

Macedonia's Name: Breaking the Deadlock

I. OVERVIEW

Macedonia is a relative success story in a region scarred by unresolved statehood and territory issues. International engagement has, since the 2001 conflict with an ethnic Albanian insurgency, brought progress in integrating Albanians into political life. This has been underpinned by the promise of European Union (EU) and NATO integration, goals that unite ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. But the main NATO/EU strategy for stabilising Macedonia and the region via enlargement was derailed in 2008 by the dispute with Greece over the country's name. Athens claims that, by calling itself "Macedonia", it appropriates part of the Hellenic heritage and implies a claim against Greece's northern province. At summits it blocked Macedonian membership in NATO and EU accession talks until the issue is settled. Mystifying to outsiders, the dispute touches existential nerves, especially in Macedonia, and has serious regional implications. The parties need to rebuild trust; member states need to press both to compromise, especially Greece to respect its commitment not to block Skopje in international organisations.

Efforts to overcome the name dispute through negotiations under UN auspices have been fruitless for well over a decade. Crisis Group argued in a December 2001 report that resolving the issue was vital in order to bolster Macedonians' fragile sense of identity, which is challenged by three neighbours: Greece, which disputes the country's name; Bulgaria, which has questioned the existence of a Macedonian nation or language; and Serbia, which denies the autonomy of its church. Macedonians' sense of identity has been further challenged by the necessary concessions they have made to their compatriots pursuant to the Ohrid Framework Agreement that ended the 2001 conflict. These seek to turn the country into a "civic state", by bolstering the rights of the Albanian and other ethnic minorities, but they also dilute its essence as the homeland of the Macedonian people.

In 2001 Crisis Group suggested a compromise, under which the name "Republika Makedonija", in Macedonian, would be used by the UN and all other international organisations and be acknowledged by NATO and EU member states and others. Today Greece has

upped the ante at NATO and in the EU. Macedonia was granted the status of an EU candidate in 2005 but no date for the start of accession negotiations. By 2008 it had fulfilled the criteria for entering NATO but was not issued a membership invitation. Apart from Greece's threat over the name issue, the opening of EU accession talks is also delayed by the country's failure to meet benchmarks set by the European Commission. Notably, serious shortcomings that came to light in the June 2008 elections will need to be addressed in elections in 2009.

Despite considerable progress, Ohrid has not been fully implemented. Inter-ethnic tensions and a risk of instability remain. The regional environment is fragile, and the potential for Kosovo to have a destabilising influence on Macedonia, as it did in 2001, continues. An indefinite delay to NATO and EU integration could undermine what has been achieved in stabilising the country, with consequences that would be particularly harmful not least for Greece itself. The name dispute is more than a bilateral issue between Skopje and Athens. It risks derailing the main strategy of both NATO and the EU for stabilising Macedonia and the region through enlargement and integration. Member states should not allow the organisations' credibility to fall victim to an intractable dispute involving one of their fellow members.

At NATO's April 2008 Bucharest summit, Skopje signalled its readiness to compromise on the name of the country. However, a combination of moves by both sides has poisoned the environment in which talks are being conducted to such an extent that the two countries are further apart than at any time since the early 1990s. Macedonia's decision in 2007 to re-name the Skopje airport after Alexander the Great seemed calculated to provoke Greek sensitivities over the Hellenic heritage. By blocking Macedonia's NATO and EU integration, Greece appeared to contravene its undertaking in the 1995 Interim Accord not to let the name issue stand in the way of the country's membership in international organisations. The fact that other NATO and EU members allowed that to happen undermined Macedonian faith in international goodwill.

In order to rebuild trust and finally resolve the name dispute, the following steps should be taken:

- ❑ Skopje should reverse its decision to rename its airport after Alexander the Great and desist from similar moves certain to provoke Athens;
- ❑ Skopje and Athens should jointly examine the common history of the region, with a view to avoiding references in their respective educational curricula that offend the other's national sensitivities;
- ❑ both sides should reaffirm their commitment to the Interim Accord, and pending agreement on the name, Skopje should use only the provisional form "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in all multilateral organisations, while Athens should drop its veto threats at NATO and the EU;
- ❑ Skopje should publicly state its readiness to accept the latest proposal of the UN mediator that "Republic of North Macedonia" be the name for all international purposes;
- ❑ Athens should respond by acknowledging the national identity and language of its northern neighbour as "Macedonian" and accepting Skopje's assurance that use of that adjective does not imply any exclusivity or territorial claim over the northern Greek province of Macedonia; and
- ❑ other NATO and EU member states should actively encourage Athens to unblock Macedonia's integration into both organisations and to respond positively to Skopje's concessions on the country's name.

II. THE ISSUE

Macedonia's dispute with Greece over its name has continued throughout the seventeen years since independence.¹ Recognition by EU member states was held up in January 1992, when the independence of Slovenia and Croatia was recognised, due to Athens's objection that the country had appropriated a name and symbols that it regarded as exclusively Hellenic and its claims that Skopje harboured irredentist ambitions towards northern Greece.² As a temporary solu-

¹ See Crisis Group Europe Report N°122, *Macedonia's Name: Why the Dispute Matters and How to Resolve It*, 10 December 2001, which contains extensive background on the origins and history of the name dispute.

² This was despite the finding of the EU's own advisory body on legal issues arising out of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Arbitration Commission under Robert Badinter, that Macedonia, having renounced all territorial claims, had met the conditions for recognition. "Opinion No. 6 on the recognition of Macedonia", Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, 11 January 1992.

tion, Macedonia was admitted to the UN in April 1993 under the provisional name, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia."³ To the incomprehension of most outsiders, the dispute has defied all attempts to resolve it ever since.

A. ORIGINS OF THE DISPUTE

There are several aspects to the dispute. Broadly, its origins lie in the differing perspectives on the history of the region and challenges which both nations perceive to their respective identities. The history question goes back to the era of Alexander the Great, centuries before Slavs arrived in the Balkans. The use by Macedonia of symbols from the classical period, identifying the modern state with Alexander, is widely seen by Greeks as an offensive appropriation of the Hellenic heritage. Macedonia's initial adoption of a flag featuring the ancient Macedonian "Star of Vergina" motif particularly grated in Greece.

The dispute over the modern Macedonian identity is much more recent in origin. In the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, Macedonia was divided among Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia. The share that went to Serbia, and then Yugoslavia, comprised, roughly, the territory of the modern republic. Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs were united in denying the existence of a distinct Macedonian nation. In their three countries, policies on education, language and surnames sought to eradicate any sense of a separate Macedonian people. In post-1945 communist Yugoslavia, this was reversed. The creation of a separate Macedonian republic within Yugoslavia strengthened the sense of a distinct Macedonian identity in the face of Bulgarian and Greek challenges.

