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# THE RESOLUTION OF THE MACEDONIAN NAME DISPUTE:

A STUDY OF THE FACTORS THAT LED TO THE  
SIGNING OF THE PRESPA AGREEMENT

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### **Abstract**

The nearly three decades long Macedonian Name Dispute was the biggest obstacle for North Macedonia on its path towards not only Euro-Atlantic integration, but world recognition as well. This thesis analyzes the role which two seemingly unrelated to the name dispute events, had in precipitating the resolution of Skopje's bitter feud with Athens. By establishing the historical context behind the name dispute, in addition to providing a detailed analysis of the 2017 Bulgarian-Macedonian Friendship Treaty and the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, this study uncovers one of the many factors that led to the signing of the 2018 Prespa Agreement, which marked the official conclusion of the 27 years long Macedonian Name Dispute.

### **List of Abbreviations**

EP – European Parliament

EU – European Union

FYROM – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

MND – Macedonian Name Dispute

MQ – Macedonian Question

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PM – Prime Minister

UN – United Nations

US – United States

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WB – Western Balkans

WWI – World War I

WWII – World War II

## ***1. Introduction***

The Balkan peninsula has historically been one of the most volatile regions of Europe. The southeastern part of the continent has seen many conflicts and struggles throughout the centuries, many of which resulted in the outbreak of violence and even genocide<sup>1</sup>. This has led to the peninsula gaining the infamous nickname “Europe’s powder keg”<sup>2</sup>. The Macedonian Name Dispute, which is a part of the larger Macedonian Question, is one of the many issues that have plagued the Balkans in recent years. It started in September 1991, when a small, landlocked state, at the heart of the Balkan peninsula, pronounced itself to be the “Republic of Macedonia”<sup>3</sup> (Constitution of MK, 1991). This act of self-identification initiated a dispute, between it and Greece, that would continue for almost three decades and would prove to be the biggest obstacle in front of the young Balkan state on its path towards not only European integration, but world recognition as well<sup>4</sup>.

For years, the relations between Greece and Macedonia remained stagnant, despite some occasional displays of goodwill from each side. The moments of rapprochement were eventually followed by new spikes in tension, thus negating the possibility of reaching an agreement. However, contrary to the established order in the relations between the two countries, on 17 June 2018, near Lake Prespa, the foreign ministers of Macedonia and Greece, Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias respectively, in the presence of Prime Ministers Zoran Zaev of Macedonia and Alexis Tsipras of Greece, signed the “*Final Agreement for the settlement of the differences as described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Parties*”<sup>5</sup>, commonly known as the “Prespa Agreement”. This groundbreaking

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<sup>1</sup> The 1995 massacre in Srebrenica during the Bosnian War, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, is a recent example of the region’s troubled past.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the ethnic tensions and territorial claims among the Balkans states, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and start of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region was dubbed by Western media and politicians as “Europe’s powder keg”.

<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter “Macedonia” or “North Macedonia”.

<sup>4</sup> Greece, France and Germany, among others, did not recognize the constitutional name of Macedonia and instead referred to it as the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.

<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter “Prespa Agreement”.

treaty, *de facto* ended the three decades long Macedonian Name Dispute and resulted in the renaming of the former Yugoslav republic, to the Republic of North Macedonia *erga omnes*. Furthermore, for the first time in many years, Athens and Skopje displayed willingness to cooperate and compromise on this very delicate subject, which opened Macedonia's path towards its much-desired Euro-Atlantic integration. It is also important to note that during the signing of the agreement, aside from government officials from both Greece and Macedonia, the ceremony was attended by the High Representative of the EU Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Johannes Hahn, thus signifying the union's interest in the dispute and its resolution.

### *1.1 Research Question*

The reconciliation between Greece and Macedonia, along with the signing of the Prespa Agreement, happened in the context of the then ongoing 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU<sup>6</sup>, and following the signing of the 2017 "*Treaty for Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia*"<sup>7</sup>. Yet, only one year prior to the signing of the historic Greco-Macedonian treaty, there were almost no signs of such turn of events. The sudden shift in the positions of the two countries, along with the factors that influenced them, are going to be the subject of this study. Taking all of the above into consideration, the goal of this work will be to present the reader with a detailed analysis of one of the many aspects that led to the resolution of the nearly three decades long Greco-Macedonian feud. Therefore, this thesis will focus on answering the following research question: What has been the influence of the 2017 Friendship Treaty and the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, over the signing of the Prespa Agreement and the resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute?

In order to answer the research question, this study examined in detail the intricacies of the Friendship Treaty, while assessing the effect of some of its sections over the then existing

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<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter "Bulgarian Presidency" or "Council Presidency".

<sup>7</sup> Hereinafter "Friendship Treaty".

Greek arguments. Furthermore, the impact of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU was also explored, with special attention given to the 17 May 2018 EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, and how these two events precipitated the reconciliation between Skopje and Athens. Finally, parallels between the 2018 Prespa Agreement and the 2017 Friendship Treaty were drawn, thereby showcasing the direct and indirect influence the latter has had over the former. Overall, the goal of this study is to fill an existing gap in the academic literature, which has largely neglected the impact of Bulgaria, and almost all third parties, over the Macedonian Name Dispute. Through the filling of said gap, this work aims to not only challenge the established Greco-centric outlook in academic circles, but to also provide a new perspective on the issue that has been tormenting Macedonia for nearly three decades, while also demonstrating the attempts of Sofia to position itself as the local EU leader for the countries of the Western Balkans.

## *1.2 Relevance*

The European Union played a key role in the resolution of the name dispute, albeit indirectly. Despite the overall lack of interest among the general European public in the Macedonian Name Dispute, it was of paramount importance for two EU members in the region. Both Greece and Bulgaria were heavily invested in the dispute's development and its eventual resolution. The hypothesis that this study will examine is that Bulgaria, through its more active involvement in the name dispute, both direct and indirect, managed to help facilitate the negotiations between Skopje and Athens that led to the signing of the Prespa Agreement. The development of this theory was prompted by the time at which the historic treaty was signed, namely during the still ongoing Bulgarian Presidency, and one month after the landmark EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May 2018. This high-level meeting saw the heads of government of the EU-28 meet with their Western Balkan counterparts, for the first time since the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit. Similarly, to its Greek counterpart, the Sofia Summit placed the Western Balkans on the top of the EU's agenda and gave new hope for the countries of this forsaken European region. Therefore, the analysis of the MND would not only provide the reader with information regarding the intergovernmental relations on the Balkan peninsula, but would also serve as an example of how the "carrot and stick" approach of potential EU membership can fundamentally change the behavior of a country aspiring to join the union.

It is with this in mind, that the analysis presented in the following chapters was conducted. Finally, history has proven that when the disputes and conflicts in the Balkans are left unchecked or unresolved, they can quickly escalate and lead to disasters and chaos. One must look no further than the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars and atrocities that followed from the lack of proper international mediation and intervention. The Balkan peninsula has always been a powder keg of ethnic conflicts and irredentist claims that have baffled Western European observers. Due to its relatively minor economic and political importance in the years following the end of the Cold War, the Balkan peninsula has been largely neglected by the European community. However, as noted by John Agnew (2009), the European project could never be fulfilled without the complete integration of the Balkans. Integration, which was largely ignored for over a decade, but was arguably reinvigorated by the resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute.

