

Does NATO Enlargement Spread Democracy? The Democratic Stabilization of Western Balkan Countries.

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Abstract: *This article deals with NATO enlargement toward Western Balkan countries and tries to answer the question of whether NATO enlargement has contributed to the democratic stabilization of the Western Balkans. The authors conclude that NATO has truly contributed to the democratic stabilization of candidate countries. Nevertheless, we have no evidence supporting the thesis that the democratic stabilization of Albania, Croatia, or Macedonia is progressing solely due to the NATO enlargement policy; it is not clear that NATO is viewed as one of the Western institutions into which these countries want to join. On the one hand, this study shows that NATO enlargement may not have as significant an impact on democratization as has been hoped for by its proponents, who started this process in the mid-90s. On the other hand, the impact of NATO on the consolidation of democratic regimes in candidate countries is by no means zero or even marginal.*

Keywords: *NATO enlargement, democratization, Western Balkans*

1. Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has undergone a very complicated adaptation process since the end of the Cold War, which has significantly changed this organization compared to the situation during the Cold War. Within this process, NATO has expanded to new member countries, in which the foundations of democratic regimes have been laid down during the transition process. However, NATO enlargement is not a new, post-Cold War, phenomenon.

The first enlargement took place soon after the signing of the Washington Treaty. In 1952, Turkey and Greece were accepted as members. They had not been counted on at first, but they gained strategic importance for the Alliance due to the advancement of the Cold War. The next enlargement occurred in 1955, when the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was accepted. The efforts to incorporate West Germany into NATO structures arose not solely from the Cold War context – on the contrary, motivations dated from far earlier, and the goal was to deal with

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the “German question.” In the case of Spain, a NATO member from 1982, political reasons have delayed its full involvement in NATO. Within the military domain, Spain has cooperated with the USA on a bilateral level since 1953, when the Madrid Pacts were signed. The United States provided Spain with economic help in exchange for naval and air bases on Spanish territory. After Franco’s death, the objections of European NATO members to the admission of Spain into NATO disappeared, and the admission became a mere formality, especially considering Spanish relations with the USA (for more details see Smith 2000: 127-161). All in all, it is therefore possible to generalize that the enlargement during the Cold War was driven by strategic calculations resulting from the Cold War reality.

In 2009, the last round of enlargement for the time being took place. Albania and Croatia became full members on 1 April 2009. This has already been the third wave of enlargement since the end of the Cold War, and Macedonia should have been part of this round as well. Its admission was nevertheless blocked by Greece, due to the dispute over the name “Macedonia,” which has continued since it became independent from Yugoslavia.

In the scholarly literature, the question of the impact of NATO enlargement upon the democratic stabilization of the post-communist states is often discussed. Furthermore, the proponents of NATO enlargement (including Bill Clinton, Warren Christopher, Anthony Lake, William Perry, Strobe Talbot, Volker Rühle, and Václav Havel) have often used the argument of the positive influence of enlargement upon the consolidation of democratic regimes in the post-communist states (Reiter 2001: 44-46).

One school of thought in the discussions in the scholarly literature underlines the fact that NATO enlargement has had a stabilizing effect on the European region, as it contributes to the consolidation of democratic regimes in post-communist states in several ways (see Michta 2009; Waterman, Zagorcheva, Reiter 2002; Epstein 2005; partly Sjørusen 2004: 702). If this was the case, and the premises of the democratic peace theory were valid at the same time, NATO enlargement would lower the odds of an outburst of violent conflict in Europe. All these approaches are based on a general proposition of neoliberal institutionalism that international institutions have an impact on the internal politics of members of international institutions (Epstein 2005: 67-73).

On the other hand, there are authors who do not agree with the conclusion regarding the positive impact of NATO enlargement on the democratic consolidation of post-communist countries. Some of the main arguments given by critics of the statement that NATO enlargement contributes to the dissemination of democracy can be found in Dan Reiter’s essay “Why NATO

Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy” (2001: 51-67). Reiter concludes that North Atlantic Alliance enlargement has not furthered the democratization of any of the nine countries which, at the time of creation of his text, could be taken into consideration as potential candidates for accession to NATO. Reiter identifies three mechanisms through which NATO should theoretically be able to support democratization of the candidate countries. These are “carrot and stick” mechanisms, NATO membership as a means to restore democracy in the member state in the case of the establishment of an authoritative regime, and support of democratization by the North Atlantic Alliance through the implementation of democratic control principles over the military during transformation of civil-military relations in the candidate countries (2001: 51-56). The main line of Reiter’s argumentation is that candidate countries become more democratic due to the fact that most of their citizens and political elites chose this way, and democratization started much sooner than debates concerning NATO accession. The impact of the international institution (NATO) on internal politics, if any, is therefore, according to Reiter, rather marginal. All in all, Reiter concludes that none of the above mechanisms were functioning during the Cold War era or after its end (2001: 67).

The goal of this study, therefore, is to assess the relevance of the hypothesis that NATO enlargement has contributed to the democratic stabilization of the candidate states and that NATO intentionally pursues this effect by its policy.² If this was really the case, it would represent a fundamental change in comparison with the logic of enlargement during the Cold War.

The hypothesis will be tested by the last round of enlargement, which has so far been less often analyzed in the scholarly literature than the previous rounds, as it is a rather recent event historically. Democratic stabilization of the candidate states as a result of intentional NATO policy can be identified by fulfilling the following conditions: first, it is necessary to determine a certain set of NATO requirements for candidate states when it comes to demonstrating the quality of their democracy, which they would have to fulfill if they wanted to become NATO members. If such a set didn’t exist, then further testing of the hypothesis mentioned above would become irrelevant, as it would be obvious that NATO does not intentionally pursue the democratization of the candidate countries. The determination of such a set of requirements can therefore be considered a necessary but not sufficient condition for the relevance of the tested hypothesis. If NATO determined such a set of requirements for candidate countries, the existence of a certain mechanism for NATO to intentionally carry out this policy is the next

² On the contrary, it is not the objective of this study to test the relevance of the thesis that spreading democracy is the best way to prevent violent conflicts from happening as democracies do not fight each other.

condition for justifying the statement that NATO intentionally furthers democratic stabilization of the candidate states. Once again, it is true that if such a mechanism doesn't exist, it is not possible to consider the tested hypothesis defensible. If such a mechanism exists, then it is possible to move to the next step: thus, to the assessment of its effectiveness. By the term effectiveness we understand the ability to achieve the changes in the quality of democracy in the candidate states. In the next part of this text we therefore assess whether the changes in the quality of democracy occurred in the candidate states. If we nevertheless conclude that during the preparation of these states for NATO accession, the quality of democracy changed, we still couldn't automatically conclude that it was solely NATO enlargement that led to the democratic stabilization of the region, as it could also have been a phenomenon caused by some intervening variable independent of the North Atlantic Alliance. In order to expertly assess the contribution of NATO enlargement to the democratic stabilization of the Western Balkans, it is therefore necessary to analyze the internal political discussion in these countries and focus on actual transformation process in greater detail, with the aim of revealing the motivations of the researched states to undergo democratic reforms and thus exclude or confirm the existence of some other intervening variable.

