



NORTH MACEDONIA: WHAT'S NEXT?

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INTRODUCTION

Located in the middle of the Balkans, North Macedonia has always been something of a regional bellwether. In recent years, it has commanded attention well beyond South Eastern Europe. In 2015-7, commentators saw the domestic political crisis there as a continuation of the standoff between Vladimir Putin's Russia and the West. The coming to power of a pro-Western government led by Zoran Zaev after the parliamentary elections in December 2016 has not alleviated fears that North Macedonia finds itself on a geopolitical fault line. The so-called Prespa Agreement—signed with Greece on 17 June 2018 to resolve the long-standing name dispute between the two countries—has raised the stakes once again.¹

In order to start the ratification and implementation of the Prespa Agreement, on 30 September 2018 citizens of North Macedonia were asked in a referendum whether they were “...in favour of European Union and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?” According to the State Election Commission's official results, just under 37 percent voted. The referendum thus failed on constitutional grounds because the turnout of eligible voters did not exceed 50 percent. Disappointment with the low turnout was somewhat mitigated by the fact that an overwhelming majority of citizens (91.5 percent) voted in favour of the Agreement. Unresolved problems related to outdated voter registries in the country additionally relativized the turnout figures.

This convincing majority—as well as the fact that the referendum was consultative in nature—allowed the government to begin the parliamentary procedure on the constitutional changes for the implementation of the Prespa Agreement, according to article 131 of the country's constitution. On 19 October the necessary two-thirds majority in the parliament (80 out of 120) was reached and the lengthy process of renaming the country North Macedonia began. The final vote on the ratification of the Agreement in the parliament in Skopje took place on 11 January, thus confirming the majority required to adopt the constitutional amendments.

Now that the constitution is changed and the country has been officially renamed North Macedonia, the Greek parliament will also have to vote on the deal.

The Agreement, the subsequent referendum for its approval and the parliamentary procedure for its ratification have had a divisive impact on North Macedonia. Those who oppose the Prespa Agreement have accused the government of capitulation to Greek demands and have raised concerns about the negative impact that changing the name would have on national identity. On the other hand, the proponents of the Agreement—which has been endorsed by most EU and NATO member states—have woven its adoption into the narrative of future gains from NATO and EU accession, which due to Greece's gatekeeping role in both organisations, would be impossible to achieve without a name change.

The Prespa Agreement itself speaks to the enduring attraction of Euro-Atlantic integration for the countries of the Western Balkans. North Macedonia's Prime Minister Zaev, foreign minister Nikola Dimitrov and the government have embarked on a compromise in order to secure their country's entry into NATO and eventually the European Union, under a compromise name, North Macedonia. The Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, and Nikos Kotzias, the country's first diplomat at the time of the signing of the agreement who served as an advisor to George Papandreou during the rapprochement with Turkey in 1999, have become staunch advocates for the neighbouring country's Western credentials. Yet the agreement remains vulnerable because of the nationalist backlash on both sides of the border. Russia sees an opportunity to undermine Western influence. Other Western Balkans countries remain involved, and their contribution to North Macedonia's stability is mixed.

This report explores how key players (the EU, NATO, Russia, other Western Balkans states) approach the Prespa Agreement, how the efforts at resolving the name dispute fit their broader strategy, and offers insight into possible scenarios for the final resolution of the bilateral issue. First, the report will delve into understanding the political significance of the name issue in Greece including a detailed account of each political party's policy toward the issue. Second, based on a number of interviews with the decision makers in Germany and other key EU member states, the report analyses the EU's decision-making process around the postponement of the opening of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in June 2018. Third, we will explain both the Russian and other Western Balkans countries' response to the name dispute. Finally, the report concludes by offering possible scenarios, principally on the ratification and implementation of the Prespa Agreement in Greece, but also on the next steps in North Macedonia's EU and NATO accession.

UNDERSTANDING GREEK OPPOSITION TO THE RAPPROACHMENT WITH NORTH MACEDONIA

Since the mid-1990s, the dispute over the name Macedonia has not been particularly salient in public life in Greece. After dominating public debate during the first half of the 1990s, the issue disappeared from the agenda in 1995 when the Interim Agreement established diplomatic relations between the two countries. Nationalist media outlets and commentators, groups that have focused on the name issue for years, were the only entities that continued to pay attention to the name dispute with the northern neighbor.

The reduced emphasis on the name issue was in accordance with a new and conciliatory Greek foreign policy in the Balkans. Since 1995, the focus has been on the Western Balkans accession to the European Union and spreading Greek economic influence in the region. Yet during all that time, there was very little attempt to talk openly about past mistakes and revisit the policies and the discourse of the early 1990s with a critical eye. Honest self-reflection and self-criticism, which would have encouraged the Greek public to view North Macedonia and its other Balkan neighbours with more understanding, was missing. Instead, the name issue was ‘swept under the rug’ and later, after Greece blocked moves in NATO and the European Union, the issue was diplomatically ‘parked’.

Briefly, after the formation of the Gruevski government, negative reports on the naming issue sprung up again—especially in relation to what Greeks perceived as purely provocative acts by Gruevski (the renaming of a motorway and airport, the policy of antiquation, and various controversial statements).² Soon after, with the start of the economic crisis in 2009-2010, reporting of all foreign and security policy issues largely disappeared.

REOPENING THE NAME DISPUTE

The name issue re-entered the public debate in the second half of 2017. It became hotly contested and dominated the news for about six weeks. After the second rally against a compromise agreement was held in Athens in February 2018, it was relegated to second place behind the alleged Novartis scandal and then other issues of competition between the government and the opposition.³ The issue returned to the front pages around the time of the signing of the Prespa Agreement and has remained a key issue of controversy ever since.

The opposition New Democracy (ND) party tried to connect the Novartis case with the ongoing negotiations on the name issue, claiming

that SYRIZA-ANEL brought out the Novartis scandal to divert attention from the name deal. Many mainstream voters (i.e., not extremists or nationalists), who were ready to view any political development through the lens of antagonism to SYRIZA, also started to believe that the government was willing to relinquish national interest in order to stay in power. These voters were not necessarily inclined to have radical views on the name issue; for example, they would probably have been willing to support a compromise solution if it came from an ND government. But they were gradually ‘acculturated’ to a new and uncompromising stance. In this way, a new and nationalist stance developed that rejected any compromise on the issue. It attracted people who were not previously drawn to radicalism and had adopted uncompromising attitudes as a result of their opposition to the SYRIZA government—and by implication, its policy on the name issue.

The new political climate around the name issue had one very important difference from previous times. Back in the 1990s, moderate voices (i.e., those accepting that the then ‘Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ could use ‘Macedonia’ in its name in some composite form) were a minority. Later, and until the signing of the Interim Agreement, such views became so unpopular that anyone suggesting them risked being cast into the political wilderness. Instead, it was fortunate that in the recent reopening of the name dispute negotiations initial moderate reactions to it were not rejected out of hand by mainstream commentators.

However, even in the early phase of the negotiations, there were several reasons to be pessimistic.

Firstly, the level of diplomatic nuance and understanding of the Balkan reality in public debate in Greece was (and continues to be) very limited. As a result, public debate ‘for or against’ a solution does not explain the less palatable features of a negotiated solution. For example, even when they are inclined

to compromise, Greeks struggle to acknowledge that such a deal would mean accepting things that most Greeks consider unthinkable or unacceptable (e.g., that ‘Macedonians’ will continue to call themselves that, and others will continue to call them ‘Macedonians’ even after a compromise agreement).

