

The Macedonia-Greece dispute/difference over the name issue: mitigating the inherently unsolvable



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Abstract

Having entered its third decade, the Macedonia-Greece naming disputeⁱ seems as if it is set to join an infamous category of international relations—that of the world’s chronic unsolvable issues. By focusing on the post-2006 decline in Macedonian-Greek (political) relations and the stalemate in negotiations on the name issue, this paper lays out and reassesses most of the fundamental components and recent variables in the dispute but also seeks to demystify important aspects of the dispute and to identify the space for a rational, common sense solution. Beginning with a substantiated claim that obstructive politics have been practised by certain NATO/EU circles towards Macedonia, and going on to deconstruct the myth that the dispute is purely bilateral and limited only to the name issue, this article warns that the intermittent optimism exhibited among the stakeholders in the negotiations means little given the historical depth of this otherwise simple dispute. The main message of this paper, however, is contained in a subsequent definition of the dispute as (part of) a perverse, inherently unsolvable, centuries-old problem that can only be mitigated rather than conclusively addressed, since it is based on vital, incompatible national interests and, consequently, a rigid, inter-state/inter-society disagreement. The pressing need to mitigate the dispute via local pragmatism, balanced diplomatic pressure, and the adoption of an inventive approach, especially after the Kosovo problem has been satisfactorily closed (at least temporarily), guarantees almost nothing, since both Macedonia and Greece have strong strategic rationales for not approaching a compromise. As the imperative of preserving the Macedonian national identity in every form seems somewhat stronger than the Greek national security concerns underlying the dispute, any so-called rational compromise seems to be possible only within the broad “dual formula” spectrum. Therefore, both parties are encouraged to leave reactive “antiquisation” aside, to focus (only) on the name issue, and to search for a mutually acceptable name variant within a flexible “dual formula” framework. Final success, however, remains elusive, as Macedonia and Greece continue to struggle with deep intra-social divisions and/or aversive intellectual trends in the context of the name dispute. In conclusion, policy-makers should bear in mind that the only intelligent way to settle the dispute and the inexorable Macedonian question in the 21st century is by fully integrating the Macedonian national identity in the European cultural and political mosaic.

Key words: the Balkans, Macedonian-Greek relations, the name issue, national security, identity, the Gruevski regime, “antiquisation”, regional security, the EU, NATO.

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Obstructive politics beyond Athens

Closely related to the unfinished NATO and EU area in the Balkans is the dispiriting fact that none of the end-goals of Macedonia's three-pillar foreign policy (EU, NATO, and good neighbourliness, initially attempted via President Kiro Gligirov's controversial concept of equidistance) has been attained in over 20 years.ⁱⁱ Ironically, although the solution to the Macedonian—and in many ways, Balkan—conundrum has been self-evident, requiring simply that the West close up the “black hole” in the heart of the Western Balkans (Ivanovski 2012a, 2012b), all that Macedonia has “gained” in return for its *de facto* allied role in Afghanistan and Iraq is the largely staged Bucharest “veto” in 2008 and the subsequent derivatives of such obstructive politics. To be fair, since 2001 the West has become much less ignorant of what it suddenly came to see in the late 1990s as “the most shining and positive example to rise from the ashes of Former Yugoslavia” and a potential success story (Liotta 1999: n.p.). Today, it is still hoped that Macedonia, despite its recent political stagnation, will become a Balkan multicultural model ready for extrapolation. More than a decade since the last Balkan war, however, one cannot help but share Liotta's bewilderment as to “how little credit or acknowledgement Macedonia has received for its success since independence” (1999: n.p.; 2000: 83; Liotta and Jebb 2004: 18).

For all these years, the blockade of Macedonia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration has been typically seen as coming from Athens, which is, of course, an instrumental half-truth. Less publicized is the fact that certain NATO/EU circles have preferred to keep Macedonia away from mechanisms of power and related privileges, at least until the Kosovo issue has been satisfactorily addressed. After Albania, a weaker Macedonia has been seen as the only reliable logistical base in the context of Kosovo's survival as an independent state, crucial for mitigating Priština's practical and nation-building problems, which have been exacerbated by both under-recognition and potentially coordinated attempts at isolation. Quite illustrative of this argument is James Pettifer's *position paper* prepared for the purposes of the UK Defence Academy's Advanced Research and Assessment Group in the lead-up to the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest (2008). In the said paper, Pettifer formulates a clear recommendation for NATO brass by highlighting the following “key points”:

“The possible NATO decision on... Republic of Macedonia membership is *complex and depends on unstable political realities*.

...

These views are not necessarily irresponsible, given...*Macedonia's key role as a buffer territory*.

There are likely to be significant movement and trade problems in the region when Kosovo independence is recognized, and post-Ohrid reforms have largely stalled. *An appropriate EU policy [towards Macedonia] is perhaps more important than NATO membership.*” (2008: n.p.; emphasis added).

So much for the myth of the Macedonia-Greece dispute being a bilateral problem limited only to the name issue.

Recovering post-2006 Macedonia-Greece relations: a possibility or just a fake optimism?

In the highly entangled reality of the Balkans, the name issue remains a historical challenge per se, and for an indefinite period, just like the rest of Macedonia’s major bilateral problems. With the coming to power of Nikola Gruevski and his revamped VMRO DPMNE in 2006, Macedonia’s political relations with Greece immediately backslid, while the UN-sponsored negotiations over the name stalled on substantive identity matters (not that they had been particularly dynamic under previous governments, but...). Ever since, official Athens, together with the Macedonian opposition, western diplomats and observers, have all been echoing the same resonant message, that the Gruevski government with its national-populist policies is the main culprit for Macedonia’s failure to advance on its Euro-Atlantic path. Such allegations tend to neglect the economic and reformist orientation of the Gruevski regime and can be deemed meritorious only to the extent to which they precisely pinpoint its ill-conceived and untimely navigation of the so-called “antiquisation” process as well as its role in undermining Macedonian democracy (human rights, media freedom) and inter-ethnic stability.

In any case, finger-pointing of this sort is never intended to provide a full explanation as to why Macedonia is still here where it is, seven years after the country’s Secretariat for European Affairs (once a renowned EU cell) was proclaimed the Macedonian team of the year for its contribution to Macedonia’s 2005 EU candidate status, four years after EU visa

liberalization was finally earned thanks to the combined effort of successive Macedonian governments, and just days before the European Commission is to issue its fifth—already dull—recommendation in a row to the European Council for setting a date for the start of EU accession talks.

Eager for diplomatic gains, Athens has so far seized every opportunity to condemn the Gruevski government's "antiquisation" projects as a major instance of unconstructiveness, nationalism, and cultural theft. Yet, after Greece shamefully lost its case before the International Court of Justice in late 2011—"By [no less than] fifteen votes to one" (ICJ 2011: 48; BBC 2011)—both neighbours judged it was time to move back to the diplomatic arena. They have since approached the issue more tactfully, though Macedonia is expected to keep invoking international law in its favour, each pretending to be the more constructive party in the dispute while mainly attempting to impose their own desired dynamics over the process. Top Macedonian leaders have been continuously inviting their Greek counterparts to high-level tête-à-tête meetings, while Athens has preferred less frequent and more formal ways of demonstrating initiative, such as the 2012 memorandum proposal. Meanwhile, UN mediator Matthew Nimetz has apparently helped the two countries to step up the tempo of negotiations and return to substantive matters. Also, the European Commission, via the Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle, has expressed its interest in helping to catalyse the process, including launching ideas of *parallel negotiations* on Macedonia's name and EU membership.

While at times there is obviously more optimism on the part of the mediator and the negotiating parties, one has to be mindful of the historical depth of this otherwise simple dispute, as well as the related national stakes. Especially ignorant in this context are the ephemeral rumours circulating since late 2012, that "the patriot" Gruevski has made a secret deal with the US and the EU whereby he should have conceded to a compromise by June 2013 at the latest, or that the Macedonian opposition has made a similar promise to deliver on the issue as soon as / if it wins the next extraordinary parliamentary elections (planned for this September but now unlikely to happen sooner than 2014).

Mitigating the inherently unsolvable

To put it in a nutshell, the Macedonia-Greece dispute is (part of) one of those perverse, *inherently unsolvable* centuries-old problems dragging from one era to another in different forms and making things difficult for all the parties involved. Because of denying historical existence and existing feelings, such disputes simultaneously engage excessive amounts of Realpolitik and identity politics, thus enraging the weak and irritating the strong respectively. Frustrations on all sides are guaranteed in a heaven for manipulations by quasi-historians and ill-indoctrinated diplomats, with little if any space for truth and tangible proofs.

