

The name game in Macedonia

By [Anastasios Proios Doukas](#), Food and Drink Editor

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March by Greek Macedonians [Image: George Papadopoulos]

The name of a country may seem like an uncontroversial topic, yet recently what many might assume is a non-issue, has caused a great deal of problems for the the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). The FYROM has not been able to join the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO and that is for one reason: they want to be called Macedonia. The naming dispute originated when the FYROM gained their independence and proclaimed themselves to be the “Republic of Macedonia”; a point of contention with Greece. This is seen as problematic because Greece’s largest region is named Macedonia, as it incorporates most parts of the ancient kingdom. To rub salt in the Greek wound they chose the Vergina Sun, an ancient Greek symbol, as their flag. Greece spoke against the FYROM’s name declaration, condemning it as a theft of culture and heritage, and a direct attack on Greek national sovereignty.

Multiple efforts have been made to reach a solution but all produced no positive outcome. The dispute seems to have two repeating phases in-between the negotiations: a phase of latency and a phase of tension. Tensions have been created by the adoption of the Vergina sun symbol, using the name “Alexander the Great” for Skopje’s main airport and the great motorway, and the building of statues and monuments that showcase achievements of the ancient kingdom of Macedon. All of these are important cultural symbols. The Vergina sun problem was resolved after Greece imposed an embargo on all products from the FYROM except for food, medicine and humanitarian assistance, until they change their flag following talks with UN mediator Cyrus R. Vance. Greece reasoned that this was done as a “last resort” as the diplomatic talks did not lead to any fruition for the span of two years. The other two issues continue to be unresolved problems today even though the prime minister of the FYROM Zoran Zaev claims that he is going to change the name of the airport and the highway to lead to the cooperation of the two nations.

So, is there any hope for stability between the two nations? The current prime minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, and Zoran Zaev have reopened the topic of the name dispute and UN mediator Matthew Nimetz has facilitated meetings between the two sides to find a common acceptable solution. Both sides seem to agree that the country cannot be named “The Republic of Macedonia” but rather use a name that contains the term Macedonia and make it abundantly clear that the Greek Macedonia is a distinctly

different territory. However, the governments in this case do not reflect the will of the people. There is real passion over the issue among ordinary Greek people.

The Greeks have three main arguments as to why the name shouldn't contain the term Macedonia. Firstly, Alexander the Great spread the Greek civilisation, was born in the Greek city Pella, spoke Greek and participated in the Olympic Games which means that he is indeed Greek. Secondly, the region of the current FYROM was not incorporated in the kingdom of Macedon but rather was a separate one called Paeonia (except its most eastern part.) The last reason Greeks cite is that the Slavs moved in much later. As a modern Greek national commented, "Giving them our name and our history is nothing short of treason and it is like taking out our eyes with our own hands".

The people of the FYROM justify their use of the name, also claiming that they are historically tied to the name as after the Romans, the region they lived in was also called Macedonia due to an administrative region that was set up. They claim that they have built a new separate culture surrounding that name. I asked a modern citizen of the FY-ROM who responded, "I think the name of our country isn't something you should change with-out votes, it takes away a lot of history and tradition". While outsiders may see the dispute between the two claim-ants of the title "Macedonia" as somewhat trivial, the two sides are influenced by a sense of national pride and both feel that their history entitles them to the name. The debate is motivated by feelings of national pride; it is having practical ramifications for relations in the region.



2 comments

Terry

14 Feb '18 at 10:54 am

There will be zero tolerance with FYROM. If Zaev wanted to mend relations with Greece he would have announced the demolition of the grotesque Italian made Hellenic reproduction statues that litter the FYROM landscape, the renaming of the airport in Skopje, the renaming of the highway, the renaming of the football stadium, the removal of the repulsive Baroque Hellenic style facades, the correcting of school curriculum, the removal of the Hellenic symbol on the national flag, the removal of all greater Macedonia maps from government institutions and a heartfelt apology to the nation of Greece for his nation being vile for the last two and a half decades. Cultural theft cannot be forgiven easily. Actions speak louder than words. Greeks do not want to hear politicians trying new age diplomacy that they learnt in their political science classes. Dimitrov, Šekerinska, Zaev and all the Slavic FYromians currently running FYROM are just as dogmatic about an exclusivity of the name as the Gruevski ultra nationalists. There is no scope for negotiation with these antiquies. Greece is the victim here. Our history has been hijacked by FYromian Slavs. Leave our history alone. It's not a good fit for you. You cannot pronounce nor read the Ancient inscriptions for they are in Greek. If FYROM wants exclusivity to the name Macedonia they will have to change their official language to Greek for this corresponds with the Ancient Macedonian language. We Greeks embrace everyone as a Hellene as long as they speak Greek. You cannot have Bulgarian speaking Slavs of FYROM claiming they are Antiques. It's ridiculous.

Sekerinska can sit around bagging the VMRO for their crimes but she is just as bad. She claims she is a Slav and a non Antique and in the same breath attacks Greece for not recognizing FYROM. I thought that her hair incident would have knocked some sense into her. Dimitrov has also had a go at it. The fool was part of the negotiation team under Gruevski. He failed miserably because he too will never give up the name. These Slavs are like a dog with a bone but in their case the bone is plastic and has zero marrow. They know what they have to do and it will never happen. The constitutional name will not change because the antiquated population of FYROM will never vote for it. They have had way too many history lessons from Milenko Nedelkovski. The vile sneaky tactics of attempting to be admitted to NATO and the EU under their provisional FYROM name won't work either. They are fruitless attempts at diplomacy that not only waste time but also soak up tax payers efforts. Think twice FYROM before attempting

negotiations with the Greeks on their history. The Albanian, Roma and Turkish birth rate is twice that of the Slavs. While you lot are busy fixating about exclusivity of your name and your antique culture the non Slavic population of FYROM will become a majority group within their ancient wonderland. The last census was in 2001, these so called minority groups were are 35% collectively. I would hate to think what they are at now. 16 years of fertile breeding has to be worrying for the new government. Back off our history you deluded farm animals.

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Geralynn

27 Mar '18 at 2:05 am

Great inishgt! That's the answer we've been looking for.

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