

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MACEDONIA AND GREECE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NAME ISSUE

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ABSTRACT

The relations between the two neighboring countries Macedonia and Greece face unique challenges. Namely, the Greek problem with the name of the Republic of Macedonia has not only deep historical roots but also creates possibility for contemporary and even future destabilization in the entire region of South-east Europe. This paper threats the issues in the relations between Macedonia and Greece mostly relying on qualitative methods.

Keywords: Macedonia, Greece, European Union, NATO, Name Problem, Relations.

İSİM SORUNU ÇERÇEVESİNDE MAKEDONYA VE YUNANİSTAN ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİLER

ÖZET

İki komşu ülke olan Makedonya ve Yunanistan arasındaki ilişkiler emsalsiz bir redde dönüşmektedir. Şöyle ki, Yunanlıların Makedonya Cumhuriyeti'nin ismiyle yaşadığı problem sadece derin tarihsel kökleri olan bir sorun değil; aynı zamanda Güneydoğu Avrupa'nın tümünde günümüz ve gelecek için bile istikrarsızlık ihtimali yaratmaktadır. Bu çalışma, çoğunlukla nitel metotlara dayanarak Makedonya-Yunanistan ilişkilerindeki sorunları incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Makedonya, Yunanistan, Avrupa Birliği, NATO, İsim Sorunu, İlişkiler.

INTRODUCTION

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia has become independent republic. This was not so good accepted by Greece that refused to recognize the new neighbor and denied the right on its name and national symbols. Despite the tensions, Macedonia and Greece have come to an interim Agreement in 1995. Still, this agreement solved the issue only partly. Despite the agreement provisions for non obstructing Macedonia in its Euro-Atlantic integrations, Greece acted opposite of this on the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. This is the reason why Macedonia brought the case before the International Court of Justice, whose verdict clearly stated that Greece has

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violated the interim Agreement. Still, Greece as EU and NATO member refuses to allow Macedonian integration in these two organizations, leaving Macedonia out of the security umbrella of NATO, on the Balkan which is still not totally stable.

1. THE NAME PROBLEM BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

“Freedom or death” is the informal motto in Macedonia and in Greece. The essence of the motto reflects the historical fate of both countries that in a good time of their past they were under the rule of Ottoman. 1830 was crucial year for creation of independent Greek state. This news resonated throughout the Balkans that was still under Ottoman rule. The sympathies regarding the creation of a free and independent Greek state were coming from Macedonian side also, which was under the Ottoman Empire at that time as well. Nearly 120 years later, Macedonia becomes independent. But this time, the reactions from Greece were not favorably inclined towards this event, at all. At the request for recognition of an independent Macedonian state, Greece responded with disturbance of the Macedonian air space with its military aircraft and military exercises near the Greek - Macedonian border.

However, before qualifying the behavior of Greece as anti-Macedonian, one ought to take into consideration other possible motives of Greece for such behavior, respectively to try to interpret such Greece's moves from another angle. One possibility is the revolt of Greece against the decomposition of Yugoslavia, i.e. the expression of solidarity with its neighbor which was breaking down. In addition to this is the fact from economic aspect- i.e. it would be better for Greece to have a relatively great state as neighbor, which is in a good part dependent on its port in Thessaloniki. At the very begin of the Yugoslav crisis Greece had declared not to recognize any unilateral secession from Yugoslavia, so logically neither the Macedonian one. So according to this thesis, the Greek nervous behavior was not anti-Macedonian, but a kind of anti-secession or pro-Yugoslav.

