




## **Weekly Briefing**

**North Macedonia external relations briefing:  
Macedonian President amongst nine other CEEC Presidents who  
accept Ukraine's request for NATO membership**  
**Gjorgjioska Marija Adela**

### **China-CEE Institute**

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.  
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin  
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 [office@china-cee.eu](mailto:office@china-cee.eu)

 [china-cee.eu](http://china-cee.eu)

## **Macedonian President amongst nine other CEEC Presidents who accept Ukraine's request for NATO membership**

### **Summary**

*At the end of September, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that Ukraine is officially applying for membership in the NATO Alliance. Although NATO is heavily involved in the war already, Ukraine's official NATO membership would mean an obligation for the Alliance to defend the country. And there is hardly a consensus amongst the NATO-members on this issue. In fact, so far only nine countries have accepted Ukraine's request for NATO membership - one of them is also NATO's latest member-state - N. Macedonia.*

On September 30th, Vladimir Putin announced that Russia will sign the treaties on the accession of the Donetsk People's Republic, Lugansk People's Republic, the Zaporozhye Region and the Kherson Region to the Russian Federation. The move followed after the referendums carried out over five days in these regions. On the same day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that Ukraine is officially applying for membership in the NATO Alliance. "We trust each other, we help each other, and we protect each other. This is the alliance. De facto. Today, Ukraine is applying to make it de jure," Zelenskyy said upon giving the announcement.<sup>1</sup>

The response from the Alliance was lukewarm - as a NATO member, fellow members would be compelled to actively defend Ukraine against Russia – a commitment that goes well beyond the supply of weapons and on which there is hardly a consensus inside the Alliance. Indeed, this became apparent from two statements made by NATO's Secretary General Stoltenberg in response to Ukraine's bid for membership in the Alliance: The first sentence was: "NATO is not party to the conflict." The second sentence was "We support Ukraine's right to choose its own path, to decide what kind of security arrangements it wants to be part of. Then, a decision on membership, of course, must be taken by all 30 allies and we take these

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<sup>1</sup> Ukraine applies for Nato membership after Russia annexes territory, published on 30.09.2022, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/30/ukraine-applies-for-nato-membership-after-russia-annexes-territory> accessed on 15.09.2022

decisions by consensus.”<sup>2</sup> These two sentences alone make it clear that Stoltenberg’s and NATO’s answer to Ukraine was “no”.

However, nine NATO-member states did support Ukraine’s bid. Amongst them was also N. Macedonia, the 30th and latest NATO-member state. On the 2nd of October nine NATO-member states issued a Joint statement titled: Joint “Statement of Presidents of Central and Eastern European NATO Member States on Russian attempts to illegally annex Ukrainian territories”<sup>3</sup> In it, the Presidents of the nine countries reiterated their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. They further stated that they do not recognize and will never recognize Russian attempts to annex any Ukrainian territory. “We support Ukraine in its defense against Russia’s invasion, demand Russia to immediately withdraw from all the occupied territories and encourage all Allies to substantially increase their military aid to Ukraine,” they underline. On the issue of Ukraine’s NATO membership they emphasize: “We firmly stand behind the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit decision concerning Ukraine’s future membership.” The statement was signed by Stevo Pendarovski, President of the Republic of N. Macedonia. It was also signed by the Presidents of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Montenegro, the Republic of Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic.

The statement comes as no surprise in view of the line followed by the Macedonian Government towards the war in Ukraine. Only 1 month earlier, media reports revealed that Macedonia had sent military jets to Ukraine. A new image, taken from the military section of the airport in the capital, Skopje, uploaded on Google earth in August, shows four jets missing from the spot where they were kept for ten years. The jets had been decommissioned from active service but kept in a conserved state for possible future use.<sup>4</sup> They had been sitting there at least since 2012. The Defence Ministry neither confirmed nor denied reports that the planes

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Membership in the alliance requires the unanimous support of all its 30 members, and there is no fast-track procedure.