Hence it all comes down to the fact that, even if a formal pragmatic compromise over the Republic of Macedonia's name were to be reached today—say, by expanding the country's existing constitutional name with some more or less appropriate geographic or political qualifier, as implied by the trend of negotiations and mediator Nimetz's already proposed sets of ideas—one would hardly find in the future an ethnic Greek who had totally forgotten that “Macedonia is [all] Greek”. Meanwhile, it would be even harder, if not impossible, to come across an ethnic Macedonian who takes no pride in simply replying “I am Macedonian” without caring too much about his/her Ancient, mixed, or “purely” Slavic genes. Quite obviously, a politically prudent compromise, which has been intended to be almost exclusively reached on an inter-governmental level, would never reflect the true sentiments of Macedonian and Greek societies and diaspora. The name issue is part of a historically deep and emotionally charged inter-society dispute, and using the name “Macedonia” is a question of national honour and dignity in the first place for both sides, especially Macedonia (Maleski 2001; 2005). Bearing this in mind, elitist ignorance encouraged by great-power mediation could be a dangerous play, with grave implications beyond those for the careers of politicians,ⁱⁱⁱ which is why current Macedonian leaders have been avoiding a stronger leadership role by insisting on a domestic referendum as a prerequisite for an effective deal with Athens.

One is thus tempted to reconcile with a reality in which these kinds of *inter-state and inter-society disagreements* “are most likely to remain the fact of the anarchical structure of international politics”. “Fortunately, in today's mainly westernized Balkans there is little likelihood to see a [brinkmanship or war] scenario like the one Hans Morgenthau ultimately predicts for...‘unsolvable’ conflicts” where neither of the parties is ready to step back in favour

of the other by either giving up or substantially redefining its vital, incompatible interests. “But, one never knows, particularly since the stalemate [in addressing the dispute] has already encouraged radical forces in the region to pursue their great nationalist scenarios” by gradually polluting “constructive, mainstream politics” (Ivanovski 2012b: 4-5; see also Morgenthau 1993a: 361–3, 1993b: 383–6, 2013: 104–5, 108–12).^{iv} Therefore, in the final analysis, if the Balkans are to become a peaceful area of formal allies, the region’s most burdensome issues, however difficult and currently benign, *must be mitigated via a threefold combination* of local pragmatism, even foreign pressure, and more inventive settlements.

The clock is ticking but...

With a satisfactory (for the West) albeit incomplete Kosovo solution knocking on the door, the Macedonian question in general and the name issue in particular will soon return on the main regional agenda to be dealt with more comprehensively. Whatever the implications of an accepted Kosovo deal for Serbia and the Serbs, in the mid-term Belgrade is expected to preoccupy itself with a relatively rewarding EU agenda and gradually eliminate its actual presence in north Kosovo. Russia would follow through and Washington and Brussels could then safely shift their focus to the remainder of their unfinished regional business, including the penetrating Russian and Chinese interests elsewhere in the region.

By the time that the US and the EU come to mount unbearable pressure on Macedonia, requesting that difficult decisions be made in no time, Macedonian leaders should understand that the Republic of Macedonia would be better off with a deal over its name. To that end, they should do their utmost to avoid the lethal hubris of the small, which would lead merely to anti-strategic moves based on fake triumphal beliefs that Macedonia can hold on its own “without [NATO and] the EU for a Hundred Years” (Nikovski, 2012, 2013). Likewise, had the West been truly interested in wrapping up its integration project and stabilizing the region as a complete NATO/EU area, it should have realized by now that *no solution can be reached without balanced pressure*. If one is to believe that a *rational compromise* is indeed possible in this case, then Athens must be strongly advised to stick to the name issue and to drop its ludicrous, inapplicable demands regarding the so-called “*other (identity and language) issues*”. Even

without these demands, it has been extremely hard if not impossible for Macedonian leaders to apply the now-very-much-debated (conservative/elitist/consequentialist) political theory whereby the true leader, while heeding the mass, should nonetheless confidently navigate the state “ship” through political storms and eventually drop the anchor at the right, safe port. Frankly, to say that this historical precedent has been unanimously despised by Macedonians as both a sophisticated attempt at their national extermination and a potential grand treason would be an understatement.

Of course, charges of betrayal and “impending national doom” would also be brought against any Greek statesman who dared to relent and let the Republic of Macedonia use “the brand name” internationally. However, there is a huge difference. Whatever the Greeks might personally feel, Greece is not the one requested to give up its own Greek identity or history, including the part related to Ancient Macedonia. The mutual concessions required for the dispute to be usefully mitigated via a pragmatic compromise cannot be given without a proper attitude of mind, recognition of realities, and a deeper mutual understanding on both sides; and in this case the recognition of realities is not limited only to an accurate assessment of the strategic environment.

For its own part, the Macedonian leadership will also have to reconsider its long-standing public claim that,

“This is an instance of irrational behaviour by our southern neighbour, not a dispute...a dispute takes two...Greece is the one that has a problem with us – our identity and existence - not the other way around.”^v

The blockade prolonging Macedonia’s plight may be deemed absolutely immoral from a Macedonian perspective, but it “is fully rational” in an instrumental and psychological sense:^{vi}

“...as on both sides there are legitimate claims for distinct identity, grievances that arise from following different perspectives on complex historical constellations and emotional...narratives, and also, mutual fears related to the ever-present security dilemma [secret projects; irredentism]. All these can be said [to be] irrational or unsubstantiated only if one knows the future. Since the latter cannot be the case, current calculations and predictions based on the past and underlying the dispute are fully sane.” (Ivanovski, 2012b: 4–5).

The Greek rationale

The most rational part is actually the core of the dispute, which has been (deliberately) blurred for decades. What can be often heard as the key reason for the dispute is that Greece, which acquired the largest piece (52%) of geographic Macedonia after the Balkan Wars and has only recently established self-government and administrative units called “Regions of Macedonia” therein, claims exclusive rights over the brand name “Macedonia/n(s)”.^{vii} Given the commercial, touristic, and cultural value of this brand, the Greek motives for eliminating any competition, primarily the ethnic Macedonians, are self-evident. Also, in this context, empowered by the arguments of some of the most preeminent western historians and archaeologists, Greece ironically considers its once “barbaric” occupier, the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon (Ancient Macedonia led by Alexander the Great and his father Philip II of Macedon), whose borders largely match Greece’s 1913 territorial acquisition, an exclusive part of the Hellenic heritage and, for that matter, modern Greek identity. While there are undoubtedly strong scientific arguments in favour of these Greek positions, there are also equally strong archaeological facts and logical explanations rebutting them.^{viii} Regardless, the thing is that one should not be distracted too much by these important Greek motives. A good reason to set them aside, along with the ideational variables of national honour and pride, is that most of them, however relevant to the dispute, lead to a tiresome debate about complex and infinitely remote historical issues. The *key rationale* underlying the dispute should instead be sought in more recent Greek history and the latter’s implications for *Greek national security*.

As is well known, today’s Greece has been carrying the heavy burden of its 20th century expansion and all the related misdeeds towards the native ethnic Macedonians (whose distinct existence as a non-Greek minority in post-1913 northern Greece is still officially denied by Athens, ultimately, by confounding them with the numerous Greek Macedonians who are a Greek identity also living in Greece’s northern region[s] of Macedonia).^{ix} Everything would have been different, and perhaps the name dispute would never have seen daylight, had there not been ethnic Macedonians in today’s northern Greece, a collective Macedonian memory of the lost Aegean Macedonia, and radical ideas for a United Macedonia. Hence, the Greek strategic motive vis-à-vis the Republic of Macedonia can be seen as twofold:

1) Residual national fantasies about the further partition of Macedonia as a geographic entity, meaning a conquest of the southern Republic of Macedonia, which is arguably still desired by some in the Greek military (intelligence) and rightist circles (Pettifer 2008: 2, 7n5); and

2) National security concerns based on a fear of a potentially assertive ethnic Macedonian minority in northern Greece, backed by a globally recognized Republic of Macedonia and the latter's potential claims for a greater, united Macedonia.

