

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE GREEK-MACEDONIAN NAMING DISPUTE: THE PRESPA AGREEMENT²⁷

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Abstract: This article examines the reconciliation phase of the Greek-Macedonian conflict known as the Macedonia naming dispute which commenced in late 1991. After a brief reference of other geographical naming disputes almost all of which were resolved amicably or by default, it is made clear that the impetus for this conflict settlement came from Skopje and not Athens. But at that juncture both sides genuinely wanted to clinch a deal, though for different reasons (which are referred to). Then the focus is on the negotiation process, based on the existing evidence (although more evidence is probably around the corner in the years to come), the sticking points that had to be overcome, the mutual compromises and sacrifices that had to be made, which were far more for the Macedonian side, however unjust this may have been. The final agreement was clearly lop-sided in favour of Greece which made the utmost of the fact that Macedonia (now North Macedonia) was keen to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions, for security and other vital reasons. The article concludes by expressing the hope that what is undoubtedly an asymmetric agreement would, in the years to come, become more balanced and positive sum through its implementation that would benefit both parties.

Key words: naming dispute, irredentism, national identity, heritage, asymmetric agreement

The Greek-Macedonian conflict known as the Macedonia naming dispute started in late 1991, when the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within federal Yugoslavia, declared its independence as Republic of Macedonia. The dispute can be divided into four phases: (1) the peak of the conflict from 1991 until 1995; (2) 1996-2005, the conflict downplayed with abortive attempts at a settlement and relations partly normalized; (3) 2006-16 a new peak of the conflict and a stalemate over the name issue; and (4) 2017-18 the gradual amelioration of relations concluding with a five-month process of conflict settlement.

Geographical naming disputes

Geographical naming disputes are not uncommon between and within states; to name but a few, disputes between Britain and Ireland (British Isles naming dispute, the Derry/Londonderry name

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dispute in Northern Ireland and others), the Sea of Japan naming dispute among Japan, South Korea and North Korea or the Falkland Islands/Malvinas dispute between Argentina and Britain.

There is also the far more problematic case of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC), a case involving the very same identity, being Chinese. Upon the PRC accession to the UN in 1971, it was decided that it was 'the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations' and thus the ROC was removed from the UN. In the ROC there are three main trends in what is, understandably, a highly emotional issue: to cling to the status quo (known as 'One China Policy'), the traditional view of representing the whole of China, however absurd this may be (this is the majority view); to no longer claim to represent all of China and to seek membership in the UN under the name of 'Republic of Taiwan', this has also appeared as a quest for a 'a unique Taiwanese national identity' (the view of roughly a fourth to a fifth of the electorate); and eventual (re)unification with mainland China as part of 'a single Chinese nation' (ten percent of the electorate) (*Taiwan* 2012: 38-45, 52-4).

The only dispute comparable to the Greek-Macedonian one, which is far more protracted and more real in substance, in the sense that it involves real – not imagined – irredentism, is the name dispute between Britain and Ireland regarding the latter's name which was finally resolved in 1998, with the Belfast Agreement (Good Friday Agreement) (Walker 2012: 3, 13-14, 146).

All other cases of the name of a state were settled early on, amicably or by default. One of the most famous cases intertwined with the coming of the Cold War: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic (commonly known as West Germany and East Germany). In 1949, when West Germany became an independent state, the Germans called their state 'Federal Republic Germany' (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) in German, without the 'of' in between which appears in the English version. This was done so as to stress that their Germany was the *real* Germany in contradistinction to the GDR.

Others name cases were linked to decolonization, with the capital used as the qualifier: Guinea and Guinea-Bissau and the more baffling case of the Republic of the Congo, which was the same name for two neighbouring countries from 1960 until 1964, commonly distinguished as Congo-Léopoldville (later Congo-Kinshasa) and Congo-Brazzaville, from the names of their respective capitals (today they are the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo).