In the second part of this text we therefore examine whether NATO developed requirements concerning the quality of democracy for the three states mentioned above and whether NATO purposefully and intentionally pursues the development of democracy in these countries. The third part will then focus on evaluation of the changes in the quality of democracy in Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia during their preparation for NATO accession. If these developments are proven, the fourth part will try to reveal whether this shift resulted from NATO activities or whether it was a manifestation of some unknown intervening variable unrelated to NATO, which could have caused the change in the quality of democracy. In the last, fifth chapter, the acquired knowledge is summed up and the question of whether NATO enlargement contributed to the democratic stabilization of the region and if so, in which manner, is answered.

2. Requirements for improving the quality of democracy and the NATO mechanisms contributing to it

2.1 The NATO enlargement debate and NATO enlargement study

In order to be able to reflect on questions concerning the democratic effect of NATO enlargement and its relevance, it is necessary to specify a set of requirements for candidate states which would also include the indicator of quality of democracy. Has this set of requirements been established?

We can generally say that by the beginning of the '90s, NATO enlargement had been quite uncertain, even though looking back and knowing the actual result may lead a researcher to the conclusion that the process of new democracies' accession to the North Atlantic Alliance had no alternative. Overall, the process of North Atlantic Alliance enlargement has been encouraged within NATO and directed by the United States. The main proponent of NATO enlargement was the Clinton administration, which came into office in 1993 and during the entire process included important officials such as James Goldgeier, Anthony Lake, Strobe Talbott, Richard Holbrooke, and Madeleine Albright. The idea of NATO enlargement had very little support inside the US administration at the beginning. An important role in promoting this idea was played mainly by Anthony Lake. The proponents of NATO enlargement became predominant in the Clinton administration in summer 1994 (Asmus 2002: 20-29). Nevertheless, support of NATO enlargement in the USA was not limited to Clinton's Democratic administration. Since 1994, all US presidential candidates with real chances to succeed have, with varying intensity, supported NATO's open door policy (Rupp 2002: 352). Moreover, George W. Bush's Republican administration also incorporated support for NATO enlargement into its foreign policy strategy (Meyer 2003: 85).

In the first half of the '90s, NATO thus forged a policy of enlargement out of the policy of cooperation with new democracies, which was articulated by the establishment of the NACC (North Atlantic Cooperation Council) and the development of the PfP (Partnership for Peace) program. This policy began with the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement. The Study dealt with a number of issues related to NATO enlargement. From the point of view of the states attempting to gain NATO membership, the passages concerning the requirements for new members were the most important. These included the establishment of a stable democratic political system which would fulfill commonly shared values advocated by NATO, the guarantee of civilian and democratic control over the military, and the bringing of transparency to the military sector, among other things (NATO 2005). The study was also relevant for the latest round of NATO enlargement, in which three states of the Western Balkans – Albania, Croatia and Macedonia – attempted to gain membership.

The necessary condition that renders relevant our reflections on the contribution of NATO enlargement to the spread of democracy has therefore been fulfilled. However, is there a mechanism which NATO uses to carry out this policy in practice?

2.2 How NATO supports the spread of democracy

One mechanism through which NATO supports the spread of democracy has been described using the example of the Czech Republic and Romania by Alexandra Gheciu (2005) in her study “Security institutions as Agent of Socialization? NATO and the New Europe.” Gheciu came to the conclusion that NATO had created an institutionalized mechanism of liberal democratic values to implement in transition states. The North Atlantic Alliance thus took advantage of its perception as one of the symbols of the West in the transitional states, which led to an increase in the perception of NATO legitimacy by these states. This is why NATO was able to use teaching and persuasion on those transitional states which were attempting to become NATO members. During the instruction process, among other things, NATO participates in workshops and seminars which are designed to educate new political elites and the security community on liberal-democratic values and how to organize the security sector on the basis of these values. The North Atlantic Alliance also takes part in the work of the Marshall Center and the PfP Consortium. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly also plays some role in this process. These institutions serve not only to educate the emerging political and military elites, but also have an influence on the education of the public within the transitional states; they also carry out NATO information campaigns in an effort to delegitimize nationalist and communist worldviews. Using the method of persuasion, NATO makes an appeal to the pro-Western political elites of the candidate states and tries to direct their policies in the direction preferred by the Alliance representatives. It makes use of the natural authority it is attributed with by pro-Western elites.³

Education and training has always been very important for NATO. This is why it has established a wide range of educational bodies and programs. One of the main NATO educational bodies is the NATO Defense College, founded in 1951. It provides training on a strategic level, whereas the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany provides education on an

³ Gheciu also came to the conclusion that these mechanisms had practical impacts in the cases of the Czech Republic and Romania as they helped to change the policies of these countries during the application of liberal-democratic values on the reform of military sector. The North Atlantic Alliance and the above-mentioned countries originally held a different view of the means of implementation of these values, which have been modified by NATO's involvement. This is why it is not possible to conclude that these countries would conduct the same policies without NATO (2005: 958-997).

operational level. These two, together with the NATO Communications and Information System School, have concentrated on the interoperability of NATO members ever since its foundation (NATO 2010a). After the end of the Cold War, a completely new role was added to NATO educational structures. The institutions mentioned above have remained the main educational bodies, but the range of their functions has been broadened. Additionally, military and civilian personnel from non-NATO states have been gradually included.

In addition to changes in the old institutions, new programs have also been introduced. These are particularly aimed at non-NATO members. The first one is the Partnership for Peace, a program of bilateral cooperation between “Partner” states and NATO (NATO 2011). The main purpose of the PFP is to enhance mutual cooperation and to build a relationship between Partner countries and NATO. Nevertheless, the first two objectives of this program mentioned in the PFP Framework Document are the facilitation of transparency in national defense planning and budgeting processes and ensuring the democratic control of defense forces (NATO 1994). As Staničić noted in connection with Croatian military personnel, at that time Croatia lacked the knowledge that was required for democratic reforms in the army (Staničić 2005). This was, of course, not only the case for Croatia – the same situations existed in Albania and Macedonia. Education thus started to be the main prerequisite for the successful democratization of their armies. According to Theodor Tudoroiu, the PFP was part of a system of structures that “maintained and intensified the transfer of democratic values” (2007: 17). The PFP itself is not an educational program, but it enables Partner countries to enter the NATO educational system, e.g. the first non-NATO state participants attended the NATO Defense College through PFP.

Another educational facility is the PFP Consortium *of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes*, established in 1999. It includes PFP Training Centers and PFP Simulation Networks. These are not directly connected with NATO; they are usually run by national governments or civil organizations and they are linked with NATO in various ways, e.g. the NATO School has played a facilitator role between PFP Centers and NATO itself (NATO 2009c). Another important part of the NATO educational system is NATO expert visits to a Partner country, where they help with reforms and provide consultations (NATO 2010a).

