

A COMPARATIVE STUDY: THE PERCEPTION OF EU ENLARGEMENT IN FRANCE AND MACEDONIA

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Introduction

It is easy to guess that making a comparative study between France and Macedonia on a subject like enlargement to European Union will lead to different conclusions for both countries, since they have not many similarities apart from their belonging to the European continent. France is, after Germany, the largest European country in terms of population (about 63 millions) and has always been one of the major actors on the international scene. As a founding member of the European Union, the country had to deal with the issue of enlargement as early as the first accession negotiations with Great Britain in 1961, creating, almost every time, a heated intern debate. Now, in 2007, the European Union is composed of 27 member states and an increasing number of French are becoming skeptical about further enlargement of the EU, especially to Turkey.

Macedonia, as one of the smallest European country in terms of area and population, has been historically part of the biggest empires (Byzantine, Roman, Ottoman) or of a federation, but only became a sovereign and independent state sixteen years ago, gaining international recognition at the same time. Thus, its place on the international scene is recent, even though since 1991 Macedonia has joined major international organizations like the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the World Trade Organization or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Since 2005 Macedonia is an official candidate for joining the European Union, and has also applied for NATO membership. The perception of Macedonia regarding EU enlargement is that of a small country in the middle of its economic transition, which has nothing to loose by tempting to join the European Union family, while France's prerogatives within the EU might be threatened if EU enlarges. As a consequence, each of them having different histories, economic situations, internal problems, their relation to EU and their perception of EU enlargement can only be different.

The last European summit that took place in June 2007 has led with very much difficulty to the settlement of an Intergovernmental conference aiming at drafting a new European treaty. This "mini treaty" should reform the European institutions so that the decision-making process can work with 27 members. Even though agreements were found, especially with Poland and Britain, it also clearly showed that some European nations were not ready to give up their prerogatives. It showed however that there was a strong willing for the European Union to progress after the French and Danish "no" to the referendum on the constitutional treaty that led Europe to a dead-centre. What is more, with the election of new French president Nicolas Sarkozy in May 2007 and the appointment of Bernard Kouchner as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, France is likely to be very active and influential regarding many international and European issues. Thus one can reasonably expect France to lead a key role regarding the enlargement process, especially during the French European presidency in 2008. At the same time Macedonia has been granted status of official country since 2005 and is waiting now for a clear date for the beginning of the accession talks.

In this general European context, such a comparative study is particularly relevant in order to have a better understanding of what is at stake for France if EU enlarges and how the French perceives a further enlargement, compared to the perception of enlargement in Macedonia, a non-member state strongly willing to join the European Union. Such a comparison can help take hindsight and bring moderation to ideas found in discourses of politicians or in public opinion, for a more objective approach to enlargement.

What are the general tendencies regarding enlargement in both countries?

Surveys have been led in each country regarding the support to EU enlargement, the results being closely linked to the perception of the European Union in various topics as well as the perception regarding the living standards in the country.

The last Eurobarometer poll¹ published in June 2007 shows that only 32% of the French are in favor of further EU enlargement in the forthcoming years, which represents one of the lowest results together with Germany (34%), Luxembourg (25%) and Austria (28%), the average figure among EU member states being 49% in favor of enlargement. A survey led in February-March 2004², that is, just after the largest enlargement of European history and one year before the referendum on the European Treaty, showed that this strong skepticism regarding further enlargement was already present, with the same figure of 32% in favor and 47% against. Moreover the French also expressed very weak support to the new enlargement with 47% opposed to it. In October 2003³, just before the 2004 enlargement, a majority of people were in favor of further enlargement, despite a big increase of those against it. The poll showed that the younger, more educated, intellectual professions and activities were the most favorable to a new enlargement.

In January 2006⁴ however, the opinions were less contrasted: 49% thought the 2004 enlargement had been a bad thing and 47% a good one. Among those who perceived this enlargement as a bad thing were people above 40 years old, those who has ended their education before 21, the inhabitants living in rural areas, and eventually those politically closer to the right-wing parties. In January 2006, those who had voted against the constitutional treaty mostly rejected the integration of Romania and Bulgaria, while a majority of French supported it but on a rather long-term perspective. The support regarding enlargement to Turkey and Croatia was more contrasted: if 38% of the people thought Turkey should never integrate the EU, 59% considered the accession of Turkey on a short or long term perspective. French people seemed in favor of Croatia joining EU even though, most of them declared they preferred it to happen in several years. Again the results showed that those who had rejected the constitutional treaty were the less favorable to enlargement to Turkey and

¹ Standard Eurobarometer 67, Public opinion in the European Union, European commission, June 2007

² Standard Eurobarometer 61, Public opinion in the European Union, European Commission, Spring 2004

³ Poll BVA-SIG, The French, the European construction and the European enlargement, October 2003

⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 178, What Europe? The European Construction for the French opinion, European Commission, March 2006

Croatia. Thus it cannot be denied that French people have been expressing, for the past years, some reluctance regarding further enlargement, especially on a short-term period. They seem however in favor of it as long as it happens in several years. The opinions are still rather contrasted, depending on several factors such as age, education, residence area or political tendencies.

