

## **The Name Dispute: an American Perspective**

*By Nina Stroempl, Residential Intern*

The name dispute between Macedonia and Greece has recently come up in US politics. The United States has urged both nations to work together to find a solution. But it is not so simple even in the US.

The name dispute is what caused Greece to block Macedonia's NATO entry and threatens to block EU accession as well. Therefore many in the US feel this issue needs to be resolved as soon as possible.

Earlier this month 15 members of the US Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and urged a speedy resolution. These members of Congress fully support Macedonia, and even called Macedonia one of the United States' "most staunch allies and trusted partners".

There are also members of Congress who tend to sympathize with Greece, however. 19 Members of the US Congress recently proposed a resolution to the name dispute all the while criticizing Skopje for "Anti-Greek rhetoric" that is damaging relations with Greece.

The Greek American community has spoken about the issue as well. They recently wrote a letter to President Obama urging him to reconsider the US policy of recognizing Macedonia by its constitutional name. Around 200 lecturers from 11 countries took part in writing this letter.

This letter is quoted as saying "We call upon you, Mr. President, to help - in whatever ways you deem appropriate - the government in Skopje to understand that it cannot build a national identity at the expense of historic truth," and later states "We believe that this silliness has gone too far, and that the U.S.A. has no business in supporting the subversion of history."

On May 22, 2009 Hillary Clinton received an award from the Greek American Community and was asked about the name dispute. She reiterated the US stance that a solution that is acceptable to both parties needs to be found. She also said that the administration is very committed to this issue which was picked up early on.

"Obviously, this has to be resolved by the parties themselves, but we are urging that resolution. We think it is in everyone's best interest. As you said, it would open the way for movement toward another nation joining the European Union, which we think promotes stability in the region, so we are very committed to doing what the United States can to facilitate that," she said.

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### **Concluding Thoughts:**

It seems Greece holds all the trump cards in this issue, leaving Macedonia with very little bargaining power. It looks like Macedonia will have to make more concessions than Greece, and is left with the choice of preserving its name (and many feel this is core to its identity) or gaining members to NATO and the EU. Macedonia says it is ready to compromise. Yet, the huge statue of Alexander the Great that the government plans to erect in Skopje's main square does not seem to send that message. That, however, is another issue.

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*Sources: The Sofia Echo, Makfax, Mina, Focus*

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