The fantasies are, of course, less rational, especially in the absence of any notable Greek minority in the Republic of Macedonia. With only four to five hundred Greek individuals in the Republic of Macedonia, Greek strategy would be forced to count on too many variables such as regional constellations, Orthodox allies, and coordination with anti-Macedonian elements inside as well as outside of the Republic of Macedonia. As for the second motive, Athens is well aware that even the most successful assimilation processes recorded by modern political history, such as the ones systematically conducted in northern Greece following both the Balkan Wars and the Greek Civil War (1946–9), have been seriously flawed. Thus Greek leaders prudently assess that, while their argument is most likely to remain dominant in western circles, primarily thanks to the standard discourse at all major western universities, diplomats socialized at those universities, powerful Greek lobbyists, as well as the over-represented Greek immigrant communities in some Anglo-American foreign and secret services (Pettifer 2008: 2, 7n4), Greece might be unable to control future developments in its northern region(s) for as long as there is a fully recognized Macedonian state and identity right across the border.

This prognostic threat assessment and the resultant blockade of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic path have been almost ridiculed by some western analysts (Harris 1999; Saideman 2012) who see no real security (irredentist) challenge for the well established Greek state, especially not in the possibility of the tiny Republic of Macedonia joining NATO under the "FYROM" reference.^x But the main problem with this sort of criticism against Athens is its incomplete realist approach. Focusing mainly on the strategic military balance (material capabilities) between Macedonia and Greece and the superior Greek position in this regard, many realists either neglect or underestimate the potential for strategic manipulation of eventually recognized or simply more confident non-Greek identities in northern Greece.

Although a destabilization scenario for northern Greece might seem very unlikely from the present perspective, the name issue is all but “substance-less” in Greek eyes (Saideman 2012), particularly in light of the recent Balkan experience with “client” minorities.

Speaking of “sleeper minorities” that might potentially rise against the Greek state backed from outside, what immediately springs to mind is *a third, less explored aspect* of Greek foreign policy and strategic motives towards the Republic of Macedonia, not necessarily related to the ethnic Macedonians themselves and their own idea of United Macedonia. In fact, this aspect may be totally disconnected from “brotherly” Orthodox Slavs. It has been sporadically argued that, given the presence of a significant Muslim community (Turks, Albanians, Roma) in northern Greece, Athens not only dislikes Macedonia’s multiculturalism as an imposing regional model since 2001 but has serious national security concerns with its northern neighbour’s evolving demographic structure. Simply put, Greek leaders are said to disallow the possibility of a *de facto* bi-national and Albanian-ruled state to the north calling itself “Macedonia” and potentially laying claims over Greece’s broader north (Preveza, Epirus, Aegean Macedonia) with the help of Turkey and well-established proxies inside Greece. Nonetheless, while this line of reasoning could be seen as being both entertained by mono-nationalist-minded Greek officialdom and allusive of a broader Muslim-Christian pattern of cleavage in the Balkans that is yet to be realized, its internal contradictions outnumber the holes in Swiss cheese. Most notably, if Athens fears a regional rise of the Albanian / Muslim factor, then why bother inviting ethnic Albanian leaders from Macedonia so frequently and welcoming them so warmly as private messengers or quasi-mediators in the name dispute?

In general, one may plausibly speculate that Greece has not been genuinely afraid of a type of irredentism that would directly put the relatively powerful Greek state into question but rather of another “OFA” (Ohrid Framework Agreement) or much lesser autonomies in its northern region(s). Such tendencies would not simply derail the Greek narrative diligently cultivated over the centuries but would represent a major blow for the strongest mono-national concept in the Balkans. In this context, Gerald Knause’s claim (2010) that Athens has been driven by a lack of trust in its relations with Macedonia, or more precisely that “the breakdown of trust between the two sides” is “the conflict’s underlying problem”, touches upon the real problem only tangentially. It can be further argued that “the breakdown of trust” expression is inappropriate in this case, where long-term trust is chronically lacking on both sides. In high

politics, such trust deficiency implies continuous existential fears and, for that matter, a serious security dilemma. Serious states, George Friedman suggests, are practical, and in contemplating their foreign policies and national security strategies they “expect the impossible” (Friedman, 2009: 3, 9, 249–50). By launching the “irrational” name issue with foreign help as early as 1991, and dragging it beyond simple inertia until the present, Greece has proved its intention to be a serious state. As this is meant to be no cynical assessment, all actors concerned with the name dispute should gain a deeper understanding of Greek preservative efforts.

The higher imperative of Macedonian identity

Greek strategy, however rational, leads to an apparently unsolvable collision of vital national interests. Greece’s fairly justifiable national security concerns, coupled with other ideational or more lucrative motives, have compelled it to insist on monopolizing the brand name “Macedonia/n(s)”. This position is nonetheless totally unfeasible because, apart from the long unrecognized ethnic Macedonian minority loyal to the Greek state, it denies the cultural (rather than the physical) existence of an entire neighbouring nation.

Now, which is more important—ensuring Greek pride and national security way ahead of time and against a perceived threat that may never be realized, or simply allowing a contemporary Macedonian nation, which exists as such here and now, with no alternative identity, to consolidate itself and join Greece as a sincere friend and ally in the western family of nations? From a neutral perspective there is simply no answer to this dilemma, and therefore the problem continues to irritate the international community in the third decade since it arose. It all comes down to a prolonged struggle between David and Goliath and a hardly mediated clash between a “softer” version of power politics and stubborn, increasingly resistant identity politics. While the Greek blockade continues, largely driven by uncertain security prognoses, Macedonia’s plight is real and its resistance mounting. It would be ignorant to think of all this as being of virtually no cost to Athens, the Balkans, NATO (US), and the EU.

At this level of Balkan integration in western structures, with conflicts smouldering under the surface, it is anachronistic, futile and dangerous to think of the dispute as *a question of Macedonian endurance*. For the sake of both more rapid Balkan consolidation and the West’s

higher geostrategic interests in an emerging multipolar era, it would be a promising step if the government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras—one of the prominent Greek statesmen who launched the name issue in 1991, hoping that Macedonia would not survive under strain for too long (Pettifer 2008: 7n5)—as well as other Balkan neighbours, showed at least some understanding of the following perspective:

“...nobody steals one’s culture and past. The Balkans is a region of common culture and past in so many respects. Moreover, [ethnic] Macedonians as an evolving identity with a rigid ideational core have been there for centuries and it is quite ludicrous to argue the opposite only because they were or were not related to Ancient Macedonia, because they came or did not come along with the rest of the South Slavic tribes to their present settlement 13-4 centuries ago, because they developed or ‘invented’ their national feelings in the late process of development of national consciousness in the Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries. Though an evolving phenomenon, identity is a fact, especially when vigorously exclaimed, and there is no force on the Earth that could possibly change that.” (Ivanovski, 2012b: 5).

Leave the reactive “Antiquisation” aside, focus (only) on the name issue, and search for a rational compromise within a flexible “dual formula” framework

Greek sensitivity to the so-called “antiquisation” processes in Macedonia is understandable for the most part. But these processes have been largely a *reaction* to the continuing Greek blockade and the negation of the ethnic Macedonian identity beyond the name issue. Antiquisation would never have reached such scale and intensity had Macedonia become part of NATO after Bucharest and subsequently begun EU accession talks. The people behind antiquisation in the Gruevski government are well aware that a broadly dispersed Ancient Macedonian legacy, which is sometimes even claimed by local Albanians (Sky, 2012), cannot be anyone’s exclusive entitlement. They have only been using the opportunity to simultaneously step up Macedonian archaeology and culture, realize some lucrative capital projects in downtown Skopje, and elevate Macedonian pride—most of which, of course, compromises as much as benefits their own rule. Regardless, debating “antiquisation” and ownership of the Ancient Macedonian legacy will certainly not bring the countries closer to a solution. Though

important from the perspective of some Greek foreign policy motives, “antiquisation” is far from the core rationale of the dispute.