As far as Macedonia is concerned, a poll realized in June 2007 showed a strong enthusiasm about the accession of Macedonia to EU with 95% of the people interviewed in favor of it, a figure that only slightly fluctuated since for the past four years. When asked about when this could happen, the average answer is within 7.3 years, whereas in March 2006, Macedonians would rather estimate the country to integrate the European Union within 9.3 years. These results tend to show an increasing enthusiasm and optimism among the Macedonian public opinion, especially following last year's parliamentary elections. In fact, the number of citizens who believed that Macedonia was moving in the right direction (34%) outpaced for the first time the pessimist citizens.

These attitudes towards enlargement cannot be separated from the perception of the European Union as well as the internal situation of the country. In the case of Macedonia, the same 2007 study reveals that Macedonians are still very much preoccupied by the state of the economy, with 37% of them stating their economic situation was worse (and 20% better) while there were 68% of them in the beginning of 2003. Almost three quarter stated their life was better before the breakup of Yugoslavia, an attitude which is often heard in Macedonia by elder people who are nostalgic of this period that provided them with employment and allowed them to travel wherever and whenever they wanted. This nostalgia could explain that, for more than half of the Macedonians (55%), unemployment is considered as the most serious problem facing the country today, but also that since November 2006, abolishing visas is the most important foreign policy issue for 38% of the people, before recognition of the name. Thus, the link between entering the EU and the hopes for better economic situation and living standards can be firstly made.

Regarding France, the case is not very different, since, even though there is a general enthusiasm about the European construction, 54% of the people thinking that France has benefited from belonging to the European Union in 2007. However, like in Macedonia, unemployment was, in autumn 2006, the very first preoccupation of the French, a strong majority of them judging the employment and economic situation bad or very bad. Moreover, the French consider the effects of the European integration as positive when it comes to the influence of France in the world and the national security, which contrasts with the effects on employment and economy where the opinions are much more mixed.

As a consequence it seems that the general enthusiasm over the European integration in Macedonia is linked to the hope for a better economic and employment situation, while most French people, while recognizing they have benefited from the European construction, express feelings that it did not have very positive effects on priority issues for them like employment. Almost three quarter (72%) of the French thought, in March 2006, that a new EU enlargement would create problems on the national labor market, and only 21% thought previous EU enlargements had

decreased the prices of many products. Once more it appears through this poll that the weaker people (elder people, less educated, unemployed or the lower incomes) expressed most fears of a new enlargement.

France: what reasons could be put forward to explain these tendencies?

- Historical perception of enlargement in France (until 2004)

“Community enlargement should not, as is so often the case, be viewed only in terms of the risks.”⁵

Throughout the history of the European construction, France’s role has been paradoxical. As a matter of fact, the country usually played a leading role in the European construction but was also one of the strongest detractors. France was a founding member of the European coal and steel community which led to the drafting of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The first project of European defense community, an idea suggested by the French famous europeist Jean Monnet, was ratified by France’s five European partners (future founding members of the EEC), but failed to obtain ratification by the French parliament in 1954, because of Gaullist and communist fears. Another clear example is that of the European constitutional treaty. The French former President Valery Giscard d’Estaing was the president of the convention responsible for drafting a constitution for the European Union, which failed to be ratified by the French population in 2005, leading to the paralysis of the European Union.

While France gave birth to the most famous europeists (Monnet, Schuman) which played an influential part in the creation of the European Union, and while it has often been an engine, together with Germany, to make EU progress (as has been the case in June 2007 with Sarkozy being very active in the negotiations for the simplified treaty), there has been a historical reluctance before each enlargement that would not end beneficial or that would threaten France’s prerogatives. In January 1963, the General de Gaulle, which favored a political cooperation between sovereign states and rejected any supranational integration, expressed its firm opposition to the accession of Great Britain in the European Common Market (CEE). He did not trust the firm relationship between Britain and USA, wanted to reaffirm the autonomy of France’s nuclear defense as opposed to USA, and feared the new application would jeopardize the Common agriculture policy. He vetoed the British application twice (1963, 1967), until it finally integrates in 1973, under the French president Pompidou.

France supported the accession of Greece mostly for political reasons, since the strengthening of the democratic regime was an absolute priority and it affirmed the European presence in Eastern Mediterranean. In terms of economy, France was not threatened by Greece since it had long been exposed to Greek competition and the treaty of accession comprised safeguards for the French interests. Moreover, Greece’s economy growing rapidly, it meant new openings for the French agriculture and industry, and an easier access to Greek market.

⁵ Speech delivered by Jean-François Poncet, French Foreign Minister, 5th December 1979 in front of the French National assembly

France first opposed the accession of Spain and Portugal since, against a background of economic recession, there were much concerns about Spanish agricultural products flooding the European market already threatened by its own surplus production. Many farmers in Italy violently demonstrated their opposition, and the farming lobby as well as communists and Gaullist members of parliament put pressure on the government to slow down the negotiations with Spain. In a period of high unemployment rate, there were many concerns that free movement of workers would lead to an excessive wave of emigration or an excessive pool of labor in EEC. Thus real skepticism and even reluctance was expressed and relayed by the Medias, which focused in the serious economic consequences, bringing the idea that the main winner would be the powerful companies of Northern Europe making larger profits out of a cheap workforce with a weaker social protection.

The fourth enlargement to Austria, Finland and Sweden (1995) did not provoke major negative reaction since these countries were small, democratic, and traditionally neutral. Moreover they had a high standard of living with a GDP and per capita income among the highest in Europe, so they did not need community subsidies. The main difficulty that arose was the strengthening of the structures of the European Union so that it could cope with an increase in the number of member states, but the EU institutions were then adjusted so as to accommodate the three new member states.