Moreover, very few (in fact only a handful) opinion makers know about the domestic situation, politics, and mentality of North Macedonia and other Balkan countries. These few experts on Balkan affairs understand how challenging (indeed, close to impossible) and unpalatable a compromise solution along the lines demanded by Greeks would be for North Macedonian elites and the public. But these views, though they are heard, are lost in the ‘sea of opinions’ expressed in Greek media.

Secondly, the role and influence of ‘mainstream’ media has deteriorated in recent years. As a result of the economic crisis and the radical transformation of the political scene, most major and mainstream print and digital media outlets went bankrupt, closed down or saw their influence radically reduced. Those who benefited were a new, highly populist and often unprofessional media. This marginalisation of moderate views was amplified by the emergence of social media. After almost a decade of economic crisis and sociopolitical turmoil, public debate in Greece is far from immune to extremism and populist rhetoric.

Finally, it was easy to discern a change in mood among many opinion makers since ND started diluting its message and later flirted with the anti-agreement camp. Since the real stakes in Greek politics are not in the name issue, but in the fierce political competition between government and opposition, many opinion makers and analysts who would not normally oppose a compromise solution jumped on the antigovernment bandwagon simply in order to fall in line with the new line of confrontation with the government. Moreover, commonly in

Greek political culture, political discourse tended to sharpen as the issue became more contested between government and opposition. Because of this, thinly veiled or openly nationalist positions have started to be heard in places that are normally moderate.

Overall, in the months after the initial reopening of the issue, things became much more difficult for supporters of compromise. Church opposition, the populism and ethnocentrism of the media, the mobilisation of nationalist and anticompromise civic actors, the heightened tensions in Greek Macedonia, and the slide of the entire parliamentary opposition into the anti-agreement camp changed the political landscape beyond recognition.

While it is too early to draw empirical conclusions about the issue, the name dispute seems to have become much more emotional and politically sensitive after a popular mobilisation and two large rallies in Thessaloniki (on 21 January 2018) and Athens (on 4 February 2018). These heightened public emotions and pushed the otherwise mainstream ND into uncompromising positions. They sidelined supporters of a rapprochement and generally created an atmosphere extremely unfavourable to compromise.

Fast forward several months, and the Greek public stood firmly against the finalisation of the negotiations and the signing of the Prespa Agreement. All polls conducted after the signing show that a large majority of Greeks reject the agreement and are against any compromise on the name dispute.⁴

It is important to take the regional dimension of opposition to the agreement into account. It is clear from opinion polls that a majority across the entire country opposes compromise. However, attitudes are much more hardened in Northern Greece (Thessaloniki, Greek Macedonia regions, Thrace,

and parts of central Greece).⁵ Conservatism and nationalism are more salient in Northern Greece as a result of developments in the last century, and especially the traumatic experience of the Greek civil war (1940s) during which many Slavic speaking inhabitants sided with the rebel Communist Army, a move widely seen in Greece as an effort for a violent carve-up of Greek Macedonia.⁶

Due to these particularly salient regional sensitivities, any government would find it difficult to reach a solution that could satisfy Northern Greece. Things looked somewhat more optimistic in November and December 2017. This was due to courageous remarks by the mayor of Thessaloniki, Yiannis Boutaris,⁷ and the fact that many academics and opinion makers from the North supported the compromise camp, including the iconic figure in Greek Macedonian conservative circles, Nikolaos Mertzos. However, the mood started to sour after the Thessaloniki rally in January 2018 and the efforts by far-right and conservative players (including the Church) to mobilise public sentiment against a compromise agreement.

GREEK POLITICAL PARTIES AND MPs ON THE RATIFICATION OF THE PRESPA AGREEMENT

One of the difficulties in ratifying the Prespa Agreement is the fact that SYRIZA MPs are the only sizeable voting bloc that will support the agreement. All the opposition parties, with the exception of the minor Potami party, are expected to vote against it. Moreover, the junior government coalition partner to SYRIZA, the Independent Greeks (ANEL), have also declared that they will vote against the agreement. Recognising this reality, top SYRIZA officials have repeatedly stated that the majority that will ratify the Prespa Agreement will be one of MPs, not parties.

Following the 2015 general elections and subsequent changes (resignations, MPs turning independent or joining other parties), MPs' strength and positions on the Prespa Agreement are shown in the table below.⁸

PARTY/GROUP	IDEOLOGY	GOVERNMENT OR OPPOSITION	CURRENT NUMBER OF MPs	SUPPORT OR OPPOSE AGREEMENT
Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)⁹	Originally hard left, moving to centre left	Government	145	Support
New Democracy (ND)¹⁰	Centre right	Opposition	77	Oppose
Movement for Change (PASOK & Democratic Left)¹¹	Centre left	Opposition	20	Oppose
Popular Syndesmos-Golden Dawn (GD)¹²	Far right/neo-Nazi	Opposition	15	Oppose
Communist Party of Greece (KKE)¹³	Stalinist left	Opposition	15	Oppose
Independent Greeks-National Patriotic Democratic Coalition (ANEL)¹⁴	National-populist right	Unitl recently in Government	7	Oppose
Potami (The River)¹⁵	Centre-left, pro-reformist	Opposition	6	Support
Union of Centrists¹⁶	Centrist, conservative	Opposition	5	Oppose
Independent MPs¹⁷	Various	n/a	10	Mixed

In order to understand the nature of political discourse about the name issue and to predict the possible outcome of the vote in the Greek parliament, it is useful to consider the positions of the ruling SYRIZA party and the main opposition, New Democracy.

SYRIZA and Prime Minister Tsipras have personally invested enormous political capital in settling the name dispute in a difficult, if not hostile, environment. The original core of SYRIZA (the so-called 3 percent SYRIZA) would very much welcome any settlement of the dispute; in fact, for core SYRIZA supporters, the full implementation of the Prespa Agreement would be evidence that not all is lost of the old leftist soul of the party. However, it is important to stress that the party itself is now much more mainstream and centre left, and most of its voters, who originate from the large pool of old PASOK voters, largely agree with the rest of the

Greeks on the name issue. This shows that the push toward the Prespa agreement was, in a sense, a highly risky move.

For the moment, SYRIZA does not seem to have endured major losses from the Prespa Agreement at the national level. The settlement of the name dispute is an emotional issue, but not necessarily a key issue determining voting behaviour, at least not for the constituency that SYRIZA wishes to appeal to. In any case, SYRIZA will suffer losses compared to its 2015 result, but mostly due to other reasons and not because of the Prespa Agreement. On the other hand, SYRIZA has achieved a boost to its image among key foreign partners, from the United States and Germany to the European Union, which could prove beneficial for improving the international political climate surrounding decisions on the economic agenda.

