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## **NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY AND RESILIENCE OF THE NORTH MACEDONIA SECURITY SECTOR IN THE ERA OF MODERN SECURITY CHALLENGES\*\*\*\***

**(Translation in *Extenso*)**

### **Abstract**

North Macedonia has become a permanent member of NATO in 2020, in the midst of the global and all-pervading Covid-19 pandemic that

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did not recognize the boundaries between rich and poor, between large, medium and small countries, between strong and weak health systems. Almost all countries were faced with the catastrophic consequences of this pandemic in the field of human security, but also the sustainability of national economies and health systems. On European level, pandemic was followed by the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, but it is a challenge that did not directly threaten the security of North Macedonia or other countries on the European continent. This conflict indirectly threatened the economic and specially the energy security of Europe. Pragmatical purpose of the paper is to find an answer to the following question – to what extent the security system of North Macedonia is prepared, as well as adapted to face modern security challenges, such as these? From theoretical perspective, authors will analyse the capacities of small states using the Republic of North Macedonia as a case study in the context of the possibility of adapting and facing modern security challenges.

**Keywords:** National defence strategy, security system, security challenges, North Macedonia, EU, organized crime, corruption.

## INTRODUCTION

The logic of security is composed of several basic elements, namely danger (what endangers us), the reference object of security (what is threatened), the subject of security and means of security (what protects us). Challenges, risks and threats can be divided into military, political, societal, economic and environmental (Gjurovski, Nikoloski, i Gerasimoski 2020, 12). But, in contemporary circumstances, “it is quite clear that due to the nature, complexity and intensity of security challenges, risks and threats, defence cannot be achieved by engaging only the military, but also other entities of the defense system” (Živanović i Radojević 2024, 179). In this context, it is important to emphasize what Arnold Wolfers said about security, that security does not refer only to the absence of a threat to adopted values, but also to the absence of fear that the values will be threatened (Gjurovski, Nikoloski, i Gerasimoski 2020, 15). When it comes to the perception of security, it is important to point out that the views of the world in

that context can be Hobbesian, Grotian and Kantian. While according to the Hobbesian concept, the world is viewed pessimistically, through the eyes of gladiators, where the rules of the jungle rule, Grotius' view is more pragmatic, because he believes that survival can be ensured through cooperation, and that relations between states can be mutually beneficial, and the Kantian model is idealistic because it assumes that all states are potentially friends which should cooperate to ensure respect for universal values (16).

Authors focus is placed to the national security. In fact, the national security strategy of the security sector of North Macedonia and its resilience in the era of new global and European regional threats. Following the mentioned context this, it is important to stress out that the strategic constant of the Republic of North Macedonia, since its independence, membership in NATO and the EU, and all of this in the function of improving and consolidating security and minimizing threats and risks (Gjurovski, Nikoloski, i Gerasimoski 2020, 20). By resolving the dispute with Greece and the Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria, North Macedonia closed bilateral disputes with its neighbours on the political level and thereby created the conditions for unblocking its Euro-Atlantic integrations in the direction of rounding off the recognition of Macedonian statehood, which a new framework for building and developing neighbourly relations and new perspectives for infrastructural, energy, economic and cultural integration has been set (21). However, according to Interpol Secretary General Jurgen Stock, although North Macedonia is considered a safe country, it should, together with the region, be more careful in dealing with new forms of security threats (Trajkovski 2023). On the same line is the position of the Minister of the Interior of North Macedonia, Oliver Spasovski, who says that current geopolitical events at the global level, supplemented with digitalization and technological development, have shown that the country is faced with sophisticated security challenges that require joint responsibility, a joint approach and united efforts (Trajkovski 2023). In the entire spectrum of contemporary security challenges, in addition to violent extremism, the phenomenon of radicalization is more present in every society, which is increasingly present in the circles of the young population, bearing in mind the fact that the young

population accepts extreme attitudes and ideas, and thus changes its behaviour starting with political activism up to the application of violent means and methods. Therefore, in order to confront and prevent the phenomenon of violent extremism and terrorism, a coordinated approach is needed at the national level through multidisciplinary teams, but also by using regional and international integrations in order to exchange information, for the sake of efficiently and effectively addressing contemporary security challenges that recognize less and less national borders.