- Context: the last two enlargements and the referendum on the constitutional treaty

The 'no' to the referendum on the constitutional treaty and the accession of twelve countries, ten of which being part of western and central Europe and having gone through an economic transition since the collapse of communism in 1989, brought an atmosphere of general skepticism to the benefits of the European Union for the French population. If, for the Eastern Europe countries, the period before accession must have seemed long, it is not the same for France and many other member states. Indeed the public opinions seemed to realize suddenly that Europe was going to enlarge whereas the enlargement had been planned at the Copenhagen summit in 1993. They had the feeling that they were forced to accept an enlargement which was badly prepared, and felt the EU could not possibly integrate ten new members without explanations.

The 'no' to the European constitution in 2005 in France (55% against) was not directly linked to the rejection of these new countries, even though they were presented by some politicians as threats for the western European social model. Indeed eurobarometer polls found that only 3% of the no-voters in France cited 'opposition to enlargement' as a motivation in their vote. Beyond the fact that the constitution was too complex for non-specialists, the main arguments developed against it were that economic liberalism was 'graved in the marble', the free market being written in such a document as a 'constitution' fixing the economic orientations of the EU forever. Moreover some arguments said that the treaty would lead to a reduction of public services, which, in a country like France, is not easily accepted. The image of the 'polish plumber', coming to lower the wages of the workers, became

the symbol of the polemic surrounding the debate in the constitution, referring to a very unpopular project of directive presented by Fritz Bolkestein that aimed to liberalize the European service market.

According to the analyst Pascal Perrineau, national concerns were actually the leading issues in the media coverage and the voters' motivations. There were very few debates on the first two parts of the constitution that were specifically European (the charter of fundamental rights and the reform of the institutions), the discussions being focused on Franco French concerns links to unemployment or the future of the social protection. This nationalization of the vote is closely linked to a deep social and political crisis. In May 2005 in France three elements were gathered that could only lead to a refusal of the European referendum: the unpopular government of JP Raffarin, the strong social and economic pessimism (high unemployment rate and social movements) and a strong heterophobia illustrated by the concern over professional mobility in EU with 25 member states (the polish plumber) as well as the omnipresence of the Turkish issue. So, in France, Europe is becoming the 'scapegoat' against which euroscepticism and nationalism can express.

However it would be wrong to say that euro-skepticism is generalized in France. The referendum has at least made clearer the distinctions between the different European projects, showing there is not one European vision that gathers all the citizens. One can thus distinguish between those with a sovereign vision, very euro-skeptical, concerned with the decline of France, reject any kind of supranational entity and favor state cooperation. This vision gathers the extreme right-wing parties which despise Brussels bureaucracy. The liberal vision, supported by Nicolas Sarkozy, considers that the goal of EU is to change the French social model so as to decrease the unemployment rate. The liberals consider that Europe must help France adapting to the new framework of globalization in order to strengthen its competitiveness. Social democrats think EU is a means to control globalization and want to balance the market by bringing social aims to the economic ones. Finally the vision of the extreme left-wing parties and the communist party is anti capitalistic: they tend to refuse competition, want to maintain public monopolies and fight against liberal globalization.

Thus, even though there still is a general enthusiasm over the European construction in France, the public opinion is divided over the main goals and benefits of the European Union, and so European enlargement. The most extreme parties have not hesitated to make Brussels responsible for many internal problems, while there has been few discourses stating the advantages of the country being EU member state. Eventually, beyond the debate about the consequences of the EU policies, the major problem in France is a lack of information and clear explanations to the citizens.

- The circulation of the information about EU and EU enlargement in France

A poll realized in mars 2003, less than a year after the 'no' to the referendum, revealed that more than two third of the French feel they are not well informed on the EU. They think French politicians and Medias should talk more about EU. It also

showed that those who rejected the treaty felt they were less informed on the EU, because they were generally less politicized. Another survey led in autumn 2006 showed that more than 60% of the French were rarely or never looking for information about EU. When asked about the running of the institutions, 50% gave the correct answers in average, but it appeared that only 43% knew that the European deputies were directly elected by the EU citizens. Moreover, the poll revealed that the French overestimated the operating costs of EU with 23% thinking the most important part of the community budget went to the administrative expenses, whereas in 2006 43% of the budget was dedicated to agriculture and only 6% to administrative costs.

This deficit of information on EU in general can explain the strong debate when it comes to adopt a highly symbolic document like a constitution. In autumn 2006, 57% of the French declared they were interested by national issues while 40% were interested by European issues. In a report drafted in 2005, shortly after the reject of the constitution, the French deputy Michel Herbillon denounces the failure of the communication policies on EU because of modest budget resources, late campaigns, a limited impact and a context not very favorable for pedagogy. Indeed, the natural mediators of the EU information, that is, the elected representatives, the Medias and the teachers are faltering. The deputy insists on the fact that on general the information campaigns on Europe are too late, since they happen once the political decision is taken. For example the enlargement has not been anticipated and the information campaign on enlargement only started a few weeks before the accession, while the enlargement schedule was known for a long time. Thus there is a time lag between the moment of the decision (Turkey has been a candidate country since 1999) and the moment of the information, causing frustration and incomprehension.