Finally, one institution that has played a significant role in the education of post-communist republics in Europe, yet is not actually part of the NATO education system, is the George C. Marshall Center. It is only loosely connected to NATO because it is primarily a German-American project; nevertheless, it has continued to play a significant role in educating and training military personnel from post-communist countries (Marshall Center 2009a).

All these institutions provide education and training in various ways, e.g. through courses, seminars, and workshops, but also organize exercises to enhance interoperability with NATO member states. These are either general and applicable to every Partner state, or tailor-made to focus on a particular state (NATO 2010a). The Membership Action Plan is an example of how NATO tailors programs to individual states' needs.

The Membership Action Plan (MAP) serves the purpose of education and persuasion, among other goals. According to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, MAP is the “NATO program of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of countries wishing to join the Alliance. Participation in the MAP does not prejudice any decision by the Alliance on future membership.... Countries participating in the MAP submit individual annual national programs on their preparations for possible future membership. These cover political, economic, defense, resource, security and legal aspects. The MAP process provides a focused and candid feedback mechanism on aspirant countries' progress on their programs” (NATO 2010b).

This general role of MAP has been recognized by Albania, Croatia and Macedonia. Albania became a part of MAP in 1999, the year of the programs' launch. In Albania, this program has been viewed as the key instrument of integration into NATO. This is also related to its significant role in supporting and facilitating the reform process. During ten rounds of MAP, Albania has come up with plans for reform in the political, economic, military, and judicial spheres. According to the Albanian government, important progress has been accomplished within all of these areas. The Albanian government mostly talks about the shift in the fight against corruption and organized crime, and stabilization of the Albanian economy. As for justice, the Albanian government is devoted to continuing the reform process in order to ensure the independence and effectiveness of the justice system (Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009).

Croatia became involved in the MAP program much later, in 2002. Similarly to Albania, Croatia has also considered MAP as a key means of integration into the North Atlantic Alliance. Tomčić, the prime minister in 2002, emphasized the role of the program not only in connection with the reforms of defense and security, but also its role in the democratization of Croatian society (NATO PA 2002). Topics such as the return of refugees, cooperation with ICTY, and judicial reforms were all included in the main clauses of MAP concerning democratization. According to Božinovic, Croatia has made substantial progress in all of the clauses. The cooperation with ICTY is, in his view, complete, the refugees' return is almost completed, and judicial reforms are in full swing (Božinović 2007).

Macedonia joined MAP in 1999. The priorities of the Macedonian MAP focused chiefly on the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. This is related mainly to equal representation in public service, the possibility to use the language of a given minority in public offices and in court, access to education in the language of a given minority, decentralization, and so on. Like the other two countries analyzed, reforms of the public sector and the judicial system, as well as the fight against corruption and organized crime have also been mentioned (Macedonian Ministry of Defence 2004; 2006a).

2. 3 Application of educational mechanisms and persuasion in Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia

Education

First of all, we have to state that Albania has been strongly committed to NATO membership ever since the downfall of the Communist regime. On several occasions it has also been stated that integration into NATO was the primary goal of the Republic of Albania's foreign policy (Albanian Council of Ministers 2007; Albanian Government 2005; Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Gheciu also points out the importance of the willingness of the country to learn, i.e. accept the role of "student" and NATO's role as "teacher" (Gheciu 2005: 982). Albania has clearly accepted this role as we can see again from many documents, statements and speeches of main political representatives (Albanian Council of Ministers 2007; Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009; 2010).

Albania has participated in numerous activities and educational programs organized or supported by NATO. Since 1994, courses at the Marshall Center have been attended by 203 Albanian military and civilian personnel (Marshall Center 2009b). The country also takes part in working and study groups within the PfP consortium and courses organized by the NATO Academy in Rome (PfP Consortium 2011; NATO Defense College 2011). Albania is a member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)⁴ and the PfP, and in 1999 it also joined the MAP, which has become the basis for preparations for NATO membership. In all of these programs, Albania cooperated with NATO member states on preparing reforms, mainly in the military-security area, but also in the political one. According to Abazi, NATO thus provided Albania with a roadmap, on the basis of which the country implemented its reforms (Abazi 2004). Alliance states also provided Albania with materiel and technical assistance during

⁴ Formerly the North Atlantic Cooperation Council.

modernization and military reorganization. This was especially true for the USA, Great Britain, Italy and Turkey (NATO PA 2007). Pietz estimates that since 1993, the United States has invested one million USD annually in the training of Albania's armed forces (Pietz 2006). The Report of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) from 2007 even talks about thirty to forty million dollars (NATO PA 2007). In 2002, a NATO command was established in Tirana, which has been part of the KFOR command and management structure. At the same time, it has also become a place for consultations concerning the implementation of reforms in the security and military sectors (NATO 2009a).

Croatian representatives have continuously stressed the importance of shared values such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and a market economy (Croatian Government 2008; 2010). The desire to enter NATO was articulated by Croatian representatives immediately after the election following former President Franjo Tuđman's death. Croatia was accepted into the PfP and soon after into the MAP program as well. Through these programs, Croatia was able to access the NATO educational system.

Croatia started to participate in the PfP, the EAPC, and the MAP much later – in 2000 and 2002 – due to an unfavorable internal political environment; it has nevertheless made up for its late start in the intensity of its involvement. Experts from NATO visited Croatia upon the invitation of the Croatian government to hold consultations, lectures and workshops. Croatia, like Albania, has also cooperated with NATO member states on a bilateral level. This was particularly true for cooperation with the USA, Great Britain, and Germany. Through joint exercises, consultations, and workshops, NATO created a road map for Croatia as well, which it would then follow when formulating and implementing reforms. NATO expert teams also participated in the preparation of the Croatian Strategic Defense Review (Pietz 2006). In addition to reforms, cooperation between NATO and Croatia also included military exercises in an effort to strengthen interoperability and education in both military and language areas. The PA of NATO states that Croatia participated in 250 exercises and training programs in 2006 alone (NATO PA 2007). Croatia also participates in the educational programs of the Marshall Center, the PfP Consortium and the NATO Academy (PfP Consortium 2011; NATO Defense College 2011). Croatian military and civilian representatives started to cooperate with the Marshall Center in 1999 and by 2009 there were 196 graduates from the Marshall Center (Cehulić, Vukadinović 2001: 85-86; Marshall Center 2009b).

Macedonia has always been very devoted to the idea of NATO membership. It is stated to be a “strategic priority” (Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008) or “permanent

commitment” (Macedonian Ministry of Defence 1997) for Macedonia. Additionally, public support for NATO membership has been continuously very high. It reaches 90% in some polls (Congressional Research Service 2008). Macedonia has been aware of shortcomings that need to be targeted before becoming part of NATO. It is also aware that this goal cannot be achieved without external help – help from NATO (Macedonian Ministry of Defence 2006b: 5). Thus, we can claim that Macedonia has accepted its role as “student” as well.