A rational compromise is possible only if Athens reconsiders its future-oriented security concerns and reconciles itself to the contemporary existence of non-Greek Macedonians, particularly outside of Greece, who will continue promoting their only known ethnic Macedonian identity without any reductionist prefixes such as “Slav”, “Slavic”, “Vardar”, “North”, or “Upper”, at home and abroad, despite any possible adjustments to the name of the Republic of Macedonia. As for the country’s name itself, which has holy, mythical proportions for Macedonians, most of whom reject even adding a dot to it, Macedonian leaders have shown considerable flexibility over the years, including seemingly dropping their “red line” from the once actual *dual formula* to a fairly acceptable, nearly universal name such as “the Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)” or “the Republic of Macedonia – Skopje”.^{xi} The latter was, reportedly, seriously considered as part of a broader Nimetz “package” in the wake of the 2008 Bucharest NATO summit (albeit originally proposed by the mediator as early as 2005). However, for a more likely success of the uneasy negotiations, if a less acceptable name with a geographical qualifier (either before or after the “Republic of”) is to be offered, such as those in circulation in the post-Bucharest period,^{xii} the government in Athens will certainly be required, as it already is, to drop its inapplicable *erga omnes* principle, since it is hard to believe that in such a case the Republic of Macedonia would simply give up its painfully acquired political capital, currently consisting of 137 UN members recognizing it under its constitutional name, let alone change its own constitution and rename itself domestically. Experienced observers understand that “*erga omnes*” might be only a diplomatic way of maximizing Greek demands prior to an anticipated, decisive bargain so that the outcome of such a bargain is more favourable to Greek national interests. History, on the other hand, teaches us that Macedonia, thinking of its security and survival mainly in terms of preserving its identity, will never commit political suicide by wilfully renaming itself domestically or even before those who already use its natural and constitutional name.^{xiii}

Therefore, if one is to believe that a deal over the name issue is still possible after more than twenty years of fruitless negotiations, then such an opportunity must have lain all along within the flexible “dual formula” spectrum—nothing more nor less. In other words, the stakeholders in the Macedonia-Greece dispute should focus *only* on the “name issue” and the

scope of official (not private and domestic-only) use of the Republic of Macedonia's constitutional name as the only space, so far as Macedonia is concerned, for a so-called *rational compromise*.^{xiv} Predictably, to satisfy Macedonian and Greek long-term security interests, such a deal would also have to include the following:

- 1) Legal and political guarantees preventing future attacks, primarily from within the region, on the distinct Macedonian identity;
- 2) Legal and political guarantees that a de-blocked Macedonian state, partly recognized under its constitutional name, will refrain from manipulating Macedonian minorities in Greece and other neighbouring countries; and
- 3) The adoption of some of these guarantees in a precise form at the highest level (by the UN Security Council).

This is not impossible, especially if Washington and Brussels reconsider their approach towards Athens. Then again, despite all the mental effort involved in this three-decade process, nothing, not even a fair version of “the dual formula” is guaranteed final acceptance as the leaders in both countries follow their peoples’ strong sentiments, standing still, at least in private, on their “red lines”. The fact that these rigid “red lines” have never been publically revealed and communicated in detail, particularly in Macedonia where political actors even struggle to come up with a single general declaration on the country’s position regarding the name issue, does not change much. Although elusive, both Greek and Macedonian bottom-lines could be well imagined, discerned, or even sensed. In their maximalist, popularly endorsed variant, Greek “red lines” have always meant no use of the word “Macedonia/n” by “Skopje”, albeit this unsustainable position has apparently changed since Washington’s recognition of the Republic of Macedonia’s constitutional name in 2004. Today what Athens struggles to “sell” to the world as an exemplar of Greek constructiveness and non-maximalist approach (Kofos, 2009:3) is suspected by Macedonian experts as a perfidious, sub-maximal “*erga omnes*” demand aimed at a *phased* “elimination” of the distinct Macedonian identity (Nikovski 2013a; 2013b). As a reaction, the current national-patriotic Macedonian rulers, while fruitlessly seeking to engage their Greek counterparts in direct high-level deliberations within the flexible “dual formula” framework, where they also hope to be able to invoke international law if/when needed, have

paradoxically retreated even from the original “dual formula” concept, with President Gjorgje Ivanov recently stating that he had been elected to defend the constitution with “Republic of Macedonia *erga omnes*” (Ivanov 2013; Klinčarski 2013).

The “Next” hindrance: intra-social divisions and intellectual trends

Given the ambiguous situation in which the political deadlock is not only the result of a compromise being “unacceptable for their societies” (Maleski 2005) but also contradicted by their smooth economic, touristic, and inter-personal relations, could Macedonia and Greece finally draw from the wisdom and pragmatism of their future-minded social and intellectual forces? Time has provided little if any evidence. Macedonian academic, diplomatic, and media circles, for instance, leaning towards either the country’s post-2006 ruling elite or the SDSM-led opposition,^{xv} are deeply divided over the name issue. In fact, they can be generally seen as separated in two, different bands.

Well-informed by orthodox international relations theory and highly experienced in diplomatic practice, the first group maintains a realist perspective on Macedonia’s relations with Greece, the region, and the West, and is thus comparatively more flexible in its approach to addressing the name issue. Clearly opposed to the current Macedonian government’s national patriotism and defiant foreign policy, which also suffers from a recent Balkan syndrome of attraction to the eastward distribution of capabilities, this group is led by preeminent, “old-school” academics and former high-level state officials. Grasping the fundamentals of international relations, the members of this group are legitimately apprehensive of the ultimate implications of power politics for Macedonia and therefore promote the need for a pragmatic compromise with Greece at an earlier date. In his recapitulation of the evolving Balkan constellations in the post Cold-War period, the first foreign minister of independent Macedonia, Denko Maleski, puts the naming dispute into a clear, realist framework (2001, 2005). Relying on his proven, lifelong academic thesis about politics dominating law, and frequently invoking “the old masters of political thought”, Maleski has no dilemma that the name issue is a classic “*political case*” (2001) ruled by “the iron laws of international politics” and requiring, apart from a rapid, political solution, preparation on the part of Macedonian statesmen “for any future

‘chances’” when the political circumstances or “The Conduct of the Great Power” (USA) might not be as favourable to Macedonia as in 2004 (2005). Following the same realist logic, Ljubomir Danailov Frčkoski, Maleski’s colleague at the Skopje Faculty of Law and yet another Macedonian foreign minister of the 1990s, who has since interchangeably played the role of an influential expert and an opposition presidential candidate, insists on a pragmatic closure of the name dispute with a complex “international” name for Macedonia and unclear Greek concessions (only) regarding the Macedonian language and identity. His most recent revelation (2013a) of “Upper Macedonia” for nearly *erga omnes* use and an ambiguous, footnote-style recognition of Macedonian identity, has been immediately dismissed by the great majority of Macedonians throughout the world as “a treacherous, Greek proposal” and “a trial balloon before the finale”. Regardless, lucid in his criticism towards the post-2006 Macedonian rulers, Frčkoski blames the latter for a lack of knowledge of “their own state’s elementary experience” and a totally misguided approach to the name issue,^{xvi} advising them, however, to focus on improving their relations with Washington and other key western partners and seek for a serious broker (-age) for their uncertain, yet-to-be developed common initiatives with the West (2013b). Moreover, frustrated by the Gruevski “regime” and “dictatorship” in general, Frčkoski has occasionally called on the only superpower to turn back somewhat from its Asia-Pacific priorities and finish, preferably via “Holbrooking”, its “success story” in the Balkans (2013c; 2013b). Faithful to the same concept of adaptability to foreign-policy realities, Stevo Pendarovski, regional security expert and former presidential aide, is mostly concerned with Macedonia’s recent “isolation”, suggesting that the ruling elite, instead of embarking on expensive “road shows” and uselessly tying Macedonia’s interests to rising actors and third-world countries, should follow pro-American neighbours like Bulgaria, or even Serbia, which have significantly strengthened their ties with Washington and Berlin respectively. He sharply refutes any allusions or conspiracy theories of the US running a hidden agenda to breakup Macedonia or the region as a whole (2012). For Pendarovski, who claims he has been drawing the public’s attention “for three years” to the post-1974 use of the “Macedonian” denominator within the UN system, the Macedonian identity has never been subject to negotiations with Greece. Also, by his own sarcastic admission, he feels no need for owning “a sealed, A4 piece of paper confirming that one is 102.5 per cent Macedonian” (2013). In addition to its matrix of foreign-policy realism, domestic liberal and multi-cultural orientation, and general pragmatism,

this group, which displays freedom from emotional history, has one more thing in common; the explicit assertion of Macedonia's Slavic roots as "the main basis for a mutually acceptable compromise" with Greece (Rizaov 2013).^{xvii} Due to its conformist attitude vis-à-vis the West, and purportedly against Macedonia's vital interests, as well as its traditional ties with the major opposition party, this group has been fiercely criticized by government supporters as if it were Public Enemy No.1. From a once renowned source of foreign-policy expertise, celebrated by many since communist times as a political asset not only of the former SDSM's rule but also of the Macedonian state in general, the group has unfortunately turned into a spitting target for conservatives and national-patriotic forces in yet another Balkan version of essentialist political division between "patriots" and "traitors".