Serbs generally accepted the existence of a Macedonian nation, rather than seeing Macedonians simply as southern Serbs, although the Serbian Orthodox Church's denial of the existence of a separate, autocephalous Macedonian Church continues to strain relations from time to time. Following Macedonia's independence, Bulgaria recognised the state, but not a distinct Macedonian people or language.⁴ As a result, Macedonians continue to feel threatened by the failure of three neighbours unambiguously to accept their existence as a nation.

³ Sometimes abbreviated to "FYROM", a designation that is widely viewed as offensive in Macedonia.

⁴ The joint declaration of 22 February 1999, signed by the Bulgarian and Macedonian prime ministers, however, recognised the official existence of the Bulgarian and Macedonian languages. This text was reaffirmed in a joint memorandum signed in January 2008.

The key to Greek sensitivity over Macedonian identity lies in the Greek Civil War of the 1940s. During that conflict, "Slav Macedonians" in the northern part of the country made up a substantial part of the communist-led partisans. In line with the policy Tito inherited from the Comintern in the inter-war period, they fought to unite the Yugoslav, Greek and Bulgarian parts of Macedonia in an autonomous, communist Macedonia within Yugoslavia. Following the communists' defeat in Greece, tens of thousands of partisans fled, including many Slavs who settled in Yugoslav Macedonia. Their properties in Greece were confiscated, and while ethnic Greek communist refugees were later allowed to return, Slav Macedonians were not. For Greeks, the notion of a distinct Macedonian nation was an artificial creation of Tito, with the aim of pressing irredentist claims against Greece, and the Macedonian language is just a local dialect of Bulgarian. According to this view, the only true Macedonians are Greeks.⁵

For Macedonians, the choice of their name is more than just a basic human right. It is about their very existence as a people. Just as the Greek national mythology stresses continuity between the ancient Hellenic world, including ancient Macedonia, and the modern Greek state, Macedonians see their identity as being crucially bound up with and inseparable from their name. The difference is that, while the Macedonian heritage is only one part of the Greek identity, for Macedonians there is no other. As Macedonians sometimes point out, the name "Macedonia" is in their national songs. If they are not Macedonians, then what are they? Are they amorphous Slavs, or, given the linguistic similarity, perhaps Bulgarians?

Outsiders often look on the name dispute with impatience, wondering how such an apparently trivial issue could assume such proportions. But attempts at resolution need to start from an understanding that national identity is not a trivial matter when it is perceived to be under attack, neither for Greeks nor Macedonians. For Macedonians, calling into question their identity is linked to the survival of their country. They fear that, at root, many Greeks and others in the region challenge the long-term viability of their state, with its internal tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.⁶

⁵For a brief discussion of the historical background to differences over the Macedonian identity, see Takis Michas, "Balkan Neighbors", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2008.

⁶Macedonian interlocutors told Crisis Group that Greek academic and journalistic commentators, as well as officials, frequently question the long-term prospects for Macedonia as a multinational state, so different from the Greek concept

B. THE INTERIM ACCORD

Following Macedonia's acceptance into the UN under its provisional name, Greece escalated the dispute in February 1994, when it imposed an embargo on its northern neighbour, excepting only food and pharmaceuticals. This mainly succeeded in raising international sympathy for Macedonia. An accommodation of sorts was reached in September 1995, on the eve of the Dayton negotiations that ended the war in Bosnia. UN special envoy Cyrus Vance (a former U.S. Secretary of State), with the involvement of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, mediated a deal, the Interim Accord, according to which Greece lifted the embargo and recognised Skopje under its provisional name. In exchange, Skopje agreed to change its flag and reaffirmed that nothing in its constitution could be construed as an irredentist claim against Greek territory.⁷

Crucially, Greece accepted in the Interim Accord that it would not block Macedonia's membership of regional or other international organisations to which it belonged, so long as Macedonia was to be referred to in those organisations as "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".⁸ The accord called for negotiations on the name issue under UN auspices.⁹ The parties also agreed that should one believe that symbols constituting part of its historic or cultural patrimony were being used by the other, the party responsible would take appropriate corrective action, or indicate why it did not consider it necessary to do so.¹⁰

C. THE OHRID AGREEMENT

The important progress achieved with the Interim Accord came in the context of the broader international momentum for settling outstanding disputes in the western Balkans at the time of Dayton. Unfortunately,

of a single-nation state that affords no recognition to national minorities. Crisis Group interviews, Skopje, October 2008.

⁷"Interim Accord between the Hellenic Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", New York, 13 September 1995. The name issue was avoided in the Interim Accord, which referred to the signatories as "the party of the first part" and "the party of the second part".

⁸Ibid, Article 11.

⁹Ibid, Article 5.

¹⁰Ibid, Article 7/3: "If either Party believes one or more symbols constituting part of its historic or cultural patrimony is being used by the other Party, it shall bring such alleged use to the attention of the other Party, and the other Party shall take appropriate corrective action or indicate why it does not consider it necessary to do so".

that international will to address the issues still undermining Macedonia's long-term stability has not been consistent. It took the outbreak of conflict there in 2001 between ethnic Macedonians and the large ethnic Albanian minority to re-engage serious international involvement.¹¹ The resulting Ohrid Framework Agreement was a notable success. A wider conflagration was avoided, and it laid the foundations for a long-term settlement of the grievances of the ethnic Albanian community, and for its full integration into political life. Much progress has since been made in implementing the agreement. The European Commission, for example, recently cited more equitable representation of Albanians in the civil service and the passing of a law on languages as key accomplishments.¹²

But the name dispute with Greece was not addressed in parallel with Ohrid. It was left on the back-burner, treated as a purely bilateral issue to be resolved within the framework of ongoing UN negotiations. That was a mistake. As Crisis Group argued at the time,¹³ by addressing only the grievances of the ethnic Albanian community, without corresponding measures to reassure the ethnic Macedonian majority and shore up its fragile and threatened identity, the Ohrid settlement was incomplete in an important respect. It redressed the long-standing, legitimate grievances of the Albanian minority in ways that the Macedonian majority perceived as being at its expense. Turning Macedonia into a "civic state", while necessary, diluted its essence as the homeland of the Macedonian people. Resentment among ethnic Macedonians at what was widely perceived to be an unjust agreement has not disappeared. Their acceptance of the concessions it required would be strengthened if the legitimate demand that their identity be recognised was met.