The second benefit for SYRIZA concerns domestic politics. This is of long-term potential and directly tied to SYRIZA's aim of dominating the center left for many years. The settlement of the name dispute and other moves, such as the change in the Greek Constitution, the renegotiation of relations between the state and the Church, the emphasis on a more politically liberal and rights-based agenda, the anti-corruption agenda, the attack on ND for its right-wing credentials, are all part of the same tactics: to illustrate and highlight the cleavage between right wingers and the leftist and progressive forces dominated by SYRIZA. The name issue, despite the fact that it is an emotional issue for most Greeks, exemplifies this strategy. The political bickering on the issue has pushed ND further to the right, to such an extent that it has made many of its centrist voters and sympathisers feel uncomfortable. SYRIZA hopes that the way the issue is being handled by ND and other opposition parties will alienate many of the centrist voters of the anti-SYRIZA bloc. These voters will probably not vote for SYRIZA in the next elections, but will become an electoral target in subsequent votes. The strategy is not for immediate gains, but SYRIZA hopes it will pay off in future electoral cycles.

Moreover, SYRIZA expects that after ratification the emotions surrounding the issue will calm down and that the opposition will lower the tone of its criticism since the solution reached is in line with Greek national interest and the official foreign policy positions. Prime Minister Tsipras has invested significant political capital in settling the name dispute and appears determined to support the initiative to the end.

Earlier scenarios calling for elections before the ratification of the Prespa Agreement did not materialise despite the break-up of the coalition with the Independent Greeks that occurred on 13 January 2019. As expected, the SYRIZA led government survived the confidence vote in the Greek parliament on 16 January 2019 and is preparing to present the Prespa agreement for ratification in the parliament later this month. It is customary for political analysts to view New Democracy not as one party, but as two: one is more progressive, liberal, and pro-European/Western, and the other is more conservative and

populist, with nationalist and anti-European/Western leanings. To the extent the party can be accurately broken into these two groups, the current leader of the party, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, belongs squarely to the first group; so does his sister and foreign policy guru Dora Bakoyannis; and so did his late father and former prime minister, Konstantinos Mitsotakis. Those who believe that the party's division is valid and that Mitsotakis will be free to follow moderate policies once in office do not worry too much about ND's growing intransigence. They believe that this is only a temporary move made necessary by the politics of the day.

Presently, ND maintains a fundamental disagreement over the use of the term 'Macedonian' to refer to nationality and language. This is the cornerstone of the rejectionists, since it offers a legitimate 'way out' of the quandary of opposing an agreement that is, by and large, in accordance with Greek demands. At the same time, it has the advantage of connecting ND with the sentiments of the large majority of Greeks, while obscuring the fact that in principle ND's position is also in opposition to that majority (by accepting the use of the term 'Macedonia' in a composite form). Since the signing of the agreement, ND officials have built various auxiliary arguments around that core disagreement, by, for example, arguing that irredentism in North Macedonia survives in the name of nationality and language, that the agreement does not bring a genuine 'erga omnes'¹⁸; that Greece has through the deal accepted the national existence of ethnic Macedonians; and various other arguments. Some have argued that the deal should not have included issues of nationality and language at all, so that Greece would not have accepted these terms in a legally binding text.

ND has officially called for early elections, which should have taken place before the Constitution in FYR Macedonia is amended. The party argued that if the changes were implemented they would produce a *fait accompli* that cannot be easily reversed by Greece. For that reason, ND demanded that Greece withdraws from the agreement while it is still possible to do so without major consequences. They also consider that Panos Kammenos, the leader of the minor coalition partner Independent

Greeks who reject the agreement and has stepped down from government over it, bears the biggest responsibility for keeping the government together long enough for SYRIZA to reach an agreement and start implementing it. Finally, ND has pledged to renegotiate the agreement from scratch if it comes to power before it is ratified in the Greek parliament.

Ever since New Democracy made its opposition to the name deal a central component of its strategy, arguments against the various Prespa Agreement provisions have been many and diverse. The referendum in North Macedonia has sparked a further panoply of anti-agreement arguments. Interestingly, ND officials such as Giorgos Koumoutsakos, argued pre-emptively ahead of the referendum that a low turnout and failure to approve such a 'generous agreement' would mean that ethnic Macedonians were overwhelmed by nationalism, and failed even to see their own interest and accept the agreement. Indeed, after the referendum, Dora Bakoyannis, a leading figure in the party, said that the low turnout in the referendum meant that nationalism in its northern neighbor remains 'stronger than we imagined'.

A separate (but somewhat secondary) line of argument by ND focused on the purchase of the energy company EDS—owned by the vice president of the government in Skopje, Koco Angjusev—by the Greek state-owned energy giant Public Power Corporation (ΔΕΗ). ND officials questioned the purchase, arguing that the price was too high given that, according to ND, EDS was a loss-making company that was involved only in distribution and not production. They enquired whether the deal had something to do with the final stages of the negotiation before the Prespa Agreement, demanded that the text of the deal be submitted to the Greek parliament for debate, and called for an independent audit to evaluate the sum paid for the purchase. The Movement for Change made similar criticisms. This criticism, however, has not addressed the obvious logical fallacy: if the agreement is generous to North Macedonia and damaging to Greek interests, why would it be necessary for the Greek side to improve the incentive and pay-off to the other side—and not vice versa?

EUROPEAN UNION: MUDDLING THROUGH

The European Union has been battered and bruised by a succession of crises: the aftershocks of the global financial meltdown in 2008, which shook up the foundations of the Eurozone, the geopolitical challenge posed by Russia, the surge of asylum seekers in 2015-6, Brexit. Though it has proven resilient, the union is nonetheless still dealing with the daunting task of internal consolidation. The electoral success of anti-migrant populist parties such as the Lega, led by Italy's current Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) which questions the fundamentals of European integration, suggest that the European Union is not yet completely secure. It is against this background that the positive breakthrough in the Skopje-Athens negotiations over the name issue was reached in June 2018.

At the end of June and beginning of July 2018, both the European Union and NATO made crucial decisions on the Euro-Atlantic integration of North Macedonia. On June 26, the EU's General Affairs Council (GAC) set North Macedonia on the path toward opening accession negotiations in 2019; on 11 July, NATO invited the country to begin accession negotiations. Both decisions were based on rewarding North Macedonia for the signing of the Prespa Agreement on 16 June and the (largely) peaceful regime change that took place in 2017 and returned the country on a path toward democratic transformation, after a decade of state capture by the then ruling VMRO-DPMNE party.

German support remains vital for North Macedonia's successful Euro-Atlantic integration into the Western Balkans. Reacting to the democratic backsliding in North Macedonia during the regime of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE, German ruling parties took a critical stance and relations between Angela Merkel's CDU and VMRO's conservative sister party cooled over time. The German government was among a few Western countries that had resisted the international financial institutions granting of loans to North Macedonia at a time when the Gruevski government focused on politically motivated infrastructure projects like Skopje 2014. Germany also played a crucial role in efforts by the European Union and the wider West to manage the 2015-17 political crisis in North Macedonia. As a member of the Quint, the German government was proactively involved in the joint EU-U.S. efforts to convince former prime minister Gruevski and his allies to accept the change of government and formation of a majority coalition led by opposition leader Zoran Zaev after the December 2016 elections. Consequently, the German government took a leading role in pushing NATO—but even more so the European Union—in June-July 2018 to unblock North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration process after a decade of standstill, and in an increasingly complicated European and transatlantic environment.

