

# MACEDONIAN CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN TRAINING



**MCET**

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Policy Brief

## FOLLOWING THE LEADER: RHYME OR REALITY

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### SUMMARY

This paper argues that Macedonia belongs in the European Union, not just geographically, but also politically. EU Member-States must not forget the commitments made to the Western Balkan countries, and their vital interest in lasting stability in the region despite of the fragmented interest of some EU Member States (Central and Eastern Europe is inclined towards the Eastern Partnership, while France and the Mediterranean countries towards the Mediterranean Union). Consequently, the Stabilisation and Association countries are spending way too much time on stabilisation and hardly any on association. The worst case of all is Macedonia, being in the limbo for five years. Such a predicament is utterly unsustainable. Urgent action is required since all of the excuses have long gone with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Team Presidency needs immediate results to prove that EU can be a credible global player as promised to the EU citizens. The Macedonian case could serve as the catapult in the delivery of that promise.

This brief will focus on the priorities and actions of the Spanish Presidency, the bilateral relations between the European Union and the Republic of Macedonia following the December Summit of the Swedish Presidency<sup>1</sup> and the future development of the relations under the Team Presidency. Furthermore, special attention will be devoted to the relations and potentials for strategic partnerships between Spain and Macedonia in light of EU Accession.

Spain is an exemplary EU Member State which transformed into democracy through its EU accession process. Since the accession in 1986, Spain made a difficult U-Turn and established a democratic system, “united in its diversity”. Seizing all the opportunities provided by the Structural and Cohesion Funds, and learning lessons throughout the negotiations, Spain managed to become the eighth fastest growing economy in the World and a member of the G20.

Understanding the approaches of the UK and Sweden (pro-enlargement, but without further deepening of common policies), as well as the approach of France and Germany (pro-deepening, but without further enlargement), Spain is the bridge of the two stances. Spain is currently the biggest Member State that is openly pro-enlargement and pro-deepening.

From 1st January 2010, Spain took over the Presidency of the European Union for the fourth time<sup>2</sup>. This time however, for the first time in EU history, Spain initiated the Team Presidency together with Belgium and Hungary as provided by the Treaty of Lisbon.

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1 The Summit took place 7th December 2009.

2 Spain presided with the EU in 1989, 1995 and 2002.

*Macedonian Centre for European Training (MCET) is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-partisan membership based organisation established in December 2002 by 26 EU trainers, certified by InWent from Bonn and the Institute for European Politics from Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany. The mission of MCET is to support the accession of the Republic of Macedonia to the EU by means of professional training, consultancy, regional cooperation, policy development and advocacy.*

*Since its establishment, MCET has delivered more than 600 days of training on various EU topics to more than 3600 representatives from the public administration, media, civil society organisations, judges and prosecutors, political party members, local government administrations etc.*

*In the last 3 years, MCET changed its focus from a training institute to a think-tank organisation hoping to mitigate the apparent lack of expertise in the country in the field of policy-making in line with EU. Recent policy briefs published are: “Lisbon-Skopje-Thessalonica: Five Reasons Why Macedonia Should Start Negotiations”, “Eight Benchmarks – Day After”, “A Council, A Bit of Money, and Lots, and Lots of Friends”, “On the Way to the EU – Monitoring the Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Directives in Southeast Europe”, etc.*

*MCET is also watching the accession process and so far it has produced 4 reports which can be downloaded from our website.*

*For the last 2 years, MCET has been working with the media to improve the coverage of Macedonia’s accession process.*

## **Lisbon Leftovers (Treaty / Strategy)**

The new Reform (Lisbon) Treaty entered into force 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009, coinciding with the end of the Swedish Presidency and the beginning of the Spanish Presidency. Proper implementation (of the Treaty) and further development (of the Strategy) are high on the agenda of the Spanish Presidency. Under the present circumstances, and bearing in mind the effect of the economic crisis on growth and creation of jobs in all EUMS - especially in Spain - understandably the first priority on the list of the Agenda of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidency is overcoming the present economic crisis by accelerating the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy<sup>3</sup>.