There is no imminent risk of a return to violent conflict. Nevertheless, the Ohrid Agreement is not fully implemented, and the integration of Albanians into Macedonian political life remains imperfect. Strains between the two ethnic groups linger, for example over the treatment of Albanian veterans of the conflict,

including their general amnesty. Albanian parties demand legal equality between these ex-combatants and ethnic Macedonian participants in the 2001 conflict, including for state pensions. A further complicating factor is the treatment of war crimes suspects. Albanian parties considered the reopening in March 2008 of cases against four Albanian former combatants that the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia had referred back to Skopje as a violation of the amnesty law.¹⁴ The new language law does not fully address Albanian demands, for example on the use of Albanian in the army and police command structures.

On issues such as language and symbols, as well as the re-drawing of some municipal boundaries to the advantage of Albanians, the mainly ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) has been remarkably patient.¹⁵ However, these issues remain contentious between it and its larger, ethnic Macedonian partner in government, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, as well as between it and opposition ethnic Albanian parties.

A crucial factor underpinning Ohrid was the promise of NATO and EU integration, the key national goal behind which Macedonians and Albanians are united. The DUI vice-president, Teuta Arifi, told Crisis Group that "NATO and EU integration keep the country together"; they are "the light at the end of the tunnel", without which Macedonia would not easily progress as a democracy. NATO enlargement in the Balkans, she added, has "an important stabilising effect", and leaving the country out would have serious destabilising consequences.¹⁶

If NATO and EU integration were to be delayed indefinitely over an issue which is of no concern for ethnic Albanians, it is questionable how long their patience would last. Presently, the principal Albanian leaders are showing forbearance over the name question.¹⁷ The recognition by Skopje, in early October

¹¹ According to the 2002 census, ethnic Albanians make up some 25 per cent of the population and ethnic Macedonians 64 per cent. Among smaller minorities, Turks account for 4 per cent, Romas for around 3 per cent and Serbs for nearly 2 per cent.

¹² "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2008 Progress Report", Brussels, 5 November 2008, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press_corner/key_documents/reports_nov_2008/the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia_progress_report_en.pdf. For more on the European Commission's "Progress Report", see Section III, below.

¹³ Crisis Group Report, *Macedonia's Name*, op. cit.

¹⁴ See *Balkan Insight*, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), 4 March 2008, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8343/.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, DUI leader Ali Ahmeti, Tetovo, July 2008.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Skopje, October 2008. A number of interlocutors pointed out that Macedonian Albanians had expected to be the first Albanians in NATO, before those of Albania or Kosovo. Crisis Group interviews, Skopje, October and November 2008.

¹⁷ Macedonian Albanians generally sympathise with Macedonians over the name issue, up to a point. Arifi told Crisis Group that Albanians should show "sympathy and solidar-

2008, of Kosovo's independence has had a remarkably positive effect on ethnic Albanians' perception of Macedonia as their state.¹⁸ However, a long delay to NATO and EU integration, while Albania and other countries in the region forge ahead, would accentuate their dissatisfaction.

The wider regional context continues to be unsettled, and the potential remains for Kosovo to have a destabilising effect on Macedonia, as it did in the 2001 conflict.¹⁹ It would be folly to put at risk the real progress in bringing stability to Macedonia since the Ohrid Agreement by allowing the name dispute to hold up its Euro-Atlantic integration. This is more than a bilateral dispute between Skopje and Athens. It risks derailing the main strategy of both NATO and the EU for stabilising Macedonia and the region, based on enlargement and integration. The credibility of both organisations is at stake. They should not allow it to fall victim to an intractable dispute involving one of their own members.²⁰

D. UN MEDIATION

In line with the Interim Accord, talks on the name issue proceeded under the new UN mediator, Matthew Nimetz, a U.S. lawyer and former senior State Department official who took over from Vance in 1999. The negotiations have dragged on ever since, at times more intensively than others, with alternately Greece or Macedonia showing more flexibility. Most of the ideas put forward never reached the public domain.

ity" with their Macedonian compatriots, especially concerning the recognition of their identity. However, while sharing Macedonians' exasperation with Greece's stance, she expressed hope that they would "find the strength" to reach a compromise on the name of the country that would enable it to proceed towards NATO and the EU. Crisis Group interview, Skopje, October 2008.

¹⁸ An ethnic Albanian interlocutor told Crisis Group that on a Macedonian national holiday in October, for the first time Macedonian flags were flown in the predominantly Albanian town of Tetovo. Crisis Group interview, Skopje, October 2008.

¹⁹ Several domestic and international interlocutors expressed concern that should Kosovo Albanian frustration mount, due to setbacks to the implementation of Kosovo's independence or the de facto division between the predominantly Serb north and the rest of Kosovo, it might fuel ethnic Albanian frustration in Macedonia as well, especially if NATO and EU membership appeared to be indefinitely deferred. Crisis Group interviews, Skopje, October 2008.

²⁰ A number of interlocutors in Macedonia expressed the view that it would take a fresh outbreak of conflict to prompt the international community to address the name dispute seriously.

Nimetz has made a series of confidential proposals, none of which has succeeded in bringing the two parties together. In March 2005, he suggested that the name for use at the UN should be "Republika Makedonija – Skopje", in Macedonian and not to be translated into any other language.²¹ This was welcomed by Athens, but rejected by Skopje. President Crvenkovski, as well as then Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski, stood by the so-called "double formula" according to which there should be an agreed name for bilateral relations with Greece, and Macedonia's constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia" should be used for all other bilateral and multilateral relations.²²

In October 2005 Nimetz put forward a new variant much more to Skopje's liking but rejected by Athens: "Republic of Macedonia – Skopje" for bilateral relations with Greece, "Republika Makedonija" at the UN, and "Republic of Macedonia" for internal use and bilateral relations with countries that had already recognised the state under that name.²³

E. A DETERIORATING ENVIRONMENT

There were further contacts and suggestions, none of which bore fruit. However, a series of events in 2007 and 2008 imparted a new urgency to the search for a solution, while at the same time considerably worsening the atmosphere in which the talks have been carried out. Actions by both Skopje and Athens have served to shatter what little trust had been built with the signing of the Interim Accord.

Considerable responsibility for this falls on the Macedonian government of Gruevski, elected in July 2006, which decided at the beginning of 2007 to rename Skopje Airport after Alexander the Great. This seemed calculated to bring back to the surface all the Greek angst about the alleged appropriation of the Hellenic heritage.²⁴ It provoked a furious reaction from Athens, which claimed a violation of the Interim Accord.²⁵ Nimetz reportedly warned Gruevski that Greece might withdraw from the Interim Accord as a result, but the

²¹ A text of the proposal, which was carried in the Greek media, is provided by the (Greek) online review "Macedonian Heritage", at www.macedonian-heritage.gr/OfficialDocuments/Nimetz.html.

²² Reports on A1 TV, 8, 9, 10 and 12 April 2005, and 8 October 2005.

