

Symbolic right-sizing and Balkan Nationalisms The Macedonia name dispute and the Prespa Agreement

Abstract

This article examines identity politics on the Macedonian name dispute and draws parallels with identity conflicts in other divided societies to examine how peacemakers and hardliners contest the prospect of negotiated peace settlements. The first part of the article examines competing narratives of the dispute and how the unexpected challenge of ‘symbolic right-sizing’ of national identity on both parts following the dissolution of Yugoslavia provoked major public and political outrage. It compares Greek and North Macedonian understandings of national boundaries, unity and ethnic group entitlement over symbols of national unity and past glory. The second part investigates conflict resolution and the two UN mediated agreements on the Macedonian name dispute: the Interim Agreement negotiated by Richard Holbrook and Matthew Nimitz in September 1995; and the comprehensive Prespa Agreement mediated by the latter in June 2018 concluded in early 2019. In the final part of the article, the wider significance of the case for the region, symbolic ‘right-sizing’, and theories of identity framing and conflict resolution are discussed.

Keywords: North Macedonia, Greece, conflict transformation, framing, symbolic conflict, nationalism

To cite this article:

Neophytos Loizides (2020) Symbolic right-sizing and Balkan nationalisms: the Macedonia name dispute and the Prespa Agreement, *Irish Political Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/07907184.2020.1816392](https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2020.1816392)

For published version please visit:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07907184.2020.1816392>

Introduction

The concepts of symbolic politics and issue framing have gained considerable currency across disciplines, with a proliferation of studies on cultural property and collective action frames (Benford & Snow, 2000; Kaufman, 2008; Ross, 2008). Yet studies of symbolic non-territorial disputes, ethnic mobilization, and conflict transformation through subsequent negotiated settlements remain rare. This article aims to address this gap by looking at a highly symbolic dispute which divided the Greek public and its northern neighbour: the Macedonian name dispute.¹ Macedonia could tell us an insightful story about symbolic entitlements (Ross, 2008) and right-sizing (O'Leary, 2001) as well as the transformation of deeply entrenched identity conflicts particularly the interplay of elite framing and subsequent UN mediations leading in this case to the comprehensive 2018/19 Prespa Agreement.

Identity is at the core of the Macedonian name dispute. Greece and particularly its citizens in the Greek province of Macedonia have insisted that the names, symbols and heritage of the ancient Macedonian Kingdom belong to them while the Republic of Macedonia or FYROM (North Macedonia since Feb. 2019) has argued following its independence in the 1990s for its own historical presence in the region and right of self-determination (Danforth, 1995; Ramet, 2005a, 2005b; Rossos, 2008). As in comparable conflicts around the globe from the Middle East to Northern Ireland,² a key issue was whether any one of the sides had the right to monopolise the cultural heritage of its region or whether those could be constructively shared through a compromise satisfying mutual sensitivities.

As argued in this article, the case for a constructive compromise among all sides lies on the fact that Macedonia hosted many different cultures for centuries, but its inhabitants considered themselves Macedonians either in ethnic or territorial sense, regardless of language or nationality. Decoupling these alternative definitions has been the key in addressing the Macedonia name dispute as demonstrated in comparable conflicts for instance in Kosovo/Kosova, Northern Ireland/Ulster/North of Ireland, Derry/Londoderry (Coakley, 2009). Drawing on this special issue's emphasis on challenge and change in identity conflicts as well as functional down-sizing and right-sizing (see also O'Leary, 2001), this article begins by discussing elite framing on the Macedonian issue and then investigates how conflict resolution initiatives on the dispute have attempted to temper competing Greek and North Macedonian framings of nationalism and national unity.

Framing and Symbolic Right-Sizing

How symbolic framing guides decisions is a central theme in the theory and practice of International Relations (George, 1980; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993). National unity frames most often build on a pre-existing cultural stock in the symbolic politics of a community (Desrosiers, 2008; Kaufman, 2008; Ross, 1997, 2008). By their nature, "frames are constraining; by directing us to perceive and interpret an event in a particular way, they reduce our options of seeing the event in other ways" (Gamson & Herzog, 1999). The framing of one group in a deeply divided society or region is likely to differ from that of another, if not be in direct opposition. Even within communities, more than one frame of any given situation with competing versions of 'up-sizing' through attempting to expand national entitlements or 'down-sizing' through for instance the granting of increasing competences to autonomous

regions or lessening claims of symbolic ownership (introduction to this special issue). Competing frames determine patterns of adversarial behaviour at the state or civil society levels and affect how policy is crafted and executed. For example, in shaping foreign policy, hawks aim at marginalizing pacifist forces and/or ethnic antagonists. By way of contrast, doves frame messages of peace and reconciliation, down-sizing conflicting national entitlements and opposing violence not just on moral and humanitarian grounds but also on the basis of solid political reasoning (Cortright, 2008: 4, Loizides, 2015).

