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FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
IN THE CONTEXT OF SOLVING ETHNIC PROBLEMS

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Annotation
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The relevance of the research problem is connected with the political events on the Balkan peninsula, many states of which are either on the way to integration into the European Union and NATO or have already successfully completed this process. The Euro-Atlantic vector of the foreign policy of the Balkan states was chosen by them as a defense against the destructive processes of fragmentation («Balkanization») and ethnopoliticization of interstate relations in the region. The fragmentation of the region was a consequence of the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, which plunged all the former Yugoslav republics into crisis. The aggravation of the political situation in the Balkan region after the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereinafter – SFRY) raised the issue of ethnic and national identity, the severity of which is confirmed by the tragic episodes of hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter – BiH), Croatia, Kosovo. Almost all regional actors considered and continue to consider joining major international organizations, primarily NATO, as a way out of the crisis. However, in order to become a member of the Alliance, each Balkan state had to resolve both internal and external issues, not least related to ethnicity and identity. That is, along with integration processes, there are processes of overcoming interethnic conflicts and democratization of interstate relations in the region. Thus, the ethnic aspect is more or less present in the foreign policy of all post-Yugoslav states. Over the past thirty years, they have carried out democratic transit and resolved controversial issues in different ways, and the «Macedonian case» in this case is of undoubted interest.

The study of the formation of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia (hereinafter referred to as the RNM) is due to the fact that at present this republic is one of the most important (along with Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece) regional actors and a member of NATO with corresponding obligations and rights. Skopje's foreign policy has gone through several stages and is currently stable, with clear goals and prospects. Despite the bloodless exit from the SFRY, ethnic problems in the Macedonian state existed continuously and provoked an acute crisis at the beginning of the XXI century, which somewhat influenced the course of foreign policy.

The issue of self-identification related to the ethnic aspect has become equally urgent and painful for Skopje. And its resolution requires a certain flexibility without harming national interests.

It is also impossible not to emphasize the exceptional position of the Macedonian state in the political space of the region: for a long time (before the declaration of independence of Kosovo) The RNM was the youngest republic, whose statehood originated in 1944. Lacking «experience» and a political and national tradition, Skopje found itself in a more difficult situation than its neighbors after the declaration of independence. This fact undoubtedly influences the formation of the foreign policy doctrine of the Macedonian state and determines the relevance of the study.

Macedonian foreign policy is of particular interest in the context of the presence of the Russian Federation in the Balkan region. Being one of Russia's partners in the Balkans, in particular in the energy sector, North Macedonia is trying to develop bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, which allows us to assume the preservation of a certain balance of power in the region in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration of many post-Yugoslav states. The experience of Russian-Macedonian relations can be extrapolated to the Balkan vector of the Russian Federation's policy as a whole.

In addition, it is necessary to emphasize the multipolar nature of modern international relations, where each region has the potential to become a center of power, and each state – to become a regional leader. In this context, the study of the foreign policy of any post-Yugoslav state seems necessary and relevant.

All of the above increases the relevance of the topic of the dissertation analysis of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The purpose of the dissertation is to identify the influence of the ethnic factor on the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia in the context of global and regional relations.

To achieve the goal, it is necessary to perform the following **research tasks**:

1. To determine the conceptual foundations of the foreign policy of the Macedonian state and the dynamics of their changes.
2. To identify the role of the Western Balkans region as part of the post-Yugoslav space and analyze the impact of the collapse of the SFRY on political processes in the region.
3. To outline the main stages of cooperation of the RNM with Albania, the EU and NATO on the «Albanian issue».
4. Analyze the dynamics of Russian-Macedonian relations in the context of Albanian issues.
5. To assess Skopje's foreign policy in resolving the «name dispute».
6. To identify the role of the Euro-Atlantic direction of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia.
7. To characterize the influence of the Turkish factor on the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia.
8. Analyze the dialogue between Skopje and Sofia in the context of the Macedonian language problem and the prospects for its resolution.
9. Identify the main trends in relations with Serbia.
10. Identify the key concepts of ethnicity and identity and through them analyze the problems of the formation of the Macedonian nation.

The object of study is the foreign policy activity of the Republic of North Macedonia in the period from 1991 to January 2022.

The subject of the study is the evolution of the foreign policy of the RNM under the influence of the ethnic factor in the context of solving domestic political problems.

This research is **theoretically based** mainly on the neorealist and constructivist paradigm. The neorealist concept offers categories of national interest, consistency of international relations and security. In a more specific sense, the study used the concept of neorealism in the version proposed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies.