Macedonia, just like the two aforementioned states, is a member of the PfP, the EAPC and the MAP. Within these frameworks, the country cooperates with NATO member states on both a bilateral and multilateral level. In 2003, a NATO command in Skopje was established. Together with a NATO advisory team still present within the defense ministry, this command offers advisory and assistance functions to implement reforms within the defense sector. Similarly to the cases of Albania and Croatia, besides the reform process, NATO also facilitates the interoperability of the Macedonian armed forces through joint exercises and training programs (NATO 2009b). Macedonia sent out its officers to take part in educational programs of the NATO Defense College, the PfP Consortium workshops, and the Marshall Center, where 172 civilian and military Macedonian officials have taken part since 1994 (Marshall Center 2009b).

Persuasion and appeals

From his 6 July 2006 speech, the General Secretary of NATO at the time, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, made it more than clear that if Albania wanted to become a NATO member, reforms in the military sector, no matter how important, would not be sufficient for Albania’s entry into NATO. According to Scheffer, the main commonalities of the Alliance states were shared values, a pluralist system, democracy, freedom, and tolerance (NATO 2006b). It is for this reason that reforms ensuring and supporting these values are so stressed by the Alliance. In the case of Albania, these mainly encompass the continuation of the fight against corruption and organized crime and the strengthening of the rule of law, primarily by reform of the justice system (NATO 2006b). In speeches from following years, the acknowledgement of newly accomplished goals has always been present, especially when it comes to security and defense areas. The challenge of further continuing with the reform process in the justice system, against corruption, and so on is nevertheless always included as well. The fact that membership was not granted at the time and that the integration of Albania into NATO would depend on the progress of the reform process has been repeatedly emphasized (NATO 2007; NATO PA 2007).

In the case of Croatia as well, NATO has exerted pressure upon the consolidation of democracy and the strengthening of the rule of law. The most often discussed problems, aside from the traditional problem with justice, corruption, and organized crime, have been the return of refugees, cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and the low level of support for Croatian membership of NATO among the public (NATO 2006a). Similarly to the case of Albania, the Croatian reform process was urged on by General Secretary Scheffer. Mainly, Scheffer stressed the need to maintain the rate of advancement of the adoption and implementation of stated reforms (NATO 2003a). The North Atlantic Alliance often praised Croatia not only for reforms adopted concerning the army, but also for the democratization processes at work in Croatian society. According to some analysts, “Croatia has been closest to NATO membership of the MAP countries” (NATO PA 2007). After General Gotovina’s arrest, a significant problem concerning cooperation between Croatia and the ICTY disappeared. This is nevertheless still viewed as a delicate topic among the public. The most discussed drawback of Croatian membership has mainly been the low level of public support.

When it comes to Alliance appeals concerning democratization processes in Macedonia, the Ohrid Agreement is often mentioned. NATO PA clearly stated in its 2007 report that it required the full implementation of this accord by Macedonia. The report also stresses the necessity to incorporate the Albanian minority into the armed forces of Macedonia (NATO PA 2007). In this respect, the importance of calm and fair elections was also emphasized (NATO 2004; 2006b). Like Albania and Croatia, much needed reforms in the justice sector as well as in the fight against corruption and organized crime have been pointed out (NATO 2004; 2006b).

According to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Alliance, the Ohrid Agreement has mostly been fulfilled. There nevertheless still remain clauses which should be worked on. Corruption and the inability of the government and opposition to cooperate are quoted by the assembly as the next problematic points to be focused on (NATO PA 2007). In the declaration from the Bucharest summit, the Macedonian attempt to build a multiethnic society is clearly acknowledged. Macedonia has also been praised for its commitment to commonly shared values (NATO 2008). NATO nevertheless also used one very specific method in the case of Western Balkan enlargement. Macedonia has been the only case up to the present in which NATO has used the method of consolidating democratic regimes by means of military operations to support peace. A special chapter thus deals with this phenomenon.

2.4 NATO PSO in Macedonia

Taking into account that these military operations were started after 1999, when Macedonia began its participation in the MAP program, they are also to be seen as operations which were running during the period of Macedonian preparation for its membership in NATO, and thus they are to be understood as a method NATO used to facilitate consolidation of a democratic regime.

The first armed confrontations between Albanian paramilitary groups and Macedonian security forces broke out as early as 1994. The developments concerning the establishment of an Albanian university in Tetovo soon served as a catalyst during the escalation of the crisis. The events related to the violent closing down of the university gave rise to the popularity of radical and extremist groups of Albanians in Macedonia, which attempted to fight for their rights using violent practices. The entire dispute concerning the university led to the radicalization of many Macedonian Albanians. In early January 2001, Albanian radicals connected to the former KLA started to attack Macedonian security forces around Tetovo (Zachariadis 2003: 271-272).

Through the European Union and NATO, Western countries started to exert pressure on the Albanian guerillas and the Macedonian government, aiming to make them cease acts of violence, come to a compromise, and peacefully resolve the dispute. After the formation of a coalition government of national unity in May 2001 led by Prime Minister Georgievski, the new Macedonian government adopted measures to de-escalate the conflict, which also presupposed a partial amnesty for Albanian guerilla combatants. These shared interests resulted in the request by Macedonian authorities to NATO (delivered on 14th June 2001) for assistance with crisis de-escalation and the disarmament of guerrilla groups.

The Ohrid Agreement was crucial for crisis de-escalation. Signatories to the agreement contracted to reform Macedonian society in order to eliminate the tension between both ethnicities. The Ohrid Agreement also required the adoption of numerous measures enabling democratic regime consolidation. These included measures to end acts of hostility and implement the voluntary disarmament of ethnic Albanians; to promote the country's decentralization of political power; to ensure a larger share of Albanians in state administration and security bodies; to grant wider cultural and political rights to minorities; to adopt the requirement of a double majority in parliament in cases of key laws influencing the position of ethnic minorities; to widen the powers of local authorities; and to establish every language spoken by more than 20% of residents as official languages in Macedonia. It is important for ethnic Albanians that with this agreement they gained the right to a university education in their own language, which was their long-term goal from which the conflict escalated in the first place. This agreement's

implementation, even if less than perfect, contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Macedonia. Many political representatives of Macedonia representing Slavic residents nevertheless rejected this agreement and interpreted it as a capitulation to Albanian terrorists imposed by external factors. Western leaders, on the contrary, welcomed the agreement and some of them, such as the Federal Republic of Germany's Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, admired it uncritically as a guarantee of everlasting peace in Macedonia (Zachariadis 2003: 276).