NORTH MACEDONIA'S EU ACCESSION AS COLLATERAL DAMAGE—INTERNAL GERMAN OPINION MAKING

Despite Berlin's leading role in promoting integration of the Western Balkan countries into the European Union, Germany has not remained immune to skepticism about enlargement since the euro crisis. Germany's support for enlargement has largely been the result of the government's handling of skepticism in the ruling parties, particularly within Merkel's ruling CDU/CSU. But the efforts of the German government and parliament to make progress on the accession issue proved unexpectedly challenging. The EU decision on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia was scheduled for the June 28-29 EU Council meeting and the government in Skopje soon reached out to Berlin. In February 2018, Prime Minister Zaev brought half of his government to Berlin, lobbying for German support among ruling coalition MPs and the government. Yet it was not North Macedonia, but an unusual controversy among the ruling parties and with the German government over the decision on opening accession talks with Albania that complicated the process. The EU Council's package decision on North Macedonia and Albania sidelined German lobbying on North Macedonia's accession negotiations, relegating it to a minor issue.

The situation regarding Albania was to a certain degree similar to that of North Macedonia. Western political intervention, primarily the United States, in 2017 managed to end a political stalemate in North Macedonia, prevent a descent into violence, and unblock the reform processes. Granting the opening of EU accession talks was vital to honour that breakthrough and support the sustainability of reforms. Yet, while the ruling German coalition's smaller partner Social Democratic Party (SPD), as well as the SPD-led foreign ministry, were in favour of opening negotiations with Albania without conditions, there was strong resistance within the CDU. The CDU caucus, though not unified, was initially against opening accession talks at all.

The resistance was led by MP Gunter Krichbaum, chair of the Bundestag EU committee. In November

2016, Krichbaum had written a caucus Seven-Point Plan of reform conditions to be implemented before the opening of accession negotiations, and remained critical of the progress made in 2017. His opposition was fueled by a smear campaign against him in Albanian media.¹⁹ The CDU caucus started to move its position toward opening the EU accession negotiations only after negotiations with Merkel's office in late May 2018. It came up with a first draft of a ruling coalition resolution to be adopted by parliament, which foresaw a tough set of conditions for opening accession negotiations with Albania. But the SPD caucus insisted on substantially lowering the conditions. It was only ahead of the 18 June 2018 German-French intergovernmental consultations in Merseberg that the ruling coalition agreed on a compromise resolution text. The Foreign Ministry was able to agree with the draft text, but only after countering an unusual intervention by the Interior Ministry, which had advocated an even stricter set of conditions.

Over the course of spring 2018, the Chancellor's Office, the Foreign Ministry, and the CDU caucus were so preoccupied by the Albania dispute that the decision on North Macedonia's accession talks was totally overshadowed. The decision to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia provoked much less dispute within the CDU caucus. Still, in light of the Albania decision, the CDU caucus continued to insist on a set of conditions, though they were much less strict. The consent of both the SPD caucus and the Foreign Ministry, which had both originally advocated giving North Macedonia the green light without conditions, proved to be much easier. On 22 June 2018 Minister Michael Roth sent a letter to the Bundestag president setting out the government's position on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia. The letter anticipated the ruling coalition's joint position written into a draft Bundestag resolution that was to be adopted on the eve of the 28-29 June European Council summit. Both documents suggested the council should decide to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia, but that the opening of the first negotiation chapters should be conditional on the implementation of certain reforms (in the areas of justice and public administration reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime). All the

actors involved agreed that this set of conditions, unlike in the case of Albania, forms a sort of ‘soft conditionality’—and that in the end, solving the name dispute would be decisive for the next steps in accession. As a CDU official noted, the CDU caucus would support the opening of accession negotiations if the government in Skopje implemented the Prespa Agreement.

GERMAN ENLARGEMENT POLICY HITS A FRENCH WALL

In mid-June 2018, as the German government prepared for the traditional biannual intergovernmental talks with France at Merseberg, the Chancellery was convinced it had overcome the greatest obstacle on the way to the 28-29 June EU decision to open accession negotiations. Yet this proved a misjudgment, as Merkel found out on 18 June when she tried to persuade the French President Emmanuel Macron to endorse a conditional green light for opening accession talks.

When German government officials had contacted their counterparts from other EU member states in previous weeks, several capitals had signaled objections. Danish and Dutch resistance to the opening of accession negotiations with the two Western Balkan countries was related to their domestic political shift toward the right and political pressure from populist political forces. In The Hague, the new ruling coalition was in the process of abolishing citizens’ referenda on enlargement issues. However, it was Paris that led the member states who raised objections to a positive decision on accession negotiations. Paris focused on Albania in contacts with German government officials, citing the issue of Albanian asylum seekers in France as one of the reasons for its skepticism.²⁰ Some officials in Berlin considered this Paris’s main objection, while others dubbed it a ‘smokescreen’. French foreign ministry officials openly signaled to Berlin that the decision on Albania and North Macedonia was entirely up to the Elysee Palace. Before they met at Merseberg, Merkel and Macron had discussed the Macedonia and Albania issue several times on the phone. ‘Until Merseberg, I was personally convinced France would

give in the end,’ insisted a high-level German government official.

Yet the French position at Merseberg was to decline to open accession negotiations. The French president insisted there should be no further steps toward EU enlargement before the May 2019 elections for the European Parliament. German government representatives explained that Paris was afraid of strengthening the extreme right in the European elections. Macron’s unwillingness to compromise mirrored his political position—presented at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in May 2018 in Bulgaria—that there should be no further enlargement before a deepening of the union.

The Merseberg meeting consequently ended without agreement. Germany and France were about to enter the European Council meeting discussions on the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania with strongly opposing positions.

The inevitable clash between Germany and France, however, did not happen at the European summit, but at the preceding General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting on 26 June. France was quietly supported by Denmark and the Netherlands, which were pleased to have Paris taking the lead.

The Bulgarian representatives (who held the EU presidency) had already given up and wanted to abandon the meeting. It was only because of a last-minute intervention by Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jan Asselborn that a compromise was found. In their joint decision, the other member states *de facto* gave in to the French position to take no further steps toward enlargement before May 2019. In their conclusions on North Macedonia (and in a largely similar decision on Albania), the council ‘agrees to positively respond to the... progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and sets out a path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019.’ The positive decision by the council was conditional on progress in several reform areas that mostly mirrored the German position. An assessment of whether sufficient progress has been made will be based on the next European Commission country report, due in April 2019.

Commenting on this GAC outcome in private, a high-level government official in Berlin took pains to stress the positive—‘at least, Skopje has something to work with’—citing the forthcoming referendum and the reform conditions listed in the conclusions. However, confronted with the unpopularity of the compromise in the eyes of North Macedonians, he had to admit that the French position had seriously undermined the credibility of the EU’s conditionality-based enlargement policy.

EU enlargement used to be the European Union’s trademark policy. That is barely the case any longer, despite the publication in February 2018 of ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’²¹ and the European Union’s political reengagement in the region since late 2016. Macron, among others, believes widening runs counter to deepening. The democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland is

hardly a reassuring precedent, let alone the chronic deficit in the rule of law in Romania and Bulgaria. Supporters of expansion as a strategic means of projecting stability in the European Union’s volatile periphery are fighting an uphill battle. The imminent departure of the United Kingdom, a traditional advocate of enlargement, has not helped. The recent summit in London under the auspices of the so-called ‘Berlin process’—designed to keep the Western Balkans on the EU track—was marred by the squabbles over Brexit that are tearing apart Theresa May’s cabinet. Given all these headwinds, it is remarkable that the European Union is still encouraging North Macedonia to join at all. However, the EU’s reluctance to unblock Macedonia’s EU accession path, even after the Prespa Agreement, returns us to the situation before the European 2017 political re-engagement—where the Kremlin was free to spread its influence in the Western Balkans unhindered.

