

MACEDONIA: SHADOW OF PATRONAGE ON INTER-ETHNIC POLITICS

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Abstract:

Macedonia has so far failed to operate a pluralist party system although its current legislatures have been designed so as to provide the politicians with the means to found and implement a real multi-cultural democracy in the country. In this failure the struggle of the parties to reap the benefits of the public patronage seems to have played a pivotal role.

MAKEDONYA: TOPLULUKLAR ARASI SİYASET ÜZERİNDEKİ PATRONAJ GÖLGESİ

Özet

Makedonya’da yasalar ülkedeki siyasetçilere çok kültürlü bir demokrasiyi kurup işletmeleri açısından önemli araçlar sağlamış olmasına rağmen çoğulcu bir siyasi parti sistemi işletilememiştir. Bunda ise siyasal partilerin kamu patronajından rant elde etme mücadelesi önemli bir rol oynamış görünmektedir.

Key Words: Macedonia, Public Patronage, Albanian Political Parties
Anahtar Kelimeler: Makedonya, Kamu Patronajı, Arnavut Partileri

Probably for many fledgling democracies of the Balkan peninsula, the function of politics still retains its mystery. Nobody denies that Yugoslav crisis was the monstrous work of once applauded democrats, in reality, demagogues. The topple of Milosevic as the most brilliant demagogue was one of the most outstanding phases the protracted crisis has undergone so far indeed. Yet, the former Yugoslav territory still awaits for true statesmen, democrats to handle the matters, and the crisis stands still. It seems that politicians of the Balkans have not relinquished or not intended to relinquish the political practices of the past. Large cadre parties feeding their sympathizers, octopusying the public sources or posts and even training their own militants are still the very realities

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of the Balkan politics. In other words, the more the public sources are limited, the higher the disadvantage of remaining out of power is. In the presence of ethnic hostilities and in the absence of political parties that dare to lure all without respecting the ethnic origin of those affiliated with themselves, the struggle for patronage deepens itself. Macedonia constitutes a clear precedence to what extent the patronage seeking policies demolish probability of a model role that this country may assume in the future for the other nations who plunged into ethnic hostilities with their own crowded ethnic minorities.

In reality, it follows that in the Macedonian case, there are some problems entailing the perceived function of politics, a major flaw that will constitute an obstacle for appealing to politics as the sole way to solve the problems ranging from inter-ethnic relations to the economic or social ones. Unless the events escalated into the other poles, as in the case of the National Liberation Army (NLA) of the Albanians, politics could easily be overlooked as a void engagement. On the other side, the prevailed tendency to see the politics only as an instrument in the hands of the ruling oligarchy to enrich itself be through legal or illegal ways, without discriminating Albanian or Macedonian rather than to solve the bleeding problems of the country seems to have eroded the chance of finding public support to the reformation. It is obvious that for the majority of the ethnic Macedonians what brought together VMRO and DPA is not their willingness to solve the problems under the roof of parliament, but establish and run effectively their patronage networks allegedly mired by and large into underground activities. Media seems to have played a pivotal role in the molding of such an image so far. For instance, one of the leading liberal political journals *Denes* claimed that ruling coalition was completely embroiled in the Mafiosi relations whose activities were carried out under a tacit permission of police organization whose officers were drawn from activists or sympathizers of the ruling parties rather than impartial professionals. Other media furthered the allegations by underlining that VMRO and DPA stroke a gentlemen's deal to share the revenues coming from the illegal activities in their respective zones.¹

Probably, the transition from a socialist economic system whose based on state-led companies network to market economy of private ones, distribution of foreign investment and credit furnish great opportunities for the cycle of patronage acts.² According to the Anti-Corruption Department within the

¹ Zeljiko Basic, 'Crime and Politics in Macedonia', IWPR, BCR No: 107, 14 January, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000114_1_eng.txt.