The second group of Macedonian intellectuals and pundits, which currently occupies the country's most influential media space, thus dominating public discourse, espouses rigid, national-patriotic views of Macedonian politics and in principle supports the projects and policies pursued by the present Macedonian rulers. Given the genuine leftist background of some of its prominent members, who once used to be within the orbit of the country's present opposition, the composition of this group is somewhat hybrid. Nevertheless, spearheaded by experienced journalists, opinion makers, and politically entangled academics, the group has so far demonstrated a degree of unity in its unclear, conditional western orientation, simultaneous anti-globalist thinking and affinity towards the emerging multipolarity (Velinovska 2013a), different (independent, "non-aligned", ethnocentric) conception of the notion of leadership (Velinovska 2012), dignified and often emotional approach to issues of the highest national importance, as well as its straightforward, unpalatable critique of both excessive political pragmatism at the expense of national interests and elitism of an Edmund Burke-type (Velinovska 2013b). As for the name issue, the group generally backs "antiquisation" as a way to add to the whole a hitherto "forbidden" part of the Macedonian ethnogenesis. Also, it strongly presses for preserving Macedonia's constitutional name, mainly via a legalistic and process-oriented approach, showing, among other things, a great deal of scepticism towards compromise proposals beyond the original "dual formula". Thus, albeit familiar with the far-reaching implications of power politics for their country and all possible future contingencies, the members of this group are prone to radicalizing their public statements, particularly upon Greek provocations. Thoroughly disappointed by Greek intransigence, and consequently the infinitely

prolonged Euro (-Atlantic) blockade, they have repeatedly called for a “termination” (Bocevski 2013), “freezing” (Alfa TV, 2013), or simply evasion of the already “exhausted” negotiations process, without completely leaving UN mediation (Nikovski 2013a). Former ambassador Risto Nikovski has even ventured to publically say what many inside Macedonia’s ruling nomenclature have recently been thinking—namely that, unlike NATO and the EU, which allegedly face uncertain prospects, Macedonia “can survive for 100 years” regardless of its relations with the western structures (2012). This is exactly the type of “oriental optimism” that Maleski warned against years ago (2005). Nikovski’s latest proposal (2013a) for immediately bypassing current negotiations with Greece and of addressing, through the UN Secretary General, the UN Security Council with a demand for a new resolution in favour of Macedonia’s constitutional name *erga omnes*, is as optimistic and likely to fail—in terms of being totally ineffective from a NATO/EU integration perspective—as Igor Janev’s predominantly legal initiative (1999:155–160, 2013a, 2013b) for mobilizing the UN General Assembly to adopt a similar resolution rectifying Macedonia’s *illegal* accession to the world organization. Other than this, Nikovski appears to be a bold, insightful realist who knows perfectly well that the solution to Macedonia’s plight lies with Washington rather than Athens or elsewhere, requiring intensive lobbying in the period ahead (2013a). His realism, however, having been largely focused on Macedonian identity “safeguards” (2013a; 2013b), challenges that of Frčkoski and Pendarovski in many respects. Unlike in the past, Frčkoski now seems to overlook the implications of a full-scope “international” name for the Macedonian Constitution, travel and customs documents, and national identity, including the latter’s underexposure in case of using various language scripts and manipulative diplomatic techniques for the formal registration of ethnicity/nationality and language. Similarly, Pendarovski may be technically correct regarding the 40-year-long use of “Macedonian” in the UN system, but he fails to recognize that any complex, negotiated package for Macedonia’s name barring the use of “(Republic of) Macedonia/n” in international communication will have far-reaching consequences for (the global exposure and visibility of) the distinct Macedonian identity.

Before turning southwards, it is sufficient to say that the Macedonian Albanians have been caught in the middle of a fierce game in which they now suddenly attempt to take the initiative, “mediating” between two deaf parties. The way this quasi-mediation has been conducted by DUI,^{xviii} with a lack of basic trust and coordination between the dominant ethnic

actors in their ruling coalition, and based on particularistic motives and foreign instruction, is highly controversial and certainly unhelpful for mitigating the name dispute in favour of Macedonia's vital interests. Driven by a couple of overriding motives, the long anticipated Albanian unification in a potentially border-free area in case of Macedonia's faster inclusion into the western structures and the possibilities for (asserting) the Albanian identity within Macedonia in case of a reduced and less visible Macedonian identity through a change of name, the Macedonian Albanians tend to run their own show, while remaining sufficiently cautious not to draw Macedonian anger on their backs too soon. Given this, they can be considered a distinct, third group whose political views on the name issue and intellectual contributions thereto are comparably closer to those offering flexibility in the Skopje-Athens negotiations (the Macedonian opposition and the first academic group) and largely aligned with Greek interests.

Despite this proximity of attitudes, leading voices of the first politico-academic group have clarified the difference. They keep reminding the Macedonian Albanians that diplomatic flexibility and insistence on the necessary Euro (-Atlantic) alternative is one thing, which they firmly support, whereas the Albanian eagerness for NATO and the EU with no due regard for Macedonia's name is quite another, particularly in the context of the long-term sustainability of the Macedonian multi-ethnic state. In that sense, NGO analyst Sašo Klekovski fully agrees that the two foreign-policy issues of Macedonia's name (meaning identity and security) and Euro-Atlantic integrations (meaning welfare and security) should be pragmatically approached as compatible goals rather than in a "patriotic", Manichean fashion (good – bad), but also warns that these goals should mutually reinforce each other along the way if the Macedonian state is to survive either now or after its NATO/EU accession. He makes it clear to the "western-minded" Albanians that their own "NATO/EU vs. the name" dilemma is just as delusional as the currently predominant Macedonian dilemma that puts the national name before the country's western integrations (2013). Very much like Klekovski, Pendarovski finds a sophisticated way to allude to both the true Albanian NATO/EU motives and the clear need for a new inter-ethnic arrangement for the sake of Macedonia. He stresses that, regardless of Macedonia's Euro (-Atlantic) destiny, at a certain point the Macedonians and Albanians will have to sit together and sincerely talk about the country's "substrate" future look and the bond "that keeps them living together". According to Pendarovski, with such an arrangement Macedonia might be capable of

surviving over the long term even in an “extreme variant” outside the EU/NATO area, while the lack of it could easily dissolve the country even as a NATO/EU member (2013).

Turning south, Greek society seems to have been spared, at least at first glance, from poisonous intellectual cleavages over the name issue. But what else can one expect from a society and politics that have remained “prisoners of an extremist nationalist interpretation of their history” (Maleski 2005)? Ever since 1991, leading Greek experts on the topic have largely conformed to the sturdy, linear course taken by the government in Athens and the main domestic political actors. Many of them, despite occasional opportunities, have failed to contribute to a broader regional debate on the name dispute (Maleska 2008/09), thus preventing deeper mutual understanding between the neighbours on what is commonly seen as an unnecessary “diplomatic imbroglio” (Kofos 2009:1). “Science follows the lack of compromise in politics” notes Maleski laconically (2005).

Nearly two decades after he challenged Macedonia’s legitimate use of its name, insisting that the latter fall within the corpus of exclusive Greek rights (Maleski 2005), Greek historian Evangelos Kofos (2009) traced back the post-1993 evolution of the name dispute, clarified the present Greek positions, and proposed a solution preferable to Athens. While it is visible that his rhetoric has changed considerably compared to the early 1990s – at least, now, he has no problem admitting that there is an “independent *Macedonian* state” to the north of his (2009: 3; emphasis added)—Kofos nonetheless conveys a few debatable aspects of the Greek perspective on the problem, some of which are most likely to remain infinitely unacceptable to Macedonians.

First, he denounces some (quasi-) official agencies and cliques of the international community, particularly the International Crisis Group (ICJ), for their alleged post-2000 conspiracy games in the Balkans and strategically calculated partiality towards Macedonia in the name dispute (2009: 2). With this, Kofos demonstrates a time-honoured, antagonistic sentiment in the Balkans directed against great-power pragmatism and basically no different than the one felt by many in Macedonia and elsewhere. The only difference in this case is that the sentiment has emanated from higher (academic) circles in Athens, adding to the post-2004 Greek discontent with the policy of George W. Bush. It is well known in this context that since 2004, if not earlier, vehement Greek Macedonians (*Makedones*), in addition to adopting the nonsensical Bulgarian thesis about the Macedonian nation being Tito’s invention, have appeared on local TV

shows and criticized the CIA for “creating the non-existent” Macedonian identity; as if a single man or an institution, however great, can ever create at will such an immense product of a millennial historical process.

