



A NATO SOLUTION FOR MACEDONIA

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IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Macedonia hopes to get an invitation to join the NATO alliance, along with Croatia and Albania, at next month's NATO Summit in Bucharest. However, the prospects of Macedonia to be invited to NATO membership when the NATO allies meet on 2-4 April 2008, is in a state of impasse, with Greece having made it clear that it would veto in the NATO summit any decision for inviting Macedonia to join the Alliance, unless Macedonia and Greece would agree on the name dispute, which under current circumstances will be difficult to happen. Macedonia's name, the Greeks say, implies territorial aspirations on their own northern province, also called Macedonia.

In addition to the dispute with Greece, earlier this month the multi-ethnic coalition government in Macedonia fell apart when the Albanian minority party walked out of the coalition government. This government debacle further complicated the efforts of the country to be invited to NATO at the April summit. The Democratic Party of Albanians quit the government over six demands that include the immediate recognition of Kosovo, recognition of Albanian as a second national language, wider use of Albanian flag, closure of the court cases that the Hague Tribunal returned, re-socialisation of the

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National Liberation Army fighters of 2001 conflict and increasing the equitable representation of the Albanians in the public service as agreed way back in 2001 under the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which brought end to hostilities that erupted in the earlier part of 2001. The crisis in the government brought a standstill in the earlier planned reforms as required by EU and NATO membership. This is a reminder of the fragility of the ability and willingness of the institutions in Macedonia to put up efforts to meet the demands of the Euro-Atlantic integration, speed up the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and find a solution to the protracted "name dispute" with Greece, in return for a NATO membership invitation at the alliance's Bucharest summit.

This latest political crisis is also an indicator that now is the right time to devise a lasting solution for political stability and prosperity in Macedonia and the region. Pending NATO summit may not propose a simple answer to the problems piled up, such as membership invitation for the three Adriatic Charter states, yet it could still contribute to a workable plan for overcoming the present status-quo.

THE LONG ROAD TO BUCHAREST

Matthew Nimitz, the United Nations mediator, holds a last round of talks with the two sides in search of a name for the country before Bucharest summit, facing difficulties in proposing a name that will reconcile both parties. The talks have been held under UN auspices for already 15 years, with initial success in 1995 leading both countries to sign an Interim Accord, which has set the bilateral relations since then with some success in both political and economic field and committing the Greece not to block Macedonia's aspirations to join EU and NATO.

Rightly so, it was under Greek presidency of the EU in 2003, that the perspective for EU membership was offered to Macedonia and other western Balkan countries. Greece did not oppose Macedonia's EU candidate status, gained in December 2005 and it also did not oppose its Membership Action Plan status with NATO, gained in April 1999. There has been consensus on both sides that the country will join these institutions under the provisional reference of the 'former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'.

However, the name dispute gained fresh urgency as Macedonia was recognised by number of countries with its constitutional name of the 'Republic of Macedonia', raising concerns in Greece that it is to lose the battle in the name dispute if the issue is not resolved before the country joins the NATO and EU. The Greek government made a U-turn from a previous deal whereby Skopje could apply to international organisations under its temporary name 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', or FYROM. Now, Greece, a long-time alliance member, threatens to veto NATO entry for the country, where it has become the major investor and from where attracts a million of tourists per year.

In the last several weeks, Mr. Nimitz has proposed various different name modifications without achieving a breakthrough. Amid intensified shuttle-diplomacy, it appears that Skopje became increasingly amenable to geographic or political adjectives such as "Democratic Republic of Macedonia", or new additions such as "Republic of Upper Macedonia" or Republika Makedonija (Skopje)". Also, Athens has gradually started to accept the possibility of existence of 'Macedonia' in the name of the country, but with addition of an adjective.

