
Interview: Kiro Gligorov

Recognition of Macedonia is key to peace in the Balkans and Europe

Kiro Gligorov is the President of the Republic of Macedonia. He spoke with EIR's Umberto Pascali on Feb. 13 and 18.

In a speech on Jan. 25 during a visit to the United States, the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, explained to a North American audience, in an original way, why Federal Yugoslavia couldn't work. He said: "First, I would like to address the original 'six pack' idea of banding six Slavic republics together in one federation. It was a noble idea. But it has proved unnatural. A 'six pack' can work if all the elements are similar—Coca Cola for instance. But in the six pack of Yugoslavia there was Coke, 7-UP, Budweiser, oil, water, and, in Macedonia's case, a . . . very fine red wine. . . . If you can cease using the name Soviet Union, likewise you can convert away from 'Yugoslavia.' "

Despite the fact that Macedonia on Jan. 15 met the criteria for recognition set by the European Community (EC), the republic was not recognized, as were Slovenia and Croatia. A fourth republic that had applied for recognition, Bosnia-Herzegovina, was also rejected. In the case of Macedonia, the EC stated that they were in favor of recognition, but there is strong opposition from Greece. The EC has postponed any decision until March 2, but Bulgaria, Turkey, Slovenia, and Croatia have officially recognized the independence of the republic.

This delay was denounced by the Schiller Institute as "cynical, deeply unjust, and dangerous," in a "Call For the Immediate Recognition of the Republic of Macedonia" issued on Feb. 13 by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, chairman of the Schiller Institute for Germany.

The statement reads in part: "Despite the recognition by the European Community and a large part of the world's nations of the republics of Slovenia and Croatia, the principle of independence and self-determination is still being applied selectively. . . . At the same time, the arrogant refusal by the Bush administration to recognize Slovenia and Croatia is the main cause for the continuation of the war of aggression against Croatia and risks making the Republic of Macedonia the next victim of the 'Greater Serbians.' This could trigger the explosion of southeast Europe and the Balkans. The principles of self-determination, independence, and sovereignty are indivisible and universal. . . .

"The Republic of Macedonia must be recognized within

its existing borders without any illegitimate condition and without any delay. . . . The Republic of Macedonia is part of Europe and must be given every chance to implement its economic integration with the rest of the continent. Macedonia must be given every chance to be integrated into the European 'Productive Triangle' proposed by the economist Lyndon LaRouche and must be offered an adequate program of investments and infrastructural projects."

President Gligorov explained the fears and the hopes of a country that has too often been a victim of the appetites of imperial or proto-imperial formations, from the Ottoman to the British empires. Kiro Gligorov is not a "newcomer"; he has been one of the leading figures in Yugoslavian politics for 40 years. But when Federal Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, he took a clear-cut position in favor of the independence of the republics and was elected, by a large margin, as President of the new Macedonia. Born in 1917, Gligorov has personal experience with the "Versailles system." When asked: "Do you think that that system is over?" he answered, "Absolutely!"

Recognition of Macedonia, Gligorov stressed, is not just a favor to Macedonia, it's a necessity if the world wants a stable Balkan region. "The essence of the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and in part even World War I and World War II, was the division of Macedonia. A result of this was the Bucharest Treaty in 1913 and the Peace Conference in Paris at the end of World War I. Because of these historical precedents, we state that the independence and sovereignty of Macedonia will mean peace in the Balkans, because the aspiration to conquer Macedonia will cease. Given our geographical position, Macedonia could be the key factor of collaboration among the countries of the Balkans. Vice-versa, if the issue of recognition remains open, we will see again emerging various appetites—and there are forces, extremists, in several countries that think in this way—forces which may think that if Macedonia cannot acquire independence, then it could be the object of another division."

In 1913, Macedonia was divided into three parts. The major portion went to Greece; the other two were taken by Serbia and Bulgaria. Recently, in order "to allay Greek fears that Macedonia will have territorial claims and also to show good will, we have adopted two amendments to the Constitution in which it is explicitly said that Macedonia has no

territorial claims," Gligorov said.