However, the events that followed were denying this view. Sufficient are the illustrations that the mass protests which took place in Greece had quite anti-Macedonian character. At the same time, no one demonstrated negative reaction against Croatia or Slovenia, which also declared independence from Yugoslavia. So, we can conclude that the reactions of Greece were neither anti-secessionist, nor demonstrated concern about its neighbor's disintegration. It was a protest organized in Thessaloniki in 1992 and across cities in other states like those in Melbourne, in which Greeks and Greek Diaspora protested under

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the slogan “Μακεδονία είναι ελληνική”(Macedonia is Greek).¹ If it’s already concluded that these protests and anger from Greek side were caused and directed towards Macedonia, the logical question would be what was the reason concretely? Officially, Greece located the problem among both countries in the “name issue”. Namely, even in 1992 all major political parties in Greece reached consensus that the word “Macedonia” cannot be contained in the name of the neighboring Republic. Such strong political unity in Greece was to be a message that Macedonia will not get Greek and international recognition of its independence till it uses the name Macedonia as a name of the republic. The main Greek argument that should have justified this attitude was the claim that the name “Macedonia” is exclusively and historically Greek and that its use by the neighboring Republic inevitably implies territorial pretensions towards the Greek province of Macedonia. The “irredentism” of Macedonia was following the “irredentism” of Turkey, which, according to some scenarios, would attack Greece together and would take a part of its territory. Such exaggeration and speculation were often circling through Greek newspapers such as the “To Vima” from 22 November 1992, which bombastically foresaw these events through various texts entitled as, for example “Turkey sends military for intervention in the Balkans”² and so on. The argument about Macedonia as an irredentist state, that every moment can attack Greece was not substantiated. Even if someone in Macedonia would really like to realize such a scenario, it simply would not be possible because Skopje had no significant military capabilities³. The contradiction of the Greek claims could be seen also through the Greek protests. Thus, at the same time, while Greece was accusing Macedonia for irredentism, at the Greek protest was clearly shouted the slogan “Macedonia is Greek” which is Greek a message of irredentism, indeed. However, such arguments of Greece brought the young Macedonian foreign policy to a situation to spend much more energy on explaining the right of its republic, and that is to be called by the name, which is a choice according to the principle of self-determination.

Not only did Greece question the right of its neighbor to call itself ‘Macedonia’ but also questioned the legally adopted Constitution, thus it practically interfered directly in the internal affairs of Macedonia. Specifically,

¹ See Victor Roudometof, *Collective memory, national identity, and ethnic conflict*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002).

² *ibid.*

³ See Sabrina P. Ramet, *The three Yugoslavias: state-building and legitimation, 1918-2005*, (Washington D.C: Indiana University Press, 2006).

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Greece questioned Article 49 of the Constitution of RM which states: "The Republic cares for the status and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighboring countries, as well as Macedonian expatriots, assists their cultural development and promotes links with them."⁴ This article was seen as one of the crucial evidence that Macedonia irredentism republic intends to interfere in the internal affairs of Greece, through its protection of the Macedonian minority in Greece, which for official Athens does not exist. At the same time, only few people remembered that in the Constitution of Greece there was an article quite similar to Article 49 of the Macedonian Constitution. It is the Article 108 of the Greek Constitution according to which: "The State must take care for emigrant Greeks and for the maintenance of their ties with the Fatherland. The State shall also attend to the education, the social and professional advancement of Greeks working outside the State."⁵ However, this Greek claim was again a great burden for the newly established Macedonian Republic, which was seeking international recognition. Because of this, the Macedonian parliament decided to change the Macedonian Constitution that was just adopted. These are changes (Official Journal of RM 1992) from Amendment 1 which clearly say that Macedonia has no territorial pretensions towards its neighbors, and the boundary of the RM can be changed only in accordance with the Constitution, the principles of willingness and the generally accepted international norms, and Amendment 2 which complemented Article 49, which clearly states that "the Republic will not interfere in the sovereign rights of other states and in their internal relations."⁶ (Translation by D.M.). By adopting these amendments, Macedonia mistakenly thought it would approve Greece and will contribute to begin finding measures for building confidence. According to the reactions, Greece was not delighted also with this Macedonian step. Greece believed that the Constitution can be changed one day again and still insisted on changing the state name.

Besides troubling and bragging about the name and the constitution, at the same time, Greece questioned the Macedonian right to freely choose a symbol that will be on its national flag. As argument Greece was claiming that the symbol of the flag is part of the Greek history, a Greek symbol, and according to that logic, Greece is the only one that can use this symbol. This claim was absurd, especially because Greece did not use the same symbol at its national flag. However, Macedonia is the party which again relented and

⁴ See the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia of 1991.