## **DEFENCE STRATEGY OF NORTH MACEDONIA**

In the latest Defence Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia, from the perspective of global security environment, it is stressed out that the challenges, risks and threats within the so-called global framework are unpredictable, as well as complex, while, at the same time, rapid and dynamic social, political, economic and technological development and changes in the balance of power have a great impact on current security phenomena. On that basis, it is pointed out that no country can face these issues independently and that is reason why cooperation is necessary in facing common challenges, threats and risks in the direction of providing a collective response (Стратегија за одбрана на Република Северна Македонија [СОPCM] 2020, 3). Frequent natural disasters, technological disasters, epidemics and climate changes make it impossible for any country in the world to be immune to them because they are threats that do not recognize political borders. In the same strategic document, it is emphasized that openness and cooperation between countries contributes to accelerated technological development and increasing the volume of information exchange between security factors at the national, regional and global level, but at the same time it warns that modern technology can be misused to endanger security and stability (4).

Bearing in mind the fact that in the defence strategy of North Macedonia, international cooperation is mentioned as one of the key elements in ensuring national security, it is important to emphasize how small this country is, with limited resources and according to

economic parameters, in the status of a developing country, focused on international cooperation in order to ensure security sustainability at the national level. The Defence Strategy of North Macedonia insists on the cooperation within regional framework, including good-neighbourly relations, as instruments for creation positive impact to the regional security, including the political entities within the region which should be aware about the cooperation interstate well-based relationship placed as a prerequisite for building mutual trust, integration into European and Atlantic governmental organizations, but also in ensuring regional security, followed by stability and economic growth (COPCM 2020, 4).

In the Defence Strategy is explicitly stated that “the security environment has been significantly improved and that good relations have been established with the neighbours, most of which are members of NATO or the EU, have a Euro-Atlantic agenda, or maintain constructive ties with both organizations, and that North Macedonia will continue to continuously invest in Euro-Atlantic security and stability, to build its capacities according to the principle of solidarity, strong transatlantic ties and to adequately share obligations” (COPCM 2020, 4).

The biggest threats to national security for North Macedonia are: “1) Economic and political problems: long-standing problems of insufficient economic growth, corruption, organized crime, insufficiently built institutional capacities, unemployment, shortcomings of the judicial system and politicization of democratic institutions is the main generator of instability in the form of social challenges. Organized crime manifests itself primarily through the illegal trafficking of people and narcotics. Thus, regional security is further threatened due to the presence of illegal weapons and ammunition that are easily accessible to criminal and extremist groups. Energy security is an additional concern given North Macedonia’s dependence on external sources; 2) Foreign intelligence services: their covert activities represent a serious security threat to North Macedonia. Their goal is to delay or prevent North Macedonia’s efforts to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community, especially for full membership in NATO and the EU. Their action is aimed at causing and weakening the political and security determinations and economic