Such an endeavour implies dealing with three immediate challenges: 1) achieving sustainable economic growth by supporting research and new technologies, thus making the Member States more attractive for investments; 2) combating climate change by adopting a new Energy Action Plan for Europe developed on the basis of the Copenhagen Summit Declaration, thus promoting the Member States' low-carbon economy; and 3) enhancing the area of freedom, security and justice by providing a new impetus to the implementation of the Stockholm Programme and the asylum and migration policies, thus making the EU the safest and most democratic place in the World. These European values and standards are seen as the cornerstone of future global development.

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3 Directions for the activities of the Spanish Presidency with the European Union in 2010, adopted by the Ministers' Council on January 23rd 2009 - <http://www.la-moncloa.es>

Spain, as a Member State, favours EU *"voicing its opinion globally and promoting the common values of peace and security"*<sup>4</sup>. The EU presidency is seen by the Government at "La Moncloa" as an excellent opportunity to promote itself as an important player in external relations. On the global stage, Spain can be more influential acting under the auspices of the EU and becoming part of the solution of the problems in the World - *"...therefore, our (Spanish) Presidency will be visibly European, openly demonstrating an European societal sensibility."*<sup>5</sup>

## **EU as a Global Player**

The three concurring presidencies will work together to promote the EU as a global player which lies at the core of the Lisbon Strategy. The plan of action presented by the re-elected president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, advocates low-carbon economy, creation of green jobs, sustainability and greater social cohesion. The Spanish Presidency will have to start the engine.

The failure of the COP-15, demonstrating the lack of EU leadership on climate change issues, as well as the new Lisbon Strategy 2020, impose the need to conclude a multilateral agreement under the United Nations. Spain will have no choice but to deal with these leftovers. Apart from bridging the gap between the end of the first compliance period of the Kyoto Protocol 2008-2012, and the entry into force of the new agreement, this action will facilitate the

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4 Web-page of the Spanish Government for EU Affairs; Hablemos de Europea - <http://www.hablemosdeeuropa.es/secciones/paginas/Noticia1.aspx>

5 Ibid 6

creation of new EU leadership on the global stage.

Apart from the high expectations to deliver on the global level, strengthening the good neighbourly relations with the Mediterranean countries has always been dear to the Spanish foreign policy. In terms of enlargement, Spain will need to focus on the possible accession of Croatia, to give a new impetus to Turkey's accession, and to start Macedonia's accession negotiations. Will the Spanish Presidency have the capacity and the determination to juggle skilfully all of these foreign policy issues?

### **Who's Afraid of the Western Balkans?**

Relations with the Western Balkan countries are held back by a very complicated set of problems. All countries have open issues, either with the EU or with each other. Macedonia has the name dispute with Greece and the recognition of the church with Serbia, Serbia is struggling with the Kosovo issue, along with the ICTY issue, Montenegro and Croatia are trying to settle the border issue in Prevlaka, Albania also has the problem with Greece, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo have statehood difficulties.

Nevertheless, the EU is still reluctant to get involved in facilitating the solutions. Are these bilateral issues more difficult than what the EU has dealt with in the past? Was former-Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn right when he stated: *"Some may say that this is nothing new in the history of EU Enlargement. There have always been issues like cross-border pollution or a nuclear power plant in the vicinity of a Member State. But in the Western Balkans, we are talking about the so-called "hard stuff" of bilateral foreign policy – open border problems, questioning neighbours'*

*statehood, identity, history, nationality or religion"*<sup>6</sup>.

Difficult as these problems are, the EU cannot continue to pretend that they do not exist, and strive to be a credible global player at the same time. Western Balkans cannot be treated as the prodigal son of Europe any longer. The fact of the matter is that Western Balkans - Europe's backyard<sup>7</sup> - needs cleaning up now! Can Spain provide, at least, for a sweeping broom?

### **Macedonia in the Limbo**

Macedonia was awarded the status of candidate-country in December 2005. The Commission stated that *"the country is well on its way to satisfy the political criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and the Stabilisation and Association Process"*<sup>8</sup>.