In this research, the theoretical categories proposed by B. Buzan and O. Weaver are used: regional system, securitization, complexes and subcomplexes of regional security. This theoretical approach interprets the foreign policy of States from the point of view of force, protection of national interests and their own security, which is interrelated with the security of other states. Despite some conservatism of the neorealist paradigm, it is in its mainstream that it is advisable to consider the processes that took place in the Balkan region after the collapse of the SFRY. Instability in the region forced every State, including the Macedonian one, to give priority to issues of security and national interest in its foreign policy.

The analysis of the Macedonian state's political actions aimed at asserting its own identity was based on the paradigm of conventional constructivism proposed and developed by A. Wendt. Consideration of controversial issues of the language and name of the RNM should be carried out through the assimilation of social attitudes created by the Macedonian state and having an intersubjective character. Identity has become the «projection» of these attitudes; as a category of constructivism, it is defined as one of the ideas that form social reality. It is advisable to analyze the process of ethno-politicization of the RNM's interstate relations with Greece and Bulgaria as a process of institutionalization of ideas constructed by the Macedonian state and civil society. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the formed identity is the result of the process of «knowing oneself in relation to another», which is also associated with the above-mentioned process of forming a civil nation in the RNM. We assume that the ethno-politicization of Skopje's foreign policy reached its peak during the period when the Macedonian state achieved a certain ideological stabilization.

It should be emphasized that in the analysis of issues of state interest and security, the neorealist and conventional constructivist approaches are definitely close: the followers of both theoretical schools emphasize the importance of these concepts for understanding the functioning of modern international systems, but look at the nature of these phenomena differently.

The methodological basis of the work is the system theory, according to which the dynamics of the development of the Macedonian state's foreign policy is assessed impartially, taking into account the totality and complexity of socio-political problems. International relations in the Balkan region are presented as a complex interaction of various actors: regional states, supranational and transnational structures.

The principle of scientific objectivity requires comprehensive consideration of the factors determining the foreign policy strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia.

One of the main methods used in the study was the method of analyzing documents, which included international treaties and legislative acts of the Macedonian Government.

The method of intent analysis is of particular importance for the study. An intent analysis of the statements of the main participants in the settlement of controversial issues of Macedonian foreign policy (for example, in the name dispute with Greece) allowed us to draw certain conclusions about the intentions of certain actors.

Historical-descriptive and historical-comparative methods were used in the study. They allow us to form a clear understanding of the main trends of Skopje's foreign policy in the first years of its independent existence, compare foreign policy actions in different periods and form a holistic picture of the processes that took place. The observation method was also used in the study. They allowed us to form an idea of the main trends of Skopje's foreign policy in recent years.

One of the empirical methods involved in the study was the survey method – in the form of interviewing. This method complemented the formation of the overall picture of the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia with the view «from within» of one of the participants in the foreign policy process of the Macedonian state.

As part of the analysis of Skopje's foreign policy, the case study method was also used to study the activities of the Macedonian leadership in overcoming crisis situations in relations with Bulgaria and Greece.

The scientific novelty of the research is determined by its purpose and objectives, and consists in the following:

1. Based on the analysis of the role of the ethnic factor in the foreign policy of Skopje, a specific concept is proposed – the ethnopoliticization of the foreign policy of the RNM. This term, conceptually similar to the concept of ethnopoliticization of the conflict, has not been previously used in domestic political science and primarily characterizes the priority of this aspect of the Macedonian state's foreign policy;

2. It is proved that the ethnic issue and the inextricably linked issue of self-identification are one of the main factors of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia in relation to neighboring countries. It is revealed that the priorities of the foreign policy of the RNM were formed under the influence of threats to the Macedonian ethnicity emanating from other states of the region;

3. As a result of a comprehensive analysis of Macedonian foreign policy, its periodization was proposed, including five stages. Significant events in the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia with the participation of large, extra-regional actors were identified as a criterion for the periodization of foreign policy activities;

4. The external transformation of the macro-regional complex in the Balkans, of which the Republic of North Macedonia is a part, under the influence of the European Union and NATO is justified.

Theoretical significance of the study. The introduction into scientific circulation of the concept of «ethno-politicization of foreign policy», which was not previously used in Russian political science, is a significant theoretical contribution of the dissertation to the development of conceptual ideas about interstate relations in the Balkans. The study proposes and argues for the periodization of the foreign policy of the Macedonian state, and also reveals the determining role of security issues and ethnic identity in the foreign policy of the Balkan states, in particular the Republic of North Macedonia. The priority of security issues in the foreign policy sphere, as shown in the

dissertation, had a decisive impact on the transformation of the regional complex in the Balkans.

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the results of the work in the implementation of activities by public authorities to develop a concept for the development of international cooperation with the States of the Balkan region, in particular, with the Republic of North Macedonia. The conclusions and materials presented in the work can be used both in scientific activities when conducting research on Balkan issues, and in educational – when preparing training courses in the field of regional international relations or specifically in the Balkan region, as well as during lectures and seminars on disciplines related to international relations in the Balkans.