potential of the state, and the erosion of the defence system's capacity; 3) Radicalism and violent extremism: in all its forms (national, political, religious), in certain cases originates as a consequence of historical contradictions and disagreements, and is additionally strengthened by the slow social and economic development of the regions. Non-state actors created with the help of a foreign factor can exploit these weaknesses to cause internal inter-ethnic disagreements and conflicts; 4) Terrorism: terrorism remains a current threat to national security, it is closely related to national and religious extremism in contemporary international relations, and the Republic of North Macedonia is vulnerable to terrorist attacks, but its territory is more likely to be used as a transit corridor for terrorist infiltration towards Western Europe; 5) Illegal migration: it does not represent an immediate threat to the national security of North Macedonia, but it can seriously burden a significant number of state institutions, thereby engaging significant state capacities in the medium and long term, which is in a cause-and-effect relationship with the dynamics of migration and a coordinated response to same; 6) Cyber: the serious potential consequences of a cyber-attack represent a threat to the functioning of critical infrastructure, including those in the security and defence systems of North Macedonia; 7) Natural disasters: we are talking about technical-technological disasters, epidemics and climate changes that belong to the group of indirect and difficult to predict threats, which can cause serious consequences for the national security system; 8) Endangerment and destruction of the environment: this is a security risk that will cause serious state problems in the long term, and at the same time can indirectly threaten the defence system" (COPCM 2020, 5–6).

In the context of so-called traditional threats, this strategic document pointed out that armed aggression as a direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of North Macedonia is minimal, but that the existing differences at the national, religious, ethnic and cultural level in the region are still a challenge which can threaten the safety and security of this country (COPCM 2020, 6).

From the perspective of our analysis, the essence of the problem, is the fact that there are no clear strategic guidelines in this strategic document that would provide an explanation of how North Macedonia

will face current and upcoming security challenges, risks and threats. In fact, the strategy itself, as a national document, does not provide an answer to the question of how to face internal problems, such as corruption, organized crime, insufficiently built institutional capacities, in order to then create a space for providing an answer to the question of how to face modern threats that threaten the national the security of this country. The essential question arising from this strategy is the following: How will the security system of North Macedonia respond and manage current security risks, threats and challenges if internal problems such as corruption, organized crime and weak institutions are phenomena that continue to question functionality of this country.

The internal problem of organized crime, is also widely represented in North Macedonia, and this strategic document does not provide an answer to the question of how to initially deal with organized crime on the internal level, in order to provide a contribution in that domain, and also in regional, European and global frameworks (Jelisavac Trošić i Arnaudov 2024, 441).

This strategic document clearly recognizes, identifies and defines contemporary security risks, threats and challenges faced by North Macedonia, the region, Europe and the world as a whole, but viewed from the perspective of strategic thinking, it is difficult to establish that it is strategy in the textbook sense of the term because this document lacks clear, precise and realistic guidelines that will provide an answer to the question of how to prevent, face and manage risks, threats and challenges. According to the latest report of the Global Peace Index made by the Institute for Economics and Peace, North Macedonia is in 38<sup>th</sup> place, and the report takes into account 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators, among which are the perception of criminality, the rate of murders, violent demonstrations, political instability, the import and export of weapons, the influence of terrorism, as well as the possibility of nuclear and heavy weapons. It is a list of 163 countries and in the region behind North Macedonia is Montenegro in 45<sup>th</sup> place, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 61<sup>st</sup> place and Serbia in 65<sup>th</sup> place (Politika 2023). After these results of the Global Peace Index for 2023, the current Minister of Interior Affairs of North Macedonia also spoke, and pointed out that his country is among the 40 safest countries in the

world, and that this is exceptional progress, considering the fact that the country was in 94<sup>th</sup> place in 2016 (Spasovski 2023).

## **LONG-TERM PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEFENCE CAPACITIES 2023–2032**

Grand strategy generally describes how states see their role in the world, and through which they evaluate the activities of their governments (Dragišić 2021, 38). Long-term plan for the development of defence capacities 2023–2032 is a document that was adopted in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia on April 26, 2023, with the aim of creating the basis for the sustainability of the security system in the coming decade. Leading fundamental imperatives in the case of North Macedonia in the process of continuous, comprehensive and sustainable development is the existence, maintenance and strengthening of the national, defence and security system that enables progress in all spheres of social life. In that direction, towards the creation and development of continuous defence capabilities and capacities for the realization of strategic defence missions, the creation of a document that will establish methods for the development of the defence capabilities of North Macedonia in order to analyse, consider and confirm the defined goals, capabilities and capacities started (*Долгорочен план за развој на одбранбените способности 2023–2032* [ДППОС] 2023, 1). In fact, with the accession of North Macedonia to NATO, this country is included in the defence planning process, as the main process in the development of the Alliance's defence capabilities. Integration in this process implies the explicit fulfilment of assumed obligations as a full member through the fulfilment of the principles of fair and equal burden sharing (Fair Burden Share) and reasonable challenge (Reasonable Challenge) (1).

