



## Setting the Record Straight on “Macedonia”

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North American journalists and politicians have tended to think of the name controversy between Greece and FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) as a petty Balkan squabble. Not understood by those who take such a position is that in the Balkans, ambitious states often claim border regions as part of their “natural” ethnic homeland in the hope of one day “redeeming” them. In late November 2016, such thinking was evident in “When Greece and Hillary Clinton tried to erase Macedonia,” an article published in *The Hill*, a top U.S. Website vital to policy, politics, and electoral campaigns.

Bill Nicholov, the author of that piece, is the president of Macedonian Human Rights International (MHRI), a Canadian-based organization advocating a more radical point of view with regards to the naming dispute between Greece and its northern neighbor. Regardless of his organization’s track record of aggressive statements, the article nonetheless warranted a response due to its multiple historical fallacies and its disturbing resemblance to a baseless, erroneous rant without the support of facts.

Nicholov appeared to be making the case that several past statements made by Hillary Clinton, her campaign chair John Podesta, and the Greek government included offensive, derogatory terms. His argument was that their usage of the abbreviation FYROM “negates the ethnic origin of an entire group.”

Nicholov first stated, “It was revealed by Wikileaks that Hillary Clinton’s campaign chair, John Podesta, made disparaging remarks about Macedonia, with no repercussions.” This is inaccurate. Podesta merely stated that he continued to refer to Macedonia as FYROM which is in line with the U.N.-brokered Interim Accord, signed by the FYROM and Greece, in which both parties agreed to use the name FYROM until a mutually agreeable solution is found. Additionally, as stated in the Interim Accord, Greece “reserves the right to object to any membership (in international organizations) if and to the extent (FYROM) is to be referred to in such organization or institution differently than in paragraph 2 of United Nations Security Council resolution 817

(1993).<sup>i</sup> If the term “FYROM” is indeed considered to be so offensive, Nicholov might want to take that up with the United Nations Security Council.

Furthermore, Nicholov claimed Secretary Clinton “executed an anti-Macedonian policy.” Nothing about Secretary Clinton’s statements indicates this to be true. Rather, on her July 17, 2011 visit to Athens, Secretary Clinton stated the following:

We have made it very clear that we support the negotiations that have gone on between Skopje and Athens. We think that there is an opportunity here. And the government in Skopje needs to know that it will not be able to move forward on its European integration until it does resolve this. And, obviously, Greece has to be willing to accept how the name is resolved.<sup>ii</sup>

There is nothing partisan in Secretary Clinton’s statement; as a matter of fact, it is in support of the ongoing UN-brokered negotiating process which the United States supports.

Nicholov then wrote that Greece initiated an “artificial name dispute” in attempts to eradicate the existence of FYROM. Not only is this false but he also neglected to mention the continued efforts on the part of Greece to support their northern neighbor despite the unresolved dispute. For example, as recently as 2013, and during its economic crisis, Greece remained the biggest source of foreign investment in FYROM and currently invests 576 million euros, putting it third among countries as a source of foreign direct investment, according to the IMF.<sup>iii</sup>

Nicholov would do well to remember that under former Prime Minister Gruevski’s administration, FYROM continued to pursue a policy of extreme nationalism and provocation against Greece. He has been pictured in public with a map of his country that includes the Greek province of Macedonia and Mount Olympus as one united political entity. FYROM also reintroduced the Hellenic symbol “Sun of Vergina” as the symbol of its country in television advertising spots running internationally, including in the United States. These acts, among many others, are a breach of the Interim Accord, distract from genuine efforts to build trust and neighborly relations, and do not embrace Euro-Atlantic values. One can imagine the outrage that would ensue if Mexico published maps showing a swatch of the southwestern United States as Mexico and depicted the Grand Canyon as a national landmark.

Despite these provocations, Greece has and continues to compromise greatly, proposing “a compound name for the country; a name that will distinguish it from both the Greek and Bulgarian part.” Designation of FYROM as Vardar Macedonia or Slavic Macedonia would help stabilize the Balkans and promote Euro-Atlantic norms. The significance of allowing the name “Macedonia” to be included in a future agreed-to

solution is huge. It is difficult to imagine what additional concessions Greece could make following this tremendous gesture of goodwill towards resolving this issue once and for all and, ultimately, supporting FYROM's long-coveted membership bid to NATO and the European Union.

Furthermore, under the administration of Alexis Tsipras, Foreign Minister Kotzias and his counterpart, former Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki, had successful meetings both in Athens and Skopje where they discussed the importance of bilateral and economic relations and marked the start of a new round of confidence building measures between the two countries. Perhaps these gestures could serve as the breath of fresh air needed for Skopje to approach the negotiating table in the spirit of cooperation after recent years of stagnation.

As a self-proclaimed advocate of Euro-Atlantic integration for FYROM, Nicholov may want to review the facts or alter his approach to better reflect the realities in both Skopje and Athens and in order to better defend Skopje's future prospects. The bilateral relationship between Greece and FYROM is already a strong one which is a testament to Greece meeting FYROM more than halfway; whether FYROM is ready to do its part to finally put this issue to rest remains to be seen.

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<sup>i</sup>Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Interim Accord (with related letters and translations of the Interim Accord in the languages of the Contracting Parties), September 1995, [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MK\\_950913\\_Interim%20Accord%20between%20the%20Hellenic%20Republic%20and%20the%20FYROM.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MK_950913_Interim%20Accord%20between%20the%20Hellenic%20Republic%20and%20the%20FYROM.pdf) .

<sup>ii</sup> Secretary Clinton's Interview with Alexis Papahelas of SKAI TV, U.S. Department of State, July 2011, [https://athens.usembassy.gov/clinton\\_skai\\_interview.html](https://athens.usembassy.gov/clinton_skai_interview.html).

<sup>iii</sup> 2015 Investment Climate Statement – Macedonia, U.S. Department of State, Table 3, May 2015, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2015/241642.htm>.