Although he does not use the term elite framing *per se*, in his seminal work on unsettled states and disputed lands, Lustick treats a concept related to framing, hegemonic beliefs, as a key variable in understanding disengagement from disputed territories such as Northern Ireland, Algeria, the West Bank, and Gaza (1993). Lustick labels the uncontested acceptance of state borders a hegemonic belief, drawing from Gramsci's "overall intention to elucidate the impact on political outcomes associated with the transformation of particular beliefs into uncontested, and virtually uncontested, 'commonsense' apprehensions" (ibid: 54). In this sense, frames determine what a group or a nation in deeply rooted identity conflict considers possible or impossible, natural or unnatural, problematic or inevitable (Lustick, 1993: 6).

As noted in the introduction of this special issue, societies in conflict downsize with difficulty. The strength and durability of hegemonic beliefs at the central state level define policies of contraction and expansion, explaining why, for instance, France abandoned Algeria while Britain retained Northern Ireland. Speaking about Israel, Gamson and Hersog (1999) demonstrate patterns of framing and perception, notably the problem of a "taken-for-granted political discourse" despite the end of the

Cold War and the otherwise open nature of Israeli political debate. Likewise, despite the openness of the Greek political discourse a compromise on the Macedonian name dispute had been overdue since the early 1990s.

The Macedonian Context and Name Dispute

The historical context of the Macedonian issue is important in situating how the conflict has been framed by the conflicting sides. Greeks inhabited the region for over a millennium before the arrival of the Slavs in the 7th century AC. Modern Greek historiography has stressed the continuity of ancient and modern histories and prior cultural ownership of the region's symbols associated with Alexander the Great and ancient Macedonia. Meanwhile, ethnic (Slav) Macedonians emphasized their own medieval heritage (also intertwined with Bulgarian narratives and claims Stavrianos, 1958; Rossos, 2008) and stressed contemporary legal and normative understandings of self-determination to oppose Greek positions. Since the 19th century, 'Macedonia' has been central to narratives of Balkan nationalism' as Greek, Bulgarian, Albanian, Serbian, Yugoslav and late Ottoman nationalisms claimed parts or the whole of it. As in the case of other unionisms in this special issue, the competing Balkan nationalisms saw Macedonia as an integral part of their sovereign territory while an indigenous national Macedonian movement claimed the territory for its own under the slogan of Macedonia for Macedonians (Banac, 1984).

Macedonians in the north eventually formed their first homeland after WWII as an entity in Josef Tito's Yugoslavia but only in the northern part of the territory. Bulgaria retained the smallest part in the northeast while Greece kept about 51 percent of the geographic region of Macedonia since the partition of 1913 (Jelavich, 1983). The division and events leading to the partition of Ottoman Macedonia left a bitter

legacy among all sides. Greek official historiography points to memories of the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, Bulgarian occupation of parts of Greek Macedonia in WWII, Yugoslav involvement in the 1944-1949 Greek civil war, and recent territorial claims by ultra-nationalists in the new Yugoslav Republic (Kofos, 1964; Koliopoulos, 1999). While for the most part, Greeks loathe any attempts to redraw their northern borders, in their own historic narratives, ethnic Macedonians grieve the 1913 partition of geographic Macedonia (Rossos, 1981). Greece considers ethnic Macedonian claims irredentist (including contemporary minority rights claims) and has used related references and the latter's antiquization policies under VMRO to oppose the recognition of their northern neighbours under its older constitutional name of Republic of Macedonia (Vangeli, 2011).

The civil war of 1946-1949 has also led to the destruction of the ethnic Slav Macedonian minority in the country while most minority members have kept their ethnic identity private (Loizides, 2015). Ethnic Macedonians have pointed to the negation of the Macedonian national identity by all neighbours, primarily Greeks, and the involuntary assimilation of (Slav) Macedonian speakers south of the border into the Greek national community (Danforth, 1995; Rossos, 1997, 2008). Parallel to many conflicts around the world (e.g. Ireland, the Basque country, or Kurdistan), one nation's partition of a historic homeland is another nation's legitimate struggle for liberation, making normative judgments by third parties extremely difficult (Lustick, 1993; O'Leary, 2007).

Since the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, both Greece and Bulgaria opted not to engage in territorial disputes with their newly independent neighbour while ethnic Macedonians themselves avoided direct territorial claims despite a history of population expulsions and minority disputes. The key issue was not

territorial exchange or downsizing but a symbolic one. Greece saw Macedonian symbolism as an exclusive national ownership while ethnic Macedonians as an essential component of their nascent statehood. In a nutshell, the contemporary dispute since the 1990s centred on the name and the cultural symbols of ancient Macedonians and whether one of the ethnic groups in the region can monopolize them, either on the basis of ancient cultural ties (Greek Macedonians) or recent presence and statehood (ethnic/Slav Macedonians), or alternatively, whether the names and symbols could be shared by all the groups in the conflict distinguishing for instance history from modern uses of the term.