More common are similar names existing in the region of another country that have not led to a dispute, such as Great Britain and Bretagne in France (Brittany in English), Luxembourg (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) and the province of Luxembourg in Belgium (in Wallonia), Moldova and Moldavia in Romania. And there the cases of compound names, such Ireland and Northern Ireland, Mongolia (Outer Mongolia) and Inner Mongolia in China, Mexico and New Mexico in the US, Bangladesh (Bengali-land) and the state of West Bengal in India or Azerbaijan and East Azerbaijan Province in Iran. In all the compound names, the qualifier is used for the federated state or province of one of the two countries and not for the state as a whole, as it occurred with the adoption of the name North Macedonia.

Another aspect of the Greek-Macedonian naming dispute is whether in the history of inter-state relations and diplomacy there have been instances of a state changing its name because another

state or states insist upon it. It seems that there exists only one such case in contemporary international politics: Austria after the end of the First World War, with the disintegration of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. In November 1919 it declared itself a republic under the name *Deutsch-Österreich* (German-Austria) and in its provisional constitution it stated that 'German-Austria is an integral part of the German *reich*', the aim being a future union with Germany. This name, for obvious reasons, was unacceptable to the victorious Allied Powers at the Paris Peace Conference, and with the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the new country was named 'Republic of Austria' and union with Germany was forbidden (by the treaties of Saint-Germain and Versailles). Clearly this instance is unique and not comparable to our case, having come after a defeat in a world war.

The dispute between Greece and Macedonia could have been easily resolved early on, had it not been for Greece's striking intransigence for most of the 1990s. After all the two states do not happen to have the same name as the Congo in the early 1960s nor are the two states part of a previous single entity, as in the case of the Sudan. Thus simply Macedonia or *Makedonija* should have been acceptable. Clearly Greece was responsible for the impasse until 2000, and from 2008 until 2016, Macedonia was mainly responsible for the non-resolution due the identity politics of Nikola Gruevski with his infamous 'antiquisation' as dubbed by its critics (Vangeli 2011), though probably a more appropriate term would have been 'antiquomania' (Vankovska 2010: 456).

The road to Prespa

The breakthrough was put on course by the SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) led government headed by Zoran Zaev, which took over power in Macedonia on 31 May 2017. The return to power of the Social Democrats 'following a decade in opposition, reinvigorated Macedonia's bid to join NATO and EU' (Bechev 2019: 26). And within two months an agreement was clinched with Bulgaria in August 2017. After the Social Democrats won decisively in the municipal elections (October 2017), Zaev's next move, which in those days was regarded much bolder, was to seek conciliation with Greece on the name issue (Bechev 2019: 27, 216). Athens after some initial hesitation (Armakolas and Triantaphyllou 2017: 9) reacted positively to Skopje's overtures.

In New York, the UN mediator since the previous decade, Mathew Nimetz suggested focusing efforts on five names (17 January 2018): North Macedonia, Upper Macedonia, Macedonia-Skopje, Vardar Macedonia and Nova Macedonia (Nimetz 2020: 212). On 24 January 2018, the two prime ministers, Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras met on the sidelines of the Davos World Economic Forum, and agreed that the talks will be bilateral, between the two foreign ministers, Nicos Kotzias and Nikola Dimitrov, under the supervision of the prime ministers. Zaev promised to take initiatives to soothe the Greeks, and delivered by renaming 'Alexander the Great Airport', 'Skopje International Airport', 'Alexander the Great Highway' was renamed 'Friendship Highway' and others. Moreover the 'Skopje 2014 Program' was dropped in February. Tsipras for his part took various initiatives aimed at easing the road of Macedonia towards the EU.

The Macedonian reasons for wanting a settlement included the following: (a) to do away with Macedonia's bleak international isolation and achieve its long-standing foreign policy goals of