Concerning the potential enlargements to the Balkan countries or Turkey, it is clear that all the debate is focused on the Turkish application, the Balkan countries being completely left apart. The lack of knowledge of the Balkans is obvious, since the only information that are given on the region deals with either the status of the Kosovo, the trial of criminals from the wars in Bosnia or Croatia, or the problems of corruption and trafficking in these countries. As a consequence, the general impression is that the Balkan countries are too poor, not stable enough and not ready to join the EU. This lack of knowledge is a particularly important to underline since incomprehension is often the source of rejection and fear of the unknown.

As far as Turkey is concerned, there is a real debate concerning whether or not it should access the European Union. This country seems to be the only issue really relevant concerning enlargement in discourses of politicians, but also in the Medias and among the people.

Macedonia: EU accession as a priority goal for the country

- Historical relations with EU: a perspective from a non-member state

Until its independence in 1991, Macedonia, as a Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has maintained close contacts with member states of what was then the European Community. As it was not compulsory to get a visa, it was rather easy to travel through Europe. Like Serbia and Croatia, the country played an important role as a

transit area between Greece –already a member of EU- and Austria, Hungaria and Slovenia as well as other farer countries. These close and ancient contacts with the current territory of European Union, especially since the accession of Bulgaria, is one of the reasons explaining the popular enthusiasm for a quick integration in EU, even though the country is divided on the linguistic policy and political preferences.

But the relations between Macedonia as an independent country and the EU are still very recent. International recognition did not come immediately after independence, partly because of Greece which considered the name “Macedonia” as belonging exclusively to the Greek heritage. The dispute led to a Greek trade embargo against Macedonia in February 1994, which had consequences on the Macedonian economy, and still have consequences today as far as European integration is concerned, since Macedonia is a candidate country and Greece already a European member state.

Even though it had to face a rather unfriendly regional environment, Macedonia was the only former federal republic that did not take part in the Yugoslavian conflict. The first contractual relation between EU and Macedonia were initiated in 1996 when the PHARE program on restructuring the economy was being signed. A cooperation agreement was signed in 1997 and in 2001 Macedonia was the first country in the Balkans to formalize a Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU in 2001. However, the conflicts that broke in 2001 between the Albanian minority and the Macedonian government revealed the difficulties for the country to cope with its mosaic of ethnics, cultures and religions. The first annual report of the Commission on the Stabilization and Association Process stated that the conflict in 2001 had a largely negative impact on the Macedonian economy as well as on the democracy and the administrative capacity to take forward the process of reform. It has to be reminded that, together with NATO, EU played a key role of mediation to pacify Macedonia and get a peace agreement (the Ohrid Agreement).

It was during the 2003 summit in Thessaloniki that all the western Balkans countries including Macedonia received the promise of accession, in a long-term period, to the EU. In December 2005, only four years after the end of the conflict, Macedonia became the second non member state Balkan country to be granted the official status of candidate to the accession. Since then, the country is still waiting, and strongly asking for the opening of the accession negotiations.

- General enthusiasm among the Macedonian population

‘The prospect of EU entry is a cohesive force in Macedonian society’ - Professor Edward Moxon-Browne

As already said previously, 95% of the Macedonian population are in favor of the European integration, also a top priority for the government. Public opinion across ethnic and political divides is strongly supportive for EU accession. For the Macedonians, integrating EU means the promise of better economic and living standards. In fact, an opinion poll conducted in June 2007 shows that since December

2005, when Macedonia was granted the status of official candidate, people thinking that Macedonia economy will get better in the next two years have outpaced those who think it will get worse.

It is highly understandable that the Macedonian population wishes to join EU since, as most of the other European countries acknowledges, it is rightly European, on geographical, historical and cultural terms. So what is at stake with the Macedonian application differs in many ways with the Turkish application. Indeed there is a strong debate on the question to know if Turkey is a European country or no. For Macedonia, beyond the hope for better living conditions, the symbolic aspect of integrating EU is very important. Europe is very present in the popular Balkan mentality. So there are no reasons why the Balkan Peninsula would be out of the European community since the region, as a basis of the Greek antiquity, is the birthplace of modern civilization.

The accession of Bulgaria, a border country, has moreover been felt as good news for Macedonians, since it was perceived as new possibilities of economic development for the eastern part of the country. On this field the politicians seemed to be more optimistic than the citizens, who feared that the Bulgarian integration would mean a reduction in trade or in the free movement of people, capital and goods between the two countries, since there were negative consequences of the accession of the Central European countries on Macedonia. For politicians, the Bulgarian accession will be positive not only for the bank sector (there are more than 35 foreign banks in Bulgaria) but also for the development of eastern Macedonia, with the possible delocalization of Bulgarian dairy firms in Macedonia.