Such symbolic right-sizing involves a restorative understanding of the complexity of each nation's past, entitlements as well as responsibilities towards neighbours. As noted in the introduction of the special issue, Unionisms such as the ones between Northern Ireland and the UK face extremely difficulties in renegotiating territorial and symbolic boundaries, and so do ethnic nationalisms in the Balkans. One should not conflate though nationalisms with unionisms as defined in this special issue. While unionisms recognise the plurality of peoples, Balkan nationalisms, focused on one primary people. This has had major implications on state development and conflict resolution. For instance, in Greece understandings of national unity of Greek Macedonians and the rest of Greece surprisingly left no independent say for the former on the dispute beyond the electoral weight of Greek Macedonia. Unlike the UK or the former Yugoslavia, Greece has had no provincial/federal decentralization while the handling of the Macedonian name dispute has been the exclusive responsibility of the government and the Greek parliament. ³

Competing Nationalist Mobilizations

Since the 1990s, the Greek political elites tied the “appropriation” of the name Macedonia to irredentist policies leading to a tough-resolve political approach to the situation particularly in the early 1990s. Greek policy took extreme forms for the first time in decades and exceeded even responses towards militarized crises in the Aegean and Cyprus with Turkey leading in the case of the Macedonian dispute to official government embargoes initiated by two consecutive Greek governments.⁴ Michas (2002: 42) notes “It would not be an overstatement to say that Greece’s foreign policy...was dominated by a single issue: Macedonia”. A key feature has been the engagement of ordinary citizens in the making of ethnonationalist policies, through petitions, demonstrations, and consumer boycotts against EU countries supporting the new Republic (Smith, 1992:10). Two major demonstrations, one in Thessaloniki (February 14, 1992) and the other in Athens (December 10, 1992) attracted at least a million people each.⁵ No other issue related to Turkey or Albania has received this type of attention from ordinary citizens, despite collective memories, recent ethnic antagonisms, and an alleged “civilizational divide” (Kaplan, 1993).

Although polls in the region from the 1990s are not very common and reliable, some indicative surveys demonstrate the level of ethnic polarization. On the North Macedonian side, the majority of citizens (nearly 76 percent of Macedonia’s 2.1 million citizens) opposed the compromise solution of ‘Republic of Macedonia-Skopje’ proposed by the then leader of the country Kiro Gligorov (Agence France Press, December 11, 1992). Even though the leadership in Skopje was eager to reach a compromise and stabilized the newly independent country (Gligorov, 2001), Greek political elites opposed any compromise if that was to include the name Macedonia. Following the massive demonstrations of Thessaloniki in February 1992 Greek public opinion was heavily polarized while by mid-1992, President Karamanlis, a

Macedonian himself, declared that there is only one Macedonia forcing the moderate PM Mitsotakis to adopt this line despite his own personal convictions. A poll of the Greek public opinion in 1992, found that 94% of those asked said that Greece should not recognize the new state while a third supported military intervention against the new state (Toumbas, 2001:151; Ellinas 2010: 144).

To this point, Greek political elites projected a view of an independent Macedonian Republic as an inherent threat established and named just in order to deliberately harm Greeks and their interests (Smith, 1993:15). In fact, on many occasions, the disagreement was not whether the country was facing an international conspiracy, but what type of conspiracy it was. These were projected in terms of evil axis. While in opposition in 1991, Andreas Papandreou will argue that “today a new axis is in the making Ankara- Skopje- Tirana and there is also Kosovo. It is a new and a major problem.”⁶ In response Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis will admit that “there is an axis in the making. Not the way Mr. Papandreou had described it. But one that starts from the North Bosnia-Herzegovina and ends at the so-called Macedonia of Skopje.”⁷ In other words, the management of the dispute demonstrates what Alexander George defines as “consensus politics” whereby policymakers make wrong decisions on the basis of what most people want and do not attempt to master the cognitive complexity of the problem through evidence-based analysis (George, 1980).

Interestingly, the “common religious bond” between Orthodox Greeks and ethnic Slav Macedonian was disregarded, even by the clergy, while Skopje and Ankara were aligned and portrayed as a “joint threat for Hellenism” in contradiction to Huntington’s (1993) civilization boundaries and projected alliances. Another source of conspiracy threat frame was presented by extreme ecclesiastical circles in

the Greek Orthodox Church framed the new Republic's religious institutions as aligning with the Vatican and efforts to secede from the Orthodox world in favour of much-despised western Christianity.

As in the cases of Sri Lanka/Tamils, Israel/Palestine and in Northern Ireland religious institutions could play a key role in escalating the conflict even when theological differences between Greeks, Bulgarians and ethnic Macedonians are minimal. To understand why the official church assumed a confrontational in its attitudes, one should look at the history of Greek nationalist thinking as this was shaped in the past two centuries. Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815-1891) was the most prominent figure of the 19th century Greek historiography. In his major contribution, the *History of the Greek Nation from the Ancient Times to the Present*, he redefined and reformulated the Greek nationalist thinking of his times. Unlike early secular thinkers such as Adamantios Korais, Paparrigopoulos rehabilitated Greece's Byzantine past and argued that Hellenism (or Greekness) contained both classical and Christian elements, the one complementing the other.