In order to properly analyze the factors and the chain of events that led to the resolution of the name dispute, one must also look back at the history of the larger Macedonian Question, its development, along with the key stakeholders in it. This would allow for a better understanding of the intricacies of the MND itself, as well as the relations between the different actors. Thus, the next chapter of this study will establish the historical framework of the dispute and its evolution over the years, while highlighting some of the significant moments of the Macedonian Question, in an attempt to present the reader with a more complete picture of the historical dynamics between the countries of the Balkan peninsula. The analysis would also provide context for some of the main factors behind Athens' hard stance in its dispute with Macedonia. Furthermore, the historical aspects of the Macedonian Question will more clearly show the longstanding connection between Bulgaria and Macedonia, along with some of the motivations behind the former's policies towards the latter, in the years since Skopje gained its independence from Yugoslavia. In addition, this would also show the direct and indirect role which the EU has played throughout the duration of the Macedonian Name Dispute, and how the prospects of a potential membership into the community swayed Skopje to compromise on "one of the most explosive issues in the universe" (Tziampiris, 2011, p. 70).



## ***2. Historical Context***

### *2.1 The Birth of the Macedonian Question*

As previously noted, the Macedonian Name Dispute was a part of the larger Macedonian Question<sup>8</sup>, the origins of which can be traced back to the 1878 Congress and subsequent Treaty of Berlin (Stamova, 2014; Danforth, 2019). This historic for the Balkans meeting took place several months after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, which saw the Ottoman Empire lose most of its territorial possessions in the peninsula, as well as the establishment of a large autonomous Bulgarian state by the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano. The Berlin Congress, hosted by the famous German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, amended most of the articles in the San Stefano Treaty, which resulted in the partition of the new Bulgarian state and the return of the Macedonian region back to the Ottoman Empire. Although the goals of the Treaty of Berlin were to maintain peace and stability in the region, it sowed the seeds for the conflicts that would erupt in the Balkans at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and gave birth to the Macedonian Question. The Macedonian region, which fell within the borders of Bulgaria, per the San Stefano Treaty, had a very ethnically diverse population at the time. This swayed the great powers<sup>9</sup> to give it back to the Ottomans, with the goal of avoiding the formation of a large and powerful Slavic state on the peninsula, while also limiting the growing Russian influence in the region. The redrawing of borders that occurred because of the desires of the great powers left almost all of the newly formed countries in the Balkans unhappy with the result, which led to the formation of the Macedonian Question, an issue that would persist and haunt the region for over a century.

Stemming from its cultural and ethnic diversity, the region of Macedonia was claimed by the three major Balkan powers, namely Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia. Initially, however, due to it being in the hands of the Ottomans, it served as one of the many factors that led to the three

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the Macedonian Question see (Danforth, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Great Britain, France, Germany, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Russia were the “great powers” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

young states joining forces against the decaying empire<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the Balkan League<sup>11</sup> was formed and the First Balkan War began. The conflict ended with a decisive victory for the allied nations and saw most of the European territorial possessions of the Ottomans being split between them. However, the manner in which the spoils of war were divided among the victors angered Bulgaria. The apple of discord was Macedonia and the fact that most of it was split between Serbia and Greece, with most of the territory of modern-day North Macedonia being under the control of the former. Thus, even before the official signing of the 1913 Treaty of London, which officially ended the First Balkan War, the Second Balkan War had already begun. The inter-allied war concluded with a crushing defeat for the young and ambitious Bulgarian state, which was dubbed as the “First National Catastrophe”, due to the large territorial losses for Sofia (Crampton, 2007).

The outcome of the Second Balkan War, the loss of much of its newly gained territory, in addition to the failure to obtain Macedonia, predetermined Sofia’s affiliation during the upcoming two World Wars. During WWI, Bulgaria allied with the Central Powers<sup>12</sup>, since the government in Sofia saw it as an opportunity to regain its lost lands, and most importantly to take back Macedonia. However, despite reclaiming much of what it desired, WWI ended with the “Second National Catastrophe”<sup>13</sup> for Bulgaria (Crampton, 2007). Stemming from being on the losing side, Sofia had to hand over all the territories it had gained during the war. Thus, once World War II started, Bulgaria chose to remain neutral for the first phase of the war. However, due to the nature of the conflict, it had to pick a side. Emanating from the longstanding dream of the country to regain Macedonia, along with some of its lost territorial possessions, in addition to immense pressure from Berlin and Rome, Bulgaria joined the Axis in March 1941. Yet again the country ended up on the losing side of the conflict and had to hand over Macedonia for the third time since the treaty of San Stefano.

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<sup>10</sup> Due to its poor economic, political and military state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was often referred to as the “sick man of Europe”.

<sup>11</sup> The Balkan League was an alliance between Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire during the First Balkan War.

<sup>12</sup> Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>13</sup> For more detailed examination of the conflicts that led to the two national catastrophes, along with the deeply rooted Bulgarian dream of reclaiming Macedonia see (Crampton, 2007) and (Marinov, 2013).

Ever since the end of the Second Balkan War, Macedonia was under the control of Serbia. During the interwar period, however, the Kingdom of Serbia united with the other Western Balkan Slavic kingdoms to form the Kingdom of Yugoslavia<sup>14</sup>. This led to the Macedonian region falling within the borders of the newly formed Yugoslav state. Following the end of WWII, and the rise to power of the infamous Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, the country transitioned to socialism, closely aligning itself with the Soviet Union. The unofficial start of the subject of this study was given in 1945, when Tito and his government restructured Yugoslavia and created the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The Macedonian Name Dispute would only materialize after the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, however, the seeds for the future Greco-Macedonian conflict were sowed with the establishment of the first Macedonian state, albeit within the borders of Yugoslavia, since the fall of the ancient Kingdom of Macedon.

## *2.2 The Birth of a Nation*

From its inception, Yugoslavia was envisioned as a country that would unite the Slavic people of southeastern Europe in a unified state, similarly to Italy and Germany, thus allowing them to have more power and influence vis-à-vis the great powers<sup>15</sup>. However, one of the main obstacles for the completion of this idea, and the inclusion of Bulgaria in the unified state, was the Macedonian Question. A major aspect of both the MND and the MQ has always been identity and one's right to self-identification. At the time of the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, most of the people inhabiting it had either a Bulgarian consciousness or pro-Bulgarian sympathies. Furthermore, the language they spoke was and still is considered a western dialect of Bulgarian (Kofos, 1986; Seftas, 2012; Marinov, 2013; Stamova, 2014). This presented a major problem for Tito's Yugoslavia and its aspirations of uniting the geographical region of Macedonia. Therefore, in order to overcome this obstacle, the approach chosen by Belgrade was to create and establish a new Macedonian nation and identity, whose legitimacy was to be derived from its alleged historical connection to Alexander the Great and the ancient

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<sup>14</sup> Initially it was called the "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", until it was officially renamed to "Yugoslavia" in 1929.

<sup>15</sup> This idea was a part of the larger 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of "Pan-Slavism".

Kingdom of Macedon. The first step in this process was the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, within the borders of the Yugoslav Federation. Followed by the transformation of the local dialect into the modern "Macedonian" literary language. These actions, by Tito and his government, were aimed at both distancing the local populous from its Bulgarian roots, as well as "Serbianizing" them in the process (Kofos, 1986; Marinov, 2013; Stamova, 2014).