To support the completion of the agreement, the NATO Council decided to conduct a military peace keeping operation named Essential Harvest. The main goal of the operation lay mainly in a clear demonstration by the international community of its willingness to prevent the destabilization of Macedonia. This successful operation was then followed by another Alliance mission, which commenced on 23 September 2001. It was conducted by 780 soldiers under the name Operation Amber Fox, supported by UN Security Council Resolution No. 1371. Its main intention was to monitor the situation in the region, mediate contacts between Macedonian authorities and the representatives of international organizations, and, last but not least, to protect OSCE and European Union observers. Amber Fox was terminated on 15th December 2002. On the next day, Operation Allied Harmony followed, lasting until 31st March 2003. After this, forces employed in the region were taken over by the European Union, which thus started its first crisis management military operation under the name Concordia (NATO 2003b). The goal of Allied Harmony was, like its predecessor, to protect international observers, contribute to the stabilization of the situation, and provide the Macedonian authorities with assistance in supporting the peaceful co-existence of all ethnicities in Macedonia. NATO also stayed in Macedonia through its command even after handing over the mission to the European Union.

NATO's main motivation was naturally to avoid conflict escalation in the area neighboring Kosovo, in which NATO has conducted the KFOR military operation since 1999 in order to support peace. The implementation of the Ohrid Agreement has nevertheless had a positive impact on the consolidation of a democratic system in Macedonia; for this reason, the Alliance's measures to ensure its fulfillment can be seen as a method used by NATO to consolidate democracy in Macedonia.

2.5 General conclusions on the NATO methods used in Albania, Croatia and Macedonia

Overall, it is possible to conclude that in the case of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia, NATO used similar mechanisms (education and appeals) to support the consolidation of democratic regimes as used in previous rounds of enlargement. NATO participated in a great

number of educational activities, the content of which was also to teach about democracy and democratic civil-military relations. The method of appeal to the political elites, challenging them to eliminate democratic deficits was also often used. However, Macedonia is an extraordinary case, in which NATO also conducted three peace keeping operations during the country's preparation for accession. But what was the nature of the shift in the quality of democracy of the candidate countries in the given period?

3. Shifts in the quality of democracy in Albania, Croatia and Macedonia

The preceding chapter has shown that NATO definitely used certain mechanisms in order to support consolidation of the democratic regimes in these three Western Balkan countries. What were the outcomes, though?

The aim of this study is not primarily to discuss the question of democratic consolidation, which is a problem being dealt with from many different angles within political science (Pridham 2009: 269-271). If we nevertheless need to evaluate changes in the quality of democracy during the preparations for Albanian, Croatian, and Macedonian accession to NATO, it is necessary to establish its criteria. Based on the work of Huntington (1991) and Dahl (1989), we will evaluate the situation in the following dimensions: division of power, replacement of political representatives wielding political power on the basis of regular and formalized elections, and the degree to which democratic control of the army has been established (Diamond 2003: 29-37). All of these parameters can be seen as crucial for the consolidation of democratic regimes.

3. 1 Albania

Division of powers

The 1998 Constitution established a system for the division of power and for balancing executive, legislative and judicial powers. The nature of the division of powers according to the Constitution has not changed in practice since 1998. Nevertheless, when it comes to clauses concerning the division of powers, disputes still exist regarding their interpretation (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003a; 2008).

The Constitution significantly limits the power of the president. In the case of Sali Berisha's occupancy of this office, the president *de facto* controlled not only executive power, but also legislative and judicial powers. Legislative power is today solely in the hands of Parliament and the presidential role is mainly representative. The Parliament is repeatedly weakened by

boycotts from the opposition party, which gives an advantage to the executive branch (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003a; 2008).

The independence of the justice system still remains the biggest problem. Both the ruling party and the opposition continue to try to secure their influence. The independence of the judiciary has always been threatened by the ruling and opposition parties alike. The reform of justice, which would stop these practices, has been repeatedly postponed, and new regulations only partially addressing the problem have been adopted. According to Freedom House, some regulations encompassed in the law concerning justice adopted in early 2008, which are intended as a further attempt to reform the judiciary, actually strengthen the control of the executive branch over the judiciary rather than reducing it. Even so, Freedom House assumes that in comparison with the situation in preceding years, this law still represents significant progress (Freedom House 2008b; 2009b). The problems which are nonetheless related to this are the low level of professionalism of judges and lawyers, corruption, and blackmail. The education and quality of judges is gradually improving; this process is, however, like the reform of justice generally, very slow.

The shortcomings mentioned above are being eliminated only at a very slow rate. We can thus state that even today the division of powers guaranteed by the Constitution has not been implemented. It still remains unstable and is violated from time to time (Freedom House 2009c).

Regular and formalized elections and shifts in power

No elections since 1992 have been evaluated by OSCE as fully corresponding with standards of free and democratic elections. According to the OSCE reports, three of the last parliamentary elections (2001, 2005, and 2009) nevertheless showed some improvement. The citizens have the possibility to choose from a wide range of political parties (most votes nonetheless go to the Democratic and Socialist parties) and the education of electoral commission members is improving, as well as the transparency of the central electoral commission and actualization of the lists of voters (OSCE 2010). Yet we still encounter violations of the elections' legitimacy, which even if less frequent, cannot be completely eliminated. Examples of such violations are, for example, the intimidation or bribing of voters or electoral commission members, as well as mass and double voting. Escalated pre-election rhetoric is also quite frequent.⁵ The reform of the electoral process has still not been completed. The election law has been adjusted eleven times since 1990, the last being a change in December 2008. This

⁵ Despite this fact, according to the report of the Albanian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, shifts towards more a positive tone of campaigns was achieved in 2009 elections. See the Albanian Helsinki Committee (2009).

last amendment brought tangible changes, according to the OSCE. It is nevertheless still important to deal with protracted solutions to technical problems (for example, the formation of the central electoral commission, the issuing of identity cards, etc.) and also with their frequent politicization (Freedom House 2009c).

Changes of the ruling party remain a very problematic fact and, for a defeated country, also one that is difficult to accept within the Albanian political scene. Election results are often put into question. These developments then lead to lengthy re-counting, when both the citizens and international community are kept in uncertainty. The defeated party subsequently chooses to boycott the parliamentary meetings. The first relatively calm handing over of power took place in 2005; however, the opposition party again chose to boycott proceedings after the last parliamentary meeting in 2009. Changes in state officials thus always accompany the commencement of a new government.

Democratic control over the military

According to the Albanian constitution, Parliament is the highest body controlling the army through the parliamentary defense committee (Kajsiu 2005: 70). The President is the commander-in-chief of the military; however, he exerts control over army through the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense in times of peace. During wartime, he appoints a commander-in-chief of the military according to the PM's proposal. The Prime Minister and the Ministerial Council prepare and propose all the documents related to defense. The Minister of Defense must be a civilian and during peacetime, he also acts as the commander-in-chief of the military. His role is not sufficiently clear in the case of war (Abazi 2004).

Democratic control of the army therefore theoretically exists. The practice nevertheless lags behind theory. The main body which should exert control, the parliament, plays in reality a rather marginal role. Due to the fact that most of the deputies aren't experienced in defense issues, the parliament is dependent on the information provided by the army and the government, over which it exerts control (Pietz 2006: 14).