The symbolic integration of Byzantium and Christianity in Greek national ideology served two practical purposes. On the one hand, it brought together conflicting views on the conception of the Greek nationhood and produced an ideology that was accepted by almost most Greeks at the time. On the other hand, his nationalism was now more compatible with the Greek version of Unionism ('The Megali Idea') mobilizing the clergy and the Orthodox masses of the Ottoman Empire. Greek nationalist thinking gradually penetrated the higher and lower clergy in some parts of then 'unredeemed' Greece including Slav (Macedonian) speakers forcing them to opt between remaining loyal to the Patriarchate in Constantinople or seceding to the Bulgarian Exarchate. The religious split also divided Slav Macedonians and led to

deadly violence since the late 19th century. Pro-Hellenic bishops in the region played an active role promoting Greek national interests in Ottoman Macedonia and created a tradition to be followed by their successors. While Paparrigopoulos framing was not unusual at his time, what was surprising, was the maintenance and utilization of their ideas for so long in the Greek public discourse making in the words of Brendan O’Leary ‘the symbolic right-sizing’ of the Greek national ideology extremely difficult. ⁸

While Greek unionism embraced a medieval past, Macedonians moved to the opposing direction of reinventing a direct link between themselves and the ancient Macedonians. According to Vangeli (2011) the contemporary Macedonian “antiquization” can be first found in the nineteenth century and the myth of ancient descent among Orthodox Slavic speakers in Macedonia, adopted partially due to Greek cultural inputs, and revived since the republic’s independence as an efficient tool for political mobilization against Greek political pressure. The up-sizing of Macedonian national entitlements was not universally accepted in the Republic especially in the left as well as the sizeable Albanian minority in the country but nonetheless became part of the policies of the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE that further antagonized Greece. With regards to the Albanian dimension, it is worth noting that post-independence North Macedonia was internally divided in national terms, and since 2001 a power-sharing arrangement had been in place to stabilize ethnic relations in the country.

The antiquization project post 2008 challenged the spirit of the Ohrid Frame Agreement (OFA) with the Albanian community by removing any sharedness to public space. While in power, VMRO-DPMNE introduced this strong sense of Macedonian ethnic nationalism demonstrated in the Skopje 2014 project involving the construction of impressive monuments, national museums and giant statues including

a 22 meters-long statue of Alexander the Great in the centre of the capital Skopje. Nonetheless, even VMRO-DPMNE has been for the most part careful about the relationship with Albanians and remained committed to the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). Yet it kept for electoral purposes the highly symbolic conflict with Greece on the heritage and cultural property of ancient Macedonia. In comparative terms, the giant statue of Alexander the Great in post-OFA Macedonia is reminiscent of the Orange Parades in Northern Ireland both supported by conservative political parties who have otherwise engaged for the most part in respective peace processes (Sandal and Loizides, 2013).

In the past decades, ethnic Macedonians expected that the increasing use of the name ‘Macedonia’ by foreign media and governments, will force Greece to give up on the issue at least at the international level. Greeks on the other hand expected the name issue to be solved with favourable terms for them when the Macedonian Republic applies for EU membership. With the two sides making conflicting estimates for their future capacities, more confrontation became likely complicating cooperation in the Western Balkans and minimizing the potential effects of EU integration in tranquilizing the region.

Reframing the Macedonian Issue: The 1995 Interim Agreement

As indicated at the introduction of the article, in any given ethnopolitical conflict, it is likely for counter frames to emerge. In Greece and a cooperative alternative reframed interpretation of national interest was put forward by a high-ranking diplomat, Ioannis Tzounis. In an official memo, he argued that the new Republic was not a threat but a “geopolitical” gift to Greece. He questioned the dominant assumptions and argued that FYROM gave Greece a buffer zone against conflict areas in the Balkans, such as

Kosovo and Bosnia. Although the memo was rejected by the government (and leaked to the daily press in an effort to discredit Tzounis; see Skylakakis, 1995), this line of reasoning eventually influenced a policy adaptation reflected in the Interim Agreement of 1995.

The Interim Agreement was a US-mediated compromise which called for respect for the territorial integrity and the political independence of each side, the recognition by Greece and the UN of the Republic with the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and a guarantee that the new state would not use Greek national symbols such as the sun of Vergina as its flag. Greece terminated an embargo it had set in place in February 1994 and made a commitment to an open cooperative economic relationship. Finally both sides committed themselves to future negotiations to finalize the name issue. All of this is surprising, given the previous level of contention.

With Andreas Papandreou's return to power in October 1993, all the signs pointed to a continuation of the vicious cycle of majority nationalism and confrontational foreign policy. Papandreou vowed that the name Macedonia represented Greece's very soul, thus assuring the public of his future tough-resolve approach (Barber, 1993; Ottaway, 1993: A12). Very soon his government took a risk by introducing a full embargo against FYROM (Hislope, 2003). Earlier, the Mitsotakis government had instituted an oil embargo against the landlocked republic between January 1992 and September 1992, but the Papandreou government's tougher approach led to a seven-month frontier embargo which only excluded food and medicine.