The "birth" of the new Macedonian nation gave Yugoslavia a pretext under which to put forward territorial claims against both Greece and Bulgaria. The rationale behind this idea was that there existed an ethnic Macedonian minority, living in the Greek and Bulgarian regions of Macedonia, with the main goal being the port city of Thessaloniki and its access to the Aegean Sea. This is one of the most important aspects of the name dispute, since it rationalizes Athens' fears for its territorial integrity, in addition to those related to the "theft" of its ancient history (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). However, Tito's plan did not materialize, due to the split that occurred between him and Josip Stalin in 1948, which led to Yugoslavia losing the support of the USSR and paving the road for the country to become one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement<sup>16</sup> (Mehta, 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to note that during the Cold War, even after Tito declared that he would "reunite all parts of Macedonia", Greece remained passive, choosing to stay in the "shadows" regarding the Macedonian Question and silently support Bulgaria in Sofia's dispute with Belgrade (Ibid, 2019; Kofos, 1986). This was the norm until the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the establishment of a fully independent Macedonian state, when the roles of Sofia and Athens changed, with the latter becoming much more active, while the former being a more passive and silent protagonist in the name dispute.

### *2.3 The Birth of the Name Dispute*

The breakup of Yugoslavia, after the end of the Cold War, along with the subsequent declaration of independence by Skopje, served as a catalyst for the official start of the name

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<sup>16</sup> An international organization of countries that did not want to support neither of the two dominant blocks during the Cold War.

dispute. Greece firmly objected the use of the word “Macedonia” in the name of the young Balkan state, since it saw it as a direct threat to its territorial integrity. Therefore, it refused to recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name and imposed a political embargo, thus blocking it from joining international institutions. However, the name was not the only issue dividing Athens and Skopje. The official flag of the new Balkan state featured the famous Vergina Sun, which is regarded as the emblem of the ancient Kingdom of Macedon. This, along with the already existing claims by Skopje, that contemporary Macedonians are descendants of ancient Macedonians and Alexander the Great, outraged Athens (Marinov, 2013). These actions solidified Greece’s arguments regarding Macedonia’s attempts to appropriate ancient Greek history, thereby straining the relationship even further. Moreover, the 1991 constitution of Macedonia included texts that were interpreted by the Greek side as being of irredentist nature. Article 49 contained references to Skopje’s responsibility to protect the rights of Macedonians living in neighboring countries, thus restating Tito’s thesis of Macedonian minorities being present in Greece and Bulgaria. Therefore, stemming from the perceived threat for its territorial integrity on one hand, along with the historical appropriation on the other, Athens imposed a trade embargo, depriving Skopje from the ability to use the port of Thessaloniki, which is the closest link of the landlocked country to a major maritime trade route.

The Greek embargo extracted a heavy toll from the young state and was only lifted after the two parties signed the 1995 UN sanctioned Interim Accord, which allowed Macedonia to join the United Nations under the provisional name “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. The document also outlined a series of “Confidence-Building Measures”, aimed at ensuring the territorial integrity of the two signatories, in addition to obligating Skopje to remove or amend sections of its constitution, with special attention being given to Article 49. Furthermore, the Interim Accord also forced Macedonia to change its national flag and refrain from using historic Greek symbols in the future. The Accord also stated that Greece should not object Macedonian membership into international institutions, if the latter uses its provisional name. However, this did not come to fruition, since Athens blocked Skopje’s accession into both NATO and the EU for nearly three decades, until the 2018 Prespa Agreement was signed.

Contrary to the Greek position at the time, the government in Sofia had chosen a different approach towards its southwestern neighbor. Bulgaria became the first nation to recognize the

newly independent Macedonian state under its constitutional name (National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1992). Furthermore, Sofia assisted Skopje during the Greek trade embargo by supplying the country with oil and other imports through the port of Varna on the Black sea. However, as the years passed and the historical appropriation from which Greece suffered started being a problem for Bulgaria, the relations between the two countries dramatically worsened (Marusic, 2014). Despite not being as outspoken as Athens, Sofia also started employing a more hardline approach towards Skopje, the culmination of which happened during the 2008 Bucharest Summit of NATO. Prior to the start of the meeting, it was expected that Macedonia would receive an invitation to join the alliance. However, Greece, with the silent support of Bulgaria, objected the proposal, thus blocking Skopje in a *de facto* violation of the 1995 Interim Accord. This eventually led to the inception of the highly controversial “Antiquization”<sup>17</sup> policy of the former Macedonian PM Nikola Gruevski, whose obsession with solidifying the ties of the current Macedonian state to the ancient Kingdom of Macedon and Alexander the Great, would prove to be one of the biggest obstacles towards the resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute.

As evident by the actions of Sofia during the first half of the 20th century, and Athens after 1991, Macedonia and the Macedonian Question have always been of paramount importance for Bulgaria and Greece. Furthermore, the MQ has been an ever-present issue for the Balkans ever since it was created during the Congress of Berlin. It has influenced, both directly and indirectly, the intergovernmental relations between the countries of the region by creating conflicts and affecting their policies and decisions. Establishing this historical context was crucial for the analysis of the events that unfolded following the end of Gruevski’s tenure and led to the resolution of the name dispute. Finally, assessing Sofia’s impact and role in the dispute’s resolution would have not been possible without the knowledge of its historical connection with Macedonia.

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<sup>17</sup> This policy saw the Skopje city center completely remodeled with statues and architecture alluding to the “ancient” past of the Macedonian nation.

### ***3. Literature Review***

Stemming from the lack of general interest in the international community regarding the Macedonian Name Dispute, the academic literature on the subject is not very extensive. Nevertheless, through a detailed analysis of the existing scholarly work, one can gain better understanding of the development of the conflict, its origins, the solutions proposed over the years, as well as identify gaps in the existing knowledge. Furthermore, the examination of the academic literature will also better position this study in the context of the existing scholarly work. Therefore, the following sections will provide an overview of the major academic debates which, in addition to the historical context provided in the prior chapter, will set the stage for the analysis that will be presented in the latter parts of this study.

#### *3.1 Identity and Geography*

One of the main aspects of the Macedonian Name Dispute has always been identity. At its core, the MND has never been only about the rights to the word “Macedonia”, rather it has been one of heritage, culture, language, territory and most importantly, the “Macedonian” identity itself. This has led to the formation of the “identity” school of thought within the academic community, which has been exploring the Greco-Macedonian feud. One could clearly see the way this concept has been intertwined with history and geography within the scholarly work on the subject. Academics from both Macedonian and Greek origin have written about the ethno-geographic aspects of the MND. Much of their work is based upon the historical developments that have taken place on the Balkan peninsula and were discussed in the second chapter of this work. Yet, despite falling within the same school of thought, not all scholars tackle the issue from the same angle.

Academics such as Daskalovski, Messineo, Kofos and Tziampiris analyze the ethno-geographic aspects of the dispute. While Messineo (2012) and Daskalovski’s (2017) arguments are primarily based upon the innate right of a person, and by extension a country, to use a geographical marker as a means of self-identification, Kofos (2005) and Tziampiris (2011) argue that, due to the historical significance, along with the geographical scope of the term, one ethnic

group or country cannot simply use it as a national identifier. According to them, this would lead to appropriation of the word “Macedonia”, thus giving the party which successfully claims it the ability to impose its own version of the “Macedonian”, thereby gaining international monopoly over the term and all its derivatives. These two opposing arguments clearly depict the dispute between Skopje and Athens. On one side Macedonia wanted to use the geographical name of the region to identify itself and its people, while on the other Greece considered it unacceptable, due to both the historical significance of the term, as well as because of fears for its territorial integrity. Despite Skopje’s implied irredentist intentions having political and historical reasoning, as discussed in the prior chapter, they do not have any weight in the framework of the current dispute. The foundation on which these fears are grounded has its roots back during the time of Tito, while Macedonia was a constituent republic of Yugoslavia. Moreover, when the current political context, along with the commitments made by Skopje in the 1995 Interim Accord are taken into consideration, one can clearly see that the Greek fears are unjustified. Nevertheless, they have played a key role in the name dispute and will be featured in the latter chapters of this study.

