

## DIPLOMATIC LABYRINTHS: HOW DOES ONE BECOME AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA?

JULY 2013

**A**mbassadorship is one of the cornerstones of a country's foreign policy. In today's interconnected world, ambassadors have plenipotentiary powers and are key players in international relations, urging for better positions of their countries. Becoming Ambassador is usually a long road and once one becomes an Ambassador, his/her title remains regardless of future engagements.

Apparently, in order to show its transparency and ensure equal opportunities for all interested citizens, the Macedonian Government announced a public call for engaging people in

managerial positions. This call, however, encompassed 19 available ambassadorial positions, including ambassadorial positions in leading countries and organizations as the USA, Germany, Austria, Russia, United Nations Organizations and NATO.

Being Head of a diplomatic mission is in many ways different from any other senior or managerial position. Therefore, it is a subject of special legal regulation. The Ambassador is a diplomatic representative of the highest ranking and in the eyes of the hosting country – he/she is embodiment and “the face” of his/her home country. However,

the Ambassador is not only representative or appointee of the sending country, but also advocates for the national interests and improves the relations between the countries. He/she protects the rights of the Macedonian citizens living in foreign countries, supports business interests of the Macedonian companies and urges for support in international relations by the host country. In these times, when Macedonia is facing multiple challenges in its Euro-Atlantic integration, it is of paramount importance that we send experienced diplomats that have the “know-how” to broker the best possible options and build friendships. Furthermore, embassies are main foreign centers for collecting intelligence with the aim of protecting the political, security and economic interests of the Republic of Macedonia. Accordingly, the head of the diplomatic or consular mission has to be a competent person in each way and above all – to be trustworthy and loyal.

According to the Law on Foreign Affairs, the procedure for appointing an ambassador encompasses the word of the President of the country, the Government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. After the Minister and the President agree on the candidate, the Min-

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ister initiates the procedure and submits the proposal to the Government. Following Government's acceptance of the proposal, the President is being informed by the Prime Minister (Article 37). This raises the question whether a public call by the Government interferes in the work of the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs or even can be seen as a violation of the Law. Moreover, the Law is very precise in determining the criteria compared to the Government's advertisement for employment, including the prerequisite for having solely Macedonian citizenship. On the other side, the public call by the Government requires university education, 5-year long experience (without further specifications) and active knowledge of at least two foreign languages. It is worth mentioning that the Law on Foreign Affairs more strictly determines the knowledge of foreign languages, listing the necessary level and valid tests proving that.

There are two ways for one to become ambassador – as professional diplomat within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (career-based) or appointee as a person who

has good reputation in foreign policy and international relations. Unlike their colleagues that are instantly set as Head of Mission, the way towards this prestigious position is much more complicated for the professional career-based diplomats. It takes them to pass several stages until they are given the ambassador rank, depending on the time spent in the Ministry, trainings completed, exams passed, assessments provided by the superiors and papers defended. The Law on Foreign Affairs demands a quota of minimum one quarter (25%) of the total number of ambassadors to be professional diplomats from the Ministry, contrary to for example the USA where typically around 70% of the Ambassadors are professionals coming from the Foreign Service.

Speaking about numbers, around 700 Macedonian citizens responded to the Government's advertisement and applied for the diplomatic posts (ambassadorial or consular). 700 citizens believe in being adequate figures in the field of foreign policy and international relations. It is unknown how the selection committee is

going to measure their prominence.

The ambassadorial position is a key position in a country's international relations. When appointing someone as an Ambassador, the authorities need exceptional vigilance in order to choose the person that would serve in favor of the best interest of the country. The efforts of the Government to show transparency and openness are being welcomed, but it could better practice those commitments in hiring civil servants of any rank and also in the work of the state institutions. A lot of time and resources have to be invested in building strong and efficient diplomatic network. The new ambassadors should be experienced diplomats so that the goals of the Macedonian foreign policy are being achieved. Bearing in mind the importance of the other countries' ambassadors in Macedonia, we should never forget the significance of our ambassadors' role on our road to the EU and NATO.

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