

Macedonia's preparations for civilian contribution to peace operations - the next big thing after the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

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policy brief

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Summary

Probably one of the most exploited phrases by politicians from the Western Balkans when talking about issues on defence reform and international security is that the “countries from the region, from peace importers, have become peace exporters”. Over the years Macedonia has established itself as a country where that export product is mainly through military means. This policy paper aims to put the question of civilian contribution to peace operations on the agenda and advocates increased debate among policymakers and officials. It does not, however, undermine nor support a decrease in Macedonia's military contribution. The main focus of the text is the identification of advantage areas that Macedonia has developed through the years which could be utilised in the civilian capacities (CIVCAP)¹ model. Therefore the paper lists: 1) policing, 2) media, 3) crisis management and power sharing as Macedonia's ready to be exported products. It also provides an insight into the ongoing legislative and institutional preparations. While legislation for contribution to peace operations by civilian means is largely in place, what seems to be lacking is a strategic turn towards more civilian contribution. This therefore produces many unknowns about civilian participation among policymakers still making it sound very remote.

Introduction

Macedonia's contribution to international peace and security throughout the years to date has been carried out primarily through military means, which in itself is somewhat odd having in mind the small size and military potential of the country. Both military participation in missions abroad as well as the small-scale civilian input are primarily driven by the prospects of joining NATO and the EU. Being candidate country for both institutions has brought significant changes to the security sector, such as cutting the military service obligation, an integrated border system whereby police took over the management of the borders from the army etc. This has given Macedonia's Armed Forces a push for greater involvement in NATO and EU led operations. Participation in such missions was seen among policymakers as something that would aid the country's bids for accession to the organisations in question. On the expense of the significant contribution to NATO missions, such as ISAF in Afghanistan, Macedonia's contribution to UN missions has remained unsatisfactory which some try to justify by pointing to the strategic objectives of Macedonia (i.e. membership of the aforementioned institutions) but also to the country's limited resources. The lack of UN involvement might well change soon mainly because of the withdrawal of Macedonian soldiers from Afghanistan and the announcement for the redirection of the military focus to UN operations², which may provide the opportunity for a more prominent CIVCAP role.

¹By civilian capacities this paper refers to non-military personnel (including police) sent to conflict or post conflict areas for the purpose of stabilisation and state-building efforts.

²Interview with Col Ljube Dukoski, Director for Politics and Planning, Finances and International Cooperation, Ministry of Defence. Interview conducted 12 February 2014

At the same time the accession prospects of Macedonia to both EU and NATO are halted for the time being due to Greek objections arising from the unresolved name dispute. This stalemate could be seen as counterproductive for Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic commitments mainly because joining both the EU and NATO is now seen as remote possibility. While being in this accession deadlock for few years there seems to be an attempt by Macedonian officials to work around the blockade and unlock all possible venues that are not directly connected with the accession process. Macedonia's participation two times in a row in EU's Battle Groups could be seen as an example of this.

Contribution to peace operations through civilian means has not been high on the agenda of Macedonian politicians mainly due to a lack of incentives and a lack of a partner country which would provide support and training. Even though Macedonia has not proceeded with full steam towards civilian contribution to peace operations, policymakers in the country are aware of the need for starting such a contribution. Formally speaking, there is no legal barrier to Macedonia sending civilians to peace operations.

What are Macedonia's advantage points?

Having had a turbulent past, Macedonia, and its multi-cultural and multi-confessional fabric is in a position to share its firsthand experience with a number of participants in current conflicts around the world. This especially applies to secessionist conflicts, which was a real threat to Macedonia in 2001. That being said most of the experiences that the country could export today to other conflict regions can be traced to the lessons learned from Macedonia's 2001 internal armed conflict and the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, a power sharing deal which stopped the violence.

Policing

To date, Macedonia has contributed with one member of the police in 2007 to the UN Mission to Liberia in an advisory role on Democratisation, Demobilisation and Disarmament activities as well as gender issues for Liberia's police. Ever since the Ministry of Interior has invested in police training schemes but without setting clear and tangible targets for participation in peace operations. In recent years efforts to buildup Macedonia's police capacities for CIVCAP presence has been and is conducted as part of NATO integration efforts, through NATO's Partnership for Peace Planning and Review process.