Given all these negative indicators, what explains the signing of the Interim Agreement? Leaderships and how leaders were perceived during this crisis was of

paramount importance. In the four years before signing the Interim Agreement, the Greek position had received very little external support despite the legitimacy of some of the Greek arguments. In fact, the country's attitude was seen as "infuriatingly emotional," "self-defeating" and "inappropriate to the country's position in the European Union."⁹

In addition, the Interim Agreement was an example of Richard Holbrooke's "diplomatic magic" described in detail in his memoirs (1998: 122-127). Holbrooke got the green light to proceed from President Gligorov and knowing US determination to influence the small Balkan republic, he offered Papandreu a "unique opportunity to make history" (ibid, 123). Although Papandreu himself played the "nationalist card" during the crisis, as an experienced politician of the Greek left, he was certainly aware of the contested aspects of the Macedonian issue. More relevant for conflict resolution was the type of arrangement brokered by Holbrooke for a temporary name FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) in exchange for Greece lifting its embargo. The proposed compromise aimed at delinking the name dispute from the overall relationship between the two countries while the Republic was to be referred as FYROM internationally until only the two countries agreed on a different name. According to UN mediator Matthew Nimetz, "two people or two nations could have a difference but agree that that difference will not interfere with other areas of cooperation" (Federal News Service, 1995). This fairly simple mediation strategy combined two basic innovations: first, the delinkage of the name from the wider prospect of a political settlement and second, the gradual improvement of relations between the two nations. Interestingly, Nimetz referred to the British-Irish example and noted how the two countries have maintained strong relations despite disputes in their use of each other's name (Federal News Service, 1995; see also Coakley, 2009).

From Interim Agreement to Prespa

The 1995 Interim Agreement proved that nationalist disputes in the Balkans are not inherently intractable. It had an impact on the Dayton Accords signed a few months later, and Greek political elites learned a number of key lessons. Throughout the dispute, Greek diplomacy never got the upper hand in its dispute with the young and less resourceful neighbouring republic to the North. At times, Greece lost external support to a country lacking any prior international connections, diplomatic experience, or membership in regional organizations such as the EU and NATO. The apparent failures led to a reassessment of the major parameters of Greek foreign policy. Before the Interim Agreement, Greece received only short-term support from its allies and partners and was subject to intense criticism for its lack of flexibility. Accompanying Greek frustration, however, was the realization that preferential treatment or superiority of the opponent (an argument made for Turkey) could not account for all disappointing outcomes, and a new paradigm was needed to explain cause-effect relationships in Greek foreign policy. Greek policymakers, especially during and after PM Costas Simitis' administration, attempted to delegitimize confrontational policies by pointing out policy failures, thus introducing anti-nationalist counter-frames into Greek public discourse. For Greek policymakers down-sizing entitlements on the Macedonia name dispute made sense as the country had to secure US and EU backing against more imminent threats from Turkey while for North Macedonia down-sizing its own claims with Greece could have provided NATO and EU membership effectively securing the country's unity against minority Albanian secession.

This interpretation also explains how decision-makers came to endorse specific frames and not others, or alternatively, what processes transform frames. With the legitimization of the public debate on the advantages of disengagement from confrontational politics, a new cognitive paradigm of cooperative politics emerged in the region. There was a realization that unless the two countries cooperated and coordinated their policies with fellow EU members' principles and interests, they would never enjoy the political advantages of European unification.

The Interim Agreement of 1995 survived for more than two decades, including the post-2008 financial crisis that wrecked Greek economy and society. In 2017-18, a new round of UN-led negotiations took place, aiming this time for a comprehensive settlement. Conventional wisdom would suggest limited prospects, as PM Alexis Tsipras' government lacked the political capital for peace initiatives, given the decade-long financial crisis, nervous international markets, and his dwindling popularity. Yet radical left Syriza also lacked the traditional symbolic commitments of the pre-crisis Greek political parties on the Macedonian issue; in fact, its electoral basis was largely anti-nationalist, pacifist and committed to reconciliation in the Balkans. While the dispute on the ownership of the Macedonian name and heritage remained a symbolic one and no physical violence took place during this period, the issue of cultural heritage and identification retained its strong emotional undertones in public life.

Acknowledging the long and painful history of the conflict, UN mediations involved new strategies to avoid past failures. Nimetz retained his position as the UN special envoy during these two decades contributing *pro bono* on the issue for a salary of one dollar per annum.¹⁰ In 2017, Nimetz suggested alternative names using the Slavic pronunciation of the term such as Republika Nova Makedonija, Republika

Makedonija (Skopje) and Republic of North Macedonia/ *Severna Makedonija*. The latter option in its English language form eventually led to an agreement reached in principle by PM Tsipras and his counterpart Zoran Zaev on June 12, 2018.

The Tsipras-Zaev agreement had multiple benefits beyond resolving the name dispute and addressing each side's traditions and cultural heritage in an even-handed fashion. To begin, with it was an obvious compromise as the area/state in the North of Macedonia was named as such. Specifically, it acknowledged the cultural heritage of ancient Greek Macedonia while recognizing Macedonian language and nationality for use in the Republic of North Macedonia. Beyond this starting point, the agreement included a number of important provisions, establishing joint committees on revising school textbooks, taking action against those promoting chauvinism and hostility, establishing a High-Level Cooperation Council (as in the Good Friday Agreement), and reiterating both parties' commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights. Finally, it included provisions for international arbitration stipulated in Article 19 which authorized the International Court of Justice to make a final decision if there are differing interpretations. Unfortunately, the agreement did not touch the question of the ethnic Macedonians in Greece including the right of return for those becoming refugees in third countries after WWII. Judging though by the spirit of improvement of relations, however those supporting the agreement expected that such rights will be eventually respected as part of future confidence building measures and as the relationship between the two countries matures (and as Greece could not hold contradictory views on the right of return in Cyprus and Macedonia).