⁵ See the Constitution of the Republic of Greece of 1975.

⁶ See the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia of 1991.

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changed its national flag under a temporary agreement which will be written below in this paper.

This unique problem was a huge burden on the relations between two neighbors. It is normal to ask what was the interest or the motivation for such an attitude of Greece towards the Greek-Macedonian relations, more concretely, what was hidden under the “name issue”. The first President of Macedonia stated “I think that Greece did not look good on Macedonia even before, while being federal unit of Yugoslavia. It is well known that, from time to time they took various measures to influence us to give up some of our potential claims towards the Macedonian minority in Greece etc. Among other such attempts is the famous Treaty of the sixties in Athens signed by Kocha Popovic, then Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia and his Greek counterpart Evangelos Avergy, which made certain concessions in terms of treating our minority in Greece.”⁷ Was it that under the “name issue” Greece was trying to obscure the problem of the Macedonian minority in Greece? Or it was a sort of continuing the policy of Greece after the civil war⁸ in Greece at which huge number of Macedonians emigrated, and their properties were confiscated ... It was later adopted law that allowed them to come back in the country, but it was restrictively only for those refugees who were Greeks by origin⁹ ... Or with such a policy Greece was afraid that someone would want to illuminate changing of toponyms in Aegean Macedonia and their replacing with Greek names¹⁰ ...

Undisputedly, this entire unpleasant historical heritage was caused of nervous reactions and politics of Greece to independent Macedonia. In this context, not only did Greece refuse to recognize independent Macedonia but it often disdained it by calling it as “Republic of Skopje”. In addition, the top Greek politicians qualified Macedonia as a base for drug production or smuggling zone in the Balkans¹¹. At the same time Greece itself directly contributed to stimulating smuggling with its policies. This becomes especially true with the introduction of the Greek embargo against Macedonia. Introducing the embargo was just one of the methods used by Greece against Macedonia.

⁷ Kiro Gligorov, *Makedonija e se sto imame*, (Skopje: Izdavacki centar tri, 2001).

⁸ From 1946 to 1949.

⁹ See John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece: the struggle to define a new Balkan nation*, (North Carolina: Mcfarland& Company, inc. Publisher, 2008).

¹⁰ According to the Greek government Decree since 21 September 1926.

¹¹ See Kiro Gligorov, *Makedonija e se sto imame*, (Skopje: Izdavacki centar tri, 2001).

2. GREECE STEPS FOR NOT RECOGNITION OF MACEDONIA

If an analysis is done, it will be found out that Greece used three main methods of pressure on Macedonia. First economic, second political and third military pressure. As economic pressure Greece used the economic embargo¹², which virtually meant closing the port of Thessaloniki to Macedonia. This decision of the Greek government had a terrible impact on the Macedonian economy, which was anyway in a period of transition. With this embargo Macedonia was left without oil and other crucial energy resources. In such conditions Macedonian exporters and importers had to seek alternative routes through Albania and Bulgaria, which automatically increased their costs. Also, the embargo against Serbia by the UN complicated the situation in Macedonia additionally. These conditions underpinned the growth of smuggling and the poor economic situation underpinned inter-ethnic tensions and growth of nationalism in Macedonia. This situation otherwise influenced directly against coming of foreign investments in Macedonia. So it was creating a circle which did not allow improvement of the economy.