²³ Reports on A1 TV, 8 October 2005; also Crisis Group interview, senior Macedonian official, Skopje, November 2008.

²⁴ See *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 18 January 2007, www.birn.eu.com/en/66/10/2105/.

²⁵ Article 7/3 of the Interim Accord, see above.

cautionary advice was not heeded. Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki declared that the action might “stimulate a moderate move forward in the discussions regarding the name”.²⁶ Further measures that risked offending Greek sensibilities were taken, such as placing several classical-era statues in front of the government building in Skopje.²⁷ However incomprehensible Greek sensitivity over the heritage of ancient Macedon may appear to others, it is well known in Skopje. At a time when talks on the name were ongoing, such actions were at the least provocative and unhelpful.

The provocation over Skopje airport helped raise the issue of Macedonia's name in the run-up to Greece's September 2007 parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis responded, promising that “Skopje will not join any international organisation, including NATO and the EU, if a mutually agreeable solution for the name is not found”.²⁸ Following re-election, with a wafer-thin parliamentary majority²⁹ and under pressure from both the right and the centre-left opposition PASOK party, Karamanlis could not easily retreat from his campaign position. The issue is sufficiently incendiary in Greece to bring down a government.³⁰

F. NATO EXCLUSION

Following the elections, Athens continued to warn that it was prepared to veto Macedonia's NATO entry. It had apparently decided that its neighbour's impending membership was too good an opportunity to miss to press for a favourable resolution of the issue.³¹ As the UN negotiations dragged on, momentum for some time had appeared to be against Athens, with more than 120 states having recognised Macedonia under its consti-

tutional name, including – a particular triumph for Skopje – the U.S. in 2004. Now, as NATO's April 2008 Bucharest summit approached, Athens seized the initiative. As a member of NATO, and so with a veto over Macedonia's entry, Greece was in a strong position. With fears growing that it would use its veto, Nimetz was brought back in to try to broker a solution, again without fruit. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer visited Athens in March 2008, reportedly to try to dissuade the Greeks and warn of the consequences for regional stability if an agreement was not reached.³²

That month, following a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at which Athens made it clear that, in the absence of a deal on the name, it would veto Macedonia's entry,³³ Washington also stepped in, sending Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Daniel Fried to Skopje.³⁴ Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nurland likewise was used to try to resolve the issue before Bucharest. Although a veto would appear to be a clear breach of the Interim Accord, Greece held all the cards. Recognising this, Fried urged Skopje to compromise. Athens's threat had thus transformed the argument. Despite warning signs over the preceding several months, Washington became actively engaged very late. On the eve of the summit, there were reports that it was determined to secure Macedonia's entry but that its determination was not matched by most alliance members.³⁵ Indeed, France took Greece's side, and ultimately the rest of the alliance backed down before Athens's intransigence.³⁶

As the Bucharest summit approached, Gruevski declared that Macedonia would not submit to blackmail and that if the country's NATO membership were blocked,

²⁶ *Balkan Insight*, 18 January 2007, op. cit.

²⁷ Several Macedonian interlocutors expressed dismay at the placing of the statues. Crisis Group interviews, Skopje, October 2008.

²⁸ See *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 12 September 2007, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/4919>.

²⁹ Karamanlis's New Democracy party won 152 out of 300 seats in parliament. The main opposition PASOK party won 102.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Greek political commentator, Athens, November 2008.

³¹ Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis indicated as much in October 2007, when she said that “we should make it clear that we are now at a turning point where Skopje could receive an invitation to join NATO. It is time for decisions”. Karamanlis also raised the matter with German Chancellor Angela Merkel that same month. Reported in *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 15 October 2007, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/6039>.

³² *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 3 March 2008, citing Greek media reports, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8322>.

³³ *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 6 March 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8429>.

³⁴ *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 8 March 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8466>.

³⁵ *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 2 April 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/9071>.

³⁶ French President Nicolas Sarkozy confirmed his support for Greece's position shortly before Bucharest. *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 14 March 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8630>. A diplomat from another NATO member state told Crisis Group that, with France supporting Greece, it was very hard to bring effective pressure to bear on Athens. Crisis Group interview, Skopje, October 2008. Speculation about the motivations of Sarkozy – who is opposed also to further EU enlargement while the Union is still struggling to cope with a number of difficult governance issues – has touched on French commercial interests with Greece and his allusions to his own family ancestry in Thessaloniki.

NATO itself and the region would be damaged.³⁷ Yet, his government did agree at Bucharest to the name “Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)”, roughly the solution it had rejected in 2005 and Greece had welcomed. However, feeling itself in a much stronger position, Athens rejected the offer, insisting in particular that the agreed name should apply in all Macedonia's international relations, bilateral as well as multilateral.³⁸

Last-minute diplomacy at least to allow Macedonia to enter as “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” failed. No one disputed that Skopje had met the criteria for NATO membership – the summit declaration commended its “commitment to NATO values and Alliance operations”. But it concluded that an invitation “will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached”.³⁹ The Macedonian delegation walked out, Milososki declaring that “Macedonia's bid for NATO membership was punished, not because of what we have done, but because of who we are”.⁴⁰

Bucharest created a new reality in the long-running story of Macedonia's name. First, the understanding since the Interim Accord that the dispute would not delay the country's integration into international organisations had been broken. Secondly, Greece's position and its confidence received a tremendous boost. Having faced down the U.S., Athens felt that all constraints on its demands had been removed. The Greek ambassador in Washington declared that “NATO endorsed our position....The requirement to solve the name issue is no longer a Greek position, it is now a NATO position and a multilateral matter”.⁴¹ The NATO conclusion at Bucharest notwithstanding, at least one NATO member state refused to acknowledge that the dispute had become a multilateral issue or its resolution a condition for Macedonia's member-

ship.⁴² Yet, Athens had served notice that it would block Macedonia's entry into NATO unless its maximal demands on that issue were met.

G. SOLUTION ON HOLD

Attempts to revive the negotiations and secure Macedonia's NATO entry initially foundered over Gruevski's decision to call parliamentary elections for June 2008, followed by further delay as a government was formed. Bilateral tensions also increased when Macedonia delivered a series of letters to governments and international organisations protesting Greece's stance at Bucharest, which mainly irritated the recipients.⁴³ Skopje raised the further issue of the rights of the Macedonian minority in northern Greece and the return of property of Macedonians who left Greece after the civil war.⁴⁴

The denial of the right of Slav speakers in northern Greece to identify themselves as Macedonians has repeatedly been cited over the years, including in the U.S. State Department's annual human rights report on Greece.⁴⁵ It no doubt warrants attention. In effect, Greece is not respecting the conditions on treatment of minorities that the EU requires would-be members to meet. Nevertheless, bringing the issue forward in the aftermath of Bucharest was calculated to raise the temperature over the name issue further, and in that context was unwise. Continuing to pursue an assertive strategy, the Macedonian government announced in January 2009 that it would name the country's main north-south highway after Alexander the Great.⁴⁶

Following Macedonia's elections, the U.S. put its weight behind a renewed effort by Nimetz to find a

³⁷ *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 25 March 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8897>.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, senior Greek official, November 2008, and international and domestic officials, Skopje, October and November 2008.