The Government discourses also relay this general support for EU enlargement. In an interview realized in July 2007, Gabriela Konevska-Trajkovska, the vice-president responsible for European integration in the government, reveals her optimism following the success of the June summit in finding a compromise on the Intergovernmental conference mandate for the reform of the institutions. According to her, the positive atmosphere prevailing in EU will be reflected in its enlargement policy, and she strongly hopes the country will receive a positive recommendation (for the beginning of the negotiation talks) by the end of 2007-beginning of 2008. She also believes that the Macedonians are really willing to support the necessary reforms in order to become part of the European family. Even if she is aware that the country still has to work hard to fulfill political and economic criteria, she also believes it is ready for negotiations. In an article written by the minister of foreign affairs Antonio Milososki, he considers that Macedonia is managing its transition well. His message is clearly to assert that Macedonia could be ready for joining EU in 2010, and that enlargement fatigue is not a problem since, as Macedonia is a small country, EU could easily integrate it, sending a positive signal to the rest of the region. Analyzing the member of governments' discourses clearly shows their optimism for the country's future, and their strong hope for a quick settlement for the beginning of the negotiation talks.

France: issues raised by the enlargement of the European Union

- The main French concerns

The main French popular concerns raised by the last two enlargements are closely linked to an “enlargement fatigue” also visible in other member states. The whole dynamics that had been the engine of the previous enlargement is weakening; the enthusiasm that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall has seriously reduced. These enlargements have raised many popular questions linked to current hot topics like economic globalization, the combined impact of legal and clandestine immigration, demographic changes, relation to Islam, security challenges in the close European neighborhood.

The preoccupations of the average people are related to the economic side of enlargement and to their confidence in the internal situation of the country. The farmers fear a cut in subsidies after Poland, a country with an important agricultural sector, accessed EU. Many workers from the industrial sector fear delocalization of their firms to countries where the labor market is cheaper like Romania or Bulgaria. Employees of the third economic sector have expressed their concern over liberalization of the public services that could mean the end of small public facilities in rural areas (this was actually the main campaign theme of Gérard Schivardi, a candidate for the French presidential election). This skepticism is closely linked to the confidence in the internal economic situation of the country. The last Euro barometer (june 2007) shows that only 26% of the French people think the economic situation is good. If the living standards and the unemployment rate do not change in a positive manner over the next years, it is possible that the reluctance towards the next enlargements (to the Balkans, most probably) increase, even though the concerns are mostly related to the internal governance of the country.

The enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania had a contrasted welcome. For Sylvie Goulard, the president of the French European Movement, this enlargement to former communist country is a good thing, even though both sides were maybe not perfectly ready for it. According to her the decision to let them integrate has a political character, it was impossible to keep them waiting, even though they have still to make a lot of progress. Even though the institutional limits of a system that was not made for 27 countries have been reached, the integration of these two countries is an important achievement if we consider their situation twenty years ago. According to her, it was not very welcome in France because of the “depressed” climate, whereas the Germans have well understood what meant the end of the cold war. Moreover they will become more prosperous and all the EU member states will benefit from it. On the other hand, the journalist Jean-Michel Demetz expresses his disappointment that their integration has almost been decided secretly (whereas it has been prepared and negotiated for about fourteen years). For him, the European political model has been challenged since the failure of the constitutional treaty, and the enlargement to ten new members was probably too early. So this new enlargement happened whereas the two main engines of the European dynamics- enlargement and deepening- are broken down. Charles Grant, the director of the Centre for the European Reform, also warned that if Bulgaria and Romania happen to be unable to manage the European programs and policies, and try to embezzle European funds through organized crime, the whole enlargement process will suffer. The consequences for the rest of the Balkans, who are waiting for the determination of their future, could be disastrous, and Europe would not win anything at the end.

Other EU experts and academics have also raised the problem, noticing the frequency of the enlargements and the growing number of states, from six to twenty-seven, which challenges the running of the institutions. They have raised important questions that are related to the European project itself: between enlargement and deepening, what should be achieved first? Should the rule of unanimity be kept with 27 member states? Should the institutions be reformed before or after enlargement? (Up to now it was always realized before)? Will European integration be possible with 27 or 30 member states? Are the newcomers “Euro compatible”? Will EU be able to absorb new countries indefinitely? Where do the European boundaries stop? All these problems are linked with the topic of enlargement and far from being answered yet.

Enlargement to Turkey is the most debated topic as far as enlargement is concerned. The new president Nicolas Sarkozy have clearly said he was not in favour of the Turkish integration but rather if a “euromediterranean union”. Former president Jacques Chirac favoured the integration of Turkey, because he feared the country might develop integrism if the European door is closed in front of it. The Turkish accession would, according to his views, extend peace and democracy, while Ankara would bring incredible power to the EU facing other important regional poles. In France the opinions are really diversified regarding this topic, since many arguments can be used in favour or against the accession of Turkey. For instance it is true that part of Turkish territory is in Europe, but the 2/3 of the country is in Near-East. Turkey has had long historical relations with the European continent, but also with Asia. The usual argument against are the absence of European traditions or values and the Muslim heritage, whereas Europe has a Christian heritage. So its position astride between the European civilization and the Arabian/Asian civilization makes it a complex case. But what is sure is that it is an official candidate country and the perspective of enlargement has been existing since 1963.

- What can be expected in the future?