Euro-Atlantic integration; (b) a settlement of the name dispute would render Macedonia at last 'a normal' (Nimetz 2020: 210) truly independent country; (c) if EU and NATO accession continuous to be blocked, Macedonian-Albanian relations in the country would suffer, with the Albanians becoming restive and assertive, especially if they were to witness Albania – and not Macedonia – joining NATO and the EU; (d) to appear positive and constructive internationally, contrary to the antics of the Gruevski administration and gain economically and otherwise as a result; (e) to do away with Gruevski's emphasis on Macedonian ethnonationalism which had marred relations with the Albanian community, upsetting 'the delicate inter-ethnic co-existence' (Abdullai 2015: 52); (f) to dispense altogether with the idea of ancient Macedonian origins which had damaged Macedonia's international reputation, a concept which they, as the social-democratic party rejected, being advocates of the Slavic origins of the Macedonians; and (g) to discredit the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) and its hegemony, and establish the SDSM as the majority party for the years to come that could guarantee a secure and more prosperous future for the country (Daskalovski 2017: 339-40; Maracik and Armakolas 2018: 5-7; Armakolas and Petkovski 2019: 3-5; Ellereit 2018: 15).

The Greek reasons for wanting to clinch a deal were the following: (a) that time was running against Greece, with Macedonia's 142 recognitions, most of them with the constitutional name and with the foreign press and media calling it 'Macedonia' (Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019, 83; (b) the new government of Zaev was perceived as sincere in wanting a settlement here and now; (c) the continuation of the Greek veto regarding Macedonia's accession to NATO and the EU could not persist given Skopje's genuine switch to moderation; (d) a settlement would establish Greece as a major stabilizing factor, 'playing a more important role in southeast Europe' (Nimetz 2020: 213); (e) to mend Greece's fences with all of its Balkan neighbours (after Macedonia, with Albania), so as to be in a better position to handle its main security concern and sense of threat that comes from Turkey; (f) the non settlement of the dispute provided an excellent opportunity for Turkey to make inroads in the Balkans, as a friend and supporter of the Macedonians (with investments, military aid and so on) (Kotzias 2019: 9; (g) Athens felt confident that it was in the position to gain more than the other side, due to its far greater power and the *quid pro quo* involved, namely the fact that Skopje was as keen for entry in the exclusive international clubs of NATO and the EU; and (h) the fear, however far-fetched, that if the dispute continued unresolved this could lead to the Albanians radicalizing, from their mild nationalism of today to virulent Muslim fundamentalism probably with links to Turkey (Kotzias 2018: 9-12; Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019: 83, 163-4, 270).

For a deal to be agreed upon that would be meaningful and viable for both parties, the Macedonians had to indicate beyond reasonable doubt that, contrary to the 1940s or 1950s, they did not aspire to irredentism as regards Greek Macedonia ('Aegean Macedonia' as they call it); and they no more seek their origins in the ancient Macedonians and Alexander the Great. As for the Greeks that, irrespective of what they held previously, they now fully accept the existence of the (Slav)Macedonians as a nation, one with a distinct South Slav language and distinct culture (distinct from the Bulgarian language and culture as well as that of the Serbs).

The Macedonians, however, were called upon to make greater sacrifices than the Greeks. In order of importance they were first and foremost to change their name, a name officially in use for three generations, from 1944 onwards. For them, even more than for the Greeks, the name is indeed their 'soul', their cherished identity; it is what makes them different from the Serbs and in particular from the encroaching Bulgarians. And, as many a Macedonian has put it, is a nation worthy of itself if it bargains with its very own name and identity? For the Greeks it is not 'the exclusive signifier of the Greek identity' (International Crisis Group 2001: 16), while for the Macedonians it is not only their identity but also their existence which is tied to the name (International Crisis Group 2001: 15).

Cognizant of the above, Kotzias made it clear to Dimitrov early on in the negotiations that the name was the Macedonians' call; it was for them to decide what compound name suits them best (Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019: 178-9). And Nimetz made sure to convey to the Macedonian leaders to 'relax about the fear' that their 'Macedonian identity will be taken away', but that the name of 'a state should reflect geographical reality', hence the need for a 'modifier to your name to more accurately reflect the geographic reality', a 'dignified modifier' as he put it (Nimetz 2020: 211).

Second, the Macedonians had to forget, at least for the time being, a legitimate claim on their part, the recognition of the existence of the ethnic (Slav)Macedonians in Greek Macedonia, a logical request which appeared consistently on the part of Skopje from the 1950s onward.

Third, was the *erga omnes* aspect, which for them had been a 'red line' since the late 1990s.