Although the four scholars differ in their approaches, they do agree on the complex nature of the meanings attached to the word “Macedonia”. Both Kofos and Tziampiris note that the term has various historical, cultural, religious and ethnic references attached to it. Daskalovski, on the other hand, argues that the word not only has salience when it comes to the cultural and historic aspects of the region and its people, but also to the modern literary Macedonian language. Thus, arguably connecting all of the characteristics of one’s identity, namely history, culture, ethnicity and language. Stemming from the apparent weight the term “Macedonia” carries and as a continuation of their analyses, all three scholars express varying degrees of pessimism regarding the prospects for the problem’s resolution. While Kofos proposes potential solutions to the name dispute, Daskalovski argues that, at the time, resolution of the issue was impossible. These conclusions underline the prevalent attitude of most of the academic community that has been exploring the MND. They indirectly refute any possibility for a Greco-Macedonian reconciliation that could be induced by a third party, regional or not.

An argument that is present within the “identity” school of thought is that of the existence of an “identity crisis” inside Macedonia throughout the duration of the name dispute. While



Daskalovski, Kofos and Tziampiris do not explicitly tackle this issue, one could argue that their studies lay the groundwork for such a debate. Some of the roots of this fundamental, for the Macedonian state, deliberation can be clearly seen in the 2012b study of Tziampiris, who questions the existence of the contemporary Macedonian nation. His work, along with that of Kofos (1986) and Stanković-Pejnović (2011), challenges the distinctiveness of the Macedonian identity, on the grounds of it being a derivative of the Bulgarian one. Georgievska-Jakovleva (2015) and Fidanovski (2018) expand on this topic by arguing that the manifestation of this identity crisis was the “Antiquization” policy of Macedonia’s former PM Nikola Gruevski and his flagship project “Skopje 2014”. However, they differ in their interpretation of the policy’s impact. Fidanovski characterizes Gruevski’s plan as a mistake, equivalent to “Skopje shooting itself in the foot”, since it was leading the country in a diametrically opposing way to its goal of Europeanization and EU membership (Ibid, 2018, p. 37). On the other hand, Georgievska-Jakovleva admits that the policy has gathered a lot of international backlash against Skopje, however, she concludes that it has nonetheless been successful, due to it constructing a “national metanarrative” that has managed to create a “new” Macedonian identity (Ibid, 2015, p. 54). Nevertheless, despite differing in their interpretation of the policy itself, both scholars agree on the fact that it represented an answer to the identity crisis that had enveloped the country.

### *3.2 The Intricacies of the Greek Policy*

Identity has always been at the core of the Macedonian Name Dispute. As discussed in the prior section, the existence of a distinct Macedonian identity has been questioned and discussed by numerous scholars from both Greek and Macedonian origin. The hardline Greek position throughout most of the dispute’s duration has not only been the biggest challenge in front of the young Balkan state, but it has also been widely accepted as the norm. However, it has its roots back at the very beginning of the MND. As seen in the second chapter of this work, throughout the duration of the Cold War and the initial development of the Macedonian Question, Greece remained passive without developing any outspoken red lines. Yet, once Skopje gained its independence in 1991, Athens became the main protagonist of the then nascent name dispute. Thus, this has swayed scholars to analyze extensively the intricacies of the Greek policies and attitudes during the duration of the Macedonian Name Dispute.

While Georgievska-Jakovleva and Fidanovski examined the Macedonian response to the identity crisis through the implementation of the “Antiquization” policy, Koukoudakis (2018), along with Armakolas and Triantafyllou (2017) delved into the intricacies of Greek policymaking. In their studies, all three scholars conclude that the strong public opinion regarding the name dispute, due to the sensitive nature of the problem, has played a vital role in the formation of Greek regional foreign policy. Koukoudakis elaborates further by claiming that many of the reasons for the development of Athens’ hard stance on the issue occurred, due to the initial “weaponization” of the name dispute by the Greek governments in 1992 and 1993. Thus, providing context as to why a hard stance regarding the MND became a staple of not only the Greek policy, but also of the political platforms of almost every Greek politician since then. In addition, these arguments also underline one of the main reasons for the inability of the two parties to reach a compromise on the name dispute, while also tying it to the main theme of the first section of this chapter, namely identity. As noted previously, the MND has never been only about the word “Macedonia”, rather, stemming from the historical and emotional weight the term carries, it has been directly intertwined with nationalistic rhetoric and policies on both sides of the border. Thus, the arguments of the three scholars only demonstrate how the name dispute has been directly linked to the national identities of the two countries.

The development of the hardline Greek position, along with the overall prevalence of Greek scholars exploring the Macedonian Name Dispute, has led to the establishment of a Greco-centric outlook on the issue in academic circles. The works of Tziampiris (2012a) and Mavromatidis (2010), who write about the significance of Athens in the name dispute, are an example of this one-sided reading of the conflict. Both scholars underline the undeniable key role Greece has had in the dispute, however, they do so by also downplaying the role of not only all third-party actors, but of Macedonia itself. In his study, Tziampiris writes “The conclusion is thus inescapable: Skopje’s tortured path towards Brussels has consistently passed through Athens”, thereby unequivocally positioning Greece as the ultimate decision maker regarding Macedonia’s European future (Ibid, 2012a, p. 164). This is further underlined when two of the main EU institutions, namely the European Commission and the European Parliament, are described as secondary actors that have had no significant impact over the development of the name dispute. Through this analysis the two scholars neglect the role or influence which the EU has had in the MND. In hindsight, these conclusions seem premature and shortsighted, since the

effect, albeit indirect, which the union had over the resolution of the issue is undeniable. Nevertheless, Mavromatidis weighs in by arguing that Greece had managed to exploit the EU's complicated mixture of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism to its own advantage. Ker-Lindsay et al., add to this argument by stating that Athens had managed to turn "EU enlargement policy into a Greek foreign policy tool" through which Greece has managed to secure its national interests, along with a better negotiating position vis-a-vis Skopje (Ibid, 2018, p. 518). Furthermore, Koukoudakis (2018) points out yet another aspect of Athens' foreign policy in the region which, according to him, has been geared towards ensuring Greece's political and by extension economic dominance in the Balkans. A manifestation of this dominance was the unofficial veto which Athens applied during the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit at which Skopje was expected to receive an invitation to join the alliance. This act of defiance not only underlined the firm and self-centric position Greece has had in the MND, but it is also a point of criticism for Athens, since it reinvigorated the name dispute, which at the time was in a hiatus.

### *3.3 The Role of Third Parties*

Overall, the Greek position within the conflict, per the existing academic literature, could be described as one of nationalistic dominance, stemming from the conviction of Athens' key role in solving the dispute. The significance of all other players, including that of Macedonia itself, is downplayed or neglected altogether, as evident by the interpretation of the role which the EU institutions have had. Although, Greece's importance cannot be dismissed or ignored, it is also necessary to analyze the influence of third parties on the conflict. Therefore, a number of academics have delved into the role which international actors have played in the development of not only the MND, but of the Balkan peninsula as a whole.