Besides economic the political pressure by Greece was also incredibly strong. This was primarily enabled by the membership of Greece in EU and NATO, also by its strong lobby abroad. The political pressure on Macedonia began with the application for recognition. Greece clearly conditions the recognition of Macedonia by changing its name. Using its membership in the EU, despite the opinion of the Badinter Commission, Greece managed to impose its position as position of EU. So, on the Lisbon summit it was clearly told to Macedonia, that it will not be recognized until as its name uses the word "Macedonia". Greece also did extensive lobbying in the UN, Macedonia not to be accepted as member under its constitutional name. The result of this Greek pressure was Macedonia's entering in the UN under the reference "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Characteristically about this form of pressure was that Greece kept it parallel in different international organizations and in various countries. Thus, while the Greek lobby in the USA managed to delay the USA recognition of Macedonia, the Greek lobby in Australia managed to obtain official decision from the Australian government for naming the Macedonians as "Slavomacedonians". The Greek political - diplomatic pressure still exists. Greece blocked in 2008 Macedonia's accession to the NATO. A similar scenario occurs also in connection with the integration of Macedonia in

¹² On 16 February 1994.

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the EU, where due to opposition of Greece, Macedonia cannot yet start the membership negotiations.¹³

Finally, Greece used military-psychological methods as means of intimidation and pressure. Demonstrating its military power was performed through repeated military exercises on the border with Macedonia and flyovers and violating the Macedonia airspace at the beginning of 1990s. The last incident connected with the Greek army occurred on the official parade on the occasion of Greece's independent in 2010. In this event, Greek soldiers marched and shouted "They are Skopjenians, they are Albanians and we will make clothing from their skins".¹⁴ It can be concluded that although Greece has never really used military force against the Republic of Macedonia, it used and is still using the military power as means of intimidation and pressure.

But there were other considerations in Greece too. Some politicians thought that the various methods of pressure should be replaced. The alternative policy of trade blockades, political vetoes and military parading, consisted in more rational policy of economic expansion. The idea was, in accordance with this policy, Greece to be able to achieve much greater impact on Macedonia. In fact, Greek direct investments should make the Macedonian economy dependent on Greek one and Macedonia a kind of satellite of Greece. In this way Greece would have avoided embarrassment in its international reputation for all those things it has done with all those blocks and vetoes to Macedonia, and would be simultaneously promoted as engine of pro-European values as well as of European unifying process in the Balkans, because it was the only member of the Union in the Balkans. That kind of Greek policy appeared with arrival of Simitis in 1996, who made a change in the previous approach to Macedonia. Unlike his predecessor Papandreou, Simitis was more pro-European oriented and saw Greece as holder of the European process in the Balkans. "Instead of embargoes and pressures Simitis promoted the idea that Greece should not use such methods against Macedonia, but should enter into Macedonia, be economic factor, invest, trade or even start a cultural exchange ... that in the economy developed to such and so high degree that it is already talking about expansion of Greece in Macedonia."¹⁵ This changed course of the Greek Policy began only a year after signing the interim agreement and

¹³ Although for five consecutive years it has had candidate status and also has got positive opinion from the Commission about getting a date for starting negotiations.

¹⁴ "Greek soldiers chant anti-Turkish-Albanian slogans at military parade", *EU Times newspaper*, 29 March 2010.

¹⁵ Kiro Gligorov, *Makedonija e se sto imame*, (Skopje: Izdavacki centar tri, 2001).

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obtained intensity with the change of government in Macedonia in 1998. Such relations between the two neighbors for the first time since the independence of Macedonia could be characterized as relatively normal. The changed Greek policy influenced on improving the overall relations in all spheres. Thus, while the Greeks were buying companies in Macedonia¹⁶, even more Macedonian citizens have started again (after almost a decade) to return to the Greek resorts, and to renew some old to some new economic connections and so on.