Second, Kofos blames the Macedonian Prime Minister for bringing up identity issues in the immediate post-Bucharest period, that is for “extending... the difference over the state name into the murky terrain of identities” (2009: 2), as if the Macedonian identity had never been subject to negotiations. This is misleading and, unfortunately, has been bought by many in Macedonia. No doubt the Gruevski government and its post-2008 “antiquisation” project have unnecessarily incited “identity clashes”, irritating the Greeks, particularly those (*Makedones*) in northern Greece identifying with the Hellenic *part* of the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon’s global legacy (Kofos 2009: 1, 3). But one has to understand that the ethnic Macedonian identity, however defined, whether Slavic, Ancient, or mixed, has always been the *implicit* subject of the ongoing negotiations, and lately, even more than that. Kofos knows this pretty well, as he correctly notes, albeit from a perspective of pure Greek concerns:

“It is evident that the dispute is not simply the state name of Greece's neighbour, it is what is conveyed through it.” (2009: 3).

Nonetheless, by the same token, the Macedonians are deeply concerned with the “conveying function” of a changed name. Kofos does not forget to underline that, after Macedonia’s name is changed via a compromise, all “its derivatives should, naturally, follow the agreed state name” (2009: 3). Therefore, what Gruevski did and is still doing is to implement an ill-conceived and asymmetric strategy aimed at making the integral Macedonian identity a bit more visible in spite of all those who continue to deny it, or who, today, in the 21st century, try to reduce it to invisibility.

Third, looking at Kofos’s proposed comprehensive solution, based almost exclusively on Greek concerns and “red lines” (2009: 3–4), it becomes clear that what Athens and others want, led mainly by national security considerations, is to clear up artificially, with one “legal” shot, a major part of the post-1913 Balkan ethno-cultural mayhem. They intend to do so simply by reducing the ethnic Macedonian identity to its predominant, well-known, and broadly acceptable Slavic roots, “locking” it as such, once and for all, inside the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, thus erasing, as if such a thing were ever possible, the question of ethnic

Macedonian minorities in neighbouring countries, and downgrading it to an awkward, non-national and non-ethnic category consisting of what Kofos perceives as “various Macedonian [identity] versions”, such as “Greek-Macedonian/s, Bulgarian-Macedonian/s...[and] Albanian Macedonian/s” (2009: 3–4). Furthermore, as an alternative to the fairly acceptable (for Greeks and others) Slav-Macedonian, Vardar-Macedonian, North-Macedonian or Upper-Macedonian denominations, Kofos proposes an even worse, non-traditional way of transferring the Latin versions of the original Macedonian language derivatives corresponding to the English term “Macedonian”, “*Makedonec/ka/ci/če*” (noun) and “*Makedonski/a/o*” (adjective), to all foreign languages.^{xix}

Obviously, the Greek maximalist way of thinking is plausible and fully understandable only from Greek and certain other local national (security) perspectives. A neutral, technical analysis would annotate Kofos’s proposal as nothing but a roadmap to a terminological chaos spreading from the UN and national systems to the development of IT software applications and web content management. More importantly, the Macedonians are not just a technical (legal) category that can be dealt with simply by inserting a footnote. They are humans who, despite the Greeks’ “reddest line” requiring them to stop thinking of geographic Macedonia as their “fatherland” (Kofos 2009: 3), have a good individual and collective memory of the Balkan wars and late 1940s, and continue to live on the territory of the entire Macedonia, including side by side with so-called Greek Macedonians. On the other hand, the fact that many of them are “Egejci” (Aegeans), dispersed refugees of the Greek Civil War lamenting their (‘ancestors’) native lands, properties, and cousins in today’s northern Greece, does not automatically make them irredentists.

As a summary, most Macedonians understand the Greek concerns and “red lines” but can relent only when/if touched upon non-“existential nerves” (ICG 2009: 1; quoted in Kofos 2009: 3). Therefore, in the name of good neighbourliness, they could readily de-emphasize their recently boosted Ancient narrative and stop “encroaching upon an illustrious past, which had been recorded in the annals of Hellenic heritage”, while retaining the right to a different perspective on that past and “the arrival of Slavic tribes” in the Balkans (Kofos 2009: 3).^{xx} They may even agree to the limited use of a compound name for their country, just for the sake of their own and regional progress within the western structures, and in the spirit of *new Balkan politics*, of course, provided that such compromise has ensured *sufficient visibility* of the single ethnic

Macedonian identity on the international stage. But their "red line" is "*Macedonian*" and strictly "Macedonian", with no prefixes, suffixes, footnotes, transliterations, transcriptions, and definitely no perfidious plans for geographic limitations and *legal cleansing* of their identity. Needless to say, Kofos's "generous" "respect" for "issues touching upon the self-identification of persons", including "their ethnicity and their right to identify themselves", is *inherently contradictory*. His proposed solution to the name dispute dictates in great detail how, not one but four so-called "Macedonian [identity] versions" should express themselves in an international environment (2009: 3–4), despite the fact that none of these "versions", except the real one, exists as a separate, pure Macedonian identity. His thesis on "various Macedonian [identity] versions" is actually better than a refreshing anecdote. The Macedonian nation and national/ethnic identity as a whole do not stay in the same line with geographically limited sub-groups that are not even separate ethnic identities, let alone nations.^{xxi}

Unfortunately, the number of future-minded Greeks who understand all this and accept the existence of the single ethnic Macedonian identity as such is still insignificant. Apart from the members of the unrecognized ethnic Macedonian minority in northern Greece gathered around their *Vinožito* political party (EFA-Rainbow; Greek: Ουράνιο τόξο), who are, indeed, individually well integrated in Greek society and loyal to the Greek state, only the Greek Helsinki Monitor head (Panayote Dimitras), some representatives of the country's radical left (Syriza, communists), and fewer Greek intellectuals have thus far dared to raise their voice in favour of the Macedonian question.

The intra-social divisions and/or aversive intellectual trends in Macedonia and Greece examined above are obviously a huge obstacle both to reaching a compromise and implementing such a compromise. Yet given the politico-academic schism in Macedonia, there has been a widespread impression that an intransigent Skopje is more breakable than allied Athens—hence the *unbalanced pressure* emanating from western diplomatic circles. This situation leads the Greek government and some in the West to believe that, so far as the dispute goes, they have found a much better interlocutor in the current Macedonian opposition. Both the impression of a "breakable" Macedonia and the belief in Macedonian flexibility through disproportional pressure or bribery are likely to prove false. First, contrary to Frėkoski's opinion (2013a), the West, influenced by previous experience and the importance of conservatives and ultra-right radicals for preserving social peace in the morrow of tough political decisions, continues to believe that

the Macedonian political right is “the chosen one” for the role of changing Macedonia’s name. This assessment, while generally correct from a consequentialist viewpoint, fails to recognize the lack of will among the present Macedonian rulers to become the ones to draw the charge and execute what is domestically perceived as an act of violating the Macedonian Constitution and inscribing one’s name in the most shameful pages of Macedonian history. Second, no matter who is in power in Skopje, any decision implying a certain change to Macedonia’s name will require endorsement as well as involvement by the country’s major political actors. Whether the SDSM-led opposition will soon have to push and pull the Gruevski team towards a certain compromise, thus assuming a considerable portion of the responsibility for such a historical decision (Frčkoski, 2013a), or further down the road, a finally defeated VMRO-DPMNE will be dealt with to refrain from a fierce reaction to a possible name change, is less relevant. Third, in the event of a government shift in Macedonia, the current SDSM-led opposition might bring about flexibility to the negotiations table, but certainly not to the extent expected or desired by Athens. In line with their experience and expertise, some of the country’s leading minds close to the opposition would be extremely cautious, while searching for a sustainable solution with Greece, not to encroach on Macedonia’s vital interests. To Kofos’s proposal (2009) for a compound name “Vardar Macedonia or preferably Vardar Makedonija” *erga omnes*, and a logically diminished Macedonian identity, Mirjana Maleska, one of the leading voices of the first intellectual group in Skopje, has riposted as follows:

“It is difficult to assume that any ruling authority in Skopje, especially this one, will enter such expanded negotiations, because the discussion regarding the identity of a young nation, which has recently barely dealt with an armed ethnic conflict, can dissolve the already weak multinational cohesion and initiate quarrels between the citizens. Perhaps...Greek politics does not want that (although one can never be certain)” (2008/09).