Fourth, was to do away for good with the presumed ancient Macedonian heritage. This heritage may have been far-fetched and unfounded (though less so in its more subtle rendition of admixture of the incoming Slavs with the remnants of the decedents of the Macedonians, Romans, Illyrians and Thracians and others), but it has caught the fancy of a substantial portion of the Macedonian public, not least given the great prestige accrued by being the descendents of those 'glorious beings' (based on the premise that the ancient Macedonians were not Greeks). On the other hand, their presumed ancient Macedonian roots had convinced no one outside Macedonia and no one among the Albanians of the country.

As regards NATO and the EU it is somewhat surprising that the Zaev Government 'did not have the courage or capacity to use the [ICJ] verdict as a bargaining chip' (Vankovska 2020: 10). This timid stance may be explained by the fact that NATO and the EU had not questioned the Greek veto, in spite of the ICJ ruling. And it can also be explained by Skopje's craving for entry into the Euro-Atlantic structures. As Biljana Vankovska has pointed out (Vankovska 2020: 6):

Ever since the 1990s, Macedonia's key strategic goals – i.e., NATO and EU membership – seem to have been not only a beacon of hope but also the glue that has kept its problematic society together. With the state's compass always pointing to the West, its foreign policy goals have served to provide internal cohesion for the ethnically divided society ... NATO and EU membership have turned into a secular religion, a dogma that must not be questioned at all.

By comparison the Greek sacrifices were negligible for by the turn of the new century both government and opposition had abandoned the outrageous 'no' to the term Macedonia under

whatever compound name and the rejection of the Macedonian nationality and language (namely that is amounted to Bulgarian). Moreover Macedonian Greek identity was only part of the Greek heritage and of lesser importance than the culture, philosophy and democracy associated with ancient Athens and its golden age. Indeed if the Greeks had been more self-confident they should have graciously accepted the appellation 'Macedonians' or at least its Slavic version *Makedonski*. The only real 'sacrifice' on the Greek part would have been to accept the obvious: the existence of a (Slav)Macedonian minority or at least an ethnic or linguistic group in Greek Macedonia, but this for Athens was a non-starter.

As this juncture it is worth referring to Nimetz's ultimate strategy, which no doubt influenced the two negotiating sides in the crucial negotiations of 2018 and bore fruit. Nimetz was inspired by the important psychological finding of economists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, known as 'the principle of loss aversion' (Kahneman 2011: 300-309), namely that people 'are more sensitive to losing something they already possess than they are to gaining something new' (Nimetz 2020: 2010-211). Thus Nimetz made sure to reframe the question by limiting and bypassing the sense of loss aversion that haunted both parties: in the Macedonian case he told them that they are about to lose their national identity as Macedonians; and to the Greeks that by accepting the name (even in compound form) they will be losing their heritage and identity linked with the ancient Macedonians. Nimetz's reframing devise to either side, was for them to forget and do away with identity which was not threatened, and move on to pragmatism based on sheer geography: that both sides lived in parts of geographical Macedonia, hence the need for 'a modifier'(Nimetz 2020: 2010-211).

The Greek-Macedonian talks started in February 2018, following the sending of a first draft agreement concocted by Kotzias, which he regarded as even-handed (Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019: 269). The talks lasted for four months, with Kotzias in particular personally drafting 'many of the provisions of the agreement' (Nimetz 2020: 213). Nimetz followed the proceedings closely and was helpful, with useful interventions, and also acted as a kind of 'grammarian-in-chief, rendering his considered opinion on various grammatical alternatives' (Nimetz 2020: 212). And contrary to a widely spread belief in both countries, the talks were indeed bilateral, with no foreign intervention or contribution, save for Nimetz's discrete assistance.

In the negotiations the sticking points were the *erga omnes*, the designation of the citizenship, the changes to be made in the Constitution and less the issue of ancient national heritage since the Zaev Government was not wedded to it. For Kotzias the main concern was shelving any notion or prospect of Macedonian irredentism; for Dimitrov it was making sure that their national identity would not be put at risk or somehow abandoned.