<sup>3</sup> Joint statement of Presidents of Central and Eastern European NATO Member States on Russian attempts to illegally annex Ukrainian territories, published on 02.10.2022, available at [https://pretsedatel.mk/en/izjava\\_02102022-2/](https://pretsedatel.mk/en/izjava_02102022-2/), accessed on 17.10.2022

<sup>4</sup> North Macedonia Sent Jets to Ukraine, Footage Suggests, published on 05.09.2022, available at <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/09/05/north-macedonia-sent-jets-to-ukraine-footage-suggests/> accessed on 17.09.2022

had been sent to Ukraine. However, the Government's past record leaves no space for doubts that this is the case. Previously in July the Ministry of Defence confirmed that it had sent 30 Soviet-era T-72 tanks to Ukraine, after photo and video footage of them being transported out of the country was leaked on social media. These reports are consistent with statements made by the Ministry since the start of the Special Military Operation when the Government confirmed its readiness to donate military material and equipment to Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> On the 15th of August Defence Minister Slavjanka Petrovska reiterated this position once again: "The government considered that in conditions when another sovereign and independent state is attacked, we should help, guided by the general principles of independence. For those reasons, we made the decision to provide military support to Ukraine, in equipment, because Ukraine is the country that was attacked," Petrovska said and added that the Government had thus far made three decisions on donations to Ukraine, without confirming what exactly is being donated. Similarly to the Minister of Defence, President Pendarovski has repeatedly boasted about such donations: "Relative to our capacities and size, we belong to the group of countries that have helped Ukraine the most in its defense against aggression. We did that not only because we are a member of NATO, but because we believe in the principles of international law, which does not allow military aggression by one country against another" - said Pendarovski. On the same occasion he added that "NATO membership is the biggest stabilizing factor in the region and beyond".<sup>6</sup>

The most ardent opposition to these moves came from the political party "Levica", which has held a consistent anti-NATO position since its founding. According to them almost a third of all the army's tanks had been donated to Ukraine. They criticized the move for "weakening the defense capacities of the Republic of Macedonia" but also for "putting the Macedonians at greater risk" by making the country complicit in the conflict. "We remind you that fighter planes were previously donated for the needs of the Ukrainian Air Force, and that Ukrainian citizens with the insignia of the Nazi Azov Battalion were present at the military installations of the

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<sup>5</sup> North Macedonia to donate military equipment to Ukraine, published on 01.03.2022, available at

[https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/north-macedonia-to-donate-military-equipment-to-ukraine/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/north-macedonia-to-donate-military-equipment-to-ukraine/), accessed on 19.09.2022

<sup>6</sup> Pendarovski: The war in Ukraine brought an energy crisis and security challenges, published on 25.09.2022, available at

<https://novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/pendarovski-vojnata-vo-ukraina-donese-energetska-kriza-i-bezbednosni-predizvici/> accessed on 15.10.2022

Macedonian Army (ARM). T-72 tanks are a key part of the ARM's ground forces and have been of great importance in anti-terrorist operations since 2001,” their statement on the donations underlined. They further added: “From a humanitarian point of view, such shipments will only prolong the agony of the ordinary Ukrainian, without changing the final outcome of the special military operation. A large part of the weapons will end up on the black market, consequently this only means more banditry, suffering and death for Ukrainians, but also a threat to the security of the entire region.”<sup>7</sup>

The Joint Statement in which President Pendarovski offered his support to Ukraine’s request for NATO membership came as no surprise to the Macedonian public. They have long become used to perceiving their political leaders as inanimate and grotesque puppets, whose only role is to follow the instructions given to them by their puppet masters in Brussels or Washington. Oftentimes however they take steps which exceed the requests of their masters, and result in acts that can best be described by the phrase “acting more catholic than the Pope”. Although comical, this phenomenon also reflects the manifestation of euro-atlantic extremism in CEEC, as a by-product of the internalization of the NATO ideology amongst the political establishment in some of these countries.

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<sup>7</sup> Almost a third of ARM tanks donated to Ukraine, published on 29.07.2022, available at <https://levica.mk/2022/07/29/skoro-edna-tretina-od-tenkovite-na-arm-pokloneti-na-ukraina/> accessed on 05.09.2022