³⁹ “Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council”, 3 April 2008, www.summitbucharest.ro/en/doc_201.html.

⁴⁰ BBC News, 4 April 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7329963.stm>.

⁴¹ Greece's Ambassador to the U.S., Alexandros Mallias, speaking publicly at Georgetown University, 15 April 2008, cited by Edward P. Joseph, “Averting the Next Balkan War: How to Solve the Greek Dispute over Macedonia's name”, *Internationale Politik*, Summer 2008.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Skopje, October 2008.

⁴³ For example, shortly after the Bucharest summit, Skopje sent letters to all NATO members except Greece. The exclusion of Greece was described by NATO officials as “immature”. *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 11 April 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/9308>.

⁴⁴ Gruevski wrote to Karamanlis and to European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso on the subject in July. *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 18 July 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/11916/>; and 21 July 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/11936>.

⁴⁵ See “Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 2007”, issued on 11 March 2008, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100562.htm.

⁴⁶ “Macedonia Names Highway ‘Alexander of Macedon’”, *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 6 January 2009, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/15863/>.

solution.⁴⁷ On 8 October, Nimetz presented a new proposal, which, although it was not officially made public, was widely leaked. It comprised four elements, reflecting the required forms for UN members. The formal name would be “Republic of North Macedonia” and the short name “North Macedonia”. For the adjectives describing the nationality and language, there would be two alternatives: “Macedonian” and the nationality and official language “of the Republic of North Macedonia”. In an effort to meet Greek concerns, a note would affirm that “Macedonian” implied no exclusivity in the use of that term. For internal, domestic use, Macedonia would continue to use its constitutional name, “Republika Makedonija”, in Cyrillic script. The UN Security Council would recommend that third-party states use the UN, international name, in official bilateral relations.

Both sides reacted coolly.⁴⁸ At this point, there are three key aspects to the dispute:

- *The name of the country.* As was already apparent at the Bucharest summit, Skopje is ready to compromise on this. While Nimetz’s precise proposal of “Republic of North Macedonia” is not the most favoured option for either Skopje or Athens, there is probably room for agreement on it or something similar. Athens insists that the geographical qualifier must come before the word “Macedonia”.⁴⁹ There is, however, a lack of consensus between the Mace-

donian president and prime minister as to whether Skopje should yield on this point without evidence of Greek willingness to reciprocate with readiness to compromise on other aspects. The feeling among officials in Skopje is that their willingness to compromise, as at Bucharest, has been met with intransigence.⁵⁰ The disagreement between prime minister and president is linked to presidential and local elections in March 2009. Opinion poll evidence suggests that Gruevski’s harder line on the name issue is popular.⁵¹

- *The scope of the use of the name.* The reluctance of the Macedonian government to reveal its full negotiating position without evidence of Greek willingness to move as well lies behind its reversion, since Bucharest, to the double formula.⁵² Crvenkovski now criticises the government for this, seeing the stance as blocking the negotiations.⁵³ But in reality, Skopje has become more flexible. If Athens were to make concessions on recognising the Macedonian identity, it likely would abandon the double formula and accept using the agreed name in all international organisations, essentially replacing the provisional name “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.

However, Athens insists that the agreed name be used in all international relations, bilateral as well as multilateral, and also for identifying the provenance of products made in Macedonia. It would likely accept Macedonia’s internal use of its constitutional name in the Macedonian language.⁵⁴ The Macedonian government is reluctant to concede the use of the agreed name in bilateral relations. More than 120 states have already recognised the country by its constitutional name, which is seen as a big success in Skopje. While Crvenkovski might be readier to give ground on this, the approaching

⁴⁷ On the Bush administration’s efforts, see Sinisa-Jakov Marusic, “Momentum Slips in Macedonia-Greece Row”, *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 16 October 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/analysis/14018>. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Daniel Fried urged Skopje to accept the latest Nimetz proposals, to avoid isolation. *Vecer*, 29 October 2008.

⁴⁸ Both Skopje and Athens avoided rejecting Nimetz’s proposals outright but stated that they contained problematic elements. Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis to the Greek parliamentary committee on foreign affairs and defence, reported by MIA, 29 October 2008, citing Greek media reports; statements by Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski and Prime Minister Gruevski reported by *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 16 October 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/14030>.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior Greek official, September 2008. The insistence on the geographical qualifier coming immediately before the name is applicable in the English language, but, for grammatical reasons, not necessarily in all other languages. For example, the latest Nimetz proposal gives the French translation of “Republic of North Macedonia” as “République de Macédoine du Nord.” Skopje would prefer the qualifier to come before the word “Republic”, as in “Northern Republic of Macedonia”, but would probably concede this point. Crisis Group interview, senior Macedonian official, Skopje, November 2008.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interviews, senior Macedonian officials, Skopje, November 2008.

⁵¹ See, for example, the poll by the Institute for Democracy, reported in *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 5 December 2008, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/15330/, which recorded 67 per cent support for the government’s decision to take Greece to the International Court of Justice over the NATO issue, with 18 per cent against. The same poll showed Gruevski to be by far the most popular politician in the country, with 30.7 per cent approval.

⁵² The double formula, as described above, involves an agreed name for bilateral relations with Greece and use of Macedonia’s constitutional name, “Republic of Macedonia”, for all other bilateral and multilateral relations.

⁵³ Reported in *Dnevnik*, 4 November 2008.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior Greek official, November 2008.

presidential election and the popularity of Gruevski's stance suggest the government is likely to determine Skopje's position.

- *The nationality and language.* The adjectives for nationality and language have emerged as critical since Bucharest. As Skopje has softened its stance on the country's name, it has insisted that the nationality and language should be acknowledged at the UN as Macedonian, without qualification. The president and prime minister share this position.⁵⁵ The importance to Macedonians lies in suspicion, not unreasonable given persistent Greek assertions about the artificiality of the Macedonian nation, that behind Greece's objections to the name lies a denial of the Macedonian nation itself. Athens tried to keep nationality and language off the agenda of the UN talks, asserting they were not part of Nimetz's mandate.⁵⁶ It is reluctant to concede Skopje's demands, preferring the formula "citizens of North Macedonia", while perhaps accepting that the language could be called "Makedonski", in Macedonian, untranslated.⁵⁷

Following the failure of Nimetz's latest proposal to find support in either Skopje or Athens, it appears that there is little prospect of the dispute being resolved in the near future, and that the recent flurry of diplomacy has run its course. Both sides have concluded that the necessary goodwill of the other is lacking.⁵⁸ The combination of Skopje's provocations, starting with the airport name, and Athens's apparent breaking of the Interim Accord at Bucharest, has reduced mutual confidence to levels not seen for more than a decade.