This document states that North Macedonia is located in an environment characterized by intense geopolitical competition and rivalries of major global powers, in which the Russian Federation is identified as the most direct security threat to European security (ДППОС 2023, 2). Then, that specific relations on the Balkan Peninsula have a direct impact on the overall security mosaic of North Macedonia, and that the security of this country can be directly

threatened as a result of conflicts in the immediate environment, but also regional and global security challenges and wars (2). This document mentions terrorism as a threat, then hybrid threats, and foreign intelligence and propaganda activities, while real internal problems are at the very end. Arnaudov in his recent research explains that “world crises have a strong negative effect on small countries and especially on open economies such as North Macedonia” (Jelisavac Trošić i Arnaudov 2023, 156). The consequences of the crisis caused by the Covid19 virus pandemic have shown how large and significant the impact of a global health crisis is on the security and stability of this country (ДПРОС 2023, 3). In this context, it is important to mention the part of this document that concerns North Macedonia’s membership in NATO: “By joining NATO, the Republic of North Macedonia has moved from a system of individual defence to a system of collective defence”. This represents the biggest gain from joining NATO and it will contribute to the long-term security and stability of the country. As a conscientious and responsible ally, North Macedonia will develop military capacities and capabilities designed to contribute to the collective security system, not neglecting military capabilities for national needs. Towards that goal, within the framework of real economic possibilities, North Macedonia will work maximally and dedicatedly to build mobile, sustainable and adequately equipped units, capable independently, but also in cooperation with allies, to defend the independence and territorial integrity of North Macedonia. Also, North Macedonia will contribute to the defence of allies, participate in international operations and missions and provide support to civil institutions in facing different types of challenges, risks and threats that are not of a military nature (4).

We can conclude that the biggest benefit of joining NATO is the collective defence system, as a mechanism for preserving territorial integrity and sovereignty, while ignoring internal challenges, risks and threats, on the political, economic, financial and institutional level, which may represent the most serious and biggest determinants in to the process of creating a sustainable security mosaic in North Macedonia.

The fact that the institutional sector is a serious challenge for the security system of North Macedonia is also evidenced by the statement

of the current American ambassador to that country, who states that “the citizens of North Macedonia deserve an independent judicial system in which positions are filled with merit and quality and through transparent processes” (Jakimova 2022), and that “in those proceedings there is no room for political interference” (Jakimova 2022), noting that the US has spent millions of dollars on training prosecutors in the judicial system of the Republic of North Macedonia (Jakimova 2022). In addition, the Eurothink survey showed that only eight percent of the citizens of North Macedonia trust the judicial authorities (Jakimova 2022), which is another indicator of the institutional weakness of this country, and thus the threat of the security system as a result of weak institutions.

The fact that corruption is a serious security challenge in North Macedonia is evidenced by the position of this country on the Global Corruption Index, where it is positioned at 85<sup>th</sup> place (Transparency International 2022), which is a lower position compared to ten years ago. In the context of the fight against corruption, it is important to point out that the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption adopted the National Strategy for the Fight against Corruption 2021–2025, but also warned in the same strategy that strong political influence is actually a key challenge in the public sector, in the rule of law and in the low-rate sanctioning of corrupt behaviour (Kramarska 2022). Also, the German ambassador to North Macedonia, Anke Holstein, pointed out that North Macedonia’s progress on the road to the EU will largely depend on the successful suppression of corruption, while her American colleague pointed out that the justice system in North Macedonia needs more investigations and prosecutions in order to show that no one is above the law (Mitevaska 2022).