Despite Bulgaria being a key stakeholder in the Macedonian Question, it has nevertheless been a third party in the Macedonian Name Dispute, similarly to the EU. Its impact, however, has been recognized by various scholars that have analyzed the intricacies of the regional intergovernmental relations. While Voskopoulos (2008) discusses the Greco-Bulgarian relationship in the context of the turbulent recent history of the Balkans, Bechev (2009), along with Nancheva and Koneska (2015), analyze the development of Sofia's relationship with Skopje in light of the former's accession into the EU. The conclusions that can be derived from

the works of these scholars point towards the influence which Sofia has had over the regional power dynamics, as well as the MND. Voskopoulos characterizes the close cooperation between Bulgaria and Greece as an “axis of stability” in the Balkans, which showed to the region and the world that there is a way out of the confrontational, zero-sum game politics of the Balkan states. On the other hand, the works of Bechev, Nancheva and Koneska contrast these observations by underlining the aggressive and hardline policies of Sofia vis-à-vis Skopje, following the former’s entry into the EU. Based on the findings of the three scholars, Bulgaria’s actions since 2007<sup>18</sup> have contributed to the deepening of the Macedonian identity crisis, because of the raising of sensitive historical topics, which have been generally avoided previously. Overall, Bulgaria utilized its EU membership by turning it into a national foreign policy tool against Skopje. Such an inference complements the findings of Mavromatidis (2010) and Ker-Lindsay et al. (2018), discussed in the previous section, thereby underlining the tendency of EU members to utilize their membership status as a leverage against non-members with whom they have an ongoing dispute.

Foreign actors have had a mixed track record when it comes to the Balkans. Their actions, both direct and indirect, have been critical for the development of the region and the establishment of the current status quo. The 1878 Berlin Congress is a prime example of the central role which outside forces have had in the peninsula’s development. As discussed in the prior chapter, the Berlin Treaty *de facto* established the Macedonian Question, thereby starting a chain of events that led to bloodshed, the loss of countless lives, as well as to the formation of the MND. Fonck (2018) and Agnew (2009) both discuss the role which foreign actors have had in the Balkans. However, their approach and conclusions differ fundamentally. Agnew’s argument revolves around the ideas of the Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek, whose thesis is based upon the idea that most of the tensions and conflicts in the Balkans were introduced by the western powers, as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, Agnew establishes the Balkans as the modern representation of Europe’s “old” self, which is marked by the presence of “malignant nationalism”, due in no small part to the actions and competing interests of the great powers on the peninsula. This reading of the intergovernmental relations on the Balkans coincides and

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<sup>18</sup> Bulgaria entered the EU on 1 January 2007.

supports the analyses presented in the prior sections of this chapter. In their core, both the identity aspects of the dispute, along with the political redlines of the different actors, are tied to the nationalistic features of Balkan politics. Contrary to Agnew's theory, Fonck argues that the role of outside actors has had a positive influence on the region and Macedonia in particular. He explores the positive impact which the EU has had over Skopje's development during the crises of 2001<sup>19</sup> and 2015<sup>20</sup>. Thereby arguing that the actions of non-Balkan actors in recent years have contributed to the stabilization of this very volatile European region.

Overall, the academic community's outlook regarding the name dispute has been rather Greco-centric. Nevertheless, analyzing the existing scholarly work established the current state of the ongoing academic debate regarding the MND, thus providing a solid foundation for the analysis in the following chapters, while also showcasing the general lack of interest academicians have shown in examining the role and influence of other actors over the bilateral Greco-Macedonian name dispute. Therefore, the goal of this work is to position itself as a counterweight to the prevalent Greek reading of the MND, while also expanding on the already existing scholarly work.

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<sup>19</sup> The 2001 Tetovo crisis saw the outbreak of violence between the Albanian minority and the Macedonian majority, which led the country on the brink of a civil war.

<sup>20</sup> This was a political crisis that led to the end of Nikola Gruevski's ten-year tenure as Macedonia's PM and to the rise to power of Zoran Zaev.

#### ***4. Methodology***

The main goal of this study is to present the reader with an analysis of one of the factors that led to the signing of the 2018 Prespa Agreement, which marked the *de facto* end of the Macedonian Name Dispute. In particular, this work focuses on Bulgaria's role in accelerating the negotiations between Greece and Macedonia, both through its 2018 Presidency of the Council of the EU, as well as via the signing of the 2017 Friendship Treaty with Skopje. Furthermore, this thesis strives to give a new perspective on the MND, to challenge the established duopoly between Greece and Macedonia in academic circles, which neglects the influence of other actors, while at the same time not to dismiss the undeniable central role of Athens and Skopje. In other words, this thesis will dive into the epistemology of the name dispute, albeit indirectly. Through the analysis of the role which Sofia had in facilitating the signing of the Prespa Agreement, this study will uncover some of the problems that have existed in the academic debate thus far. As seen in the previous chapter, much of the scholarly work has focused on the various aspects of the power struggle between Athens and Skopje, paying little attention to or dismissing the influence of local and international actors. The partial filling of this academic gap is one of the main aims of this work, while still maintaining the focus on the two key actors – Greece and Macedonia.

In order to achieve this goal, interviews were chosen as the main research methodology of this study. This decision was made, due to the ability to gather firsthand information, observations, as well as analyses from people who have had direct involvement in the historical processes that took place in the months leading up to the signing of the Prespa Agreement. Therefore, five interviews were conducted over the span of three months, from April to June 2019, with professionals who have knowledge or expertise on the subject matter. Three of the interviews, that will be featured in this thesis, were with employees of the Ministry for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. These people were directly involved with the fulfilment of the main priority of the country's presidency, namely the European integration of the Western Balkans. Moreover, they had direct involvement into the execution of the key "EU – Western Balkans Summit" in Sofia on 17 May 2018, which saw the heads of government of the EU-28 meet with their Western Balkan counterparts, including Zoran Zaev of Macedonia and

Alexis Tsipras of Greece. The three interviewees not only gave invaluable information regarding the execution of the Summit itself, but also precious insight into the interpersonal relationship between the two leaders in the context of Sofia's main presidency priority. Due to the expressly stated desire of the three Ministry Employees, they will remain anonymous in this work. Therefore, no records of or references to their names or exact positions were made or kept.

One of the people that had an instrumental role in the successful execution of both the Sofia Summit, as well as the overall Bulgarian Presidency was the Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Ms. Lilyana Pavlova. Her work, along with that of her team were crucial for bringing together Prime Ministers Zaev and Tsipras and facilitating the negotiations between them during their stay in Sofia. Therefore, the interview with Ms. Pavlova provided invaluable insight into the innerworkings of the Bulgarian government, as well as the design of the country's policy towards the MND in the context of the then ongoing Council Presidency.

In order to obtain an opinion from a well renowned expert on both Macedonia and the MND, an interview with the Bulgarian MEP Mr. Angel Dzhambazki was conducted. Mr. Dzhambazki was a Vice-Chair of the "Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee" during the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term of the European Parliament and is currently a member of the Committee on Legal Affairs in the newly elected EP<sup>21</sup>. He is also a member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, in addition to being Vice-Chairmen of the Bulgarian VMRO<sup>22</sup> party. His expertise on the subject matter, along with his deep understanding of the complex Bulgarian-Macedonian relationship, gave a new perspective on the resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute. Furthermore, he provided an invaluable analysis regarding the influence of the 2017 Friendship Treaty and the 2018 Bulgarian Council Presidency over the signing of the Prespa Agreement.

As evident by the professional occupations of the interviewees, all of them were Bulgarian citizens, which can be interpreted as a Bulgaria-centric bias by fellow academics.

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<sup>21</sup> As of the writing of this work in June 2019.