Reflecting the poisonous atmosphere, in November 2008 the Macedonian government took Greece to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for breach of the Interim Accord.⁵⁹ Foreign Minister Milososki stressed

that the court action concerned not the name dispute itself but the principle, enshrined in the Interim Accord, that Greece should not block the country's entrance into international organisations under the provisional name. Skopje requested the ICJ to order Greece to comply with the 1995 agreement and "cease and desist from objecting in any way, whether directly or indirectly", to Macedonia's membership of NATO or any other international organisation.⁶⁰

Though Milososki estimated that the case might take three to five years,⁶¹ the government appeared to have concluded that, with no resolution on the name in sight and membership in NATO and the EU blocked, an ICJ decision was a way to regain the initiative.⁶² Skopje feels it has a strong case, although questions have been raised over the fact that it was the promise of a Greek veto rather than an actual veto that led to the adoption of negative summit conclusions on Macedonia's membership application.

Athens responded that, in bringing the case to the ICJ, Skopje demonstrated it was not interested in a swift solution to the name dispute. It also contended that Macedonia had itself repeatedly violated the Interim Accord.⁶³ It considers the renaming of Skopje Airport a violation of that document and Skopje's use within the UN of the constitutional rather than the provisional name a violation of its spirit.⁶⁴ At the end of December 2008, Athens indicated that it might bring a counter-suit before the ICJ for such alleged breaches of the Accord.⁶⁵

Greater use by states of the ICJ as a bulwark of international law is a development to be wished for. States have a right to seek judicial relief, and such a step is

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, senior Macedonian officials, Skopje, October and November 2008.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, senior international official, New York, November 2008.

⁵⁷ Appearing to confirm Macedonians' concerns about Greek non-recognition of their existence as a nation, a senior Greek official said he did not know of a "Macedonian language", that there was Bulgarian and Greek, but Macedonian was not an "original language". He said that, as a goodwill gesture, Athens might accept the use of "Makedonski" for the language, but the question of nationality was more difficult, and that in that case too it could not be translated. Crisis Group interview, senior Greek official, November 2008.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, senior Macedonian and Greek officials, November 2008.

⁵⁹ According to Article 21 of the Interim Accord, any difference or dispute that arises between the parties concerning the implementation of the Accord may be submitted by either of

them to the ICJ. A judgement handed down by the court in such an instance would be legally binding upon the parties.

⁶⁰ Press release, ICJ, 17 November 2008, www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/142/14881.pdf. See also *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 17 November 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/14845>.

⁶¹ See *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 8 December 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/15374>; www.b92.net/eng/news/region-article.php?yyyy=2008&mm=12&dd=08&nav_id=55584.

⁶² But some in Skopje felt the ICJ case would only postpone resolution of the issue. See, for example, comment by Sinisa-Jakov Marusic, "World Court Suit Heats up Macedonia Name Row", *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 19 November 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/analysis/14924>.

⁶³ Greek foreign ministry statement, reported by *Kanal 5*, 17 November 2008.

⁶⁴ See the 27 November 2008 letter from Greece's permanent representative at the UN to the Secretary-General.

⁶⁵ A1 television, 28 December 2008.

normally to be welcomed as a means for allowing tempers to cool and an impartial third instance to contribute to peaceful resolution of a dispute. The possible motivations of Macedonia and Greece in their respective approaches to the Court aside, however, the specific circumstances of the present dispute suggest that the ICJ route is unlikely to be productive.

While both governments asserted they would continue with the UN negotiations, the court proceedings risk ensuring a lengthy further postponement of Macedonia's EU and NATO integration, unless member states press Greece to stop its blocking tactics. That is something they likely will be less inclined to do when they have the argument at hand that elements of the dispute are under adjudication. It can be anticipated that the resulting delay will further undermine relations between the two principal parties and in consequence also wider regional peace and stability. Both parties should be encouraged, therefore, to give priority to negotiations and be prepared to withdraw their case (or threatened case) at an appropriate time as a stimulus for clinching diplomatic settlement of the name issue.

III. EU INTEGRATION

Over several years, Macedonia had pursued EU integration, sometimes fitfully, but recently more determinedly, unaffected by the name dispute. It secured candidate country status in December 2005, a success that reflected a strong EU political commitment to advance the country's integration ambitions and thus buttress its stabilisation following the 2001 conflict. The open-ended nature of the commitment, with no date for accession talks to begin, indicated the significant challenges that Macedonia faced to become a credible candidate.⁶⁶ However, until the Bucharest NATO summit, the assumption was that, provided sufficient progress was made on all the technical requirements of EU integration, Macedonia would proceed on the same basis that it had entered other international organisations, that is, if the name issue was not resolved, as "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

⁶⁶ See Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°41, *Macedonia: Wobbling towards Europe*, 12 January 2006.

A. MEETING THE BENCHMARKS

To stimulate the government to meet the criteria for opening accession talks, the EU adopted an Accession Partnership with Macedonia in February 2008, which listed eight key short-term priorities.⁶⁷ The European Commission gave a mixed assessment of their implementation in its 2008 Progress Report.⁶⁸ It noted solid achievements in several areas, including justice and police reform, the fight against corruption and professionalising the civil service. Advances on meeting the criteria required to obtain visa liberalisation were highlighted as a notable success.⁶⁹ But shortcomings, notably regarding the political criteria, were also underlined.⁷⁰ The European Council conclusions of 8-9 December 2008 reaffirmed many of the same points, including the need for further work on the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, that corruption remained a "particularly serious problem", and that there had been little progress in ensuring the rights of smaller minorities, especially Roma. Crucially, the Commission did not recommend a date to open accession negotiations.

Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn and the EU Special Representative (EUSR) in Macedonia, Erwan Fouere, emphasised that it was in meeting the political criteria that Macedonia most let itself down.⁷¹ In particular, the poor conduct of the June 2008 parliamentary elections was seen as a significant setback to

⁶⁷ The priorities identified by the Council of the EU in its 18 February 2008 decision included: "a constructive and inclusive dialogue, in particular in areas which require consensus between all political parties"; "effective implementation of the law on police"; judiciary reforms; sustained implementation of anti-corruption legislation; professionalisation and de-politicisation of the civil service; an improved business environment, through further rule of law reform; and strengthened independence of regulatory and supervisory agencies. For the full list see the Council decision, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:080:0032:0045:EN:PDF>.

