

20 Years of Macedonian Independence – 20 years of political division

The Macedonian independent country was born on 8th September 1991 when the citizens of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia expressed their will on a Referendum to secede from Yugoslavia. The Albanian minority boycotted the Referendum as they were not satisfied with their status in the country therefore their representatives were not present at the proclamation of the independence which was held at Skopje's Square.

This month Macedonia celebrated its 20 years of independence. The main celebration was again at the main square in the capital Skopje, and was marked by the official opening of a new museum dedicated to Macedonian independence, the 22 meter-high triumphal arch "Macedonia" and the 23 meter-high fountain and statue of "the Warrior on a Horse" alias Alexander the Great, all part of the Skopje 2014 project, which has been the centre of a lot of controversies in and outside the country. The events of those days in 1991 were repeated, the main happening was boycotted, just this time it was not ethnical but mainly political boycott as the opposition parties decided not to be part of it. The main argument of the biggest opposition party, SDSM, was that the ruling authorities were misusing the event for promotion of their own projects (Skopje 2014), while the Albanian opposition parties did not participate because of their persuasion that the Albanian ethnic community living in Macedonia was discriminated regarding the celebration. Even the ruling Albanian party DUI mentioned that even though it respects the event it will not take part in it. This celebration showed once again the ever growing division between the parties in Macedonia and their practice of mutual accusation. If we look back in the past there are several cases that confirm this.

In 2001 Macedonia went through its hardest moments since it got its independence: the internal conflict which lasted few months and was located

mainly in the north-western part of the country. Even today the main causes for this conflict remain unknown and different parties and stakeholders interpret it differently. It has always been a ground on which the political parties have tried to win votes for their causes. Playing the nationalist feelings, even today 10 years from that conflict, remains strong on the Macedonian political scene. Even during progress periods in the country, there is a lack of unification of the different political interests. Such example is the granting of the candidate status of Macedonia for an EU membership in 2005. The biggest opposition party at that time (VMRO-DPMNE) accused that it was just a "personal party" of the then ruling leadership in the country (SDSM) and refused to take part in the event. In 2008, the NATO summit was held in Bucharest where Greece vetoed Macedonian entrance in NATO on the grounds of the unresolved name dispute. Just to remember, 20 days before the summit the Albanian party (DPA) that was part of the governmental coalition at that time, because of disagreements inside the governing majority was threatening to leave the Government.

Where politicians have failed to promote unification, non-politicians have managed to unite. One current example is the Macedonian Basketball Representation which historical success at the European Basketball Games 2011 proved that Macedonians can unite and celebrate its victories together. People are celebrating all over the country singing the Macedonian national anthem and waving the Macedonian national flag without mentioning any political party, ideologies or similar.

Macedonia, relatively speaking is still a young democracy with a lot to learn on the topics of strengthening democracy, promoting good inter-ethnic coexistence and solid political dialogue. Whether our politicians will finally learn to leave aside their own political interests and disagreements when it comes to defending the interests of all citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, remains to be seen in the challenging period that follows.

Written by Elena Jakimovska, Residential Intern: ejakimovska@analyticamk.org