Equally problematic is the implementation of approved programs and plans. The relationship between the Prime Minister and President is tense due to the fact that their positions are not explicitly defined by the Constitution (Pietz 2006: 14).⁶ Last but not least, attempts to eliminate the connection between the ruling party and the army have also partially

⁶ A similar tension is to be observed in the case of Macedonia and Croatia as well; NATO approaches it in the same way.

failed up to now. It is still common for important army representatives to be replaced with a change of government.

3. 2 Croatia

Division of power

During the period from the gaining of independence until the year 1999, the division of powers practically did not exist in Croatia. All power was concentrated in Franjo Tuđman's hands and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). The government of Iвица Račan, resulting from breakthrough 2000 elections, started the process of reform. Amendments to the Constitution have been accepted; they have led to the strengthening of the role and transparency of parliament and also to a partial weakening of the president's position. Since 2000, the government has thus managed to build functioning democratic institutions and establish a system of mutual control. This system of control and the division of powers is also described clearly and in detail in the Constitution. Parliament is the main legislative body; it passes the laws and the state budget, and exerts civil control of the army. The President and the army represent executive power. The President is responsible for the defense of the independence and territorial integrity of the country. The government proposes laws and the budget to the Parliament and oversees the implementation of passed laws, etc (Croatian Parliament 2010).

Judicial power is exercised by the systems of courts and is supposed to be independent (Croatian Parliament 2010). However, as in the case of Albania, Croatian justice was also previously under the control of the ruling party. Only in 2004 did the government adopt the first concrete measures in order to reform the judiciary. Originally it was thought that it would be finished by 2007. In reality, the reform hasn't yet been completed (as of 2011). Prolonged proceedings are still currently continuing. Education and the professionalism of judges are improving, but at a rather slow pace.. Interference in the independence of the justice system by politicians has by no means been eliminated; mainly, regional courts are still under the political influence of Zagreb (Freedom House 2008a; Freedom House 2011).

The biggest criticism directed towards Croatia concerns the handing over of persons accused of war crimes to the criminal court. Croatian society is still very sensitive about this topic and a large part of it does not agree with the prosecution of its "war heroes." Their being handed over to a criminal tribunal is thus considered a betrayal (OSCE 2010). Some government officials

have attempted to ensure that these accused persons are judged in Croatian courts rather than at the ICTY (Freedom House 2008a). Some cases have indeed been transferred to Croatian jurisdiction. These, however, have been lower profile cases perceived to be of less importance.⁷

Only a few of the most important problems facing Croatian justice were solved during the period between 2002 and 2008. Justice thus still remains a weak point in the Croatian democratization process.

Regular and formalized elections and shifts in power

Since 2000, both international and local observers have described the electoral process in Croatia as free and fair (Freedom House 2009c). Election observers can nevertheless still encounter discriminatory practices against voters from national minorities (attempts to prevent them from voting, humiliation, attacks, etc.) (GONG 2008: 21-22)⁸. Also, the administration of elections has remained problematic, especially when it comes to electoral rolls and the absence of a permanent state electoral commission, as well as the non-transparent financing of electoral campaigns and opportunities for Croats in diasporas to vote. During the 2002-2008 period, most of these flaws had not yet been eliminated, with the exception of the establishment of an independent state electoral commission in 2006. This body takes care of activities linked to presidential, parliamentary, regional and local elections, as well as elections of mayors and directors of municipal authorities (Legislationline 2006).

The financing of electoral campaigns continues to be non-transparent even though regulations were adopted in 2008. These nevertheless have had no impact. Only a few parties actually presented their financial reports and those which did not suffered no penalty (Freedom House 2008b; 2009b). The possibility for Croatian citizens residing abroad to participate in elections has been a much discussed long term problem. Nevertheless, it has not yet been resolved.

When talking about the handing over of power, we cannot state with certainty that Croatia fulfills democratic standards. Since the end of Tudjman's administration, only two changes of ruling party have taken place. In 2000, the HDZ handed over power to the Social Democratic Party, a situation which was reversed in 2003.⁹ The process of handing over power

⁷ The case of Generals Ademi and Norace had first been handed over to Croatia (Freedom House 2005).

⁸ GONG is a Croatian NGO established in 1997. Its goal is to encourage active participation of citizens in political affairs in the country.

⁹ In 2007 the HDZ won elections again.

has nevertheless been conducted in an orderly way and the defeated party has always accepted its new role in opposition.

Democratic control of the army

In the first half of the '90s, Croatia was a scene of domestic warfare. The army was strongly politicized. *De facto* civil control of the armed forces did not exist. In this respect, there hasn't been any significant change during the rest of the '90s. This situation started to change after Tudjman's death and new government elections. Even in 2000, however, when some changes resulting from amendments of the Constitution were introduced, the laws that started the reforms of the Croatian armed forces were not accepted until 2002.

The supreme body executing civil control over the army is again Parliament, more precisely the Parliamentary Committee for Internal Policy and National Security. Its most important means of control is the budget. The lack of independent civil experts in the area of defense and cooperation with the general staff remain problematic in practice (Pietz 2006: 38).

The President is commander-in-chief of the armed forces. As in the case of Albania, there is a struggle between the Prime Minister and the President for "dominion" over national defense. This disagreement is nevertheless to a certain extent softened by the fact that many decisions require the approval of both the President and the Prime Minister in order to be made, though this also slows down the decision-making process (Staničić 2005: 119).

The Ministry of Defense implements the approved defense and security policy. This minister has to be a civilian.¹⁰ The general staff is part of the Ministry of Defense. The commander-in-chief of the general staff is the main military advisor to both the President and the Minister of Defense. In 2007, the Security Council was established. It deals with essential defense documents and supervises ongoing reforms in the sector of defense, and so on. In order for the council to be convoked, the approval of both the President and the Prime Minister are required (Croatian Ministry of Defence 2008).

Pietz states in his study that in comparison to Macedonia and Albania, Croatian reform of the armed forces is grounded in well-developed democratic institutions. Moreover, the entire process is supported by a growing economy. He also emphasizes important progress in terms of the denationalization of the army (Pietz 2006: 47).

3. 3 Macedonia

¹⁰ The first real civilian in this function was Jozo Radoš, who was in office from 2000 until 2002 (Cehulić, Vukadinović 2001: 84).

Division of powers

The Macedonian Constitution guarantees the division of powers between the legislative branch, represented by the Assembly; the executive branch, represented by the government; and the judicial branch, which is entrusted to courts. The President is elected in direct elections and represents Macedonia on the international and domestic scene (Macedonian Assembly 1992).

The Assembly, aside from approving laws (including constitutional ones), also elects the government, which is accountable to the Assembly; moreover, it also elects judges (including the judges of the Constitutional Court). The Assembly cannot be dissolved by the government and the President, which is rather unusual. Its dissolution can only be ordered by itself (Spirovski 2001). The government determines which laws will be discussed in the Assembly, proposes a budget, decides on the recognition of foreign states and governments, and so on (Macedonian Assembly 1992). Ever since Macedonia's independence from Yugoslavia, it has been common for minorities living in its territory to take part in the government. According to the presented description it may seem that the president plays a rather marginal role, whereas the Assembly has significant powers at its disposal. It is not necessarily, however, this way in reality. The truth is that the Assembly is dependent on the government to a significant extent, especially if the winning party has a majority in the Assembly.