As the Macedonians continue to think of their existence and national security mainly in terms of preserving their identity in a vivid, unreduced form, Kofos’s hint that the Bucharest “precedent ...cannot be ignored in view of the admittance of FYROM to the EU” has already materialized (2009: 2), thus erecting new barriers among the stakeholders in the dispute. A few days ago, after the latest round of name talks, Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Popovski was compelled to diplomatically admit a well known geographical fact, namely that “mountains stand between” Macedonia and Greece (Marusić, 2013). Frankly, an experienced optimist in this

case has the feeling that, even if an inter-governmental compromise were to be reached tomorrow, it might be much harder to implement domestically than the recent Serbia-Kosovo deal.

Conclusion: the big picture and addressing the Macedonian question intelligently

If a compromise is not reached soon, stepping up the dose of power politics on the part of Greece and its western supporters might seem like the only remaining option. Such thinking could be very dangerous for regional stability and is certainly undesirable in the context of the general and geopolitical interests of NATO and the EU. Ultimately, any attempted *proxy intervention* in Macedonia would predictably boost Macedonian nationalism, creating chaos, likely to the benefit of the Greater Albania plan, and leaving the Macedonian question indefinitely open amid a new regional mess. The question is: does anyone in the region really need this?

John Reed (1916; quoted in Liotta 1999) was dead right about one thing in his otherwise highly distorted vision of 19th and early 20th century Macedonia. The Macedonian question, he suggested, must be settled as a top priority if there is to be “peace either in the Balkans or out of them”. Today, Liotta adds (1999: n.p.), the only way to do this intelligently is by linking an *unambiguously* recognized Macedonian national identity to the other identities and organizations in the European cultural and political space. After all, this identity has been around for centuries, evolving, with no intention of being “vaporized” just like that.

ⁱ The present Macedonian government led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his ruling VMRO-DPMNE prefers using the syntagm “difference over the name” instead of “dispute over...” Such preference is not simply due to the government in Skopje being consistent with the wording of the relevant UN resolutions on the name dispute (UN Security Council Resolution 817 and UN General Assembly Resolution A/47225) and the 1995 Interim Accord between Macedonia and Greece. It should also be viewed as a kind of allusion revealing the true position of the Macedonian people and officials on the name issue. Most Macedonians are deeply convinced that there has been *no dispute* between their country and Greece but rather a situation where the latter unilaterally takes issue with the constitutional

name of her northern neighbour and, for that matter, with some universal human rights such as the right of the individual to nurture and express their own identity as desired and the collective right of a nation to self-determine all aspects and parameters of its identity. In other words, they consider the Greek blockade to be a classical blackmail trap based on endurance and continuously backed by Greek supporters in the West. That is why the preferred expression has been largely relied upon in official communication. In addition, top Macedonian officials and academics insist that Macedonia is *not legally bound to pursue conclusive negotiations with Greece* but rather to participate in constructive talks with a view to forging a possible compromise.

ⁱⁱ It may be argued that the post-2006 Gruevski government has managed to build a fourth, distinctly economic pillar of Macedonian foreign policy, as many believe, at the expense of the original three. Due to several interrelated factors, such as Macedonia's unenviable domestic situation and economy, the continuing NATO/EU blockade, as well as the emerging multipolarity, over the past seven years the ruling VMRO-DPMNE has devised a prominent "Invest in Macedonia" campaign featuring, among other things, official "road shows" around the globe and purposeful contacts with the world's business elite.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sharing his personal diplomatic experience from the early 1990s, Denko Maleski (2001) vividly depicts how dangerous a compromise over the name could be for rational and flexible politicians:

"...the people should not be idealized. At my remark, as foreign minister, that the confrontation with Greece would impoverish the people and thus distance us from our strategic goal... membership in the EU and NATO...I got a lecturing response from a person who made a career in the service of the state. Those same people, he remarked, will hang you if a compromise over the name is made. He then concluded that only after the people have paid the economic price of their heated feelings and demand a solution [will] the politician [come]...onto the scene."

Unfortunately, the "heated feelings" in Macedonia and Greece have never really disappeared, only their intensity has become more controllable over the years. Thus, the ultimate social sanction of "hanging", whether interpreted as a hyperbole or as a possible cruel penalty, continues to hang like the sword of Damocles over politicians' heads.

^{iv} This is a partial departure from the author's original assessment presented in early 2012. The Balkan strategic environment has since rapidly evolved. Over the past year or so, some radical forces have come to the fore and the Greater Albania plan is no more pursued merely "in the background and away from the eyes of constructive, mainstream politics" (Ivanovski 2012b: 5).

^v This is the author's paraphrase of a number of statements made by various Macedonian politicians and academics in the past 20 years. It accurately conveys the general Macedonian attitude towards the name issue.

^{vi} In the context of the discipline and practice of International Relations, one should distinguish between the dominant concept of instrumental or "selfish" rationality, which is promoted by orthodox, mostly realist international relations thinkers and practitioners, and some ethical perspectives on rational behaviour such as the idea of "communicative rationality" (Eckersley 2010: 261). The latter is pertinent to critical international relations images (neo-Marxism i.e. the Frankfurt school, normative theory, green theory, post-colonialism) and moral diplomats.

^{vii} As part of its 1986/7 local self-government reform, meaning just four years before the independence of the then Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Greece purposefully established three self-governing regions in the Aegean part of geographic Macedonia that it had annexed after the Balkan wars. These are (called) East Macedonia and Thrace, Central Macedonia, and West Macedonia. Also, under the 2010 Kalikratis Plan, out of seven decentralized, regional-level administrations formed throughout Greece, two largely overlap the self-governing "Region(s) of Macedonia" in a geographical and toponymic sense. These two regional arms of the Greek central government are Macedonia-Thrace and Epirus-Western Macedonia. Therefore, it is often said that prior to 1986/7 the word "Macedonia/n" was but a taboo in the Greek political communication.

^{viii} Greece cannot possibly enjoy exclusivity over the name “Macedonia/Macedonian(s)” simply because it has never had the entire geographic or ethnic/Slavic Macedonia under her own rule. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire 100 years ago, the historical and geographic region of Macedonia was partitioned between three Balkan states. This was followed by further partitions of Macedonia, both violent and peaceful, as a result of some of the 20th century historical milestones in the region (today, five Balkan states, plus Kosovo, hold various parts of geographic Macedonia). Thus, except for the ethnic Macedonians who have always lived across the entire region, with the majority of them presently representing the constitutive people of the Republic of Macedonia, there are other Balkan actors, notably Bulgaria, with their own historical rationale for using the brand name. And they have been using it with no explicit objections from Athens.

Second, while nowadays the Greeks claim that the Macedonian name is integral to their history, Hellenic heritage, national honour, and dignity, in today’s northern Greece (Aegean Macedonia) the name is officially used either in a territorial (geographic) and administrative-political context (since recently) or in relation to Ancient cultural heritage. None of this official uses refers to the modern Greek ethnic and national identity in general. There are the so-called Greek Macedonians (*Makedones*) who use the name as an identity group, but they are only a sizable Greek identity subgroup living in today’s northern Greece and relating itself to the territory and heritage of the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon. They are a cultural subgroup, not a separate ethnicity. While their use of the name is legitimate from a territorial and historical aspect, it must be noted that many of these Greek *Makedones* came to the territory of today’s northern Greece (Aegean Macedonia, the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon) only after its 1913 annexation. Moreover, given the time distance of over 2000 years, they tend to use the (-ir) name in a territorial rather than cultural sense. Opposite to the Greek *Makedones* is the contemporary Macedonian ethnic and national identity. The Macedonians use the term “Macedonia/n” in every possible sense as their only known identity denominator. This non-Greek, mainly Slavic identity has been living on the territory of historical and geographic Macedonia, including today’s northern Greece, for centuries and may legitimately relate itself to Ancient Macedonia on various accounts.