Nevertheless, this situation did not last forever. Although Greece has never waived the economic presence in Macedonia, there was again a change in the course of Greek policy toward Macedonia. Definite change occurs at the time of Prime Minister Kosta Karamanlis and Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, specifically, at the NATO summit held in Bucharest in April 2008. Greece blocked at this summit Macedonia's NATO - accession, which definitely returns the policy of sanctions and vetoes as a form of pressure on Macedonia. This created enormous difficulties for Macedonia. Such case was present also with the request for recognition of its independence, with joining the UN, or any other organization where Greece is already a member. Last and most challenging examples are the membership of Macedonia in NATO and its integration to the EU. Macedonian diplomacy directed its energy primarily at providing recognitions of Macedonia under its constitutional name as much as possible.¹⁷ Nearly two decades of work of Macedonian diplomacy resulted in securing recognition from 132 countries, including the United States, Russia, China, Canada, Turkey ... But, this Macedonian argument is not sufficient to overcome the dispute, and the fact that because of the way of making decisions in NATO and the EU, the dispute cannot be ignored. The name dispute continues to cause inconveniences to both parties. Because of this dispute imposed by Greece, the Macedonian diplomacy was spending lots of money and energy, because it is the only major obstacle to Euro-Atlantic integration of the country. The games about this dispute were reason, Greece, even before 1990s to start with series of renaming airports, streets and building expensive monuments in the spirit of ancient Macedonia. Macedonia itself accepted a similar game 18 years later¹⁸. This process later on will be called "antiquation process" by some Macedonian politicians.

¹⁶ Like Stopanska Banka, Marble combine, Prilep, Octa and so on.

¹⁷ "Drzavata Tavulu ja prizna Republika Makedonija pod ustavnoto ime", *Dnevnik*, 30 June, 2011.

¹⁸ Especially after the Greek veto on NATO summit in Bucharest 2008.

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3. THE INTERIM AGREEMENT FROM 1995

Such dispute, which is often characterized as bizarre and as dispute, annoying the international community and quite incomprehensible, continues to exist. Its solution is difficult to assume. The nearest point to what both sides could come, was signing of the interim agreement since 1995¹⁹. This was mostly under auspice of the United States. The agreement itself must contain fore-compromising decision regarding the way of naming of Macedonia, to be able to be concluded. That was enabled through the formulation "second side" for the Republic of Macedonia, while Greece was named as "first side". If analyzing of the interim agreement these significant moments could be extracted²⁰. In Article 1 of the Agreement, Greece recognizes the independence of Macedonia. This is an important moment for RM which finally gets recognition of its sovereignty by Greece. Article 2 guarantees the infringement of the common border. This was not a special deviation by Macedonia, because it had a similar formulation in its Constitution. In Article 5, paragraph one, the parties became obliged to further negotiations under auspices of the UN about the differences described in Resolution 817 of the Security Council. In other words, the parties agree to continue the negotiations about the different attitudes regarding the name of Macedonia. Particularly significant is the second paragraph of the same article, according to which the parties will not allow the name issue to affect the normal trade and exchange of documents. Practically it is this paragraph that enables further normal economic communication between the two neighbors. Furthermore, with Article 6, paragraph 1, Macedonia confirms that nothing in its Constitution can be interpreted as pretensions outside its borders. The paragraph two of the same article stresses that Macedonia will not interfere in internal affairs and particularly will not interpret Article 49 of its Constitution in that way. So, according to this Macedonia can only care for its citizens on the territory of Greece, but not of the Macedonian minority there, because it would be considered as interference in internal affairs. These provisions caused debate in Macedonia, which essentially was boiled down to waiving the Macedonian minority in Greece, by the Macedonian state. In the same article, paragraph three, Macedonia declares that it would not interpret its constitution otherwise. This is really questionable, because it raises the question whether the Constitution of Macedonia could be interpret with a bilateral agreement, and moreover, whether another interpretation of the Constitution of RM could be prohibited with the bilateral agreement? With

¹⁹ 13 September.

²⁰ See Interim Accord from 1995.

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Article 7, paragraph two, Macedonia is obliged to change its flag. This is considered as one of the biggest compromises of Macedonia on its own account. With Article 11 Greece is obliged not to oppose the membership of Macedonia in international organizations, if Macedonia becomes a member under the reference adopted by the UN. In this way the path of Macedonia in the international organizations was unblocked. Article 23 provides that competent court in case of dispute is the International Court of Justice. Article 23 provides that the agreement is valid until its superseding by a definitive one (because the name of this agreement is interim agreement) or if after seven years either party withdraws from it. The agreement was signed in English and later translated into the languages of the “first and the second party”.