It is also not unusual for opposition parliamentary parties to boycott the assemblies of the Assembly and thus restrict its function as a legislative body (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003b).

In the case of Macedonia, justice also represents a rather weak element in the democratization process. Judges on all levels are elected by the Assembly, so the question arises of their true independence from political influence. The reform of justice started in 2005. Since then, a number of laws strengthening the independence of the judiciary and improving its effectiveness have been approved. We, nevertheless, still encounter overloaded courts with inadequate facilities, which leads to delays and backlogs of judicial processes. Freedom House's 2009 report also mentions another problem – unoccupied posts in some judicial institutions such as the public prosecutor's office or Constitutional Court (Freedom House 2009a). The lengthy implementation of newly approved justice-related laws constitutes yet another significant problem.

Regular and formalized elections and shift in power

With regards to imperfections during elections, OSCE remarks concern the financing of electoral campaigns, inaccurate voting registries, the training of members of electoral commissions, and the specification of laws regarding the role of the media (OSCE 2011).

Since 2000, OSCE reports have also mentioned occasional violent incidents. Paradoxically, these did not reach a maximum during parliamentary elections held after the end of the conflict between the Albanian minority and the government in 2001 (as these were, on the contrary, assessed as rather free and fair) (Freedom House 2003) but during early parliamentary elections in June 2008. These early elections were regarded as running completely afoul of democratic election standards (OSCE 2008).

From 2002 until 2008, three parliamentary elections took place in Macedonia. In 2002 and 2006, a change in the ruling party occurred. These changes were fundamentally peaceful; the defeated parties nonetheless failed to accept their role in opposition in either of these cases and boycotted the parliamentary assemblies. Additionally, changes in administrative posts still accompanied the new governments.

Democratic control of the army

Until 1992, Macedonian soldiers were part of the Yugoslavian people's army. After Macedonia gained independence, an agreement regarding the departure of the federal armies was signed in February 1992. The Macedonian army was then established by the Constitution to defend the country's territorial integrity and independence. It is thus intended to address external threats.¹¹ The defense law forbids the preparation for, and participation in any actions linked with political parties (Vankovska 2005: 153). The Assembly also supervises the government's functioning when it comes to security and defense issues. According to Pietz, the Assembly has long played the marginal role of a "voting machine" (2006: 28) in the security area; its position has nevertheless continued to strengthen lately (2006: 34).

A much more important role is played by the President and the government, more precisely by the Ministry of Defense. The President is, as in the two previous countries, also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Vankovska identifies the fact that advisory functions at the Ministry of Defense are occupied not by external civilian experts but mostly experts directly from the army, a flaw which does not comply with the principle of civilian control of the army (Vankovska 2005: 147-148).

¹¹ Internal threats are addressed by the police.

The Minister of Defense has to be a civilian. Nevertheless, it is unclear who the Minister of Defense is subordinate to – the President or the government. The defense law does not clarify the relations between the president and the government; or between the government and the Minister of Defense; or last but not least between the President and the Minister of Defense vis-à-vis the general staff. In practice, this problem is currently solved by the actors themselves – the one who shows the higher level of assertiveness usually plays a more important role in the defense and security areas.¹² The lack of coordination among the President, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense was fully demonstrated during the crisis in 2001, when contradictory orders came from all three institutions (Pietz 2006: 29).

3. 4 Overall assessment of changes in the quality of democracy in the examined countries

As far as the quality of democracy in Albania, Croatia and Macedonia is concerned, on the one hand, it is possible to observe a certain improvement; on the other hand, many deficiencies remain. In Albania, essential principles of the division of powers have been introduced, the voting process suffers from fewer shortcomings than in the past, and essential principles of democratic civil-military relations have also been established. Albania nevertheless still faces the problems of the *de facto* implementation of the division of powers, especially with ensuring the independence of the judiciary and changes of governing elites based on electoral results which would be equally accepted by winners and defeated parties. Croatia has undergone significant progress when it comes to the practical implementation of the division of powers; elections are free and changes of government are generally recognized by both winners and losers. The weak point of Croatian democracy is the quality and independence of the justice system, the exercise of voting rights by Croatian citizens residing abroad during elections, and the practical realization of the principles of democratic civil-military relations. Macedonia has succeeded to push through essential reforms of the division of powers; however, problems with achieving an independent judiciary, a transparent voting process, peaceful changes of government, and appropriate civil-military relations nevertheless remain. In spite of persisting problems concerning the quality of democracy in these three states, it is nonetheless possible to come to the conclusion that during the process of their preparation for accession to NATO some improvements have been achieved in all of these three countries.¹³ The question which, however,

¹² This phenomenon is well visible when comparing the behavior of two former presidents, Gligorov and Trajkovsky (for more information see Vankovska 2005; Pietz 2006).

¹³ The greatest progress is probably most evident in Croatia.

remains is whether these improvements have been brought about by a purposive and intentional policy of the North Atlantic Alliance, or whether other intervening factors dominated.

4. The motivation for Albania, Croatia and Macedonia to embrace democratic reforms

4.1 Albania

Albania's membership of NATO has had consistently high support among the population as well as among politicians (for more information see Congressional Research Service 2006; The Institute for Democracy and Mediation 2007). According to the current Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, accession to NATO and the EU is the "biggest project of the Albanian nation this century" (Albanian Government 2007). The main goals of the Albanian government such as NATO and EU integration, the strengthening of democracy, the restoration of the rule of law, the elimination of corruption, etc. are often mentioned (Albanian Council of Ministers 2006; 2008a). The democratic character of the state and the rule of law are at the same time conditions of accession to both NATO and the EU.

Albanian political elites have talked rather ambiguously about the necessary reforms to fulfill NATO's democratic standards. Even so, it is still possible to encounter some who point out the connection between such reforms and preparation for accession to NATO. In his speech during the 53rd annual plenary assembly of the NATO parliament, Sali Berisha, for example, underscored Albanian efforts to become a consolidated democracy subject to the rule of law, free elections and an independent judicial system. Implemented or ongoing reforms heading towards this goal will enable the accession of Albania to NATO (Albanian Government 2007). In the National Strategy for Development and Integration, the importance of contacts with Euro-Atlantic partners which help strengthen democracy in Albania is mentioned (Albanian Council of Ministers 2008b: 9).

In other documents, the reforms needed in order to enter NATO are often interpreted as associated with accession to the EU. Those two processes, i.e. integration into NATO and the EU, are viewed as "related and mutually complementary processes" (Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005). It is very hard, if not impossible, to separate reform steps undertaken exclusively for the sake of integration into NATO structures and those which fall under the area of the European Union, as EU and NATO requirements are very similar, if not identical, in terms of the effort to motivate the country to undertake reform steps guaranteeing democracy and stability.

