



THEME 4: Regional Conflicts

Teaching and learning aids

Fact-based approach

Macedonia - Country with an uncertain future?

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Preliminary thoughts

To be in a position to answer any question about the future of Macedonia it is first necessary to clarify a number of concepts that may be used as assessment criteria for particular aspects of that future.

1. National territory

When at the beginning of the 20th century the Ottoman Empire gradually broke up under pressure from the European Great Powers and national uprisings in the Balkans, three peoples, namely the Serbs in the north, Bulgarians in the east and Greeks in the south found themselves in dispute over the territory of present-day Macedonia. After World War I the area passed to the newly created Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in which however especially the Serbs had the biggest say. During World War II Macedonian territory came mainly under Bulgarian rule between 1941 and 1944, and thereafter in 1945 it became one of the constituent republics of the multiracial state of Yugoslavia under the leadership of the Communist Party with Tito as head of state. (Tf 402/2)

Year by year after his death in 1980, relations among the Yugoslav peoples became increasingly strained until in 1989 – linked with the general crisis of Communism – Yugoslavia's unity as a federal state effectively fragmented and in 1991 the individual republics declared themselves to be sovereign states.

2. National borders and official name

In the north, Macedonia borders on Kosovo and Serbia. In 2005 it was still unclear whether Kosovo would remain a part of Serbia or whether it would become a new independent Balkan state. In the east, Macedonia has a border with Bulgaria, a line that is no longer seriously disputed by Bulgarians. There is a similar situation in the south with neighbouring Greece.

However, in the 1990s the Greeks objected greatly to the choice of the name "Macedonia" for the new state, as they are of the opinion that the province with the name "Makedhonia" in northern Greece has the sole right to carry forward the tradition of ancient Macedon and not some Slav tribes or other who migrated into the area in the 6th century. Therefore Macedonia in Greece only was called FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia).

The fear that, on the basis of the name of the country, present-day Macedonia might consider itself to possess territorial rights extending all the way to the Aegean seems greatly exaggerated under the conditions at present in operation in the EU.

In the west, Macedonia has a common border with Albania, a country whose borders were largely drawn in the period of World War I, with brief changes during World War II. To what extent these borders will remain depends for the greater part on future developments in Macedonia. (Tf 402/3)

3. People/Nation/Nationality

In political theory, apart from a defined territory (1) with fixed borders (2), a state also possesses a people (3). Looked at on the surface, this is the population living in the area that makes up the state. However, a lot depends on whether this population is made up of one, or two or even several peoples. Peoples share a common blood ancestry, language, history and customs.

Nations define themselves on the basis of shared ideals, as for example the French nation was created from peoples, and is still being created from peoples, who adopted (or adopt) the ideals of the French Revolution: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity. In the concept of nationhood stemming from the French, blood ties do not play a great role.

For example: As long as the population of Great Britain shares common ideals, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and the Irish of Northern Ireland will all swear their allegiance to the British nation although they belong to different peoples. But in the English language the concept of "nation" can mean two things: 1) it stands for the British citizenry, i.e. all of Britain's population together or 2) it stands for a group of the population in one of the three historical countries that make up Britain today, so one also speaks about the English nation, the Welsh nation and the Scottish nation. And among those, who have British citizenship, there are also Catholics in Northern Ireland, who as a minority would prefer, sooner rather than later, to be members of another nation (have a different nationality).

The citizens of Yugoslavia between 1918 and 1991 were of Slovenians, Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Kosovars (ethnic Albanians) and Macedonians, i.e. Yugoslavia was – just like the Habsburg Empire of days gone by – a multiethnic state.

Even present-day Macedonia does not possess an ethnically homogenous people, but is made up of approximately 64 % Slavic Macedonians, 25 % Albanians, 4 % Turks, 3 % Roma und 4 % Serbs, Bosnians and others. That is to say, Macedonia is made up of different peoples or ethnic groups, which however – in contrast to Great Britain, or to Spain or to Switzerland, for example – are not held together by common ideals or values. (TF 402/2 und TF 402/3, Cf 402)

4. Territorial sovereignty/State authority/Executive power

Theoretically speaking, within the framework of a legal system (constitution), a fully functioning state is entitled to pass laws and orders, and to see to it that they are obeyed within the boundaries of its territory, if necessity demands, even through the use of physical and/or armed force. When a state in exercising its rule – i.e. in acting through its organised forms of authority – is free from interference from inside or outside its borders, then it is fully sovereign.

However, sovereignty today must be understood differently from what it meant in the days of absolute monarchs. The exercise of sovereign power today is directed essentially at three goals: it must

- guarantee security at home and abroad, ('power state')
- create a just society and (state founded on the rule of law)
- generate prosperity. (welfare state)

To achieve these ends, the state must provide corresponding institutions (administrative organs), which benefit the greatest number of citizens and are not disproportionately favourable to specific groups or individuals. When this succeeds, a state can then expect to receive its citizens' loyalty, i.e. allegiance and support.

In a state that is functioning well the relationship between state and society is one in which each regulates and controls the other. The citizens' political will is transferred through parties and pressure groups/lobbies to the state, which in turn has influence over its citizens through the legal authorities, the police, military, financial and social administrative organs.

The ways in which both sides influence one another, i.e. both from the bottom up and from the top downwards must follow set rules (laws) and be open to public control through independent courts of law and a free press.

Using the assessment criteria

Consideration of the question asked at the beginning - whether Macedonia faces an uncertain future - involves reflection on the following values:

- peace
- democratic participation in the governing process
- justice
- prosperity
- combating spheres of lawlessness as breeding grounds of criminality, human trafficking and terrorist structures
- the worth of a nation state
- identity and loyalty

But it also involves attempts to solve existent problems:

- solidarity
- aid and assistance in various fields
- peacemaking through being part of a community guided by the rule of law and prosperity

The newspaper articles provided in the materials section contain relevant information on all these issues. If these do not give enough detail, the Internet may be referred to.

e.g.: BBC NEWS Country profiles

Possible topics for class assignments

1. In what respects is the territory of Macedonia in its present form endangered? (Tf 402/3)
2. Is Macedonia populated by a people or a Macedonian nation? (Tf 402/1, Tf 402/2, Tf 402/3, Tf 402/4)
3. Is there a sovereign state authority (government)? (Tf 402/1)
4. Why do many Macedonians find it difficult to feel loyal towards their state? (Tf 402/1, Tf 402/2)
5. Why are Macedonia's problems also a danger for EU member states? (Tf 402/1, Tf 402/4)
6. What measures must be taken to improve the given situation? (Tf 402/4)