² Zeljiko Basic, 'Macedonia Locked in Cycle of Corruption', IWPR, BCR No: 126, 21 March, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000321_3_eng.txt. For instance, the

Interior Ministry, since 1998, of 1.056 cases for corruption which were brought before the courts, only 147 cases were handled properly. Although, Balkan Stability Pact summits at Sarajevo, Geneva, Bari and Oslo leant toward the matter seriously, Macedonian governments opted to suspend an initiative to articulate an anti-corruption legislation in the face of more serious matters waiting to be handled.³ On the other side, the public sector and bureaucracy which provide their employees insufficient yet at least a regular salary is naturally a proper pie to be offered to the sympathizers. Probably, the basic impact of patronage politics is inevitable disproportionality between the cadres as well as the expenditures for their salaries and effectivity. This is the reason why the IMF austerity packages ordering the reduction in the bureaucratic cadres in the name of productivity as well as covering budget deficits can not be deemed as a painful panacea as reluctantly accepted in many countries throughout the world, yet an act of treason.⁴ Obviously, in the face of the pressure of the debts to be paid back, the governments that remained in between have preferred to liquidate the implementation of the IMF packages. What makes the case more problematic is the rising demand of the ethnic Albanian for a greater slice from the pie of patronage indeed and in return, the Macedonian politicians' resistance to introduce wider contingents and to amend constitution so as to make them equal claimants.

When the case is some strategic posts, the problem distinguishes itself with all relevant and complicated phases. For instance, a recent scandal on the filling of the ranks of the army with the activists of VMRO led to initiation of a vote of no confidence in the parliament against the Defense Minister. Although NATO made a deal with Skopje to reduce the number of the army from 22.000 to 16.000, the VMRO government could not afford to implement the act accurately in the face of the probable reaction of officers who would lose their jobs. On the other side, it was reported that the former SDSM government had sacked some 1.000 police officers due to fill their place with its own sympathizers.⁵ When one takes into account that the army ranks are still harboring former JNA officers, as sole truly professionals, well-known with

government was accused by the opposition of deriving some illegal benefits from the sell of state-led OKTA refinery to the Greek Hellenic Petroleum.

³ Veton Latifi, 'Macedonia Mired in Corruption', IWPR, BCR No: 183, 16 October, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20001006_5_eng.txt.

⁴ Dragan Nikolic, 'Skopje's Diplomatic Rumpus', IWPR, BCR No: 207, 5 January, 2001, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20010105_1_eng.txt. IMF Representative to Macedonia Bisvazdit Bonerdzi asked the government to sack 4.500 state employees for receiving IMF funds and credits. The acquisition of the government was angrily reacted by the Macedonian media.

⁵ Zeljiko Basic, 'Scandals Rack Macedonian Army', IWPR, BCR No: 145, 2 June, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000602_2_eng.txt.

their tendency to SDSM, it can be understood easily how and why a constitutional amendment that will allow much more Albanian officer in the army may be blocked because of struggle for sharing the public patronage along with the other conventional reason, namely, security. Other reasons accompanied to jealousy not to share the posts with the ethnic Albanians as well. Probably, there is a close linkage between the education problems of the Albanians and the distribution of the public sources. Macedonians are obviously pleased to see Albanians not to become serious contenders in the employment in public posts due to their disadvantage derived from the lack of high schools and universities in their own native tongue. It is obvious that the Macedonian recalcitrance not to recognize controversial Tetovo University or ethnic Albanians at Mala Recica as a state university has been inherited in this concern as much as their phobia of a 'linguistic federation' that will be fleshed out in the case the Albanian is accepted as the second official language of the state.

Nobody can deny that the Albanian parties have been equally responsible for the sustenance of the prevailed system of patronage. Although during the Ottoman administration Muslim population resided mostly at the urban centers in Macedonia, as Western Macedonia was situated at the periphery of the commercial centers of the time like Istanbul and Selanik. Macedonia was peripheral again during the Socialist Yugoslavia era and adjoined the struggle of the rich north and poor south in the throngs of the latter. Today, there available many clues to the fact that the Albanian minority has remained peripheral in economic terms in the new republic as well. Probably what makes an ordinary Albanian to recognize the official status of Albanian language as vital as an Albanian intellectual who deems it as the very component of his identity in the face of assimilation and consequently obliteration, is a more concrete expectation; namely, the expectation for it to open the doors for a more prosper life for him/herself and their children speaking only Albanian along with a poor Macedonian in a country where all the exams for access to public posts, university and so forth is conducted in the Macedonian. Although, the Albanian political parties policies seem to be based on more idealistic goals like Albanians' enjoyment all the democratic rights as equal citizens of Macedonia along with the ethnic Macedonians, their actual strategies seem to have given priority to encroachment to the detriment of the rival camp in the distribution of the public resources, indeed a clumsy challenge to integrate the peripheral interests into the plundering mania in the center.