The main sticking points did not include the most suitable name for both understood that it was to be a compound name of Macedonia and that in this crucial matter Skopje had the main say, as readily accepted by Athens (Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019: 178, 283). In 17 May at a meeting of the two prime ministers, Zaev suggested a name not previously on the table: 'Republika Ilidenska Makedonija' (Republic of Ilinden Macedonia), which Tsipras seemed to accept but then

Athens backed down, for Tsipras was told by his advisers that Ilinden was linked with the idea of a reunited Macedonia, and Skopje for its part did not insist.

At the final stage of the talks two compound names were left on the table: 'New Macedonia' and 'North Macedonia'. Dimitrov had difficulty with the first for as he confided to Kotzias, many Macedonians were emotionally associated with socialist Macedonia and 'new' seemed to imply abandoning it. So they both settled for North Macedonia as the most appropriate term so as meet the Macedonian main desideratum, not jeopardizing their identity, and the Greek main desideratum, of banning irredentism for good (Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019: 283).

In general the whole negotiation process, from January to June 2018, was 'wearisome, politically exhausting and at times highly controversial; but ultimately it was a process that proved successful, despite encountering opposition or even hostility on both sides' (Armakolas and Petkovski 2019: 1).

The provisions of the Prespa Agreement

According to the Prespa Agreement the name is to be 'Republic of North Macedonia' ('North Macedonia'), to be used *erga omnes*; its nationality (in the sense of citizenship) is to be 'Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia'; and its language the 'Macedonian language', with the proviso that 'the Macedonian language, is within the group of South Slavic languages' and 'not related to the ancient Hellenic civilization, history, culture and heritage'.

A crucial and unique provision is Article 7 that 'puts all this in historical context' (Nimetz 2020: 213). It specifies that the citizens (of North Macedonia) are not related to the ancient Macedonians for the terms Macedonia and Macedonian refers 'to a different historical context and cultural heritage'; the language and other attributes of North Macedonia are 'not related to the ancient Hellenic civilization, history, culture, and heritage of the northern region' (Article 7, 4).

There is an array of provisions regarding international law principles, such as sovereignty and independence, territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers, non-intervention in internal affairs, not tolerating activities of a non-friendly character, and repeated references to a ban on all manifestations of irredentism. These references, most of them aimed at placating the Greeks are superfluous (being well established fundamental norms of international law), with the exception of irredentism, and would have been more appropriate if the much stronger party was North Macedonia, realistically threatening Greece. Moreover, it is stated that if either party 'believes one or more symbols constituting part of its historic or cultural patrimony is being used by the other', it will bring it to the attention of the other party that 'shall take appropriate corrective action to effectively address the issue and ensure respect for the said patrimony', again aimed to satisfy the suspicious Greeks.

Furthermore, 'The Parties shall establish a High-level Cooperation Council ("HLCC") of their Governments, jointly headed by their Prime Ministers' (Article 12, 2), which 'shall convene at least annually and shall be the competent body as regards the proper and effective implementation of this Agreement and the ensuing Action Plan'.

One of the trickiest provisions which is likely to become a headache and a cause of misunderstandings in the near future is the one on school textbooks.

As regards procedure various steps were agreed upon, including a referendum, if Skopje decided to hold one, the changes in the Constitution, ratification by North Macedonia and prompt ratification by Greece. From the signing in Prespa until the ratification by Greece, there were a number of major hurdles that had to be overcome for the agreement to win the day. The ratification process 'in both countries was difficult. Opposition was intense. The entire population of each country was engaged' (Nimetz 2020: 213).

Despite the many difficulties on 11 January 2019, the Macedonian Parliament completed the legal implementation of the Prespa Agreement by approving the constitutional changes for renaming the country to North Macedonia with a two-thirds parliamentary majority (81 MPs). And on 25 January 2019, Greece's Parliament approved it with 153 votes in favor and 146 votes against (a simple majority was needed), with one abstention.