Viewed from the point of view of the high rate of corruption, which directly affects the effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions, it is difficult to establish that the security system of North Macedonia is sustainable and resilient in facing modern security challenges, especially those that do not belong to the group of traditional security threats. If we go back to the document that we previously analysed, which concerns the long-term plan for the development of defence capabilities in the period 2023–2032, we will find that in this document, very little attention is directed to

national civil resistance capabilities, in terms of institutional capacities and economic resources that would significantly contribute to the sustainability of the security system of North Macedonia in the modern security environment. In fact, the largest part of this document is directed towards the defence system of North Macedonia in the military sense, while ignoring the current security challenges that North Macedonia is facing, which at the same time contribute to the resilience and sustainability of the security system of this country.

## **REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE SECURITY OF NORTH MACEDONIA**

When it comes to the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the report of the European Commission for 2022 states that North Macedonia has fully adapted to the position of the European Union (100% in February 2022, as opposed to 96% in 2021), which clearly confirms strategic orientation of this country towards the EU (European Commission [EC] 2022, 105). In the context of the war on the territory of Ukraine, the report of the European Commission states that North Macedonia has joined the restrictive measures of the EU against Russia and Belarus, and as an example of this, the decision of the Macedonian government to expel eleven Russian diplomats and not to allow the passage of Russians in at least two cases government planes through Macedonian airspace (105–106).

But the same report calls for more effective enforcement of existing laws, instead of launching ad hoc initiatives (Stojančov 2022). When it comes to modern security challenges, it is important to state that in the European Commission's report, in chapter 24, stated that this country is moderately prepared. The Macedonian authorities are required to continue the implementation of the measures taken in the process of suppressing violent extremism and the fight against terrorism, a more systematic approach is required in the management of the migrant crisis, and the state institutions are required to establish appropriate systems for managing irregular movements, but also to stop the practice of returning migrants (EC 2022, 37). More specifically, North Macedonia is required: 1) To continue the implementation of institutional reforms to combat organized crime with a focus on

increasing operational capacities; 2) To continue the implementation of the Joint Action Plan on Counterterrorism for the fight against terrorism with a focus on the prevention of extremism; 3) To improve the migrant registration system and adopt a more systematic approach in the fight against migrant smuggling (37).

On the other hand, when it comes to the fight against organized crime, “North Macedonia has reached a certain level of preparation in the fight against this type of crime” (EC 2022, 38), but that “more needs to be done to improve the efficiency of law enforcement” (38), which relate to the “fight against certain forms of crime, such as money laundering and financial crime” (38). On this occasion, the Macedonian authorities are requested: 1) “To strengthen investigative centers in the Public Prosecutor’s Office in order to increase the efficiency of investigations and improve coordination between the prosecution and the police; 2) To increase experience in investigative procedures, criminal prosecution and conviction of cases of organized crime and money laundering; 3) To prepare the necessary legislation on cyber security in the direction of creating a unified system for combating cybercrime” (38).

In this context, North Macedonia is criticized for the fact that “the measure of confiscation of property acquired through criminal acts is not sufficiently used in criminal proceedings, and the confiscation of property acquired through crime should become a strategic priority in the fight against organized crime, terrorism and corruption at a high level in the country” (EC 2022, 40).

The essence of the problem is that the degree of corruption, but also the all-pervasive role of organized crime on social, political, economic and institutional flows in North Macedonia greatly endangers the security system of this country as a whole, thus first of all making public institutions dysfunctional and inefficient and ineffective for dealing with current security challenges, risks and threats that intertwine from one domain to another in the public life of a system or society.