However, there surfaced many problems here again. Although, the ethnic Albanian parties have connected to the patronage network due to their position in the fragile coalition governments, they have constantly remained in the two extremes of idealism and pragmatism. For instance, DPA was the most ardent

advocate of a fundamental solution in the case of, for instance, Tetovo University, yet after it came to power as the junior partner of the ruling coalition, it opted to pursue a mid way in the matter by supporting the East European University (SEEU). Ironically, the leniency or alleged incompetence of PDP in the same matter was one of the major reasons of its defeat in the face of once-hawkish DPA in the 1998 elections. Now PDP sees the efforts of OSCE High Commissioner Max van der Stoel for the establishment of a multi-lingual, internationally funded university as a dynamite placed under the pillars of the controversial Tetovo University and accuses DPA of betraying to the Albanian cause.⁶ The law passed with the consent of DPA giving way to the establishment of the SEEU was responded with rallies in Tetovo, probably organized by PDP and supported by hawkish Ruzi Osmani, one of the main figures of the tragic political imprisonment crisis following the events in Tetovo and Gostivar in 1997.⁷ Yet, the act must have been seen as a success for the DPA.

Up to now, the issue has retained its controversial character within the Albanian political elite. Yet, what makes the case more problematic is the opposition's insisted reflection of the case in a distorted way to the community in spite of the fact that it is well understood that the DPA support to the SEEU is in return to the acceptance of the long-debated amendments in the constitution. By and large this strategy worked out albeit thanks to heavy external pressures from without in the Ohrid Framework Agreement dated 13 August 2001.⁸ As many experts comment, the inter-ethnic politics in Macedonia is based on the purported usage of ethnic tensions in favor of sustenance of the ossified patronage mechanisms. Some Albanians have continued to see the stand of DPA as a concession to the Macedonian side for the sake of the benefits deriving from retaining power or an act at least confirming the allegations on the grounds that Xhaferi is mired into corruption and his colleague Memduh Thaci is the patron or one of the main beneficiaries of the tobacco smuggling run across the Western Macedonia.⁹ Actually, the problem invokes, for both the communities, the established custom to see the glass empty rather than filled with water by its half.

⁶ Zeljiko Basic, 'Macedonian Language Dispute', IWPR, BCR No: 142, 23 May, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000523_4_eng.txt.

⁷ Veton Latifi, 'Educational Law Splits Albanians', IWPR, BCR No: 160, 28 July, 2000. The mentioned law was passed in 25 July 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000728_4_eng.txt.

⁸ Veton Latifi, 'Albanian Education Battle', IWPR, BCR No: 297, 16 November 2001, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr2/bcr2_20011116_4_eng.txt.

⁹ Tom Hughes, 'Xhaferi Rivals to Mount Challenge', IWPR, BCR No: 155, 11 July, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000711_4_eng.txt.

The unbearable cost of being outside of power is overtly one of the basic sources of the mutual distrust between the two communities. As long as hostile stand and political power retain its symbiotic characteristic, it seems that there is still no chance for a truly moderate and non-ethnic party to come to power in Macedonia. Yet, it constitutes simultaneously the very basis of political proliferation and polarization too. For the Albanian side, taking over the role of scapegoat renders the Albanian parties vulnerable to the splits for more fervent political movements, as in the case of the reestablishment of National Democracy Party (NDP) by the deputies drawn from DPA ranks. NDP under the chairmanship of Kastriot Haxhirexha, distinguished itself with a more ardent political discourse and gradually became the spokesperson of NLA under the roof of the Macedonian parliament.¹⁰ It is valid for the nationalistic Macedonian party VMRO-DPMNE as well. VMRO-VMRO or True VMRO which is established by those who advocate a firm resistance against the Albanian demands demonstrates that the proliferation phenomenon is not peculiar only to the Albanian side. However, the incidents during the 20 September 2000 local elections proved that polarization also became a fact for the Albanian politics and escalated into unexpected levels. During the election day, it was reported that the PDP activists smashed the ballot boxes in some Albanian villages, namely, Vishtice, Collopek, Zheline, Polkishte and assaulted the DPA activist in the municipality of Llabunishte. DPA activists responded by harassing PDP activists in Diber and voting had to be suspended at 24 poll stations in the province.¹¹