Concerning enlargement to Turkey, one of the most controversial issues about enlargement, the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in May 2007 has changed the official French position. In fact Jacques Chirac was in favor of the accession of Turkey into EU while Nicolas Sarkozy, as said previously, have brought the idea of a Mediterranean Union (that would gather countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea), an idea rejected by the Turkish authorities. He has agreed to let the talks between EU and Turkey continue but has however succeeded in blocking one important chapter in the negotiation talks that opened in July 2007 (on economic and monetary policy) since France threatened to oppose its veto. On this issue, if France goes on using its veto to block further negotiation chapter, it could upset the Nordic countries, Spain, the UK and Germany who want the negotiation accession to continue. Maybe Sarkozy will be reminded by Merkel, Barroso and politicians from other EU countries that EU has taken the pledge to let Turkey in when it fulfils the necessary criteria. The accession process would help Turkey to become more stable and prosperous. Some analysts in Turkey fear that blocking new chapters on the grounds that it would bring Turkey closer to full membership will derail the whole process while giving credibility to Turkish nationalists. Two things can be encouraging for Turkey: the fact

Sarkozy's other European plans are controversial (more protectionist trade policies) should bring him to be more careful on a fight over Turkey. What is more, he appointed Bernard Kouchner, who is openly in favor of the Turkish application, as a minister for Foreign affairs. Eventually the issue of the Turkish integration will depend on the evolution of EU in the next 10 years. If EU turns to evolve in a hard core surrounded by a large market, then Turkish can integrate. In the current state of affairs EU has to strengthen before integrating such a state as Turkey which is still in political, cultural and demographic transition.

Concerning enlargement to the rest of Europe and especially the Balkan countries, the position of Sarkozy is clear: he declared several times that EU enlargement had to be suspended as long as the institutions were not reformed, since the absorption capacity of the EU was not endlessly extendible. But for him a distinction has to be done between the countries who are to develop a privileged partnership (euro - Asian and Mediterranean countries) and those whose future integration to EU is not a problem for anyone. He meant all the countries clearly belonging to the European continent that will be joining whenever they want (Norway, Switzerland, and Island) or whenever they are able to (Balkans). The European council of December 2006 decided as well of a pause on the enlargement process after the integration of Romania and Bulgaria. However, since the last European summit in June 2007 when an agreement was found on the opening of an intergovernmental conference aimed at drafting the final version of a new European treaty, the reform of the institutions is in progress. Even though the issue of enlargement was not dealt with directly, the aim of the new treaty is to facilitate the running of the EU with 27 member states and diversified fields of action. The goal is to be working with institutions adapted to an enlarged Europe and more democratic, since up to now the EU had been running with institutions mostly inherited from the EEC with 6 member states. The Balkan countries thus are bound to join the EU when they are ready; however, as far as France is concerned, a referendum is from now on necessary to ratify the accession of new countries. The risk that the French fears compromise new enlargement exists.

Macedonia: confronting hopes and expectations to obstacles and challenges on the road to EU

It is rather common in Macedonia to hear middle-aged and elder people who have lived in the communist time talk with nostalgia about the good old time when the Macedonians had a better lifestyle under Tito and Yugoslavia, when they could travel much easier, they all had a job and did not have to pay for medical care... A survey led in June 2007 shows that 71% of the people think their life was better before the breakup of Yugoslavia. Since gaining its independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia has faced a troublesome political and economic transition. The symbolic value of the EU is clearly important for the Macedonians: since 1957, EU enlargement has consolidated democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law across the continent, as well as extended the area of peace and stability. In economic terms it has helped to increase prosperity and competitiveness (for example with the case of Spain or Ireland). Thus it is understandable that joining the EU means the prospect of better living standards, political stability, less unemployment with the opening of markets, an increase in foreign direct investment.

Another benefit the people would gain when integrating EU is the resolution of the visa problem, which is psychologically a crucial issue and seems to be one of the first short-term interests of EU accession for the Macedonians. With the last European enlargement, Balkan countries like Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia remain locked in a shrinking economic space, since, as the new guardians of the European Union's frontiers, Romania and Bulgaria had to tighten their borders in order to protect the common European space. There is a risk that EU enlargement might lead to a 'ghettoization' of the Balkans. For some analysts, many of the European Union's current policies on the Balkans and its visa policy in particular, have far-reaching economic consequences. For example it makes it much more difficult, if not impossible, for families in eastern Macedonia that were living on trading of foodstuffs between Macedonia and Bulgaria to conduct their business. Regular business trip across EU member states can require multiple visas, which requires many documents, time and money. And these are just a few examples of the problem the visa policy entail, let alone the psychological humiliation that is part of the process. In April 2007, the EU and Macedonia concluded a visa facilitation agreement that, when it comes into force, will decrease visa fee rate and accelerate application procedures for the Macedonians who want to travel within the EU territory. It represented a first step towards visa-free travel even though before that the country will have to improve significantly, in particular its capacity to fight organized crime, corruption and illegal migration and to strengthen border control. A survey led in 2007 reveals that abolishing visas is since January 2007 the most important foreign policy issue facing Macedonia for 38% of the population, before the issue over the name.

In October 2006, new Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said his country wanted to join EU in 2013, that is, in six years. While calling on the EU to set a date for starting negotiations next year, he also admitted the disappointment of Macedonians over the growing anti-enlargement atmosphere linked to the Union's absorption capacity, which was not a reason since Macedonia had only two millions inhabitants. The disappointment of the Macedonians reveals they are maybe not aware that the implementation of reforms, and not the Union's absorption capacity, is the major restraint to Macedonia's faster integration, especially since the European institutions are being reformed. The almost unanimous support for EU accession reveals the Macedonians are not well informed on what EU accession really means. The impression is that EU is seen as an Eldorado, which is far from being a realistic approach of EU. In fact, when the visa regime will disappear and people will be able to travel easily in the EU area, the EU support will inevitably decrease because of the increasing awareness of the reality of EU. There is the risk that, when comes the time to adopt and implement all the European norms necessary for the economic, political and legal adaptation of the country, it wont be easily accepted by the Macedonians, all the more so since their will be repercussions on the everyday budget with the increase of taxes. So the realistic approach to support for EU accession should be 60 to 65%. However the Macedonians seem interested in the EU affairs and are willing to have information about it. At least thirty persons daily visit the EU Information Centre in Skopje, and the EU issue is constantly treated in the Medias.