⁶⁸ "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2008 Progress Report", Brussels, 5 November 2008. Full document at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press_corner/key_documents/reports_nov_2008/the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia_progress_report_en.pdf.

⁶⁹ EU visa liberalisation for Macedonia is expected to go ahead in 2009, following a positive report by the European Commission on the country's success in meeting the criteria, as announced by EU Special Representative Erwan Fouere at the beginning of December 2008. Macedonian Information Agency (MIA), 5 December 2008.

⁷⁰ "2008 Progress Report", op. cit.

⁷¹ Quoted in *Utrinski Vesnik*, 6 and 7 November 2008.

EU integration hopes, and the holding of good elections became a ninth EU benchmark. The decision to hold the snap vote had been against the advice of international officials, who considered it a distraction from reforms needed to meet the EU's benchmarks and unlikely to contribute to calming the political environment following the failure to gain NATO membership.⁷²

Macedonia has an unhappy record of elections marred by violence and serious violations, and in June 2008 the country appeared to surpass itself. International election observers noted that:

Numerous violent incidents in predominantly ethnic Albanian areas before and during the official campaign period produced an environment of intimidation. Failure to take effective preventive action was attributed by many interlocutors to senior police officials in the north and west of the country openly supporting one ethnic Albanian party. The fact that such acts remained unaddressed by the responsible local and national authorities contributed to a culture of impunity during the 1 June elections.⁷³

On election day itself, "organised violence and intimidation disrupted voting in many predominantly ethnic Albanian areas, leaving one person dead and several injured". The observers also noted the "seemingly partisan police response to election-related incidents" in ethnic Macedonian areas.⁷⁴ Police, notably the special "Alpha" units, were reported to have actively participated in violations.⁷⁵ Following complaints from the DUI, then the main ethnic Albanian opposition party, that they had perpetrated violations on behalf of the ruling Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), the Alphas were withdrawn from the towns of Tetovo, Gostivar and Kumanovo during the re-runs held in 187 polling stations on 15 June, when the observers noted improved security and a calmer environment.⁷⁶

In its Progress Report, issued in November 2008, the European Commission noted the steps taken by the authorities to tackle the significant shortcomings recorded by the election observers. Investigations had

been launched in 34 cases, leading to prison sentences for fifteen persons, with cases ongoing against another 143. Twenty-eight police officers had been suspended, and criminal charges brought against eleven of them. This readiness to punish perpetrators of election violations contrasts positively with past years. The holding of re-runs in many places two weeks after the original elections and the steps taken to ensure a healthier environment were assessed positively, as were measures to address the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) recommendations, including amending the electoral code in October. Nevertheless, Rehn has put Macedonia on notice that good elections are a "basic requirement" and that the spotlight will be on the 2009 local and presidential votes.⁷⁷

Another area of EU concern has been the lack of political dialogue. The Progress Report noted parliamentary boycotts by opposition parties, including one by the main ethnic Macedonian opposition bloc led by the Social-Democratic Union (SDSM) from 17 July to 4 August 2008 during which the government used an emergency procedure to push through 172 bills, including some that were contentious. International officials saw this as undermining democratic practice and worsening an already difficult political climate.⁷⁸ The government later acknowledged a mistake but asserted that there was political dialogue, and the main parties did work together, for example on the amendments to the electoral code.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the toxic political atmosphere can also be seen in the failure of the president and prime minister to reach consensus on the name issue, notwithstanding a 3 November parliamentary resolution on the subject.⁸⁰ Rather than being treated as a matter of overriding national importance, the issue has been a subject for political point-scoring.⁸¹

⁷² Crisis Group interviews, international officials, Skopje and Brussels, October 2008.

⁷³ "Final Report on the Early Parliamentary elections of 1 June 2008", Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), at www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/08/32619_en.pdf.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Skopje and Tetovo, June and July 2008.

⁷⁶ See *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 12 July 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/10967>.

⁷⁷ Quoted in *Southeast European Times*, 10 November 2008, www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2008/11/10/feature-01.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, international officials, Skopje, October 2008.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, international and government officials, Skopje, October and November 2008. The government's adoption of twenty more bills by emergency procedure at the beginning of December 2008, with the explanation that they were required to deal with the global financial crisis, cast doubt on its will to meet the EU criteria. *Utrinski Vesnik*, 4 December 2008.

⁸⁰ *Utrinski Vesnik*, 4 November 2008.

⁸¹ For example, the president's decision, on 3 November, to dismiss Macedonia's negotiator on the name issue, Nikola Dimitrov, led to a fierce exchange between Crvenkovski and

B. EU ACCESSION AND THE NAME ISSUE

In light of the shortcomings highlighted in the Progress Report, EU officials assert that, even if the name dispute were to be resolved, Macedonia has not yet fulfilled the requirements to open accession negotiations.⁸² This is a major disappointment for the government, which had hoped a start date would be set before the end of 2008. Suggestions that membership progress had been blocked solely over the name issue were greeted with irritation by EU officials, who saw in this a wilful denial of failings that still must be dealt with, particularly in light of the June 2008 elections fiasco.⁸³ Indeed, even if progress on the other eight benchmarks were judged sufficient, the EU would be correct to insist on concrete evidence from the 2009 polls that the record of serious electoral problems has been genuinely addressed.

That said, since the Bucharest NATO summit, Athens has indeed made resolution of the name issue an additional condition for further progress on EU integration. At the EU summit on 19-20 June 2008, it succeeded, against the objections of some other member states led by the Slovene presidency, in inserting a statement into the Conclusions that this was essential.⁸⁴ Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis reportedly flatly refused otherwise to agree to a text that held out a prospect to start accession talks in 2008. Some EU members naively

argued that the inserted text amounted to nothing more than an exhortation to good neighbourly relations.⁸⁵

The new conditionality was reiterated on 8 December by EU foreign ministers, who declared that it is essential for Macedonia "to maintain good neighbourly relations, including coming to a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue".⁸⁶ The French foreign minister was unequivocal: "Without the resolution of the name issue, we cannot move forward, because this issue has to be solved first".⁸⁷ EU member states also noted that "actions or declarations that can negatively affect good neighbourly relations should be avoided".⁸⁸ Athens thus established resolution of the name issue as an additional condition for accession talks. In introducing the reference to "good neighbourly relations", it misappropriated a key requirement in the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process for the countries of the western Balkans, bringing it into the service of its bilateral dispute with Skopje. So even though the name dispute is not the only factor holding up EU integration, it will have to be addressed if progress is not to be blocked.