RUSSIA: PLAYING THE SPOILER

Russia's principal interest in the former Yugoslavia in general and in North Macedonia specifically is to counterbalance the West. Moscow lacks a positive agenda, but pursues opportunities to thwart its adversaries. It does not support the Western Balkans' membership of the economic and security platforms under its purview, such as the Eurasian Economic Union or the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. The Kremlin is reluctant to expend scarce financial resources on the region, much less commit troops in order to claim a stake in Balkan security affairs. Meddling in local conflicts, through diplomatic channels or direct involvement in domestic politics, is therefore the strategy of choice. The ultimate objective is to prevent the consolidation of the Western-backed order by maintaining the status quo in the region. Unresolved disputes in the Balkans draw the attention of policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic away from Russia's 'near abroad' in the post-Soviet space.

Russia's obstructionism is a function of its confrontation with the European Union and the United States, triggered by the annexation of Crimea. Up to that point, relations between Moscow and the West in South Eastern Europe were not entirely based on zero-sum logic. That is not to suggest that frictions were absent, as anyone who remembers Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference can attest.²² Yet overlapping interests drove cooperation in areas such as energy infrastructure. In those days, Russia viewed the former Yugoslavia as an extension of the West. It gave a low-key response to NATO's expansion to Croatia and Albania and raised no objections to EU enlargement. Why take issue with Montenegro or Serbia's accession into the union, given that these countries, which have extensive ties with Russia, would enlarge the number of Moscow-friendly member states in Brussels?

Much has changed over the past six years or so. The confrontational turn taken during Putin's third term and the war in Ukraine transformed Russia from a difficult partner to a spoiler. It aids anti-Western and nationalist groups as well as maverick leaders such as Milorad Dodik, a member of the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At times, Russia is prepared to gamble, as in Montenegro—where it seems to have thrown its weight behind an alleged coup attempt in 2016, with the aim of blocking the country's entry into NATO. Prosecutors in Podgorica have pointed the finger at Moscow's military intelligence, the same outfit implicated in the nerve agent attack against Sergey and Yulia Skripal in the United Kingdom.

Russia has raised its profile in North Macedonia, too. Even as Prime Minister Gruevski remained rhetorically committed to the European Union and NATO, he put considerable effort into building up ties with the Russians. For instance, Skopje and Moscow developed plans to supply the country with gas. Russian companies have invested in other parts of the energy sector (e.g., Lukoil in petrol stations or the Cyprus-registered TKG, which took over a combined cycle heat and power plant near Skopje). Sergey Samsonenko, a businessman from the southern Russian city of Rostov with stakes in the gambling industry in North Macedonia, became the sponsor of sports teams such as Skopje's FC Vardar, adding to Russian soft power.

During the 2015-7 crisis, Russia aligned itself with the then governing VMRO-DPMNE. Pro-Kremlin media cast the anticorruption protests in Skopje as an extension of the Western plot to export colour revolutions, sowing chaos and destruction in their wake. In the aftermath of a shoot-out between ethnic Albanian militants and security forces in the town of

Kumanovo, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov publicly levelled accusations at Albania and Bulgaria, two NATO members, of conspiring to partition North Macedonia. The theory originated in a commentary published by RT, a TV channel sponsored by the Kremlin. Such speculation gained currency in pro-Gruevski media, which fanned fears of an Albanian resurgence in Macedonia and the region aided and abetted by Western powers. There were echoes in Serbia, too (see below), where nationalist commentators raised alarm about a 'Macedonian scenario' threatening the country.

Now in opposition, VMRO-DPMNE is campaigning against the deal with Greece, dismissing it as an act of national treason. Its partisans look up to Russia as a protector against the perceived Western diktat, as well as against Albanians. Russian flags have become a regular sight at antigovernment rallies. A radical pro-Russian party, United Macedonia, has sprung up and is trying to capitalise on the backlash. The appeal to Russia is common in Greece, too, where far right opponents of the compromise with Skopje consider Putin an ally in the resistance against the West, notably the United States and Germany.

Russia's attitude toward the Prespa Agreement has been ambivalent. Initially, the Foreign Ministry welcomed the compromise. However, there is no doubt that Moscow would benefit if the Zaev-Tsipras deal unravels. It would appear that Russia has already triggered active measures to undermine the resolution of the name dispute. In an unprecedented move, Greek authorities expelled two Russian diplomats in July 2018 and denied entry to two more for working with groups in Northern Greece fighting the agreement with North Macedonia. Russia reciprocated by expelling two Greek diplomats. Greece recalled its ambassador from Moscow too, an unprecedented move in a country which has been traditionally friendly toward Russia. In a parallel development, ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople have turned sour. The patriarchate

has recognised the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has broken away from the ecclesiastical authority of Moscow. The Greek government denied visas to Russian monks wishing to travel to Mount Athos. Lately though, in a recent visit by Tsipras to Moscow the two sides made efforts to mend relations. Moscow has mentioned that they would not oppose the Prespa Agreement as long as it is ratified by the Greek parliament, though the Russian MFA returned again only a couple of days ago with a statement expressing its dissatisfaction over alleged external pressure on the two countries to settle the name dispute.²³ Moreover, Russia continued to express its opposition to North Macedonia's membership to NATO.

Tensions between the government in Skopje and the Kremlin are peaking as well. Zoran Zaev accused Ivan Savvidis, a Greek-Russian tycoon based in Thessaloniki and former member of the Duma (the lower house of the Russian Federation legislature), of channeling EUR 300,000 to football hooligans in North Macedonia to take part in protests against the Prespa Agreement.

Active measures and disinformation campaigns intended to boost nationalists in both Greece and North Macedonia are fully in line with Moscow's policy of pushing back against the West. A refusal by the Greek parliament to endorse the Prespa Agreement, would halt NATO expansion in the Balkans and therefore come as a major diplomatic coup for Russia. It will not come as a surprise if Moscow toughens its rhetoric and redoubles efforts to influence domestic affairs in both countries if the implementation of the Prespa Agreement unravels.

ELSEWHERE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Since gaining its independence in 1991, North Macedonia's position in South Eastern Europe has been contested by a number of neighbouring countries. Until early 2018, Bulgaria questioned the distinctiveness of the Macedonian nation and language. It took Serbia five years to recognise North Macedonia as an independent country and the Serbian Orthodox Church never accepted the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The successful implementation of the Prespa Agreement will increase pressure on other countries in the region to resolve their bilateral issues. The yes vote in Skopje increased the pressure on Serbia and Kosovo to agree on a solution for an outstanding bilateral dispute in the region over Kosovo's future status.

The first foreign policy success of Zaev's government was the signing²⁴ and ratification²⁵ of the Treaty on friendship, good neighbourly relations and cooperation with Bulgaria. The treaty recognises both countries' territorial integrity, envisages the establishment of a commission to work on resolving their differing views on history, and pledges to protect the rights of the other country's nationals living on their soil. In addition, it includes provisions on non-interference in each other's domestic affairs and focuses in detail on cooperation in the economy, infrastructure, and culture, envisaging the formation of a joint working group to discuss ways to improve cooperation. This treaty is perceived by both sides as a basis for Bulgaria's pledge to help its western neighbour in its bid to join NATO and the European Union.