After four years of EU candidacy, Macedonia finally received a positive assessment by the European Commission since *"The country fulfils the commitments under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, has consolidated the functioning of its democracy and ensured the stability of institutions guaranteeing the rule of law and respect of fundamental rights and the country has substantially addressed the key priorities of the*

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6 Olli Rehn, EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Lessons from EU enlargement for its future foreign policy, European Policy Centre, Brussels, 22 October 2009.

7 Commissioner Rehn put forward the following considerations in his address at the European Policy Centre in Brussels on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009: *"Let me first ask you a question of conscience: Would you elect somebody who has a messy backyard at home to your City Council? Following the same logic, the EU's credibility as a global actor stands or falls by our ability to shape our very own neighbourhood"*.

8 Opinion of the European Commission, December 2005.

accession partnership"<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, the Commission recommended Macedonia's transition to the second stage of association<sup>10</sup>.

The December Summit of the Swedish Presidency did not bring the desired opening of accession negotiations. However, reading the conclusion in its exact wording "*The Council notes that the Commission recommends the opening of accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and will return to the matter during the next Presidency*"<sup>11</sup>, one could not deny that it is still positive when it comes to Macedonia. The Council committed itself to come back to the issue under the next, i.e. the Spanish Presidency. This fact has been recognised by the President of the Government of the Kingdom of Spain, Mr. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in his address to the Spanish Parliament on the priorities of the Spanish Presidency with the EU<sup>12</sup>, and confirmed by the Deputy Head of the Mission of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain in Macedonia, Ms. María Ángeles García de Lara<sup>13</sup>.

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9 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, COM (2009) 533, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010, pages 12-13.

10 On the basis of Article 5 of the Stabilizations and Association Agreement

11 Council Conclusions on Enlargement/ Stabilisation and Association Process – General Affairs Council, Brussels 7-8 December 2009; [http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly\\_fs/1.27005!menu/stand/ard/file/111830.pdf](http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly_fs/1.27005!menu/stand/ard/file/111830.pdf)

12 Special appearance and address of the President of the Government before the forum of the Congress of Representatives and Senate of the Spanish Parliament, to explain the Conclusions of the European Council and present the priorities of the Spanish Presidency with the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2010 [http://www.eu2010.es/comun/descargas/noticias/Conferencia\\_Zapatero\\_161209.pdf](http://www.eu2010.es/comun/descargas/noticias/Conferencia_Zapatero_161209.pdf)

13 Statement given for "Dnevnik", daily newspaper on December 19th 2009; <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/default->

Once Macedonia is given the green light for opening accession negotiations, the Commission will initiate the bureaucratic process of screening and developing the Joint Negotiation Position of the EU. The Spanish Presidency will have to push all that work, and hopefully the elaboration of the Joint Negotiations Position will happen under the Spanish Presidency. No doubt, Spain is supportive of the process and its Ambassador-at-large for European Integration Projects, Mr. Carlos Carnero Gonzales, does not see any objective obstacle to Macedonia's accession. End of November 2009 in Madrid, at the Pre-presidency conference organised by the Royal Institute ELCANO within the framework of TEPSA, he stated:

*"The future of Macedonia is in the EU. There is no alternative scenario, and there is no Plan B. Macedonia will open up Accession Negotiations. Macedonia will negotiate its membership, and in the end Macedonia will become an EU Member State."*

## **The Traps of EU Foreign Policy**

Spain is the largest Member State that is explicitly pro-enlargement and pro-deepening. Spain has invested a great deal in the Balkan stability and particularly in its reconstruction<sup>14</sup>. Bearing in mind that the

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[mk.asp?ItemID=D24B7C995D71844FA0022317F97DAA75&arc=1](http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/default-mk.asp?ItemID=D24B7C995D71844FA0022317F97DAA75&arc=1)

14 Interview with Ms. María Ángeles García de Lara, Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain in Macedonia; published in "Dnevnik", daily newspaper on January 30th 2010. Ms. García de Lara states: "Spain participates in the project on the improvement of the Hydro Power Plant "Lera" financed through FAD (Assistance for Development) with 7.325.388€, as well as in the construction of the dam "Lisice" with 6.879.659€. At the economic level, an increased interest for investing in Macedonia is noted among the renowned Spanish companies, and especially in the fields of energy and infrastructure."

