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COMMENTARY



Running for the UN Secretary General
position – the Macedonian way

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This November it is all about elections. Even though finished, the US presidential election is still producing shockwaves throughout the world and the election campaign for Macedonia's early parliamentary elections, scheduled for December, is in full swing. One election, however, went almost unnoticed among the general Macedonian public – that for the next UN Secretary General. A rather important position, where the successor of Ban ki-Moon is supposed to bring to humankind a better tomorrow, or at least according to the textbooks.

This battle was fought on the Macedonian side, by Srgjan Kerim, a sound name in Macedonia, former Ambassador, Minister and President of the 62nd UN General Assembly. Apart from these successes, Srgjan Kerim is

also known to the Macedonian public as an owner of MPM, a distribution network of Macedonia's biggest newspapers and magazines and a business that for many seems to be problematic. Several affairs are related to this name. One of the examples is the so called "money in a bottle" affair when Srgjan Kerim's personal driver was caught en route to Vienna with 750K EUR cash. The money, according to police records was owned by the MPM network.¹

While the red and yellow fans in Macedonia received news of the nomination of Srgjan Kerim as if it were news of his eventual victory, the campaigning yet again

¹ Fokus, "Dali Srgjan Kerim za da izleze od shishete na prerodbata go flashirase dnevnik" <http://fokus.mk/dali-srgan-kerim-za-da-izleze-od-shisheto-na-prerodbata-go-flashirashe-dnevnik/> 12.01.2014

portrayed the weaknesses of Macedonia's diplomacy. For a start his competitors were sound names not only in this region but throughout Europe. Some of the names included: Vuk Jeremikj (Serbia), Irena Bokova and Kristalina Georgieva (Bulgaria), Vesna Pusikj (Croatia), Danilo Turk (Slovenia) etc. For many of them their beefed up CVs were result of their countries' membership of the EU. For example, Bulgaria's candidate Kristalina Georgieva, is Vice President of the European Commission.

Additionally, the list as such suggests that Eastern Europe was given preferential treatment this year, because so far this part of the world had not had a representative in such an important position. Hence the

candidacy of Srgjan Kerim as one of the contenders for the position should not be a surprising fact.

The questionable candidacy of Srgjan Kerim for this position and the out-of-date diplomatic machinery were evident on several occasions. The almost non-existent public diplomacy efforts were critical to the representation of Macedonia's candidate. Mr. Kerim was the only candidate from Eastern Europe who did not put any resources into digital communications. Among the above listed names he was the only one without a Twitter account. Overall this had a bad impact on his visibility. Moreover the absence of substantial number of visits to countries abroad, with the aim of lobbying for support for him as a candidate as well as his vision for a reformed UN led to his name being placed near the

end and never really being taken seriously. Speaking of his vision for a reformed UN, Kerim's uninteresting manifesto did not really suggest any answer to the question of the UN of tomorrow. The manifesto also did not borrow much from Macedonia's foreign policy objectives.

The attempt by the UN to give these elections greater visibility, and transparency about the candidates was seen as something that could further democratise them. For the first time in the UN's history a Q&A session with the candidates was organised and streamed live with the focus being on the future of the UN. Macedonia's candidate did not attend this session. Instead of being able to charm the public with concrete answers to some very burning questions such as the war in Syria, de-

velopments in South Sudan as well as climate change, what we've seen was Macedonia's Ambassador to the UN reading an unimaginative statement.

All of this leads to the conclusion that Macedonia's diplomacy has failed in presenting Srgjan Kerim as a serious candidate for the position of new UN Secretary General. Putting him in the race without having a sound public diplomacy concept, which is supposed to go hand in hand with the traditional conduct of diplomacy was one of the biggest weaknesses of his candidacy campaign. ●



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