Third, even though the cultural and subsequent political ties of the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon with the then Hellenic city-states is a well recorded fact in (western) social sciences, which is understandable given the powerful influence of Ancient Hellenism, the Kingdom was nonetheless *distinct* in many ways. In fact, the Kingdom’s legacy can be by no means related only to modern Greece, whose British-boosted Hellenic origins have been questioned by many non-western scholars, and, at the same time, fully separated from ethnic Macedonians who, apart from their predominantly Slavic roots, have been living across the entire Macedonia, with many of them originating from or still living in Aegean Macedonia (today’s northern Greece). Ultimately, it is not rocket science to realize that what used to be the Kingdom of Macedon’s north-western part called Pelagonia or Upper Macedonia is today’s south-western Republic of Macedonia where Ancient Macedonian artefacts are found in abundance. How did the Ancient Kingdom reach the territory of today’s independent Macedonian land? Many preeminent historians and archaeologists explain this with the standard narrative whereby today’s Republic of Macedonia mainly occupies the territory of Ancient Paeonia (Paionia), a land north of the Kingdom of Macedon partly conquered by Philip and Alexander, yet never genuinely Macedonian, thus suggesting that the contemporary ethnic Macedonians should either call themselves Paeonians or otherwise join the “Greek Macedonian” identity (Miller 2009). While it is logical to relate today’s ethnic Macedonians to Ancient Paeonians, the main problem with the “Paeonia-only” argument is, obviously, its failure to recognize the full implications of the social intermixing between the Ancient Macedonians and the occupied Paeonians. Also, such an argument, even if true, cannot deny the fact that a considerable number of the modern ethnic Macedonians are either natives or descendents of natives of Aegean Macedonia and what was once the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon, as well as of many other places of geographic Macedonia beyond the territory of Ancient Paionia (today’s Republic of Macedonia).

^{ix} Many in the West are used to the term ‘Slav Macedonian(s)’. The latter has been adopted by western literature and media mainly for pragmatic purposes and conceptual distinction in the context of both Ancient Macedonia and Greece’s contemporary region(s) of Macedonia. In most of the Balkans, however, the term is considered redundant just as it is redundant to refer to “Slav Serbs”, “Slav Croats”, “Slav Montenegrins”, and similar. Also, the Macedonians, particularly those who today prefer to stress their Ancient roots, purportedly at the expense of their well known Slavic origin, do not like being called “Slav Macedonians”. They take this “special label” as a pejorative that tends to exclude an important part of their historical genesis, culture, and existence, albeit, for some researchers, being a Slav and Ancient Macedonian at the same time is not contradictory at all. In this context, by connecting the dots some Russian, Balkan and even western scholars challenge not only the “official” history of the Slavs’ origin and migrations in the fifth and sixth centuries but also a clutch of other well established theories (e.g. Hellenism, the origins of the Germanic peoples). They posit a highly controversial hypothesis according to which the Slavs did not move from anywhere in the 6th and 7th centuries CE, that they have always been “‘here’”, in the Balkans, for “‘ten thousand years at the least’” and that Ancient Macedonians were nothing but a tribe of *Ancient / Proto Slavs* who, unlike the other European peoples, had been strongly linked to Europe’s oldest civilized inhabitants, the Veneti (French: Vénètes) (Cvejić 2013).

^x Harris (1999) begins his famous article underlining that Macedonia

“is sparsely populated and has little strategic or geopolitical importance, yet forces in neighbouring countries hold that its statehood and national identity pose grave threats to their security.”

^{xi} The “dual formula” in its original form refers to an old, 1990s idea whereby the Republic of Macedonia would be permitted universal use of its constitutional name except in its bilateral relations with Greece.

^{xii} Of Nemitz’s numerous ideas for a complex “international” name for Macedonia, two have remained in circulation as generally acceptable for Greece: (the Republic of) North (-ern) Macedonia and (the Republic of) Upper Macedonia.

^{xiii} Over the past two decades, many have argued that a political suicide for the Macedonian state as a whole is exactly the opposite, namely the lack of flexibility and pragmatism on the part of Macedonian leadership and, as a consequence, Macedonia’s continual refusal to join NATO and the EU under a new name that will not simply replace the “FYROM” reference. This argument, which is both at the same time prudent and mistaken, is mainly maintained among Macedonian Albanians and foreign diplomats. As noted by Denko Maleski (2005), the first foreign minister of independent Macedonia and subsequently Macedonian ambassador to the UN, at a White House reception in late 1992 former US national security advisor General Brent Scowcroft “pointed out examples of states that [had] changed their names, like Burma and Ceylon”. After Maleski’s “remark that they [had] done it at their own will”, Scowcroft reportedly answered “that *the survival of the country should be a sufficient motive* to do that” (emphasis added). Obviously, the main problem with this position is the lack understanding that most Macedonians, while aware of the plight and misfortune potentially laying ahead, link their survival or even welfare, just like their predecessors did over the centuries, to preserving their own identity rather than submitting to the powerful structures of the day. To many, this national perseverance might seem masochistic, displaying an apparent discrepancy between the state’s real, core interests (security and welfare) and the society’s demands followed by politicians’ interests (see Maleski 2001). Nonetheless, it is a proven fact of life, now becoming even more so under the Gruevski regime.

^{xiv} The seemingly vague concept of “rational compromise” was popularized by the Macedonian media after a 2009 interview with Macedonian President Gjorgje Ivanov in which he failed (i.e. refused) to explain to the public the meaning of his own, long advocated idea of a rational, common-sense solution (BBC [Macedonian], 2009; *Dnevnik* 2009). This idea, subsequently renamed “dignified compromise”, found its place in VMRO-DPMNE’s 2011 electoral manifesto (*Utrinski vesnik* 2011).

^{xv} SDSM (Macedonian Latin: Socijal Demokratski Sojuz na Makedonija) stands for the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, the country's largest opposition party and, formerly, a ruling political force.

^{xvi} The Gruevski government's approach to the name issue has been somewhat burdened by legalistic and, recently, reformist elements. Many Macedonian experts and academics, including some of those who generally support the government's policies, have expressed reservations towards the futile aspects of such an approach.

^{xvii} It is, however, noteworthy that many in this group, while generally thinking of the Ancient Macedonia topic as an unnecessary complication of Macedonia's relations with the sensitive Greeks and a remote historical fragment irrelevant to the modern Macedonian state and people, do not explicitly deny connections between today's mainly Slavic Macedonians and Alexander the Great's legacy.

^{xviii} DUI stands for the Democratic Union for Integration (Macedonian [Latin script]: Demokratska unija za integracija; Albanian: Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim).

^{xix} In his work, Kofos wrongly and incompletely presents the original Macedonian language derivatives of the term "Macedonia/n" transliterated into the Latin alphabet. For instance, instead of "Makedonci" (noun, plural, correctly transliterated from the original Cyrillic "Македонци") he writes "Makedontsi", obviously applying phonetic transcription (c = ts) helpful for English language speakers and others. Second, while his incompleteness could be somewhat justified, it should not have prevented him as a Greek-language speaker from realizing the range of implications of transferring multiple grammatical forms (singular, masculine, feminine, neuter, plural, diminutive) of local language derivatives to foreign languages.

^{xx} In the future, provided that Greece has set itself free from the past and embraced its northern neighbour in the western alliances, the government in Skopje could also develop common cultural and touristic initiatives with Athens whereby the Ancient Macedonian heritage found on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia would be purposefully integrated with "what had been recorded" as Hellenic heritage and thus jointly presented to the world (Kofos 2009: 3).

^{xxi} The Greek Macedonians are a Greek cultural sub-group, mainly from post-1913 northern Greece, which strongly relates itself to the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon's legacy, despite the fact that this legacy extends well beyond present Greek borders. Northern Greece is also home to thousands of ethnic Macedonians whose existence as a minority Athens still officially denies, and who could at least territorially relate themselves to the legacy of Ancient Macedonia. The Bulgarian Macedonians can be by no means considered a separate Macedonian "version". They are either Bulgarians taking pride in their links to geographic Macedonia or unrecognized ethnic Macedonians from Pirin Macedonia, Bulgaria's post-1913 acquisition. There are also some Bulgarian Macedonians living in the Republic of Macedonia. The latter have chosen to declare themselves Bulgarians from Macedonia instead of ethnic Macedonians. The funniest part of Kofos' "anecdote" is, however, the one dedicated to the virtual "Albanian Macedonians". While Kofos persistently uses this designation for the Albanians in Macedonia, he, as a Greek, should know better than that. Wherever they live and whatever their native country is, the ethnic Albanians demonstrate a strong collectivist spirit, always insisting on their ethnicity and being called "Albanians". They are hardly affected by the impact of geography, the concept of political nation, or mono-ethnic tendencies for integration through assimilation. In that sense, the Albanians whose native country is the Republic of Macedonia are, at best, called "Macedonian Albanians" but not vice versa. Also, one has not heard local Albanians considering Alexander the Great as part of the Albanian history call themselves "Albanian Macedonians". Therefore, Kofos's reference to "Albanian Macedonians" can only be applied to the ethnic Macedonians from Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo, Albania, but these are no separate Macedonian identity.

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