If the European Commission's 2009 Progress Report finds that Macedonia has met the designated criteria, it will likely recommend that accession negotiations be opened. If Greece maintains its current stance, and the name issue has not in the meantime been resolved, however, the European Council would most likely not act on that recommendation. Member states appear unwilling seriously to press Greece to soften its stance and at least enable negotiations to begin. For the medium term, however, the European Commission can continue to assess progress through annual reports and work through the sub-committees established under Macedonia's Stabilisation and Association Agreement to address the technical requirements of the accession process. So long as Skopje moves along this track, it could meet most accession requirements even before the formal opening of negotiations.⁸⁹

the prime minister's cabinet chief. *Utrinski Vesnik*, 7 and 10 November 2008.

⁸² While underlining the shortcomings in meeting the political criteria crucial for an accession negotiations date, Rehn stressed that the European Commission considers the name issue a separate matter, outside the scope of Macedonia's European partnership. *Utrinski Vesnik*, 6 November 2008).

⁸³ Following assertions by the prime minister that Macedonia would be denied a start date for EU accession negotiations due to the name dispute, the EU special representative told the European Parliament's committee on European Affairs that it was wrong to minimise the country's problems. Crisis Group interviews, Macedonian and international officials, Skopje, October 2008. "Fouere: Macedonia should take Responsibility for its Setbacks towards EU", *Southeast European Times*, 14 September 2008, www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/newsbriefs/setimes/newsbriefs/2008/09/14/nb-05; and *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, 12 September 2008, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/13098>).

⁸⁴ The European Council noted that: "Maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, remains essential". "Conclusions of the Brussels European Council", 19/20 June 2008, at www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Council_Conclusions/June/0619_EC-CON.pdf.

⁸⁵ "Greeks Win Points on Macedonia at EU Summit", *Balkan Insight*, BIRN, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/analysis/11299>.

⁸⁶ "Western Balkans Conclusion", General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), 8-9 December 2008.

⁸⁷ "France Warns Macedonia over 'name row'", *Balkans Insight*, BIRN, 8 December 2008. www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/15377/.

⁸⁸ GAERC, op. cit.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, EU officials, Skopje and Brussels, October and December 2008.

IV. MOVING FORWARD

For the time being, efforts to resolve the longstanding dispute over Macedonia's name appear to have reached an impasse. While there was movement on the Macedonian side in 2008 in its willingness to accept a composite, geographically-qualified name, Greece has dug in its heels and appears unwilling to reciprocate with concessions of its own so as to enable a reasonable compromise. Both sides share responsibility, however, for a deterioration in bilateral relations that are now more poisonous than at any time since the early 1990s. Following Skopje's decision in November 2008 to take Greece to the ICJ, the prospects for immediate progress appear poor.

Yet, the importance of finding a solution remains. Greece's decision to block Macedonia's membership in NATO and further progress on EU integration undermines the whole strategy of both organisations for stabilising the western Balkans through enlargement. The Ohrid settlement remains fragile, with continuing tensions between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians and an unsettled regional environment, particularly as regards Kosovo. Neither NATO nor the EU can afford to treat this as a purely bilateral issue that may continue unresolved indefinitely, with potentially serious consequences. Efforts to push the two sides towards agreement will need to include a greater willingness among NATO and EU member states to press Athens to adopt a more constructive stance and respond to concessions from Skopje with meaningful concessions of its own.

As a prelude to tackling the issue, both sides must act to rebuild trust. The Macedonian government should desist from moves calculated to provoke Athens, above all by not offending Greek sensitivities about the Hellenic heritage and reversing moves that have already caused offence, especially the name of Skopje Airport. Skopje and Athens should also undertake to examine treatment of the common history of the region, from ancient to modern times, in order to reach a basic understanding and avoid references in the educational curriculums that offend the national sensibilities of either country. This might be accomplished through a joint commission of historians, along the lines employed by Germany and France after the Second World War.

Both countries should reaffirm their commitment to the 1995 Interim Accord. Pending an agreement over the name, Skopje should undertake to use only the provisional name "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in multilateral forums such as the UN. In return, Greece should respect its Interim Accord commitment

and drop its threat to veto Macedonia's membership of NATO and accession negotiations with the EU.

After rebuilding some trust, serious efforts should be resumed to find a solution for Macedonia's name. While those may continue under UN auspices, they should be supported by much greater commitment and involvement from NATO and EU member states. The one time when significant progress was made in bringing the parties together, to secure the Interim Accord, the effort was underpinned by broad international will, including pressure on Athens not to undermine stability in its own neighbourhood. This will not be easy. Greek domestic politics makes concessions on the name issue difficult. But it would be a mistake to imagine that Greece is always and uniformly intransigent with regard to its northern neighbour. EU and NATO member states have limited leverage, but that does not mean Athens is impervious to reason. It has shown past flexibility, over the Interim Accord and in its response to Nimetz's 2005 proposals. Nimetz's 2008 proposal goes much further toward meeting its concerns, and Greek leaders should see Skopje's greater readiness in 2008 to make concessions as an opportunity.

Confident after the Bucharest summit, Athens appears to believe that it can insist on its maximal demands and Skopje will eventually have to concede all three key points: the name of the country, the scope of its usage and the adjectives for nationality and language. Such expectations are unrealistic: Skopje will not compromise on Macedonians' national identity, and should not be expected to do so. While there are differences between the governing and opposition parties, compromise on the national identity is out of the question for Macedonians. Given Skopje's readiness to compromise on the name of the country, however, Athens should act responsibly, and accept the "Macedonian" identity of its neighbours, bearing in mind Skopje's acceptance that use of the term "Macedonian" does not imply exclusivity and does not challenge the application of the same adjective to the inhabitants of the Greek province of Macedonia.

In the current climate of mistrust, the Macedonian government is disinclined to state publicly its readiness to compromise on the name, even though it is widely known that it offered a compromise at Bucharest. However, it should publicly express its readiness to accept Nimetz's latest proposal on the name, as a challenge to Athens to reciprocate on national identity and to other NATO and EU member states to press for Greek compromise. Skopje's reluctance to give up the success it has had in securing recognition of its constitutional name by over half the UN's members is understandable but should not be allowed to hold up

an agreement. In reality, once agreement is reached on a name for multilateral usage, almost all NATO and EU members would adopt it for bilateral usage. That some dozens of states, mostly far from the Balkans, have recognised Macedonia under its constitutional

name is of little practical relevance to either Macedonia or Greece.

Pristina/Brussels, 12 January 2009

APPENDIX A

MAP OF MACEDONIA AND GREECE



This map has been adapted by the International Crisis Group from Map No. 3877 Rev. 7 (September 2008) by the UN Cartographic Section. The shaded area represents Greek Macedonia (approx.).



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