Western Balkans is going through a difficult democratisation process; decentralisation being the best instrument for democratisation; the Spanish complex constitutional and organisational structure<sup>15</sup> could serve as a role model for facilitating that process. In recent years, Spain has been quite visible in Serbia. This visibility could become regional. EU integration has proved in the past to be the best tool for the stabilisation of the region. Further facilitation of the process is necessary, since every delay gives time and room for various mishaps that crash the process from the inside. Spain can review its role and push enlargement higher on the Team Presidency agenda with specific actions.

The recent merger of the portfolio of Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy in the newly proposed composition of the European Commission may further delay the integration of the region. The accession of the Western Balkan countries may seem to be an *easier* nut to crack from a technical point of view<sup>16</sup>, but from a political point of view, the EU has proved that it is chewing more than it can swallow. Moreover, most of the new EU Member States from Central and Eastern Europe have always had vested interest in strengthening the relations with the Eastern neighbourhood countries. Considering what these countries bring to the table, one can

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15 The administrative organisation of the Kingdom of Spain provides for 17 Autonomous Communities with widespread autonomy. Apart from the Spaniards, people with strong national feelings, speaking Castellano, Catalá, Gallego and Vasco languages live in the country.

16 After the “Big Bang” of 2004 and the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, DG Enlargement had considerably less work to do with the association/accession of the Western Balkan countries and Turkey, thus the conclusion/opinion for a lighter portfolio of Enlargement.

expect that the process of EU accession during the mandate of the new Commission will shift on the expense of the accession of the Western Balkans.

### **Rubbing shoulders**

For Macedonia in its slow progress towards accession all assistance is more than welcome. Recently we are witnessing numerous European leaders offering assistance to Macedonia to resolve its most difficult issue<sup>17</sup>. There are not so many similarities between the two countries, but so many lessons learned could be taken over by Macedonia and directly applied.

The bilateral relations between Spain and Macedonia are not burdened by an open issue. Both countries suffer from overstretched diplomatic services that are understaffed, underfunded and underequipped. Neither the Spaniards express any true interest for the Macedonians, nor are the Macedonians aware of how much they can benefit from the Spanish experience. More efforts should be put into promoting bilateral cooperation on all levels - culture, education, and civil society - which could improve the image of Macedonia in Spain and promote Spain as a role model society in Macedonia.

Spanish companies have hardly expressed interest for the Western Balkans. Although, there are no particular reasons why Spanish entrepreneurs should not be interested in investing in the Macedonian market, where there is obviously an economic opportunity, traditionally they

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17 Borut Pahor, *Prime Minister of Slovenia*; Boris Tadic, *President of Serbia*; Michael Spindelegger, *Foreign Minister of Austria*; Foreign Minister of Finland, Alexander Stubb; and even the name of Javier Solana, *former-High Representative for CFSP and Secretary General of the Council* has been discussed lately.

focus mainly on Latin America, Morocco and Western Europe. If used wisely to include the Western Balkans region, this focus could expand and prove beneficial for all by linking the region with Latin America and Saharan Africa.

To expand horizons the misperception of opinion-makers in Spain towards Western Balkan enlargement and its adverse effect to the Mediterranean Union should be rectified. The WB enlargement and the Mediterranean partnership are two parallel processes that could prove to be complementary if steered in the right direction. Macedonia might not be on the Mediterranean, but its main route leads to the Mediterranean and is strongly influenced by the things going on in the wider region. For example, the latest research in the field of desertification indicates that the eastern part of Macedonia might be faced with the same destiny as Southern Spain. The fact that Macedonia is a smaller country suffering from the same problem could offer Spain an opportunity to produce immediate results and to prove its leadership skills in combating climate change. The Mediterranean Union and the Southern Axis of the EU will be reinforced with Macedonia's accession, thus providing Spain with an ally for its positions inside the EU.