There is a political will in the Ministry of Interior and its senior officials recognise the importance of participation in peace operations, hoping for assistance from countries, mainly from Scandinavia, which have longer track record in civilian contribution to

peace operations.³ So far around 200 police officers have applied for a provisional roster, something that signals readiness to make a contribution abroad.⁴

Crisis management and power sharing

Immediately after the armed conflict in 2001 between Macedonia's security forces and ethnic Albanian rebels, the country has undergone various state building reforms that, from today's perspective and lessons learned would be applicable to and could be deployed in other parts of the world. The experience from the conflict and the period of reconciliation afterwards, through the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, have to some extent been systematised in policies affecting many societal stakeholders such as the public administration, local municipalities etc. The extent of the applicability of such experiences could be recognised in Marti Ahtisari's proposal for the resolution of the final status of Kosovo later on incorporated into the Kosovo Constitution.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement has tackled areas such as constitutional reform, decentralisation of powers from the central authorities, equitable representation in the public administration, identity and cultural rights etc. It would therefore be safe to expect that with more than 10 years of implementation of the agreement there are many civilians who, having accumulated relevant knowledge, are ready to share their experience in areas such as conflict mediation, power-sharing and state-building efforts. For a start this could be applied through utilising existing mechanisms such as secondment through international organisations which should in turn give a basis for further advancement into this area.

Kosovo's ongoing state building processes could, for example, serve as an entry point for Macedonia's civilian potential. Years of experience in multi-ethnic patrolling, equitable representation, language and identity rights, judiciary etc. could all potentially be useful for Kosovo authorities, either through international missions such as EULEX or the Kosovo government.

Media

The role of the media during and after conflicts can be a crucial element in further development of conflicts either by deteriorating or improving the likelihood of stabilisation. Very often, areas affected by conflicts face difficulties when there is a need of timely, accurate and objective information sharing. Macedonia's Public Affairs Regional Centre, dealing with training in media and communications and originally set by the Ministry of Defence in 2005, has been accredited as a NATO Partnership Training and Education Centre. It offers media training, primarily to military personnel as end users in countries from Europe, Asia and Africa. Even though most of the time the training is tailored for military purposes, a number of

³Stalevski, Ljupco, "Stabilization and Reconstruction Capabilities," Public Presentation, November 17 2011. Conference "Regional Security Dynamics in the Western Balkans" Ministry of Internal Affairs.

⁴Interview with a high-ranking official from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Conducted 27. 02. 2014

training elements also provide purely civilian content such as crisis management and crisis communication. With an established good track record in providing media courses to state officials across South East Europe, the Public Affairs Regional Centre could expand its work and incorporate more civilians as end users of its trainings. This would primarily encompass the offering of training possibilities for the police, local municipalities, emergency units etc. Apart from expanding training to new beneficiaries the Centre could also consider providing courses abroad by sending certified trainers there instead of hosting the training. This would ultimately provide better flexibility, lower costs and better outreach. For the time being potential regions that could benefit largely from media and communications type of training are the countries from the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region that are undergoing processes of democratisation.

Legislative framework and institutional setup

The legislative framework that regulates the sending of civilians as part of peace operations to conflict regions satisfies the minimum requirements. Even though there are certain areas that could be improved by being more detailed, such as decision-making and command once civilians are deployed, this for the time being does not necessarily represent a major obstacle to sending civilians abroad. At the moment there is ongoing preparatory work for the adoption of the law on International Development Cooperation which should provide better legal support and introduce new ways of civilian participation in peace operations. The law as such stems from Macedonia's EU integration efforts, aligning the country with EU's acquis. Areas listed in the draft law such as rule of law, democracy building, human rights, social and economic development, poverty reduction, education etc. are among the priority areas which fit well with the challenges peace operations are trying to tackle and are applicable to conflict torn regions. Under the draft law Macedonia should develop a multiannual programme which would be in accordance with the EU's development goals but also devote a certain percentage of its GDP for development and aid. One of the challenges with this draft law is its implementation, which according to the text should happen only when Macedonia accedes to the EU. This would create a time gap and delay further possibilities for greater civilian contribution to peace operations. Even though the draft text is already circulated among various ministries and was envisaged for adoption by 2013 no public debate has occurred. Instead, the adoption of the law has been delayed until later in 2014.