As a consequence, Nikola Gruevski's hopes for Macedonia to join EU in 2013 seem optimistic, but even though it was the case, it does not really help Macedonia to focus

on the efforts to make. In fact, it's up to the European commission to assess, in its annual report on the progress of the country, if the country has met all the standards. So, the date to start the negotiation talks will be given when Macedonia has implemented the necessary *acquis*. For the moment Macedonia is not ready for that, since numerous obstacles still remain on Macedonia's road to EU. Many reforms have been implemented since the Macedonian application in 2004 and this have been acknowledged by the European Commission, for example in December 2005 when Macedonia was granted the status of candidate, recently with the launch of the visa facilitation and readmission agreement with the EU, and, most importantly, the implementation of the Ohrid agreement as well as the fruitful consultations between the government and the opposition on the use of the Albanian language in public institutions.

But, even if the perspective of the Macedonian accession is ensured, many Macedonians are probably not aware that the criteria to join EU are very strict and very technical. The annual report drafted by the European Commission on the progress made by the country criteria by criteria testifies of the complexity of the European accession on practical cases such as the standard of the civil aviation system, construction and maintenance of the railway system... Thirty-three chapters examine the country's ability to assume the obligations of membership, that is, the *acquis* as expressed in the treaties, the secondary legislation and the policies of the union. It also analyses the country's administrative capacity to implement the *acquis*.

In 2005, the European council decided to grant Macedonia candidate status as an acknowledgement of the implementation of the Ohrid agreement framework, but also as an incentive to continue implementing further reforms. The council also decided that negotiations for accession will be opened when Macedonia has fulfilled its obligations to a suitable extent under the Stabilization and Accession Agreement. The short-term and medium-term priorities were also given. The opening of the negotiations will not happen this year, the commission being unable to make a favorable report since all the five short-term priorities have not been implemented, among which the police and judicial reform, which also concerns the problems of corruption and organized crime. Legislation have been adopted on these issues over the last year, however it is not sufficient since the implementation also has to be monitored, which will be impossible to assess before the next report of the Commission in November 2007. Regarding the respect of the obligations of the SAA, reforms on intellectual propriety or liberalization are still not totally implemented. The reforms regarding the electoral code and the registration system of new companies have been implemented. However, as long as the five key priorities are not fulfilled, the negotiations cannot start. Administration is mobilizing, for example in the police and justice fields the means are progressively increasing. There's also an increasing mobilization in some agricultural sectors, the business world, universities... The internal political crisis also added another preoccupation, since it revealed a crisis in the institutions, political stability being one of the EU criteria and one of the main reasons for receiving the candidate status.

What can be expected in the future?

The perspective of Macedonia to integrate EU is certain. The European Union has already integrated the Balkans in many European policies which precede their accession and make it clear that EU and Macedonia are interdependent. Only the Macedonians can decide on the date the negotiations will start, depending on the implementations of the necessary reforms. Even if the date for the beginning of the negotiation talks is fixed next year, it has to be reminded that they can last a long time. However in the case of Macedonia, the negotiation talks may be shorter since Macedonia already has links with European politics. But they can also be suspended if the country does not comply with the accession criteria, as it was the case with Turkey. The conditions for integration will be the capacity of the country to implement necessary reforms.

Two elements can also play a role, but will not have much impact on Macedonia as far as EU integration is concerned. The first one is the possible turmoil the settlement of the Kosovo status could entail. It seems very unlikely that an independent Kosovo provokes new conflicts with Albanians. The modernization of country is having a positive contribution to the rest of the region; Macedonia has developed fairly good relationships with its neighbours and helps for the stabilization of the whole Balkan region. The status of Kosovo is a bilateral problem between Belgrade and Pristina, and in that sense Macedonian officials have stated the country would support any agreement that would be found between them. The conflict with Greece over the name remains a frustration for Macedonians. As an ongoing issue discussed in UN, EU would agree on any position between the two countries under United Nations. EU officials declared recently that the name dispute was not part of the conditions for organization accession. However Greece, as any member state, has the possibility to veto Macedonian accession. In late June Greece threatened to seek a veto on Macedonia's bid to join EU unless the name dispute was resolved in its favor. According to the latest poll conducted in June 2007, more than 80 percent of Greek citizens would block their neighbor's bid to join EU under name "Macedonia," while some 60 percent would block it regardless of which name it was registered under. But can Greece really afford it? The dispute over the name is a bilateral dispute, and moreover the integration of Greece in 1981 was made without the approval of the European Commission. Greece is one of Macedonia's greatest investors and the agreement found in 1995 on a temporary name for Macedonia allowed Macedonia to integrate other international institutions. Macedonia is in a better position now since most of the major world powers support Macedonia in the case or have demonstrated a complete lack of interest in the dispute. Eventually, for some analysts, any attempt by Greece to block Macedonia's EU accession would be a major expenditure of political capital. In the end, Greece would be blamed for inhibiting the Euro-integration of the Balkans, especially since EU wants to make more credible the European policy to the Balkan people that are rather skeptic with the international promises.