The agreement came into force during Bulgaria's presidency of the European Union and its positive results were immediate. In a very short period of time, Bulgaria turned from an ambiguous and suspicious neighbour to a strong supporter and promoter of the country's EU and NATO memberships.

Relations between Skopje and Sofia were far from positive in the recent past. Under the previous government's administration in Skopje it had been in the pipeline for years, but was never concluded due to tense bilateral relations between the countries. The allegedly poor personal relationship between the two prime ministers, Borisov and Gruevski, despite the fact that their parties are both members of the European Peoples Party bloc, only exacerbated this tension.

North Macedonia's relations with Serbia have become more tense since the change of government in Skopje. The former Macedonian leadership enjoyed strong support from the then prime minister Aleksandar Vučić and his political party (also part of the European People's Party). When the wire-tapping scandal developed into a full-fledged political crisis, with daily protests, an orchestrated campaign against a change of government in Skopje was launched in pro-government tabloids in Serbia. Accusations that the new government would enable the creation of a 'Greater Albania', and play into the hands of the Albanians who favour the dissolution of North Macedonia, became common currency in the pro-government press. Serbia was highly involved in

the political crisis and President Vučić praised former prime minister Gruevski and his government for standing up against external influences and foreign mercenaries and agents. When the protests escalated into violence, and protesters stormed the parliament in April 2017, media in North Macedonia published a photo of a Serbian intelligence officer who worked for the Serbian Embassy in Skopje, Goran Živaljević, amongst the mob. The Serbian investigative websites KRIK and OCCRP published transcripts of conversations among Živaljević, a pro-Russian politician and a leader of the Serbian minority

party in North Macedonia, a staunchly pro-Kremlin Serbian journalist, and a member of parliament from the ruling party in Serbia, indicating attempts to interfere in the turmoil in the country.²⁶ Shortly after, Živaljević left North Macedonia and the Serbian government pulled its entire embassy staff from the country.²⁷ They were acting on intelligence reports of alleged ‘offensive action’ against Serbia and Serbian interests in North Macedonia.²⁸ To take such steps against North Macedonia was unprecedented, even during the NATO intervention against Serbia.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Following the successful change in North Macedonia's constitution and the adoption of 'North Macedonia' as its official name, as well as a successful confidence vote for SYRIZA-led government after the break-up of the coalition with ANEL over the deal with Skopje, the Greek government is now expected to shepherd ratification of the Prespa Agreement through parliament in the coming weeks, and subsequently to bring the protocol on North Macedonia's NATO accession to the Greek parliament for ratification some time in February or early March. Hence, in the summer of 2019, NATO is likely to welcome its 30th member state and the European Union is expected to launch membership negotiations with North Macedonia and, potentially, Albania sometime in 2019 or early 2020. The breakthrough will embolden Euro-Atlantic policies in the region. With North Macedonia on the right track, policymakers will concentrate on hard

cases such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Serbia will continue to strengthen security and defence cooperation with NATO, without formally changing its policy of neutrality. The alliance's expansion will decisively limit Russian influence in the Western Balkans.

If, and when, the vote for the ratification of the Prespa Agreement reaches the Greek Parliament, we can identify three possible scenarios:

- a. SYRIZA secures a relatively comfortable majority;
- b. SYRIZA secures only a marginal majority;
- c. SYRIZA fails to win the vote. Based on our analysis, we can forecast the vote for the ratification of the Prespa Agreement and the probability of each vote scenario as follows:

RATIFICATION VOTE	MAJORITY	NUMBER OF VOTES	PRO-RATIFICATION GROUP	PROBABILITY
Optimistic scenario	Comfortable majority	153-158	SYRIZA & most Potami MPs plus some ANEL and independent MPs	40%
Moderate scenario	Marginal majority	151-152	SYRIZA & most Potami, plus a couple of ANEL MPs	30%
Pessimistic scenario	No majority	<151	SYRIZA MPs plus fewer than six MPs from Potami, ANEL, and independents	30%

Thus, if the ratification of the Prespa Agreement reaches the floor of the Greek Parliament it is highly likely that it will be approved. However, the situation got more complicated when Kammenos finally realised his threat and formally withdrew his party from the government on account of the Prespa Agreement. The move was rejected by four of his MPs, including two ANEL Ministers who stayed in their positions, only to be excluded from the party by Kammenos soon thereafter. Prime Minister Tsipras successfully called a vote of confidence on his government and will proceed with the next step, which is to bring the Prespa Agreement to parliament for ratification. What complicates things further is the fact that the expected majorities of the two crucial votes do not coincide. To survive the confidence vote Tsipras relied on several (current and former) ANEL votes, while the Potami MPs all but one voted against the government; in contrast, the Prespa Agreement vote will rely mostly on the Potami votes, but will still need a couple of MPs elected with ANEL.

A potential *pessimistic scenario* could signal the failure of the Prespa Agreement and a return to the pre-2017 status quo. New governments led by New Democracy and VMRO-DPMNE could come into office in Athens and Skopje, further complicating the settlement of the dispute. There would be very little scope for compromise and the two parties could opt for nationalist posturing, as in the pre-2017 period. The European Union will be powerless to intervene, especially if Skopje fails to carry out its part of the bargain. NATO expansion would be halted. Russia would gain—and may even offer North Macedonia some sort of defence cooperation deal akin to the one it has with Serbia. Of course, VMRO-DPMNE would, in all likelihood, not embrace Russia in full but rather follow Serbian President Vučić's example of juggling East and West. It would flirt with Moscow while reiterating its commitment to membership of the European Union and NATO. However, Russia's overtures to North Macedonia would be sure to stoke interethnic tensions in both countries, as well as beyond its borders.

THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS IN GREECE

The elections in Greece are likely to be held before, or alongside, the European elections in May 2019. It is certain that New Democracy will do best; its lead over the second party could be anything between 5 and 10 percentage points. Most observers and opinion polls agree that SYRIZA will be a strong second party, and this will ensure that the two main poles of the political system will continue to dominate Greek politics. This is significant because it influences post-election alliances and will shape the politics of Greece while the Prespa Agreement is implemented. Furthermore, Golden Dawn, Movement for Change, and the Communist Party are expected to join the parliament, each with between 6 and 8 percent of the vote. Various small parties represented in the current parliament, including Independent Greeks, are not expected to keep their seats.

Interestingly, one new entrant to parliament may be a new party of the far right. According to polls, there are two-three smaller far right (and to a different degree, pro-Russian) parties that poll under the threshold of 3 percent. If these parties manage to agree on a coalition before the elections, they will probably easily gain seats. It is also possible that one of them—'Greek Solution', led by the fierce nationalist and former MP Konstantinos Velopoulos, who has connections to Russia—will be able to pick up seats by itself. In either of these scenarios, ND will lose seats. Moreover, given that these parties focus heavily on the Macedonian issue and have strengthened because of the settlement of the dispute with Skopje, they are likely to influence public debate if they enter parliament, and shape Greek policy if they enter government.