Given the predominance of nationalist frames in Greece for decades, the ratification of Prespa could not be taken for given. Rallies, including a massive one in Thessaloniki, have attracted 300,000 Greek Macedonians highlighted from the first

moment that any comprehensive compromise would have been an uphill battle.¹¹ Greece's troubled neighbourhood, both the Balkans in the north and Turkey in the east, is rife with unresolved foreign policy and minority issues, and multiple opportunities for escalation continue to present themselves. Former Greek PM Tsipras used these challenges, particularly escalations with Turkey, to his advantage to legitimize the June 12 agreement. He also took advantage of the tangible benefits for Greece from NATO's imminent enlargement to satisfy some of the Greek positions and to secure a military alliance with North Macedonia. Besides those security gains, for Greek Macedonians, the 2018 agreement safeguarded their cultural heritage through explicit references to ancient Greek Macedonian and ended the de facto monopolization of the name by their northern neighbours.

Equally interesting has been the moderate administration of PM Zoran Zaev in Skopje who offered a radical departure from the antiquization policies of its VMRO predecessors (*Agence France Press*, 2006). Preceding his administration, VMRO attempted to appropriate Greek cultural heritage by constructing replicas of ancient Macedonian monuments in the country's capital. Although antiquization attempts took place since the 1990s or before (Vangelis, 2011), it was the giant bronze statue of Alexander the Great erected in 2011 in the centre of the city that epitomized modern Macedonian claims on ancient Greek Macedonian cultural history. The NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008 where Greece blocked its northern neighbours accession into Alliance, increased negative sentiments threatening to destroy what has been achieved since the Interim Agreement (Pop-Angelov, 2010). In same year VMRO's Nikola Gruevski was re-elected in an early election triggered by the Greek veto. The Bucharest decision meant for Greece the condemnation of the International Court of Justice for breaching the Interim Agreement and for N. Macedonia the

dominance of Gruevski until 2016 when the latter resigned due to corruption allegations. Elected in 2017, PM Zoran Zaev reversed his country's policies and even before the signing of the Prespa Agreement implemented a number of significant confidence building measures by renaming his country's airport and main highway thus indicating a departure from the use of classic antiquity names belonging to the Greek cultural traditions.

As noted above, Zaev's success could be attributed to three main factors. While Greece secured the cultural heritage of ancient Macedonia, Northern Macedonia kept the same name for its language and the use of nationality for its citizens in a non-exclusive manner. Secondly, Zaev's government secured Greek support for his country integrity and accession to NATO and the European Union. Finally, the agreement satisfied North Macedonia's Albanian community which makes about a quarter of the population; the country has been already implementing the challenging 2001 Ohrid Framework which stabilized relations with its Albanian minority in a power-sharing system that allowed a positive role for the latter during the ratification process in parliament.

Conclusion

Peace frames propagated by moderate elites make conflict resolution possible by transforming the symbolic landscape of ethnic relations. The cases discussed here show how wisely designed and mediated institutional frameworks could neutralize the impact of ethnonationalist frames or coexist with them in a stable symbiotic relationship, allowing ethnic communities to down-size their imagined entitlements and right-size their narratives. The Zaev-Tsipras was the first agreement to be signed

in the Balkans in the past decade and Greece's only agreement following the Zurich-London agreements on Cyprus with Turkey.

Will the Zaeu-Tsipras agreement survive the turbulent future of EU and Balkan politics to become a blueprint for similar disputes? Initially, the Tsipras' administration in Greece relied on the right-wing Independent Greeks who opposed the settlement. During his administration, PM Tsipras has proven resilient to crises both financial and foreign policy. The June 2018 compromise secured, in principle, the solid support of Syriza and an additional liberal/leftist party in opposition, contributing to a realignment in Greek politics. Tsipras did not include the conservative New Democracy (ND) in the peace talks and was seen as initially attempting to split the latter's moderate and ultra-nationalist sections. He failed to do so as the Prespa Agreement had neither a negative nor a positive impact on ND's lead in the Greek polls since 2016. Kyriakos Mitsotakis was eventually elected as PM in July 2019 by taking a cautious position on the name dispute, opposing the ratification in parliament but committing to implement any legal obligations for Greece once the agreement had been ratified by all parties.

The question of implementation will be therefore critical for the preservation of the agreement. As noted in this article, symbolic right-sizing and compromises are too difficult to be sustained only with national and regional support efforts. EU and NATO enlargement for North Macedonia will provide the space and strong incentives for smooth implementation. In the long-term, EU enlargement should aim to entice wider support through immediate benefits for the entire region, for instance, a generous financial peace package for the Macedonian region (including Bulgaria's Macedonian region). As noted elsewhere in this volume, the Northern Irish peace process has been facilitated by EU aid programs aiming for peace and creating the

space to transcend community and national boundaries while Northern Ireland will require similar aid packages to address the possible impact of Brexit.¹² But the weaker image of the EU following Brexit is epitomized by the decision of October 2019 to postpone opening membership talks with N. Macedonia. Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission himself described this decision as a historical mistake' and a failure of the EU to keep its promises.¹³