The success of DPA at the local elections at the end of which his party managed to secure 12 municipalities whilst PDP only one,¹² may be interpreted as the continuation of support to the party because of its success in settlement some problems like the release of Xhavit Hasani, former UCK commander and a national hero, by the Macedonian authorities¹³ or Xhaferi's charismatic superiority against respectively naive Imer Imeri of PDP. On the other hand, municipal elections should not be seen as an accurate criteria to assess the position of the political parties, in that it may give a slight advantage to the parties in power that will say the last word for the deliverance of the funds to local administrations. It can be hypothesized that National Liberation Army

¹⁰ Veton Latifi, 'Support for NLA Fighters Grows', IWPR, No: 227, 16 March, 2001, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20010316_1_eng.txt.

¹¹ Veton Latifi, 'Albanians' Division Exposed', IWPR, BCR No: 174, 20 September, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000920_1_eng.txt.

¹² Karina Johansen, 'Georgievski Survives Election Test', IWPR, BCR No: 174, 19 September, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000919_2_eng.txt.

¹³ Zeljiko Basic, 'Hasani's Release Sparks Outcry', IWPR, BCR No: 132, 11 April, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000411_2_eng.txt.

(NLA) was the only political movement independent from the concerns of patronage shared by the official Albanian parties. The following feud between the established Albanian political parties' leaders and NLA leader Ahmeti who initiated a new political movement aiming at unifying all Albanians under the roof of a new party proved the aforementioned thesis to be true. Ironically, it had played a significant role in those parties' leaving aside their struggle for distribution of public resources and unifying by and large concretely behind the Albanian cause on the verge of the Ohrid Agreement. Actually, what a pity the Albanian politicians could not deal with the matter in conventional way thereby giving way to violence. Unfortunate for those who wish the solution of the problem through peaceful means, that the demands of NLA was not different from those of the official Albanian parties, blackened further their image in the eyes of ordinary Macedonian and placed a big stone on the road leading to a full fledged consensus to form and operate a multicultural democratic polity in the future. The incompetence of the Albanian parties in addressing their community's grievances because they had been much more engaged with selfish political arithmetic created NLA. Yet, they seem to have disguised into the spokespersons of the organization, be intentionally or unintentionally, thereby preparing a ground for the Macedonian parties which plan to relieve themselves off the burden of the reform package that may cause their political excommunication by their kin. Actually, as Muhic truly remarked, both group of parties play the ethnic tension against each other to acquire political or economic benefits to their patronage networks, thereby undermining the efforts to form a multicultural democracy.¹⁴ However, many of them forget that from now on under the current situation, neither borders can be redrawn, nor prosperity flourishes on these soils without deciding to live together in a peaceful way.

Zeljiko Basic, 'Crime and Politics in Macedonia', IWPR, BCR No: 107, 14 January, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000114_1_eng.txt.

Zeljiko Basic, 'Macedonia Locked in Cycle of Corruption', IWPR, BCR No: 126, 21 March, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000321_3_eng.txt.

Veton Latifi, 'Macedonia Mired in Corruption', IWPR, BCR No: 183, 16 October, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20001006_5_eng.txt.

¹⁴ Ferid Muhic, 'The Devil of Perversity', IWPR, BCR No: 246, 14 May, 2001, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20010511_3_eng.txt.

Dragan Nikolic, 'Skopje's Diplomatic Rumpus', IWPR, BCR No: 207, 5 January, 2001, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20010105_1_eng.txt. IMF¹

Zeljiko Basic, 'Scandals Rack Macedonian Army', IWPR, BCR No: 145, 2 June, 2000, available on http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20000602_2_eng.txt.

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