The European Commission is not going to take risks and will only give a date for negotiation talks on the basis of a solid report on the progress made by Macedonia in implementing the criteria. The negotiation talks being based on a double system between an Intergovernmental Conference (member states) and the Commission, the member states need to be convinced that Macedonia is ready to enter so that the final decision, which requires the unanimity rule, does not compromise the whole process.

Conclusion- Recommendations

This comparison between France and Macedonia on the approach to enlargement shows that they do not – and cannot- have the same perceptions on the issue. As a non member state willing to join the EU club and in the process of reforms and transformations, Macedonia is willing to be given a clear sign that its efforts will be rewarded. For now the government is especially calling for the settlement of a date to open the negotiation talks, and hopes to be ready to access EU by 2010-2013. For the government, Macedonia is managing its transition well and is getting ready fast, and so find the perspective too far away, while many EU or foreign diplomats working in Macedonia are skeptical as to the reality of EU membership, and finds the EU perspective too close due to the complex and difficult situations met by the Balkans, including Macedonia. The Macedonian government thinks a too late settlement of a date would remove hope and motivation for Macedonia in its way to reform. A clear date could act as a focal point, an incentive for implementing reforms. As Miloski put it in March 2007, “the appeal of membership pushes us to adopt reforms and helps us keep the peace. Giving Macedonia a date to start our membership talks is a win-win for all. The EU internal process is unlikely to be impacted in any way by this decision, and yet, democracy, reforms, and economic progress in the region will win out in the long-run. By opening up to Macedonia the EU would send a positive signal to the region”. Nikola Gruevski also underlined in October 2006 that “progress in Brussels toward EU membership was vital because it would encourage people in his country to support tough measures needed to revamp the economy and institutions required for admission to the elite club.”

Instead of asking constantly for a date, the Macedonian government should focus on meeting the rigorous standards, each applicant country’s performance being a condition for the pace of enlargement. As Michael Leigh, Director General of European Commission's DG for Enlargement, said in 2006, “applying a rigorous conditionality is for the benefit of all. It is the means for the EU to promote political, economic and administrative reforms in the candidate countries. (...)A well-functioning Union is in the interests of both present and future members. Therefore, the EU will and must remain firm in demanding that aspiring members fulfil all the requirements before they join”. Of course much progress has been made since 2001, however the November Progress report of the commission has noted that the pace of reforms have slowed down in 2006. For Leigh, there are several priorities for the country: first, to ensure political consensus. Political leaders must work together in a spirit of consensus – which implies mutual concessions. Constructive and permanent dialogue among all political parties will be essential for adopting and implementing important political reforms and related legislation. Secondly, the country needs to go on implementing the necessary reforms in order to comply with the criteria.

Most importantly, the citizen has to be put at the centre of the political action and the national interest before any other interest. In that sense the Macedonian politics have to modernize. There should also be a general mobilization in every levels of society, since it is not only the government responsibility to lead reforms and start changing things, but also the universities, the companies, the NGOs, associations etc. The way to Europe is an individual and collective responsibility, and in Macedonia there is the feeling of a general lack of popular will in that sense. The necessary reforms to implement, whether economics, judicial, police, have to be seen primarily as a way to

improve the daily life of citizens rather than a way to please the European Commission. The reforms of the economic, judicial, police systems should be encouraged by the citizens as a way for the life to improve. The perspective of integration should not be the first incentive for the implementation of such reforms. In that sense more pedagogic programs should be put into place in order for every people to understand the complexity of EU integration and the different parameters at stake. It would probably make them more involved in the general transformation of their country.

However there is much hope considering the new generation coming which is trained, more educated, seem to understand better the imperatives and are more prepared to bring Macedonia inside the EU. Moreover the general support for accession is likely to put pressure in order to make the necessary reforms.

As far as France is concerned, the image of Balkans does not correspond to reality, the Medias are talking about the region whenever there are fights, but the everyday life, the opening to modernity, is never treated. There is obviously a lack of information and education. It is necessary to cross a mental boundary as regards to the Balkans and stop imagining them as people always fighting. It is necessary to promote a better knowledge of Balkan countries in order to facilitate the enlargement process, and destroy stereotypes and preconceived ideas that are the basis of fears and reject of the unknown. Turkey is a different case since the parameters are different, it is not entirely in the European continent, the majority of its inhabitants are Muslims... Here information is also necessary but the issue at stake is different. While the Balkan countries are certain to integrate EU one day, the case of Turkey will depend on the approach taken by EU.

That is why the goal of the European project has to be defined clearly soon, in France but also in other western countries, otherwise further enlargement, especially to Turkey but also to the Balkans, shall be compromised if EU citizens are not clearly explained the motives and benefits for further enlargement. Some essential questions have to be answered: where EU is going to extend? Can EU with 27 or more countries become a global actor? Two main approaches can be defined: a visionary approach of those who think EU cannot become a global actor without Turkey, and a pragmatic approach of those who think a new enlargement would threaten the stability and the internal development of EU? On these two approaches, it's difficult to say which one is going to frame the future of Europe.

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