In the absence of external EU support at least in the short-term peacemakers in the Balkans and the two countries will have to rely on their own efforts and preserve the agreement locally. If the logic of peace processes is to serve local communities, a more participatory multi-level multi-party approach could be sought as an alternative or to maintain alive the current peace process. To begin with, a better understanding of trade-offs in peace processes could lead to settlements that include the preferences of larger segments of the population including opponents. Moreover, it is important to involve local communities in the broader region of Macedonia through a north-south forum bringing together municipal and civic leaders and investigating confidence building measures, such as a common travel area in the Balkans. This could emulate the initiatives in the Northern Irish peace settlement noted in this special issue that enabled freedom of movement. None of these initiatives offers an easy exit from the region's decades-old problems but admittedly positive signs of progress are challenging conventional wisdom guiding the Balkans towards the direction of peace and prosperity.

REFERENCES

- Agence France Press, (1992) E.C. presidency backs Greece after Mitsotakis plea December 11.
- Agence France Presse*. (1994, March 2). Greece pushes ahead with trade embargo against Macedonia
- Agence France Presse*. (2006, December 28). Macedonia defies Greece with “Alexander the Great” Airport
- Alexandri, L. (1992, February 14). Rally against recognition for Yugoslav Republic draws 1 million. *Associated Press*.
- Banac, I. (1984). *The national question in Yugoslavia: origins, history, politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Barber, T. (1993, September 27). Rebel takes on Greece’s “Dinosaurs” at the polls. *Independent*, p. 10.
- Benford, R. & Snow, D. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639.
- Coakley, J. (2009). ‘Irish Republic’, ‘Eire’ or ‘Ireland’? The Contested Name of John Bull’s Other Island. *The Political Quarterly*, 80(1), 49-58.
- Cortright, D. (2008). *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas*. Cambridge University Press.
- Danforth, L. (1995). *The Macedonian conflict: Ethnic nationalism in a transnational world*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press
- Demetriou, O. M. (2018). *Refugeehood and the Postconflict Subject: Reconsidering Minor Losses*. SUNY Press.
- Desrosiers, M. (2008). *Communicating group solidarity: Fostering intercommunal violence*. International Studies Association, Annual Convention, San Francisco

- Ellinas, A. A. (2010). *The media and the far right in Western Europe: Playing the nationalist card*. Cambridge University Press.
- Federal News Service*. 1995. "Foreign Press Center Briefing with Ambassador Matthew Nimetz, Special White House Envoy (Subject: Macedonia-Greek Agreements)" *White House Briefing*, September 18
- Gamson, W. A., & Herzog, H. (1999). Living with Contradictions: The Taken-for-Granted in Israeli Political Discourse. *Political Psychology*, 20(2), 247-266.
- George, A. (1980). *Presidential decision-making in foreign policy: The effective use of information and advice*. Boulder: Westview.
- Goldstein, J. & Keohane, R. (1993). *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gligorov, Kiro (2011), *Memoirs* [in Greek] Athens: Courier Ekdotiki
- Hislope, R. (2003). Between a bad peace and a good war: insights and lessons from the almost-war in Macedonia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26, 129-151.
- Holbrooke, R. (1998). *To end a war*. New York: Random House.
- Huntington, Samuel (1993) *The Clash of Civilizations?*, *Foreign Affairs* vol. 72, no. 3, pp. 22–49
- Jelavich, B. (1983). *History of the Balkans* (Volume 2). Cambridge University Press.
- Kaplan, R. (1993). *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Kaufman, J. S. (2008). *Symbols, frame and networks: studying ethnic war in the Philippines*. Manuscript submitted for publication
- Kofos, E. (1964). *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia*. Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies.

- Koliopoulos, G. (1999). *Plundered loyalties: World War II and civil war in Greek West Macedonia*. New York: New York University Press.
- Loizides, N. (2015). *The politics of majority nationalism: Framing peace, stalemates, and crises*. Stanford University Press
- Loizides, N. G. (2007). Ethnic nationalism and adaptation in Cyprus. *International Studies Perspectives*, 8(2), 172-189.
- Lustick, I. (1993). *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- McGarry, J., & O'leary, B. (2006). Consociational theory, Northern Ireland's conflict, and its agreement. Part 1: What consociationalists can learn from Northern Ireland. *Government and Opposition*, 41(1), 43-63
- Michas, T. (2002). *Unholy alliance: Greece and Milošević's Serbia*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Moore, G., Loizides, N., Sandal, N. A., & Lordos, A. (2014). Winning peace frames: Intra-ethnic outbidding in Northern Ireland and Cyprus. *West European Politics*, 37(1), 159-181
- O'Leary, B. (2001). "The Elements of Right-Sizing and Right-Peopling the State", in *Right-sizing the State: The Politics of Moving Borders* eds. Brendan O' Leary, I. Lustick, and T. Callaghy, 15-73. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- O'Leary, B. (2007). Analyzing Partition: Definition, Classification and Explanation. *Political Geography*, 26(8): 886-908.
- Ottaway, D. (1993, October 12). Papandreou vows tough stance on Macedonia. *Washington Post*, p. A12.
- Paparrigopoulos K (1860-1877. *History of the Greek Nation from the Ancient Times to the Present*, [in Greek]