MACEDONIA: SUCCESS STORY GONE BAD

NATO and EU membership are vital security goals for the former Yugoslav republic of 2m people. Historically, veto has never been used for NATO membership for issues not related to membership criteria. Greece should drop its veto

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approach as Macedonia is one of the NATO's most impressive successes. Macedonia moved within a short period away from the brink of ethnic war becoming credible candidate for NATO membership. To support this process, the NATO deployed all the instruments at its disposal: helping the negotiations of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, military missions, NATO representatives, and a credible promise of eventual NATO accession. In this context, it was Greece that played the prominent role in supporting the NATO engagement in Macedonia. Greece contributed with the large number of troops to the NATO Military Missions in Macedonia. It has had strong bilateral defence cooperation with Macedonia. Greek EU presidency of 2003 played a crucial role at the Thessaloniki Summit, offering EU membership prospects to Macedonia. It is the largest investor in the Macedonia, and most visited country by Macedonians.

A veto by Greece would mean a breach of Interim Accord of 1995, that may lead to unilateral withdrawal of Macedonia from the Interim Accord, a split within NATO leading to the failure of NATO enlargement as a whole, destabilisation of the situation on the ground between ethnic communities, and implications on other parts of the Balkans, waiting to join the Alliance. The decision to be made at Bucharest Summit is viewed by all in the region as determining not just the invitation to Macedonia, but the entire Euro-Atlantic policy towards the Western Balkans. NATO membership has, in the recent history of Central and Eastern Europe, preceded the EU membership.

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POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

A solution could be based on the Nimitz plan. However, this proposal was designed for getting Greek and Macedonian endorsement, which it will not get. The plan needs therefore to be adapted to this new situation.

A potential way out of the deadlock would involve a change of paradigm, namely to withdraw the matter from the UN's auspices, and to place it instead into the framework of NATO integration, where NATO and Greece itself will better understand the implications of not inviting the country to join the Alliance. The success of this approach was seen in the case of Kosovo. Current discussions, both in Skopje and Athens, point out to a success of a name proposal with a political or geographic adjective, combined with proper guarantees to the language and nationhood of Macedonians.

As the pace of adaptations of the public opinions shows (from straightforward rejection of all proposals to an agreement over adjectives) parallel to the ongoing negotiations under the UN auspices, both countries are in need of additional time to come to an agreement. The governments of

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Gruevski and of Karamanlis, both centre-right prime-ministers, will gain time to overcome qualms about any name change among the overwhelming bulk of their constituencies. Both sides certainly need time that will go beyond Bucharest summit of 2-4 April, at least until the time comes to the actual accession of the invited country (which may be towards the end of 2008 or early 2009). The time period from the invitations to the actual accession (which may be around a year), gives sufficient time for both parties to agree on the name issue.

This will also correspond to the time when Macedonia is expected to start the accession talks with the EU towards the end of the year or early 2009. If the dispute drags on, Skopje's eventual start of accession talks with the EU may also be in danger.

Another dimension of the proposal is that NATO would invite the country for membership, with the NATO providing, inter alia, guarantees for Macedonian security and for Greek concerns. This may be called NATO Security Area, where Macedonia would not be a full member, but will benefit from the NATO tools and institutions. Since the ultimate objective, like for all the Balkans, is full integration with the NATO, the principle would be one of general application of NATO provisions (including article

5 of collective security), subject to special arrangements. This would bear some comparison with the legal status of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein in the European Economic Area. Now it is time therefore for a “special status”, which the NATO could offer, in case the Greek veto becomes a reality and no agreement is found on the name dispute.

CONCLUSIONS

There is now a distinct possibility that the NATO Summit meeting beginning on 2 April 2008 in Bucharest, will deny invitation for membership to Macedonia, and throw the entire NATO enlargement strategy into confusion. For this reason, Analytica is calling on NATO member states, including Greece not to forget their commitments to the countries of the Balkans, and their vital interest in lasting stability in the region. To deny NATO membership to Macedonia for another couple of years, would risk throwing away the possibility for faster economic growth and social development in the region.

A negative decision in Bucharest Summit would leave the NATO and its members without credibility or leverage in the region, as it happened in 2006 when NATO delayed the invitations for membership.

NATO should send a clear signal to the Western Balkans that the promise of membership is real, by extending conditional invitation to Macedonia. This will show how flexible the NATO’s institutional system actually is. It is not the first time that pragmatic solutions are in need to be found. Imagine if NATO member states put a veto to Greece re-joining the military wing of the Alliance after the end of dictatorship in Greece.