Gligorov stresses that the position of Greece "is strange enough in itself: How can a small country without an army, endanger a greater country, a member of NATO, and of the European Community? But you know that in political life there are emotions and irrational situations. And if we can, we want to help calm down these emotions. There is no reason for Greece to feel threatened by Macedonia. We expect that they, as neighbors, will help us in getting our independence. These are two close nations with the same faith and customs. . . . This becomes a great moral issue for the EC, which has set conditions that we fully satisfied, and now does not respect its own decision. The EC should help to reassure Greece."

'We want peace and prosperity'

One point hammered home again and again by President Gligorov: "We wish only to become a hub of peace and economic prosperity in a region of the world that has too long been afflicted by poverty and strife. We have a vision of a Balkan region of independent states and mutual respect among neighbors." Instead, Macedonia is still the victim of the continuing embargo imposed by the United States against the whole of the former Yugoslavia.

The Serbian war against Croatia, and the war economy, has provoked a brutal hyperinflation. Says Gligorov: "Because most of our trading routes were through ports in the north—our exports cannot get out and imports cannot get in. We have had no milk for more than two months and many factories are closed for lack of parts and materials; unemployment is rising."

But there is no support for any real program of development from the West. "In many respects we have to swim through a transition from communism to democracy with both hands tied behind our back." Macedonia needs huge investments. Macedonia looks first of all to the European Community, which it wants to join. The only other apparent source of investments are the sadly famous World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

"What the countries seeking independence need are deep structural changes. First of all, infrastructure that will create the conditions for further development. These countries need a system of transportation and communication, without which we cannot communicate on an equal base. And thus we need the large financial institutions," Gligorov said.

At this point, the conflict between the desire to join the West and desire for economic development becomes overwhelming. Says Gligorov: "It is true, countries are granted loans with conditionalities, which makes it very difficult to repay them. Countries accept these conditions because they need development. But the conditions imposed for loans must be much more advantageous. The debt issue must be solved as soon as possible, so that these debtor countries become creditworthy."

'Productive Triangle' needed

This is the contradiction which Macedonia and other countries in the Third World and in the former Soviet bloc are facing. Macedonia wants to abandon the communist economic system, but, in fact, it is made impossible for it to join the West and keep alive its hopes for development at the same time. This is why Gligorov considers the "Productive Triangle" proposal of Lyndon LaRouche as extremely important.

"This is a really interesting idea, because now the EC is facing the gigantic task of how to carry out the transformation of the eastern European countries. Without such a triangle, it is very hard to conceive how the task can be accomplished. The crisis is here, and I do not see any other adequate proposal which can get us out of the crisis. The same approach should be used for Africa and other regions of the world.

"Once we have gained experience of how to do this, the program can be spread to other regions. This is a good idea. The 'poles of development' is a valid concept. I think this can be broadened. For example, considering the position Macedonia has in the Balkans, the country could be a pole of development in the region, in connection with the major pole of the Triangle."

On this and other issues, Gligorov called for closer cooperation with the Schiller Institute, which he thanked for its "extraordinary initiatives and honorable support. . . . We are a small nation and we are one of the oldest nations in Europe, which unfortunately only now, with Slovenia and Croatia, shall acquire its independence and sovereignty. Because of that, the support of the Schiller Institute is highly appreciated."

On Feb. 4, the Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church approved a document considered by many observers as very polemical against the Vatican, the Pope, and the Republic of Macedonia. According to these observers, one of the reasons for the polemic was the decision by Pope John Paul II on New Year's Day to revive the tradition of delivering the traditional New Year greetings in the Macedonian language and languages of other countries where Uniate Churches are present, i.e., Roman Catholic Churches of Oriental rite. The Uniate tradition is part of the heritage of the Council of Florence, when the Oriental and Western Churches were unified.

"As is known, we are of the Orthodox faith, the same as the Greeks, and I do not see why there should be any difference among us," Gligorov commented. "The polemics are obviously political. It is not a religious approach. I should stress that we have a good relation with the Vatican simply because we celebrate together Saints Cyril and Methodius and their role. Macedonia is the country where the Slavs were first Christianized. Here, the Slavic alphabet started. At that time the Church was not divided between East and West. There exists this common uniatic tradition. So that does not mean any special ties to the Vatican or something peculiar in respect to the Greek Church. Simply, this is history."