriate image. For this end, it is not enough to simply know the communication tools, one must also understand the role and the impact of the media and develop a solid strategy for successful establishment, implementing and functioning of public relations. Hence, the promotion and proper implementation of public relations is vital for adequate representation of all entities of the Republic of Macedonia and for creating a positive and recognizable image at home and worldwide. The entities are faced with a series of problems in promotion and presenting to the public, due to

a lack of understanding or inadequate use of the potentials offered by various tools, this is supported with insufficient knowledge of the media in the country as well as poor communication with them. The first serious engagement concerning lobbying was made by establishing a Lobbying Centre (June, 2010) that operates as part of Macedonian Scientific Association (MSA) from Bitola, after the Law on Lobbying was enacted in the country, in 2009. It can be concluded that lobbying in the context of the dispute between Macedonia and Greece has had very little coverage – both as an important tool that should have been implemented more often and more skilfully by Macedonia, and as a method that our neighbour Greece has used to a maximum (www.mia.mk 2010.) For successful international presentation, one must analyse and adequately implement the process of communicating with the public. In this context, the media must first be defined their appearance and development as well as the changes they are currently undergoing must be understood, along with their similarities and differences so one can determine the proper time and manner in which to use specific media outlets. The analysis has shown that as one of the smaller countries in the region it has been in real need of proper promotion, however was unable to utilize communication mechanisms for its successful presentation before Europe and the rest of the world.

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