The current legislative framework under which civilians could be sent abroad is through the Law on sending personnel to international missions and international organisations as well as systemic laws such as the Law on police. The former identifies civilians as "experts" and even though the law does not explicitly mention "peace operations" when speaking about deployment in missions it refers to missions that should support international order, establishing democratic institutions as well as providing aid to civilians affected in crisis. Even though the law looks all encompassing still it is not of much use for some of the ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because of its complexity and the need for additional

changes in the text.⁵ Additionally even though adopted in 2007, some of the secondary legislation is still missing.⁶

Since there has not been a strategic turn towards sending civilians to peace operations and the experience so far has been limited and mainly canalised through secondment positions the institutional setup is incomplete. At the same time there have been some positive steps in this direction such as the opening of a Unit for Humanitarian and Development Aid within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dealing with issues around humanitarian aid, mainly disaster relief. The unit at the start had two employees but this number has now dropped to only one, which might signal weak commitment. Civilians working for the public administration such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Public Prosecutors Office etc. are very hesitant when it comes to participation in missions abroad due to lack of experience and information. There have been no promotional campaigns and tailored trainings and this additionally alienates the process.

Conclusion

Civilian participation in peace operations has not been high on the agenda of Macedonian policymakers. The focus was put on military operations, mainly through EU and NATO missions, which in turn has side-lined UN participation. Most of the legislation is in place and visible potential for participation can be seen in the example of the police. Civilian contribution to peace operations in the Ministry of Interior is not an unknown concept and some preparatory work, such as initial roster and basic trainings have been organised. The experience with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement through which Macedonia glued some of its inter-ethnic divisions could be applicable to many similar cases abroad. Finally, the potential for exporting knowledge in media and public affairs through the Public Affairs Regional Centre to more civilian stakeholders abroad could strengthen Macedonia's expertise sharing in new regions which could unlock much new potential.

⁵Information obtained through utilising the Law on free access to information from Public Character.

⁶Interview with a high-ranking official from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Conducted 27. 02. 2014

Policy recommendations

1. There should be a public debate on the draft Law on International Development Cooperation and the Law should be adopted by autumn 2014 as set out in the National Programme for adopting the EU law 2014-2016.
2. The provision stating that the law on International Development Cooperation will enter into force with Macedonia's EU accession should be removed due to the uncertainty of the country's accession pace, and implementation of the law should not be delayed.
3. The Unit for Humanitarian and Development Aid within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should assume greater responsibilities and start coordinating Macedonia's civilian contribution to peace operations. It should start working on preparations for creating a roster of experts and start gradual implementation of the Law on International Development Cooperation.
4. The Law on sending personnel to international missions and international organisations should be amended in the areas of selection of persons as well as decision-making procedures. All secondary legislation stemming from the Law should be put in place.
5. The Law on Police should be amended so that police officers can be employed in executive missions abroad, such as those maintaining public security.
6. Macedonian authorities should approach the Republic of Kosovo and the EU offering assistance in the state building efforts of this country. Expertise in border management, the judiciary and the media can be offered.
7. Macedonian authorities can offer small-scale assistance to EULEX Kosovo as a Third state, in particular when it comes to policing and confidence building expertise for Northern Kosovo.
8. In consultation with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should make a formal assessment of the potential civilian capabilities it can offer to Afghan authorities. This is based on Macedonia's long presence in Afghanistan (since 2002) through military personnel as well as the commitment to support Afghan authorities in their state building efforts.
9. Apart from the ongoing discussions about possible enhancement of Macedonia's military participation in UN missions, there should also be space for augmenting Macedonia's contribution by civilian means.
10. Greece and Macedonia should engage in more constructive dialogue about the differences over the name issue and resolve those under the auspices of the UN. Greek authorities should respect the Interim Accord signed in 1995 and the ICJ ruling from 2011 under which Greece should not block Macedonia's entry to international organisations (where Greece, is already a member) under

the provisional reference Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This should ultimately clear the way for Macedonia's entry into both EU and NATO and thence increase Macedonian civilian participation in peace operations.

11. Those institutions where contribution with civilians in peace operations is mostly expected, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Public Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Justice etc. in coordination with the Ministry of Defence should organise public awareness events so that they introduce their employees to the possibilities of being seconded or contracted by international organisations as well as the security risks (if any).
12. The Ministry of Internal Affairs should reach out to authorities in Norway and Sweden (having been previously identified as possible supporters by Macedonian officials) asking for comprehensive support for sending police officers to peace operations abroad. Support should be given primarily in pre-deployment training.
13. The Public Affairs Regional Centre should consider the possibility of its staff members providing training in post conflict regions. That way the costs of conducting the training can be lower and the possibilities for outreach greater.