The main question is whether ND will manage to get an absolute majority and form a government on its own, or whether it will have to go into coalition with one of the opposition parties. If the scenario involving the five parties materialises, the most likely coalition partner will be the centre-left Movement for Change. This will be good news for the Prespa

Agreement since these parties would be less likely to adopt a radical stance toward North Macedonia's EU accession. However, if ND fails to get an absolute majority and also fails to agree on a joint coalition with the Movement for Change or SYRIZA, then the far-right party will be the only choice left, since the Communist Party never joins coalitions and Golden Dawn is *de facto* excluded from collaborations in parliament. If a far-right party with an extreme agenda on the Macedonian question joins ND in government, it will not only be bad news for the future of relations with North Macedonia, but also the rest of Greece's Balkan neighbours.

The immediate question, of course, is what to expect from a future ND-dominated government in Athens when it comes to the Prespa Agreement? Will the implementation run smoothly or not? In an interview for *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, Mitsotakis stated in July 2018: 'I have made it clear that I do not like this agreement... However, I also say that I will respect [the deal] as a commitment undertaken by the country, provided that it has been ratified by the Greek Parliament.'²⁹ Observers who have a good understanding of the internal workings of the ND insist that NATO and the European Union have to be treated separately in any analysis of the party's future policy.

NORTH MACEDONIA'S UNCONTESTED NATO MEMBERSHIP

Unlike negotiations over North Macedonia's EU accession process, the July 2018 NATO Summit on the country's membership application proceeded without controversy and received the blessing of the current Greek government. At their Brussels summit on 11 July, heads of state and government 'decided to invite the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to begin accession talks to join the Alliance.' In his official letter to Prime Minister Zaev, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stressed that 'this invitation comes in the context of the historic agreement reached between Skopje and Athens....' The decision was fully supported by the German and other EU governments, who consider North

Macedonia's membership of NATO as an important step in countering Russia's meddling in the Western Balkans region. No conditions for North Macedonia's full NATO membership—beyond the implementation of the Prespa Agreement—were mentioned.

The benefit of North Macedonia's NATO membership is not so much to contain Putin's Russia as to strengthen stability in the post-Yugoslav space. For NATO, it is about getting business dating back to the 1990s finished. For North Macedonia, membership means internal and external security. Each of the main communities in the country stand to benefit. North Macedonia's entry into NATO won't necessarily bridge the ethnic divide, yet it might dissuade political entrepreneurs from exploiting it and thereby create more unity.

In this scenario, if the parliament in Athens ratifies the Prespa Agreement, and provided that the United States unconditionally backs North Macedonia's accession and that the ratification process in the Congress doesn't face political hurdles (as happened with Montenegro in 2016), North Macedonia will become NATO's 30th member.

EU INTEGRATION OF NORTH MACEDONIA

On the other hand, when it comes to EU accession—which is a long-term process that offers more options for blocking—things are different, and a future ND government may be tempted to follow a different policy. It has become clear that the ND leadership is already pondering a tougher policy on the EU accession process in view of its expected coming to power. For example, two days before the vote of confidence in the Greek parliament ND leader Mitsotakis stated in a TV interview that if the government ratifies the Prespa Agreement and the NATO accession protocol then there is nothing that can be done and Skopje will join NATO. However, Mitsotakis said, "they have not entered the European Union. Skopje's course towards the European Union is a long process and it will largely depend on whether [the country] will exhibit good neighbourly

relations with Greece”. He also did not disagree with the interpretation of the Greek interviewer that the EU accession process offers opportunities “for corrections in the future”.³⁰

The Greek government, like every other EU member state, will have to give the green light for every negotiating chapter of the EU accession negotiations. Under the current legislative framework, Athens can be the sole blocker of the process, since it requires the unanimity of all EU member states. A future Greek government could register its opposition to the deal on the name issue. For example, it could raise issues related to the implementation of the Prespa Agreement and the honouring of the letter and the spirit of the text. Future Greek governments will be very attentive to the terms used in North Macedonia, whether in domestic or international use, and will certainly flag the use of terms considered by Greece as inappropriate. Different interpretations of the Prespa Agreement provisions are also likely. The Greek side could try to impose its own interpretation on all these contested issues, and may use its blocking power in the EU accession process to that effect. A possible change of government in North Macedonia and the return of the nationalist VRMO-DPMNE to power may further complicate the process. Overall, it is less likely—but not entirely inconceivable—that a future government in Athens may even look for opportunities to terminate the

Prespa Agreement, using any perceived violations as a pretext.

Previous negotiations offer ample precedent for blockages in the EU accession process: Slovenia vs. Croatia and Cyprus vs. Turkey, for example. As North Macedonia would already have joined NATO, the effect of a partial blockage will not be devastating. There may be sufficient room for compromise. However, any impasse in the negotiations will give credence to voices in Skopje arguing for a multi-vector foreign policy, with Russia and/or Turkey as alternative poles. Moscow’s ‘hearts and minds’ campaign will pick up speed as well.

In order to prevent or manage future disputes over the Prespa Agreement, given that then EU membership process requires unanimity from member states, the EU itself should consider to – along with North Macedonia – adopt a roadmap on the implementation of the Agreement. The bilateral dispute between Skopje and Athens needs to be converted, as far as is realistically possible, into a multilateral issue within the European Union—thus making it more difficult for any individual member state to hijack the European Union’s enlargement policies. Treating it as a multilateral issue would also ensure that the agreement would be equitably implemented to the benefit of both sides to the (former) dispute.

