

THE MACEDONIAN NAME ISSUE BACK TO THE STAGE

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Macedonian Question in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was called the quest by the Christian kingdoms in the Balkans to grab geographic Macedonia at the expense of decaying Osmanli empire. It was a chapter of the large Eastern Question. The issue was resolved with the treaty of Bucharest (August 1913), reflecting the results of the 2nd Balkan war. Greece which sustained severe casualties on the battlefields of that war was able to liberate almost the entire territory of ancient, classical Macedonia.

In our days, the Macedonian issue consists of the inherently delicate and difficult exercise how to ensure the viability of the multiethnic formerly Yugoslav, Republic of North Macedonia as a buffer state landlocked between Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, without sacrificing historical, cultural, linguistic concerns and interests of these bordering countries on the altar of the imaginary nationalistic narrative coming from Skopje.

Sunday, May 12, 2024, professor Gordana Siljanovska who won the presidential race supported by the maverick populist VMRO-DPMNE party took oath as the next head of state of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM). President Siljanovska failed to utter the word «North» while giving oath. She was duly rebuffed by her own Foreign Ministry, realizing the considerable cost for this not only diplomatic but in particular constitutional misdemeanour. There should be no doubt that nobody in Europe or North America, caring for security and stability in western Balkans would accept such a behaviour.

Balkan neighbours, European and Atlantic actors alike want to exert influence over this state entity. Greece on her part, in the days of PM Tsipras and FM Kotzias, signed the controversial Prespa agreement (June 2018), an international legal document by which following its ratification in January 2019 is bound, an international treaty supported by the EU as a whole and backed by the US. The signing of the agreement paved the way for RNM to join NATO and to enjoy its guarantees. Yet the accession process to the EU, foreseen already by the EU 2003 Thessaloniki Declaration on the western Balkans, is the prize for obvious reasons most coveted by the officials and the population of the said republic alike, no matter their religious affiliation or ethnic origin. Be said that an unspecified number of Greeks live in the country, aspiring to enjoy the protection of the EU human right guarantees, in compliance with the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Skopje and Brussels, i.e. before RNM gets ready to join the EU.

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Greece has assumed obligations by the Prespa agreement, honours them and has embarked to fully implement them. Our Diaspora, in their wisdom and sense of pragmatism, realize that the interests of both the Hellenic Republic and the Hellenism at large, under the prevailing historical circumstances in the Balkans, the Mediterranean and beyond, impose for reasons of principle and of political necessity the strict adherence to the Prespa agreement. This is the appropriate avenue to check irresponsible attitudes emanating from the new nationalistic leadership in Skopje and to make sure that Greece has the moral and political high ground.

Keeping with the existing legal framework provides the solid foundation for sincere and solid neighbourly relations with Bulgaria, an important stakeholder in this issue, our direct neighbour, ally and EU partner, as well as with Serbia, the resilient nation at the centre of the Balkans, while keeping at bay the adventurism of irresponsible Albanian circles in Kosovo, the RNM itself or elsewhere. It must be said that the rejection two weeks ago of Kosovo's request to be admitted into the Council of Europe -the watchdog for human rights- is inter alia a reward for all those who were pondering the negative signal a premature admission would convey across the border into the fragile RNM.

Greece, while entirely framing the government of the Republic of North Macedonia and urging them with all available means to carry out in full their contractual obligations, should not be distracted from other priority foreign policy issues, vital for her present and future. There is no room for complacency and wishful thinking.

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