Some of the reforms are nonetheless more often mentioned in terms of accession to the EU. These include the reform of justice and the voting system, the development of the rule of law, the fight against corruption and so on. The reforms accentuated in connection with NATO are rather of a military character. These encompass the reform of the army according to Alliance standards, democratic control over the army, and Albanian contributions to NATO's peacekeeping missions (Albanian Council of Ministers 2006; 2008a).

4. 2 Croatia

One of the main goals of Croatian foreign policy has long been the accession to the North Atlantic Alliance. Croatian political elites repeatedly mention that the process of enlargement of the Alliance isn't related only to the armed forces. Goals shared by the Alliance and Croatia, such as democracy, the rule of law, and protection of the rights of minorities, have also been mentioned (Božinović 2007; Croatian Government 2007). Former Prime Minister Ivo Sander, as well as the then-president, Stjepan Mesić, repeated many times that Croatia was ready to adopt all reforms which would lead to integration into NATO structures. The reform of the armed forces, the consolidation of democratic control over the army, military professionalization, and overall harmonization with NATO standards have been discussed predominantly (Croatian Government 2008; Croatian President 2002). The Alliance itself has emphasized the issue of the return of refugees and reform of the judicial system (Božinović 2007). Here we again encounter a phenomenon similar to that found in the case of Albania, as, when it comes to the reform of the justice system and consolidation of the rule of law, discussion is mainly in connection with the European Union (Croatian Government 2003, Croatian President 2006). In the governmental program for the period of 2003-2007, only accession to the EU, not to NATO, was presented as one of the reasons for reform steps in the area of justice (Croatian Government 2003: 20), irrespective of the fact that a reformed and functioning judiciary is one of the most substantial requirements of NATO.

Croatia nevertheless once again views the process of integration into NATO and the EU as complementary. In speeches by the then-president, Stepan Mesić, and former Prime Minister Sander, the issues of joining NATO and the EU are mostly interlinked (Croatian Government 2007, Croatian President 2007). Moreover, Croatian politicians do not try to hide the fact that they consider accession to NATO as the unofficial first stage of integration into the EU (Croatian Government 2003: 34-35).

For this reason, it is again very difficult to unequivocally assess such reforms – with the exception of reforms concerning the defense sector – as being conducted only for the sake of integrating into NATO.

4. 3 Macedonia

In the case of Macedonia as well, we can find a number of characteristics in common with the two preceding countries. Macedonia equally considers accession to NATO and the EU as priorities of its foreign policy. Macedonia, like Albania and Croatia, considers the processes of integration into these two communities of states as complementary and leading to stability and peace, not only in the Balkans, but also in the whole of Europe (Macedonian Government 2009a). We once again encounter the problem of distinguishing between the reasons for reform efforts, i.e. whether such efforts are driven by the desire to join the EU or by the desire to become a member of NATO.

In the case of Macedonia, we nevertheless find references to reforms which are said to be necessary in order to facilitate accession to NATO in the speeches of the Prime Minister or in the governmental program for 2006-2010. In this program it was stated that to “intensify Macedonia’s integration in NATO, [Macedonia] will continue to strengthen [its] democracy and develop [its] civil society” (Macedonian Government 2006: 19). Even though, in this document, reforms regarding the defense sector predominate in the enumeration of the steps necessary for harmonization with NATO standards, it is also clearly stated that reforms in other areas are indispensable in order to become a NATO member. These encompass the reform of justice and reforms geared toward the prevention of corruption (Macedonian Government 2006: 20).

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski has spoken about the fact that Macedonia has approved and implemented very strict anti-corruption laws and also reformed the army for the sake of easier integration into the North Atlantic Alliance structures (Macedonian Government 2009b).

What remains problematic is the fact that for the sake of accession to the EU, reforms in the same areas are required, which is a logical step in terms of the fact that both organizations promote values such as democracy, the rule of law and respect for the rights of the individual. Even though Macedonian political representatives often mention accession to the Alliance as the reason for such reforms, we cannot say that this is their only reason. Objectively, we have to state that in this area, the situation in Macedonia is again similar to the two preceding states, as we cannot unequivocally state that the wish to join NATO is the only reason for the reforms.

4.4 Overall assessment of NATO's influence on shifts in the quality of democracy in the examined states

To sum up, we can say that in all three states one influential intervening variable has been acting on the process; that is, the European Union. Accession to the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union is viewed as part of the general process of starting to participate in Western structures. NATO as well as the EU are viewed as important institutions in the examined states. This is a situation which also existed during the preceding rounds of enlargement after the end of the Cold War. It is thus very difficult to identify which reform efforts have been motivated by the wish to join NATO (or, alternatively, have been provoked directly by the North Atlantic Alliance) and which have their roots, rather, in the effort to become a member state of the EU. The unequivocal and demonstrable influence of NATO can be identified only when it comes to progress in the reform of the defense sector and civil-military relations.

5. Conclusion

If we sum up all the acquired findings, we can conclude that the North Atlantic Alliance has truly contributed to the democratic stabilization of candidate countries. NATO clearly identified progress towards building a consolidated democracy as a necessary condition for membership in its *Study on NATO Enlargement*. This requirement has also been applied in the case of NATO enlargement with respect to Western Balkan states. The Alliance has used its past historical mechanisms to spread democracy in the cases of these three countries as well, more precisely education and persuasion. Moreover, in the case of Macedonia, NATO conducted three military peace support operations which, besides contributing to the de-escalation of the internal conflict, also helped to establish the conditions needed for consolidating democracy in this country. What is significant is that these three countries considered pressure exerted by the Alliance as legitimate, even though all of them had partial objections in some aspects. The strongest objections came from a part of Croatian society concerning full cooperation in the prosecution of war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and from Macedonia concerning the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. These objections, led by nationalist circles, showed that not all sections of the respective societies were reconciled with the role of NATO, a fact which was also further demonstrated by only half-hearted support for the accession of these countries into NATO.

We nevertheless have no evidence supporting the thesis that the democratic stabilization of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia is continuing thanks only to NATO enlargement policy.

These states have indeed constructed democratic institutions because their governing elites decided to do so and not because NATO wished it so. The North Atlantic Alliance has nevertheless supported in this process all of the pro-Western elites in all three countries analyzed above. The North Atlantic Alliance is viewed as one of the Western institutions into which these countries want to integrate. Preparation for accession into NATO is one side of the 'coin' – accession into the European Union is the other.

In NATO policy, we can certainly identify an effort to contribute to the democratic stabilization of candidate countries. On the one hand, as indicated in this study, the push towards NATO enlargement may not be having as significant an impact on democratization as hoped for by its proponents, who started this process in the mid-'90s. On the other hand, it nevertheless has not had a destructive effect on European security as feared by some of its critics, and the impact of NATO on the consolidation of democratic regimes in candidate countries is by no means marginal.

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