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Macedonia: European Powder Keg

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The Balkans is a region known to be a European powder keg. The events in Macedonia prove that. One should see what is happening there through the prism of US Balkans policy. One of the goals is to prevent the construction of Turkish Stream.

American energy companies want Europe to get gas from Azerbaijan, not Russia. If it's not enough, it can launch shale gas extraction projects with US help. The United States has started exploration works and it has know-how. But what is strange, the US estimates happened to be many times higher than proven reserves. They gave Europeans a hope but the real picture is not

that rosy. The US has problems with starting production because Europe has enforced rigid ecological requirements.

With the South Stream pipeline project cancelled and the Turkish Stream on the way Macedonia becomes a key country on the route. The current government headed by Nikola Gruevski welcomes the plans to build the pipeline. But Zoran Zaev, his opponent who organized the Macedonian Maidan, is certain to refuse the participation in Turkish Stream. He is known as a staunch ally of the United States. Zaev is openly supported by Jess Baily (1), the US ambassador to Macedonia, who has publicly accused Gruevski of «unacceptable behavior».



In February Zaev launched a campaign to discredit the Macedonian government. It would be interesting to know how Zaev & Co got the information used for the purpose. For instance, Arab dissidents in Tunisia, Egypt and Iran used gratuitously the Onion Router software invented in Massachusetts. (2) Did the Macedonian opposition do it on its own? Was it done without US help? In any event, ambassador Baily doubts the allegiance of Macedonian government to the principles of democracy and values of Euro-Atlantic community. (3) The opposition media outlets say Nikola Gruevski turned Macedonia into a dictatorship like... North Korea. (4) They accused the government of nothing less than orchestrating the police action in Kumanovo when 8 policemen and 14 terrorists died. The government allegedly paid for the provocation.



It's not a surprise that this version of events is strongly supported by Albanians living in Macedonia. And not them only. German Social Democrat Walter Kolbow, former Parliamentary State Secretary (1998-2005) in the Federal Ministry of Defense and the current chairman of the German-Macedonian Association, (5) also supports this view.

The National Liberation Army (NLA) has claimed responsibility for the attack in Kumanovo. The organization is the Macedonian branch of Kosovo Liberation Army. The NLA has recently proclaimed the so-called "Republic of Ilirida", an Albanian 'independent republic' it wants to be internationally recognized.

Walter Kolbow believes «the safety device» has burnt in Macedonia and the situation poses a threat to the whole region. According to him, the way to keep the threat away is to dismiss Gruevski and hold snap election. This is a classic scenario «to overthrow an authoritarian regime» described by Gene Sharp, a retired professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts known for his extensive writings on nonviolent struggle, which have influenced numerous anti-government resistance movements around the world.

Western media does its best to turn a blind eye on ethnic issues. It says Macedonians and Albanians join together in an effort to overthrow the corrupt regime. James Ker-Lindsay, Senior Research Fellow focusing on the Politics and International Relations of South East Europe at the London School of Economics and Political Science, says this is not a conflict on ethnic ground. The German Foreign Ministry offers a more sober assessment of the situation. On May 20, Frank-Walter Steinmeier met his counterpart Ditmir Bushati in Berlin saying he expects situation in Macedonia to normalize and not to create a conflict that would lead to an open confrontation between ethnic communities or regional conflict. (6) German diplomats should remember well the history of inter-ethnic strife in the Balkans.

The crisis in Macedonia is complicated enough but, whatever its origins are, it poses a threat to European security. There is a new hot spot on the European map. Austrian Wirtschaftsblatt believes that Macedonia has become more important than Ukraine. (7) Sounds ridiculous! It is tantamount to comparing acts of God. What's more damaging: an earthquake, a typhoon or

tsunami?

(1) Before his appointment as ambassador to Macedonia Jess Lippincott Baily, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, has served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Ankara, Turkey (2011-2014) and Director, Office of Southeast European Affairs (2010-2011).

(2) www.necn.com/01/30/11

(3) Schwere Regierungskrise in Mazedonien/ Tagesschau, 05. 13. 2015.

(4) Gruevski Turns Macedonia into North Korea (Груевски превърна Македония в Северна Корея), Trud, 05. 18. 2015.

(5) Saarbrücker Zeitung, 05. 19.2015.

(6) Reuters, 05. 20.2015.

(7) Wirtschaftsblatt. Mazedonien ist jetzt wichtiger als die Ukraine, 05. 19.2015.