Apart from learning the basics from the Europeanized Spanish society<sup>18</sup>, Macedonia can also contribute with its lessons learned in overcoming problems. Problematic bilateral relations are not exclusive to Macedonia. Spain has the open issue of Gibraltar with the United Kingdom. The consideration of *the*

*Rock* as integral territory of the Kingdom of Spain still leads to problems in the EU negotiations. The European Union is, above all, a political union and has taught the Member States how to put aside the problems when common interest is at stake without using the veto mechanism as the last resort. Given the chance, Macedonia can contribute in consensus building, the Ohrid Framework Agreement being evidence for this.

Not only internally, but also bilaterally, Macedonia has proved to be a factor of stability in the region. A couple of months ago, Macedonia signed and ratified the border demarcation agreement with Kosovo, thus solving a decade-long bilateral problem. That makes Macedonia the first and only country in the region without an open border issue, and by that, an example for resolving sensitive issues. More important, Macedonia can be the source of security in the region.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This paper argues that Macedonia belongs in the European Union, not just geographically but also politically. EU Member-States must not forget the commitments made to the Western Balkan countries, and their vital interest in lasting stability in the region despite of the fragmented interest of some EU Member States (Central and Eastern Europe is inclined towards the Eastern Partnership, while France and the Mediterranean countries towards the Mediterranean Union). Consequently, the SAP countries are spending way too much time on stabilisation and hardly any on association. The worst case of all is Macedonia, being in the limbo for five years. Such a predicament is utterly unsustainable. Urgent action is required since

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18 In the last century Spain was governed by a dictatorship for more than 40 years, and was a witness of a coup de état. It has been the exemplary of an isolated country that managed to turn around its fortunes by joining the EU.

all of the excuses have long gone with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Team Presidency needs immediate results to prove that EU can be a credible global player as promised to the EU citizens. The Macedonian case could serve as the catapult in the delivery of that promise. Therefore, the following actions should be taken by the parties concerned:

### **1. For Spain:**

- a) Spain should revisit its position towards the Balkans by getting more involved in the region and by putting Western Balkans higher on the Agenda.
- b) Spain should strengthen the diplomatic representation in Skopje, both in terms of human and financial resources. Such a consolidated representation should work on promoting the relations between both countries.
- c) The Spanish Presidency should put on the agenda the opening of accession negotiations with Macedonia and use the excellent relations developed with Greece to start the screening process, at least.

### **2. For the European Union:**

- a) The Council should revisit the leftovers from the Swedish Presidency, recommend a date for initiating accession negotiations with Macedonia and mandate the European Commission to start the screening process.
- b) The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton, should get involved in the dispute between Greece and Macedonia by mandating the European Commission to develop benchmarks to measure the

progress made in the negotiations surrounding the name dispute between the two countries.

- c) The Council of the EU should develop a roadmap, with definite dates for accession of the Western Balkans to make sure that the Eastern Partnership does not take over the enlargement agenda.

### **3. For Macedonia:**

- a) The Macedonian Government should send out an explicit message of good will to resolve the name issue with Greece.
- b) Macedonia should strengthen the diplomatic representation in Madrid, both in terms of human and financial resources. Such a consolidated representation should work on promoting the relations between both countries.
- c) The Macedonian Government should allocate funds for civil society organisations and think-tanks promoting the European image of Macedonia in Spain (as well as in Belgium and Hungary) by means of organising conferences, seminars, joint actions and etc.
- d) The Macedonian Government should project greater interest to get involved in the Mediterranean Union.

The strategic partnership forged between the two countries will prove that flamenco can be danced on the drums of the "Teskoto"<sup>19</sup>, and vice versa, and verify that Ortega y Gasset was right when he said "*If Spain (i.e. Macedonia) is the problem, EU is the solution!*"

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<sup>19</sup> Teskoto – Traditional Macedonian dance "oro"





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