Probably the phenomena of corruption and organized crime in North Macedonia can best be explained through a realistic approach, bearing in mind the fact that a very little and limited work is being done to curb the above-mentioned phenomena, even though we are writing

about the security issues that greatly threaten the sustainability of the country's security mosaic. It seems, from a realistic point of view, that corruption and organized crime in North Macedonia are not sufficiently perceived as a security challenge that threatens the sustainability of that country, while, on the other hand, it seems that the fight against these phenomena will not change the speed of movement of this country in achieving key foreign policy goals.

### **INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION – IDEAS FOR POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS**

The biggest challenges for the security and defence system of North Macedonia in modern security circumstances are primarily internal risks and threats identified in institutional inefficiency, pervasive corruption and organized crime. From the point of view of traditional threats, such as threats to territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence, North Macedonia was not a threatened country even before its admission to NATO membership, while with its admission to the Alliance and its integration into the largest security and defence bloc established on the principles of collective security, this country additionally strengthened its defence capacities against possible external and “hard” threats. On the other hand, when we talk about modern security threats, such as hybrid threats, which include fake news, political radicalization, extreme activities of small groups, but also health, economic, financial, and natural disasters, we conclude, based on existing analysis and existing data, that the Republic of North Macedonia is a partially threatened country primarily due to internal factors that directly and indirectly affect the security system of this country, i.e. dealing with modern security challenges.

In order to have a clear picture of the vulnerability of North Macedonia due to modern security threats, we must first state the internal problems that this country is facing. The internal problems are: high rate of corruption, pervasive organized crime, political instability and corruption, high rate of poverty in society. In fact, we are talking about determinants that have a pervasive effect on the entire institutional infrastructure in North Macedonia, and thus on the security sectors. Why is this? Because the mentioned internal challenges,

primarily organized crime, corruption and political instability, threaten the functioning of the system, because corruption makes institutions weak and vulnerable; organized crime, makes institutions less independent and financially vulnerable; while, political instability and corruption make the entire institutional infrastructure of this country unstable, without concise and strategic enforceable decisions, and makes them an instrument in the hands of political elites. The high rate of poverty is a decades-long problem that has caused the phenomenon of mass emigration of the young, educated population with professional qualifications. One such negative trend additionally destroys the institutional infrastructure of North Macedonia, because in the labour market is a deficit of young, qualified and professional workforce, which in the medium and long term threatens, from this point of view, the institutional sustainability of this country, and in the short term makes it an instrument in the hands of political elite in order to satisfy business and professional ambitions and goals of party cadres. Those are internal challenges and problems faced by North Macedonia, which directly contribute to the country's vulnerability, but also indirectly due to modern security challenges that the country's system is not ready to face. In essence, it is a phenomenon of a cause-and-effect relationship of challenges, problems and risks that exists in North Macedonia, and which is currently doubly threatening this country and makes its security system vulnerable, not resilient, and therefore not sustainable.

From the point of view of membership in NATO, without diminishing the importance of this realized strategic and foreign policy goal, the Covid-19 health pandemic showed how dangerous internal institutional problems are in the process of creating a sustainable system in North Macedonia, despite the strong support that this country received during pandemic by allied countries. The pandemic has shown that no collective system of defence and security, especially when it comes to modern security challenges, such as Covid-19, can play an efficient and effective role in facing the challenges and overcoming the consequences if the national institutional system is vulnerable, not ready and susceptible to internal problems. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the sustainability, resilience, efficiency and effectiveness of the security and defence system of North Macedonia is not achieved according to the automatic model by the act

of membership in the collective security and defence system, nor by the formal adoption of strategic and long-term documents concerning security and defence, but rather above all, by providing independent, autonomous and professional institutional capacities that continuously work on the analysis of modern security risks, challenges and threats, that continuously, according to an independent but also collective model, determine which factors directly and indirectly threaten the national security of North Macedonia and which are freed, protected and secured from any threatening internal factors, such as corruption, organized crime and political instability, which is still a negative trend in this country.