An assessment

According to the Tsipras Government, it was 'an honourable compromise', far better than the cost of the ongoing impasse, a compromise with two winners. Greece achieved its main goal, the change of name, and pocketed the *erga omnes*, which was no easy matter and had not been set by previous Greek governments as a clear prerequisite. The issue of Greek national heritage (ancient Macedonia) is also a major achievement and gain for Greece, as well as the many provisions on the sanctity of borders and against irredentism. And it is very unusual for a state to change its constitutional provisions at the demand of another state. Moreover no state in the contemporary world has changed its name due to the desire and pressure by another state (the only exception being Austria after a world war). But the Agreement could hardly have been an all-out Greek victory for otherwise there would have been no agreement for the other side would have been humiliated. Thus Greece in order to accommodate the needs of the other party, gave in to the following: the nationality (though meaning citizenship and not nationality in the sense of a nation) to be called 'Macedonian', as well as the language (in fact this had been conceded by Greece back in 1977 at a UN conference held in Athens), and of course lifting the veto to accession to NATO and the EU (Kotzias and Kotrotsos 2019: 83-4, 163-4, 167, 204, 242-3).

According to the Zaev Government, an advantageous compromise had been achieved, securing the language, the citizenship and through both the Macedonian nationality and national identity. Entry as soon as possible to NATO and the EU were major gains that would assure peace and security as never before for the country. Zaev went as far as to talk of a 'second independence' for Macedonia, of a 'confirmation of the state's existence once and for all', and of 'getting a place in the cadastral map' that would make 'the Republic of Macedonia a real state for the first time in its history' (Vankovska 2018: 8, 13). When pushed hard by his critics not only from the VM-RO-DPMNE nationalists but more convincingly from independent, mainly leftist analysts, Zaev conceded that 'the price was high but worth it: this was the best possible agreement under the circumstances and that Macedonia had to accept the Greek ultimatum in order to move ahead towards NATO and the EU' (Vankovska 2018: 8).

Criticism of the Agreement on the Greek side, leaving aside the shrill cries of the jingoists (that 'Macedonia' can only be a Greek concept and that the Macedonians and their language are non-existent but an artificial Titoist invention, and that the Prespa Agreement is 'a crime against the nation' and a 'treachery'), is, according to the hawks, that Skopje gained more than it should have been allowed to gain: in view of the two obvious 'carrots', entry into NATO and the EU, Greece should have committed wholesale blackmail, demanding more and not giving in on language and nationality, with the latter also implying nationality in the sense of national identity. At the very least the term 'citizenship' and not 'nationality' should have been used. And the conclusion is that Athens paid more than it had to in order to clinch the composite name and ban irredentism (Syrgios and Hadjivasilou 2018; Armakolas and Siakas 2018).

On the Macedonian side, putting aside the views of the nationalists (the Prespa Agreement as a betrayal of national interests and of identity, a humiliation and an act of treason), the more sophisticated argumentation against the Agreement is that the Prespa Agreement is not 'a compromise or an agreement between equal parties'; it patently asymmetrical, favouring Greece, the stronger party, with various 'rights', with 'obligations only on the weaker side', as seen by the following: the *erga omnes* and the imposed constitutional changes (both of which had been 'important pillars' of Macedonia on the name dispute), the intrusion of Greece into the internal affairs of Macedonia, including constitution-making, history, culture, nationality, language and others; censorship or self-censorship when historical research and education (schoolbooks) is concerned; prescribing 'a total restructuring and redesigning of the internal order of a sovereign state, starting with the constitution, changes to names of the state institutions, symbols, currency, history, culture, trade codes, etc.' (Vankovska 2018: 8, 10-11, 13, 22).

Macedonian criticism raises a number of other substantial issues, which have also been touched upon by a very small minority of Greek scholars who regard the Agreement lop-sided in favour of Greece (Heraclides 2018: 323-34). Foremost of all is the change of name itself, to have to accept a different name and identity from their own, which is 'the only identity they have ever known' (Vankovska 2010: 440). Is it possible for 'a state/nation to have a dispute over its own name and self-identification?' (Vankovska 2010: 440). This is unprecedented in the history of international relations, with no modern state 'the object of such an imposition' (Vankovska 2010: 444).