ENDNOTES

- 1 English translation of the Prespa Agreement: <http://www.ekathimerini.com/resources/article-files/aggliko-1.pdf>
- 2 See Srdjan Cvijic, "Macedonia: What's in a Name - and Behind It?", European Policy Centre, 16 July 2009. http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/41255650_Macedonia.pdf
- 3 For more on the Novartis scandal see for example here: <https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-politics-novartis-scandal-pharmaceutical-whistleblower/>
- 4 For example, according to poll by the agency Public Issue conducted in November 2018, 65 percent of Greeks are against the Prespa Agreement, while a mere 17 percent are in favour and 13 percent remain neutral on the issue; according to the same polling agency the pro-agreement segment of the public opinion was reduced by 4 percent between July and November 2018. <https://www.publicissue.gr/14729/varometro-nov-2018/>
Interestingly, according to a nationwide poll conducted by polling agency Pulse for Skai TV on 16-18 September 2018 the attitudes of SYRIZA and ND voters toward the Prespa Agreement are divided. Broken down by their voting behaviour in the September 2015 elections, the negative outlook is 41 percent (26 percent very, 15 percent rather) for SYRIZA voters and 81 percent (62 percent very, 19 percent rather) for ND voters. When it comes to a positive outlook, with 53 percent (30 percent very, 23 percent rather) this is a majority attitude for SYRIZA voters, while it is very low (11 percent with percent very, 8 percent rather) among ND voters. <https://www.iefimerida.gr/sites/default/files/skai-pulse-092018.pdf>
- 5 For example, an opinion poll that was conducted by Pro the Rata polling agency in the 1st Electoral District of Thessaloniki (several municipalities forming the city's urban complex) on 5-7 September 2018 showed that 65 percent of SYRIZA voters and 71 percent of ND voters rejected the Prespa Agreement. http://myportal.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Prorata_Erevna_9-2018.pdf
- 6 Apart from the trauma of the Greek civil war other factors also played a role in shaping ideology and political culture in Northern Greece. Church politics were crucial in political and national power games throughout late Ottoman times. The influence of the Greek state administration (conservative education, secret service, police and the army) due to the threats outlined above has traditionally been more salient. Pontic Greek (Black Sea-Northern Turkey) and Asia Minor Greek (mainland and Western Turkey) refugees who repopulated Greek Macedonia have traditionally held strong religious sentiments. For decades local politics was a powerful mix of the influence of refugee associations (traditionally nationalist) and religious institutions. Occasional ungrounded isolationist sentiments and perceptions of threat were further shaped and consolidated during the Cold War. These feelings hardened during the new nationalist wave that overtook Greece in the 1990s as a result of the collapse of Yugoslavia, the wars of succession, and the independence of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.
- 7 Things were aggravated after several statements by Mayor Boutaris, which were considered even by moderate Northern Greece opinion makers to be blunders. While an invitation to PM Zaev to spend New Year's Eve in Thessaloniki was generally welcome, Boutaris' repeated use of the term 'Macedonia' enraged even moderate voters. The 'straw that broke the camel's back' came when Boutaris mentioned that, after the renaming of the Alexander the Great Airport in Skopje, perhaps Thessaloniki should consider renaming its own airport (currently 'Macedonia' airport). These statements outspent his political capital in Thessaloniki and weakened the appeal of the compromise camp.
- 8 The total number of MPs in the Greek Parliament is 300, and for the ratification of the agreement the government must secure an absolute majority of the MPs who are present in the session.
- 9 SYRIZA is the core party in the government coalition and the main driver of the name issue settlement. In previous months, there was some speculation that MPs from Northern Greece were opposed to the policy but the leadership has managed to stifle dissent. All SYRIZA MPs are likely to vote in favour of ratification.
- 10 New Democracy (ND) is the major party of the opposition and is leading the polls with a comfortable majority. It is widely expected to form the next government, either on its own or with the support of a smaller party, such as the centre-left Movement for Change. ND is expected to win anywhere between 70 and 80 new MPs in the next elections, a fact that makes this party a very attractive alternative for MPs from collapsing smaller parties. Moreover, due to the fact it will almost certainly win the next elections, the scope for dissent is at the moment close to zero—which is a typical feature of Greek politics. ND will vote against the agreement.
- 11 Movement for Change is the newly formed coalition between PASOK, formerly the biggest party in Greece, and Democratic Left, a minor party, which is itself a splinter of one of SYRIZA's factions. The Movement for Change is dominated by the PASOK leadership and voters. The party reluctantly fell into line behind its leader Fofi Genimata and adopted an anti-Prespa Agreement stance, despite the fact that many major figures in the party, including almost all of the candidates in a recent presidential contest, were in favour of the agreement. The party is therefore highly divided on the issue, but due to its instinct for political survival and the struggle to avoid a fatal division they are likely to follow the official party line. The only exception here may be the leader of the minor Democratic Left, who favours the agreement and has left open the possibility of voting for it.

- 12 Golden Dawn is a well known far-right movement with neo-Nazi inclinations. All 15 of its MPs will vote against the agreement.
- 13 The Communist Party of Greece is a curious hybrid that remains ideologically committed to Stalinism, fully participates in Greek parliamentary life since its legalisation in 1974, and tends to vote against all major pro-Western decisions. It is one of Greece's most stable political parties, typically winning between 7 and 10 percent of the vote in the last 40 years. The party tends to oppose nationalism, but is against the Prespa Agreement because it considers it yet another attempt by the United States and the West to extend their control over new territories and states. The party's 15 MPs will vote against or abstain because of the agreement's provision for North Macedonia's entrance into NATO.
- 14 Independent Greeks (ANEL) is a party of the ethno-populist right that broke away from ND during the crisis. It adopted fiercely anti-austerity and anti-bailout rhetoric, which facilitated the formation of the government with leftist SYRIZA. The party's core positions, however, are also strongly nationalist and many of its views on foreign policy are more akin to those of the far right. From the start of negotiations with North Macedonia, the Independent Greeks party has been against any compromise and has continued to argue that the term 'Macedonia' should not appear. Overall, from the MPs elected with the ANEL list: 4 MPs (party leader Kammenos and Kollia-Tsarouha, Zouraris and Katsikis) are expected to follow the party line and vote against the agreement; 1 MP (Papachristopoulos) has declared that he will support the agreement, while the 2 MPs who were recently excluded from the party (Kountoura and Kokkalis) may go either way.
- 15 Potami is a centre/centre-left party that was formed during the crisis with an explicitly pro-bailout, pro-reform and pro-European platform. For a period of time, they formed a united front with the centre-left Movement for Change and later flirted with both ND and SYRIZA. Potami is the only opposition party that has fully supported the name issue negotiations, is in favour of the Prespa Agreement, and has pledged to vote for its ratification when it comes to the parliament. But, according to Potami officials, the party will not support the SYRIZA-ANEL government in a vote of confidence, whether it comes before or after the ratification vote. Only one Potami MP (Danelis) has pledged to support the government in a confidence vote if this would be necessary to save the government from collapse so that it could ratify the Prespa Agreement. Overall, from the Potami list 4 MPs (party leader Theodorakis, Likoudis, Mavrotas, and Danelis) are likely to follow the party line and vote in favour of the ratification of the Prespa Agreement and 2 MPs (Psarianos and Amiras) will vote against the agreement.
- 16 Union of Centrists is an older party that for more than two decades was at the margins of the party system and had never been in parliament before the 2015 elections. It gained many votes in Northern Greece, famously winning in Thessaloniki more votes than the formerly dominant PASOK. It is considered a manifestation of citizens' frustration with traditional politics. Since 2015, the party has been left with only 5 MPs after several went independent. Its leader Vassilis Leventis has been among the fiercest critics of the Prespa Agreement, calling it treason and demanding that the government officials responsible be prosecuted after the next elections. He has also described the signing of the agreement as unconstitutional. None of these allegations have any legal basis whatsoever. Overall, all Union of Centrists MPs are expected to vote against the ratification of the agreement.
- 17 MPs who were elected on party lists but have broken ranks and are now independent. Only one independent, Minister Papakosta, a former ND MP, may vote in favour of the agreement.
- 18 An *erga omnes* solution would apply in all circumstances both internationally and internally in the North Macedonian constitution and legal system.
- 19 <https://exit.al/en/2018/04/23/history-repeats-with-attacks-on-krichbaum/>
- 20 According to the French Asylum Authority (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides) there were 100,412 asylum requests in total in 2017, which represented rise of a 16 percent since 2016. Out of these, Albanian citizens were top of the list by nationality with a total of 7,630 (a 6.5 percent rise from the previous year). <https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/fr/l-ofpra/actualites/les-donnees-de-l-asile-2017-a-l>
- 21 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf
- 22 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Speech_and_the_Following_Discussion_at_the_Munich_Conference_on_Security_Policy
- 23 http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3471933
- 24 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-macedonia-bulgaria-treaty/macedonia-bulgaria-sign-treaty-to-improve-ties-idUSKBN1AH4E3>
- 25 <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/02/14/agreement-macedonia-bulgaria-enters-force/>
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