<sup>22</sup> VMRO is a Bulgarian nationalistic political party, whose name refers to the revolutionary "Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization" (IMRO), established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Unfortunately, gaining access to Greek or Macedonian officials was not possible during the research phase of this study. Nevertheless, the professional experience and expertise of the people interviewed should provide confidence in their impartiality and objectivity. All the interviews were conducted in the native for the author and interviewees language, namely Bulgarian. The interviews were semi-structured, lasting for approximately 30 minutes each. This interview method was chosen, since a semi-structured interview, unlike a structured one, allows the researcher to accommodate different interviewees, as well as to adjust the interview itself based on the varying degrees of knowledge and expertise of the participants (Bryman, 2012). At the beginning of each interview, the researcher provided every interviewee with a consent form regarding their voluntary participation in the study. In addition, participants also had the opportunity to decide if they would like their names and positions to be kept secret based on any privacy concerns, they might have. Finally, any and all questions, which the interviewees had prior to the start of the interview process, were answered in detail by the researcher, thereby ensuring that the respondents were well informed regarding the nature of the study, as well as how their answers will be used in it. As noted previously, some participants chose to remain anonymous, because of which no records of their names or positions were made.

Aside from the consent form, no other materials or questionnaires were provided to the interviewees. Instead, a list of five questions was used by the researcher in order to guide the discussion. This method was employed, since a more structured questionnaire would have not been able to account for the different knowledge and expertise levels of all the participants. Therefore, the discussions that followed were open-ended without a particular structure to them, with the main goal being for the interviewees to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions on the matter, as well as eliminating the possibility of a potential researcher bias influencing their answers. A full list of the participants in this study, the questions used during the interviews, along with a sample consent form are provided at the end of this work in Appendices 1-3. Detailed records of the interviews, wherever applicable, along with the signed consent forms are available upon request.

Utilizing the knowledge and insight gained from the interviews and in order to properly uncover the role of Sofia in the Macedonian Name Dispute, this study also analyzed two key, landmark documents. First, an in-depth examination was performed over the 2017 Friendship



Treaty between Bulgaria and Macedonia, which this study considers as a turning point in the name dispute, due to it changing the dynamics of the Greco-Macedonian feud. Then, the 2018 Prespa Agreement was analyzed, because it being the *de facto* end of the MND. In addition, official press releases, along with press conference statements by officials were also included in the following sections. The analysis of the two intergovernmental agreements, in conjunction with the official press releases, were used as a supplement to the findings and conclusions derived from the interviews conducted during the research phase of this work.

Finally, in order to provide the reader with confidence, the nationality and potential personal biases of the author must be disclosed. As noted in this chapter, the native language, and by extension nationality, of the researcher is Bulgarian. This has undeniably played a role in the interpretation and analysis of the events and documents discussed in this work. Nevertheless, this thesis strives to be as impartial as possible by providing the most factually correct information that could be easily verified. Thus, despite the potential presence of Bulgarian bias within this study, the reader should rest assured that all necessary measures were taken in order to ensure the objectivity of this thesis. Lastly, the conclusions of this work are by no means exhaustive, but they nevertheless depict a somewhat unpopular reading of the name dispute.

## 5. Analysis

The resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute was arguably one of the biggest breakthroughs in regional Balkan politics in recent years. The signing of the Prespa Agreement concluded a protracted argument between Athens and Skopje that had challenged the distinctiveness of the national identity of the people living in today's North Macedonia. However, the conclusion of the MND would have not been possible without the involvement, both direct and indirect, of Sofia. Therefore, the following sections will explore in detail how Bulgaria's role and influence helped Greece and Macedonia reconcile their differences which led to the signing of the historic Prespa Agreement in June 2018.

### 5.1 *The Influence of the Friendship Treaty*

Macedonia has always held a key spot in Bulgaria's regional foreign policy. Stemming from the close historical ties between the two countries and their people, as described in the historical context chapter of this work, Bulgaria became the first country to officially recognize Macedonia in January 1992. Sofia has historically been very supportive of the Macedonian state, however, as noted previously, many of the issues surrounding Skopje's dispute with Greece became a problem for Bulgaria as well. The historical appropriation, which is one of the many aspects of the MND, was one of the biggest obstacles for the attainment of good neighborly relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia. The tenure of the former Macedonian PM Nikola Gruevski proved to be one of the biggest obstacles for the country, due to his highly controversial, nationalistic policies which resulted in the almost complete isolation of Skopje. This deepened not only Macedonia's confrontation with Greece, but with Bulgaria as well. However, once Zoran Zaev became Prime Minister of the country, Skopje's relations with both of its EU neighbors dramatically improved. The first major sign of this reconciliation, as well as of the upcoming resolution of the name dispute, was the signing of the Friendship Treaty with Bulgaria in August 2017.

The crucial significance of this treaty in the context of the MND cannot be understated. On one hand, it normalized the intergovernmental relations between Sofia and Skopje, while on

the other, it managed to end the decade long political isolation the country had been suffering from. Furthermore, it also shifted the balance of power in the name dispute, since prior to the signing of the Friendship Treaty Bulgaria was siding, albeit silently, with Greece. Thus, the reconciliation between Skopje and Sofia proved that there was a path towards the resolution of sensitive and very controversial issues with Macedonia. The decisive role which the Bulgarian-Macedonian agreement had over the MND was confirmed by Zoran Zaev himself during a meeting with his Bulgarian counterpart Boyko Borisov. In his official statement, Zaev noted that the Friendship Treaty and Bulgaria had given his country the historic opportunity to not only resolve the name dispute with Greece, but to also set Skopje on its path towards membership into the EU (Yordanova, 2019). This opinion was also shared by the Bulgarian MEP Mr. Angel Dzhambazki, during his interview with the author. According to him, the Friendship Treaty persuaded Athens to soften its position regarding the MND, due to it losing the support of Sofia. Per Mr. Dzhambazki, Bulgaria had been foolishly supporting Greece in its dispute with Macedonia, contrary to its national interests, which had in turn given weight to the Greek arguments and demands (Interview 4). Therefore, the preliminary conclusion which can be derived concerning the influence of the 2017 Friendship Treaty, is that it served as the turning point in the Macedonian Name Dispute. The signing of this agreement laid the groundwork based on which Greece and Macedonia would negotiate in the months leading up to the historic Prespa Agreement. It helped Skopje by depriving Athens of its longstanding ally, thereby leaving the latter in the politically unfavorable position of a bully. As noted previously, the Friendship Treaty demonstrated to the international community that Macedonia was willing to compromise under the leadership of Zoran Zaev, thus making the Greek hardline stance vis-à-vis its northern neighbor unjustified. Furthermore, Mr. Dzhambazki noted that the growing Russian influence in the region, and especially in Serbia, convinced both the EU and NATO that they had to act quickly in order not to lose Skopje. Therefore, taking all of the above into consideration, it becomes clear how the Bulgarian-Macedonian agreement, in conjunction with the ongoing geopolitical clash between the West and Russia, persuaded Athens to soften its otherwise unyielding position and open itself to negotiations with the former Yugoslav republic.

It is also important to explore in detail the intricacies of the Friendship Treaty itself, and how it influenced the then upcoming Greco-Macedonian negotiations. The preamble of the agreement indirectly undermined some of the foundations on which the overall Greek argument

has been based upon. It unequivocally states that the two signatories have and share a common history. Since Greece has never contested the validity of Bulgaria's history or the existence of a unique Bulgarian identity and state, the officialization of the shared Bulgarian-Macedonian history, and by extension identity, makes the Greek arguments of Skopje's historical appropriation unfounded. Indeed, under the leadership of its former PM Gruevski and while it was a constituent republic of Yugoslavia, Skopje did claim historical ties and connections to the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon. However, the text of the preamble of the Friendship Treaty not only relinquished all of their claims to the ancient Greek history, but also confirmed the undeniable connection between the Bulgarian and Macedonian people, thereby negating any and all fears the Greek side might have. In addition, the acknowledgment of the common history of the Bulgarian and Macedonian nations also guaranteed that there would be no more allusions to the connection between the people that inhabited ancient Macedonia, and those that live in the borders of today's North Macedonia.