Things would of course have been different if the name 'Macedonia' happened to be the main or exclusive signifier of Greek identity and existence, as it is for the Macedonians. Moreover international law offers no basis for Greece's imposition of its name on another sovereign independent state; only the recognition of another state can, for whatever reason, can be withheld for that is a matter of discretion and a sovereign right and does not imply the non-existence of the other state. Clearly the imposition of a name is counter to a state's independence, sovereignty and juridical equality between states (which goes back to Jean Bodin), and its right to its own self-definition inherent in the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes the right to one's name and flag (Vankovska 2010: 440, 450; Craven 1995: 199-200, 234-5; Daskalovski 2017: 331-3. And the original demeaning FYROM designation and the call on the Macedonians for talks so as to change their name implies an unacceptable inequality between states and a form of international discrimination (Daskalovski 2017: 333; Heraclides 2018: 324-8).

As for the views of outsiders or of those in the two countries with no axe to grind, there are two main viewpoints. One regards the agreement 'a major positive development in the Balkans, contributing to the consolidation of stability and the advancement of the region's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures' (Tzifakis 2019); and as a pace-setter for the resolution of other conflicts in the Balkans and elsewhere, an innovative agreement and 'a model international treaty for security, good neighbourly relations and peace' (Christopoulos and Karpozilos 2018: 12). A second approach acknowledges that it is more favourable to Greece, but this does not necessarily make it unworkable for the future. But both lines tend to agree that it is 'far-from-perfect agreement' (Rohdewald 2018: 578), but irrespective of its ambiguities and future difficulties in its implementation, and lop-sidedness, it has at last put an end to the 27 year name dispute, which seemed unsolvable. Nimetz for his part has praised the Agreement, but concludes with a cautious note: that it 'is a work in progress. Whether it is a success or not, whether Greece and North Macedonia have truly resolved their differences, and whether the Macedonian Question ... has finally been resolved will be for future generations to determine' (Nimetz 2020: 214).

According to Armakolas and Petkovski, respectively a Greek and a Macedonian Balkan expert writing together, the main achievements of the Agreement, apart from the 'elephant in the room', the name, was how to tackle identity and heritage, the first crucial for the Macedonians, the latter crucial to the Greeks (Armakolas and Petkovski 2018: 3). The outcome had elements of 'creative ambiguity', especially as regards identity, with language and nationality (as citizenship) called 'Macedonian'; as regards heritage it is clear enough, antiquity (ancient Macedonia) goes to the Greeks. The thrust of the agreement is that we do not agree on everything, but above all there is 'the willingness to live side by side despite disagreements' (Armakolas and Petkovski 2018: 3).

Stefan Rohdewald has criticized the Agreement for adopting an essentialist, retrospective and ahistorical view of ethnicity, nationhood and cultural heritage, especially concerning the Greeks; and as for the Macedonian (as a South Slav language) there is no mention of the Albanian language, the second language of North Macedonia (Rohdewald 2018: 579-84).

I would argue that this criticism though valid, misses the point. Inter-state agreements are not the outcome of a scientific encounter among sophisticated and open-minded historians and other social scientists, but down to earth documents that can be understood by the majority on either side, both of which are steeped in the respective national narratives. A more pragmatic line of inquiry is probably the following: (a) whether the agreement is roughly balanced (give and take 'positive sum') or decidedly lop-sided favouring one party more than the other; (b) if the latter case, are its defects insurmountable rendering the agreement self-defeating or harmful to the losing side; (c) whether the agreement as it stands is viable and manageable even though it is lop-sided.

Clearly the agreement tilts in Greece's favour, for most of its crucial provisions were made to fit the Greek needs and demands. It is thus astonishing that the Greek public, in its majority, was against the Agreement, which can mainly be explained by misinformation and the haughty Greek national self-image and Greek ethnocentrism and nationalism. Be this as it may, one hopes that what is to begin with, on paper, asymmetric and hardly 'win-win', will in its practical

consequences (along the proof of the pudding being in the eating), especially through increased mutually beneficial economical transactions and contacts leading to better mutual knowledge and discarding misunderstandings and prejudice, gradually transform itself into a 'positive sum' outcome for both parties and by the same token enhance peace and stability in this volatile region of the Balkans (Heraclides 2018, 334; Heraclides 2019, 44-7).

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