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## **СТРАТЕГИЈА НАЦИОНАЛНЕ ОДБРАНЕ И ОТПОРНОСТ БЕЗБЕДНОСНОГ СЕКТОРА СЕВЕРНЕ МАКЕДОНИЈЕ У ДОБА САВРЕМЕНИХ БЕЗБЕДНОСНИХ ИЗАЗОВА\*\*\*\***

### **Резиме**

Безбедносно-одбрамбени систем Северне Македоније у савременим безбедносним околностима се суочава са унутрашњим ризицима и претњама идентификованим у институционалној неефикасности, због слабих економских капацитета, распрострањене корупције и организованог криминала у овој земљи. Посматрано са становишта такозваних традиционалних претњи, као што су претње територијалном интегритету, суверенитету и политичкој независности, Северна Македонија није била угрожена земља ни пре пријема у чланство НАТО,

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док је пријемом ова земља додатно ојачала своје одбрамбене капацитете од могућих спољних и „тврдих” претњи. Што се тиче савремених безбедносних претњи, као што су хибридне претње, које укључују лажне вести, политичку радикализацију, екстремне активности малих група, али и претње као што су здравствене, економске и финансијске, као и природне катастрофе, на основу постојећих анализа и постојећих података, можемо тврдити да је Република Северна Македонија делимично угрожена држава првенствено због унутрашњих фактора који директно и индиректно утичу на безбедносни систем ове земље, односно савладавање савремених и актуелних безбедносних изазова. Унутрашњи проблеми са којима се ова држава суочава су: висока стопа корупције, распрострањени организовани криминал, политичка нестабилност и корупција, висока стопа сиромаштва у друштву. У ствари, реч је о детерминантама које имају продоран утицај на целокупну институционалну инфраструктуру у Северној Македонији, а самим тим и на сектор безбедности. Ти унутрашњи изазови, пре свега организовани криминал, корупција и политичка нестабилност угрожавају функционисање система, јер корупција чини институције slabим и рањивим, организовани криминал, с друге стране, чини институције несамосталним и финансијски рањивим, а треће, политичка нестабилност и корупција чине читаву институционалну инфраструктуру ове земље нестабилном, без концизних и стратешки спроводљивих одлука, и чине их инструментом у рукама политичких елите. Затим, висока стопа сиромаштва је вишедеценијски проблем који је проузроковао појаву масовне емиграције младог, образованог становништва са професионалним и стручним квалификацијама у Северној Македонији. Један такав тренд додатно уништава институционалну инфраструктуру Северне Македоније, јер на тржишту рада ове земље постоји дефицит младе, квалификоване и стручне радне снаге, што на средњи и дуги рок угрожава, са ове тачке гледишта, институционалну одрживост ове земље и краткорочно је чини инструментом у рукама политичке елите за задовољење пословних и професионалних амбиција и циљева партијских кадрова. Унутрашњи изазови директно доприносе рањивости земље на савремене безбедносне изазова

са којима систем земље није спреман да се суочи. Стога је важно нагласити да се одрживост, отпорност, ефикасност и ефективност безбедносно-одбрамбеног система Северне Македоније не постиже по аутоматском моделу чином чланства у систему колективне безбедности и одбране НАТО, нити формалним доношењем стратешких и дугорочних докумената из области безбедности и одбране, већ пре свега обезбеђивањем независних, самосталних и стручних институционалних капацитета који континуирано раде на анализи савремених безбедносних ризика, изазове и претњи, који континуирано, по независном али и колективном моделу, одређују који фактори директно и индиректно угрожавају националну безбедност Северне Македоније и који су ослобођени, заштићени и обезбеђени од било каквих негативних унутрашњих фактора, као што су корупција, организовани криминал и политичке нестабилности.

**Кључне речи:** Стратегија националне одбране, безбедносни систем, безбедносни изазови, Северна Македонија, ЕУ, организовани криминал, корупција.

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