The Friendship Treaty also guaranteed, albeit indirectly, the territorial integrity of Greece. As discussed in the prior chapters, one of the main concerns of Athens has always been the potential irredentist claims that could arise from the usage of the word "Macedonia" in the name of the former Yugoslav republic. Even though Greece's concerns did have historical reasoning, it is also important to note that they had no weight in the context of the MND. The main reason for this was both the complete revision of Article 49, as well as the addition of amendments to article 3 in the Macedonian constitution<sup>23</sup>, which guaranteed that Skopje would not violate the territorial integrity of any of its neighbors. Nevertheless, the Friendship Treaty only reaffirmed Skopje's commitment by including Article 11, which explicitly states that neither of the parties would violate the territorial integrity of the other. Despite this agreement being a bilateral one between Bulgaria and Macedonia, it further reaffirmed the rather peaceful and cooperative attitude of Skopje's government, thereby undermining yet another of Greece's arguments for its hardline position regarding the small Balkan state. Moreover, Paragraph 5 of Article 11 should be given special attention, since it unequivocally resolves any concerns other parties may have regarding Macedonian interference in their internal affairs. The text states that

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<sup>23</sup> Amendments XXXV and XXXVI from 11 January 2019 revised Articles 3 and 49 respectively.

Skopje confirms that no sections of its constitution can be interpreted as a basis on which it will attempt to protect the interests of persons who do not possess Macedonian citizenship. Thus, one of the final arguments utilized by Athens became irrelevant. Through the signing of this treaty, Skopje unambiguously refuted any claims or fears that it might attempt to meddle in Greek or Bulgarian internal affairs on the basis of the existence of a Macedonian minority in either country. As discussed previously, many of the fears of the Greek side were rooted in the details of the plan devised by Tito, based on which Yugoslavia would have attempted to gain access to the Aegean sea, under the pretext of the existence of a Macedonian minority in the Greek portion of geographical Macedonia. However, with the recognition of a shared Bulgarian-Macedonian history, along with the wording of Article 11, the Friendship Treaty effectively made the unyielding Greek position, regarding the name dispute, look unfair and unjustified. Thus, the conclusion of Mr. Dzhambazki, in addition to the statement given by the Macedonian Prime Minister himself, only reaffirmed the undeniable role which the 2017 Friendship Treaty had in facilitating the Greco-Macedonian negotiations that led to the resolution of the name dispute.

### *5.2 The Role of the Bulgarian Council Presidency*

As discussed in the previous section, the Friendship Treaty had a tremendous impact over the balance of power in the name dispute. It tipped the scales in Skopje's favor by leaving Greece in a minority, thereby making it look like an aggressor. Yet, the role which Sofia played in the MND became even more prominent with the start of the Bulgarian Presidency on 1 January 2018, only five months after the signing of its agreement with Skopje. Since Bulgaria had decided its main priority to be the integration of the Western Balkans, during the six months of its Council Presidency, Macedonia received, yet again, support from Sofia in its feud with Greece. Despite the EU not being heavily invested in the MND, it nevertheless paid close attention to its development. The lessons learned from its actions, or lack thereof, during the Balkan wars in the 1990s<sup>24</sup> had arguably made the community more aware of the volatility of this highly problematic region of Europe. Therefore, the decision of the government in Sofia to

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<sup>24</sup> The EU was unable to respond to the massacres that occurred in Bosnia, and especially in Srebrenica, for which it was heavily criticized.

tackle the integration of the Western Balkans during its first ever Council Presidency was met with wonder and doubt at the same time. Per the words of Boyko Borisov, the European partners of Bulgaria advised the country to choose a main priority that is much easier and attainable (Vasilev, 2019). However, the development and subsequent EU integration of the countries from the region is of paramount importance for Sofia, according to Ms. Lilyana Pavlova (Interview 5). Furthermore, the signing of the Friendship Treaty gave the Bulgarian government confidence in the country's ability to tackle the very complicated issues that have been plaguing the Balkan peninsula. Therefore, even though it was not explicitly stated as a main priority during its presidency, Sofia wanted to facilitate the negotiations between Skopje and Athens (Interview 1).

The influence of the Bulgarian Presidency was confirmed by both Mr. Dzhambazki and Ms. Pavlova, who argued that it, along with the Friendship Treaty were the major driving forces behind the reconciliation between Greece and Macedonia. These claims contradict, to an extent, the rather Greco-centric arguments prevalent in the scholarly work on the subject. As described in the literature review, most of the academic community had focused on Greece as the ultimate decision maker, thereby neglecting the role of all other parties. The most prominent example of this reading of the conflict was the work of Tziampiris, where he stated that "Skopje's tortured path towards Brussels has consistently passed through Athens" (Ibid, 2012a, p.164). Yet, the development of the events that followed after the signing of the Friendship Treaty, and especially after the start of the Bulgarian Presidency, partially disproved this thesis. Skopje still had to resolve its outstanding dispute with Athens in order to move forward with its integration into both the EU and NATO, however, the central role of Greece in initiating and dictating this process was arguably taken by Sofia. The US Secretary of State solidified this argument by noting that Bulgaria demonstrated strong and positive leadership capabilities through its successful Council Presidency and its vital support for the signing of the Prespa Agreement, thereby strengthening peace and stability in the region (Pompeo, 2019).

In the six months in which Sofia held the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the positions of Skopje and Athens started to converge dramatically. According to one of the interviewed Ministry employees, the Greek government felt strong international pressure, due to Sofia's actions vis-à-vis Macedonia. The cooperative attitude demonstrated by Zaev's government, in addition to his willingness to compromise on sensitive issues, persuaded Tsipras

to soften the Greek position on the name dispute, despite the domestic political repercussions his government and party would suffer (Interview 2). Per Koukoudakis (2018), the general Greek public historically has had a very strong and unyielding position regarding the MND. Yet, this was something that Tsipras had to essentially ignore in order to even negotiate with the Macedonian side. Stemming from the implications of the Friendship Treaty, and the upcoming EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, expectations for a Greco-Macedonian reconciliation were high, thus the governments of both countries intensified their efforts on reaching a compromise on the name dispute. Therefore, the preliminary conclusion which could be drawn, is that if the Friendship Treaty gave the initial start of the reconciliation process between Skopje and Athens, the subsequent Bulgarian Council Presidency ensured that the negotiations would continue, with the ultimate goal being the final resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute.

Due to the nature of the six months long Presidency, the Western Balkan focus of Sofia was not at the center throughout the entire time. Yet, according to Ministry Employee 1, the main priority of the country still influenced both Athens and Skopje by providing them with an opportunity to end an arguably futile dispute, which should have been resolved a long time ago (Interview 1). Per the words of the Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency Ms. Pavlova, through its decision to tackle one of the most complicated topics available, Sofia set the stage for the dialogue that was needed between Greece and Macedonia, and which eventually led to the signing of the Prespa Agreement (Interview 5). The Bulgarian PM Boyko Borisov also shared a similar opinion, during an official meeting with his Macedonian counterpart. According to Borisov, it was not a coincidence that after 27 years of ongoing disputes for history, identity and culture, Greece and Macedonia came to an agreement during the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2019). His words were unequivocally supported during a ceremony in Munich, at which Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras received the Ewald von Kleist Award<sup>25</sup>. While giving his official statement, the Macedonian PM declared that he would share his award with his “good friend – the Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borisov” (Baksanova, 2019). Zaev elaborated further by stating that, because of the 2017 Friendship Treaty with Sofia, Macedonia was able to move forward and reach an agreement with Greece.