The interim agreement had its good and bad sides. The agreement brought normalizing of the relations with Greece and beginning the process of Greek investments in RM which was positive for Macedonia. At the same time, it meant unblocking to the Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonia. Thus, Macedonia was coming closer to NATO membership, and in relation to the EU it reached an official candidate status. However, in 2008 on the NATO summit in Bucharest, Greece clearly violated the Interim Agreement, in particular Article 11, and directly conditioning the Macedonian membership in NATO by changing its constitutional name. This was crystal clear said by the Foreign Minister of Greece Dora Bakoyannis in her interview.²¹ The response from Macedonian side was bringing the case before the competent International Court of Justice, whose verdict clearly stated that Greece has violated the Interim Agreement. So, the existence of adequate provision in the agreement did not prevent Greece to act contrary to what it had signed. On the other hand, Macedonia kept its obligations and changed its flag. However, the Interim Agreement was a document which allowed normalization of relations, but it seems that its time has passed. The only way to keep it alive is a pressure from the major powers to respect it, but for now this is absent. One other possible solution would be signing a new interim agreement that would enable unblocking of the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonia. Finite solution to the dispute seems quite difficult, especially because the Greek side disputes the language and the nationality, too. The process continues within the UN. Greece's arguments are that they have made a concession with agreeing the new name of the country to contain the word “Macedonia”. According to Greek position a possible solution could contain the word Macedonia, but with

²¹ “Vo NATO i vo EU ke ve prifatime koga ke se resi imeto”, *Dnevnik*, 27. October 2006.

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compulsory additional geographical determinant. Greece also insisted that this new name should be "erga omnes", i.e. one name to be applied to everyone and everywhere. This means in any official communication even with countries that already have recognized R. Macedonia under its constitutional name. Otherwise, the Macedonian position, at least officially, is to keep the dual formula under which Greece would address according to a common agreement, and everyone else would address under the name Republic of Macedonia. UN mediator Matthew Nimetz has repeatedly come up with concrete proposals but these were not accepted. From what we could hear in the publicity, there were proposals such as "Northern Macedonia" or "Upper Macedonia" etc. In our view, the name and the identity are linked. Accordingly, any change of the name by adding a geographical prefix before the name of Macedonia (unless it is placed in parentheses) will automatically cause a change in the name of the nationality. For example, the name Northern Macedonia would imply that the people living here are Northernmacedonians. The only change of name with a geographical determinant before the name of Macedonia would be "European Macedonia". This determinant as any other would affect the identity and would create simultaneous dual identity - European and Macedonian. But this would not be problem because it is already a case in the EU member states whose citizens had double identity. For example the citizens of Germany are Europeans and Germans.

In a situation, where Greece is economic burden for whole EU, it still manages to dictate its politic regarding the name issue over whole EU and makes obstacles for Macedonian integration in EU, but also the integration of the Turkey and Northern Cyprus. Although Macedonia received sympathies from the international community, the reality is just as it is. In addition a part of the interview of the former USA State Secretary Eagleburger is given²² "The country that is now called Macedonia was also so called during its existence as a republic within the former Yugoslavia. Did this fact lead to serious problems between Greece and Yugoslavia, or between Greece and the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia? There were misunderstandings that were sparking occasionally, but they never reached the point of threat to peace in the region. And why would they escalate to such point? Is there something more immature and more foolish than 'blackmailing' of a nation through denying of its membership in international organizations, whose goal is to keep peace and to protect its members from aggression by no members?"(Translation by D.M.).

²² "Greece has no historical right to dispute the name of Macedonia", *MIA*, 23 September 2010.

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CONCLUSION

The bilateral relations between Macedonia and Greece, as two neighboring countries have never really been normal. But, the unique problem of denying the existence of a whole nation, the right, an independent and sovereign state to use its name, its symbols and so on is no longer only a bilateral issue. After fulfilling all of the requirements for joining NATO, Macedonia has now faced only one unsolved problem. Having in mind that Greece is a NATO member and has right to veto accessions of any new members, the name issue will be also problem of both NATO and EU.

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