- Pop-Angelov, M. (2010). *A disputed name: is there a solution to the name issue between Macedonia and Greece?* (Doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University).
- Ramet, P. S. (2005a). The Macedonian enigma. In S. P. Ramet and L. S. Adamovich (Eds.) *Beyond Yugoslavia: Politics, economics, and culture in a shattered community* (pp. 208-229). Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- Ramet, P. S. (2005b). *Thinking about Yugoslavia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ross, H. M. (2008). *How narratives and ritual enactments frame escalation and mitigation in ethnic conflict*. International Studies Association, Annual Convention, San Francisco
- Ross, M. H. (1997). Culture and identity in comparative political analysis. In M. I. Lichbach and A. S. Zuckerman (Eds.) *Comparative politics: Rationality, culture, and structure* (pp. 42-80). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rossos, A. (1981). *Russia and the Balkans: inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908-1914*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Rossos, A. (1997). Incompatible allies: Greek communism and Macedonian nationalism in the civil war in Greece, 1943-1949. *Journal of Modern History*, 69, 42-76.
- Rossos, A. (2008). *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A history*. Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University.
- Sandal, N., & Loizides, N. (2013). Center-Right Parties in Peace Processes: ‘Slow Learning’ or Punctuated Peace Socialization?. *Political Studies*, 61(2), 401-421.

- Skylakakis, T. (1955). *Στο Όνομα της Μακεδονίας*. Αθήνα: Ευρωεκδοτική (To the Name of Macedonia, Athens: Euroekdotiki).
- Smith, Helena “Legacy of Alexander: Macedonia's bid for freedom has stirred Greek nationalism,” *New Statesman & Society*, (Jan 15, 1993 v6 n235), p.15.
- Smith, Helena (1992, February 29). Macedonia boycott hits EC partners. *Guardian*,
- Stavrianos S. L. (1958). *The Balkans since 1453*. New York: Rinehart and Company.
- Toronto Star*, Huge protest in Athens against Macedonia. (1992, December 10), p.18
- Toumbas, R. C. (2001). Impact and impasse: The role of the media in the formation of Greek national consciousness with a special emphasis on the Macedonian conflict 1992-1995, Doctoral Dissertation: Boston University.
- Vangeli, A. (2011). Nation-building ancient Macedonian style: the origins and the effects of the so-called antiquization in Macedonia. *Nationalities Papers*, 39(1), 13-32.

¹ The article uses the terms ethnic Slav Macedonians and Republic of Macedonia /FYROM/ Republic of North Macedonia. Where historically appropriate, it adopts the current official and mutually acceptable name of Northern Macedonia based on the 2018-9 Prespa Agreement.

² See for instance on Northern Ireland (Moore et al. 2014; McGarry and O’Leary 2006); Cyprus (Loizides, 2007; Demetriou, 2018) as well as more broadly (Desrosiers, 2008; Kaufman, 2008; Ross, 1997, 2008).

³ To address this gap, the author made a number of proposals drawing on Northern Ireland’s principle of consent and aiming to identify ways to involve Greek Macedonians in the mediation. However, these did not generate support in Greek Macedonia or the rest of Greece <https://theconversation.com/who-gets-to-use-the-name-macedonia-a-decades-old-row-still-to-be-resolved-90708>

⁴ The Mitsotakis government introduced an oil embargo against the landlocked Republic between January 1992 and September 1992, while Andreas Papandreou introduced a seven-month frontier embargo (excluding food and medicine) on February 16, 1994 (*Agence France Presse*, 1994; see also Hislope, 2003: 136).

⁵ For informal figures, see Alexandri (1992) and *Toronto Star* (1992).

⁶ Greek Parliament February 12th, 1991. (p. 5969)

⁷ Greek Parliament February 12th, 1991. (p 5977)

⁸ This view is introduced in the writings of Romanticism and particularly of Johann Gottfried Von Herder (1744-1803) who saw nations as natural, perennial and permanent features of humankind. Herder introduced an organic conception of nations and treated them as the eternal and central agents of history. Herder appeared as an opponent to the objectivity of enlightenment and stressed the importance of some of the most subjective elements of human behavior found in language, customs and the social life of nations. Most national intellectuals in Eastern Europe (including Paparrigopoulos) emulated Herder's ideas in their writings and tried to identify and 'revive' the perennial features of their ethnic groups in language, history and folklore. From the 1960s and onwards though, most western scholars will see nations as modern constructions.

⁹ For an excellent summary of these reactions, see Skylakakis (1995)

¹⁰ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/55610/article/ekathimerini/news/matthew-nimetz-special-un-mediator-seeks-a-just-solution-i-try-to-be-objective-and-even-handed-to-both-sides-involved>

¹¹ For info on the figures of this rally and various estimates see <http://www.voria.gr/article/erevna-ochi-tis-vorias-elladas-sti-chrisi-tis-lexis-makedonia>

¹² <https://www.northernslant.com/new-brexite-poll-finds-a-plan-for-the-irish-border-both-unionists-and-nationalists-can-agree-on/>

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/18/eu-refusal-to-open-talks-with-albania-and-north-macedonia-condemned-as-historic-mistake>