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<sup>25</sup> An award given by the Munich Security Conference to people who have made special contributions to peace and conflict resolution.

Through these statements, Zoran Zaev only underlined the undeniable role which Sofia had in facilitating the negotiations between his country and Greece. Yet, if the start of these negotiations was given by the signing of the 2017 Friendship Treaty, and their initial development occurred during the first five months of the Bulgarian Presidency, arguably their unofficial completion happened during the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May 2018.

### *5.3 The Sofia Summit*

The culmination of the six months long Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU was the EU-Western Balkans Summit that took place in Sofia on 17 May 2018. It managed to accomplish something that had not happened for 15 years, namely, to bring together the heads of government of all the 28 EU member states with all of their Western Balkan counterparts, the latter of which is an achievement in its own right<sup>26</sup>. The historic meeting was the pinnacle of Sofia's efforts to establish itself as a local political leader, following in the footsteps of Greece that did so in 2003 with the Thessaloniki Summit, which placed the European integration of the Western Balkans on the EU's agenda for the first time. According to Ministry Employee 1, the Bulgarian Presidency team was aware that the majority of the most controversial issues in the region would not be resolved during, or because of the Sofia Summit. However, the most important, albeit unofficial, priority of Sofia was to facilitate the negotiations between Skopje and Athens, with the hope of their conclusion happening either during the Summit itself or at least prior to the end of the Bulgarian Presidency (Interview 1). Although the official end of the MND did not occur during the meeting in Sofia, the signing of the Prespa Agreement happened exactly one month after its end, on 17 June 2018. Therefore, it becomes evident that the goal of Bulgaria, to help conclude the three decades long Greco-Macedonian name dispute, was attained.

As discussed previously, the unofficial start of the reconciliation process between Macedonia and Greece was given by the 2017 Friendship Treaty. The following Bulgarian

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<sup>26</sup> Stemming from the still ongoing disputes between Serbia and Kosovo, for the independence of the latter, as well as the historical animosity between Albania and Serbia, the gathering of their leaders in one place was considered an impossible feat.



Presidency served as a catalyst for the intensification of the two countries' efforts to reach an agreement. The Sofia Summit was the climax of these efforts since it provided an ideal opportunity for the leaders, along with other high-ranking government officials, of both countries to meet in person in an official setting. Per the words of Ministry Employee 3, the expected domestic political costs for the Greek Prime Minister and his government were extremely high, yet, due to the mounting international pressure and expectations to finally settle the country's outstanding conflict with Macedonia, he had to compromise to his own political detriment (Interview 3). In hindsight, the assessment made by the interviewee, regarding the consequences for Alexis Tsipras and his political future in Greece prove to be correct, since his party is expected to lose a big majority of the seats which it currently holds in the Greek parliament<sup>27</sup>. The same assessment could be made for Macedonia's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, but to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, all three Ministry Employees agreed that during the Sofia Summit both the Greek and Macedonian delegations were very motivated and eager to utilize the accumulated momentum in the preceding months to conclude their negotiations. Thus, the conclusion that can be derived from their assessment, is that Bulgaria managed to successfully predispose the two sides in seeing the Sofia Summit as the time and place where they should reach a preliminary agreement.

The role of Bulgaria in the entire resolution process of the name dispute complements the argument made by Voskopoulos (2008), where he characterized it and Greece as a local stability axis in the Balkans. Despite that in this instance the latter was one of the perpetrators of instability in the region, one of the two pillars of said axis managed to serve as a stability inducing force. Through its arguably far-sighted and sage policies, the government in Sofia was able to assume the position of a peacemaker by facilitating the reconciliation between Greece and Macedonia. In addition, it also brought together the leaders of the other Western Balkan nations, thus ensuring the peace and stability in the Balkan peninsula. According to the Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency Ms. Lilyana Pavlova, it was of paramount importance for Sofia, as well as the Balkans as a whole, to demonstrate to the other European nations that the region was prepared to move forward with its development and European integration during the EU-Western

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<sup>27</sup> As of the writing of this work in June 2019.

Balkans Summit (Interview 5). Arguably, the best example of this progress was the then ongoing rapprochement between Skopje and Athens.

The completion of the Greco-Macedonian negotiations during the Sofia Summit would have not been possible if Bulgaria had not positioned itself as an important factor in the overall balance of power in the MND. Since the signing of the Friendship Treaty, and following the start of its Council Presidency, Sofia naturally assumed the role of a mediator between its two neighbors. As noted by the Bulgarian MEP Mr. Angel Dzhambazki, through its actions, Sofia managed to sway Greece to soften its position vis-à-vis Macedonia on one hand, while on the other, to encourage Skopje to compromise, because of the prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration, which also coincided with the Bulgarian national interests (Interview 4). Thus, one could clearly see how Sofia utilized the “carrot and stick” approach of potential EU membership in order to lure Macedonia into the negotiations. This is a perfect example of the tremendous soft power which the EU possesses and how a relatively small member state can use it to its own advantage. As noted previously, the European Union has had a significant influence over the resolution of the MND. This influence, however, has been mostly indirect. Stemming from its sheer economic size and importance, the union exerts a strong gravitational pull over the entire Balkan peninsula. This was used by Sofia throughout the entire duration of its Council Presidency, and especially during the Sofia Summit, with the goal of solidifying its role as the regional EU leader for the Western Balkans. According to Ministry Employee 1, the envisioned culmination of Bulgaria’s efforts was the official resolution of the MND during its Council Presidency (Interview 1). Thus, the successful mediation and facilitation of the negotiations between Greece and Macedonia were of paramount importance during the Sofia Summit, when the Prime Ministers of the two countries, along with their delegations had the opportunity to meet with each other under the auspices of the EU.

While the official and unofficial bilateral meetings were crucial for the clarification of some of the finer details in the name dispute, the personal relationships between the leaders were perhaps even more important for the resolution of the MND. According to all three Ministry Employees, the existing rapport between not only Alexis Tsipras and Zoran Zaev, but Boyko Borisov as well, was of vital importance for the dispute’s settlement. Ministry Employee 3 contrasted Zaev’s relationship with his Greek and Bulgarian counterparts to the one which his

predecessor Nikola Gruevski had. While Gruevski was regarded as highly controversial nationalistic leader, with little will to compromise or negotiate, Zaev was seen as his polar opposite (Interview 3). The merit of these claims is undeniable, since the reconciliation between Sofia and Skopje begun after the current Macedonian PM assumed office in May 2017. An attestation for the radically different policies and attitude of Zoran Zaev is the fact that only three months after he became Prime Minister, Skopje signed the Friendship Treaty with Sofia. Thus, the fact that Greece and Macedonia were able to reach an agreement, given the existing political context, in addition to the good personal relationships the leaders of the countries had with one another, becomes less surprising, but no less important. Moreover, once the role of these personal relationships is taken into consideration, the statement of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, in which he claimed that it was not a coincidence that Skopje and Athens were able to overcome their differences during the Bulgarian Presidency, becomes even clearer.

The culmination of the 2018 Sofia Summit was the official Sofia Declaration, released by the leaders of the 28 member states. Although it did not provide any concrete assurances to any of the Western Balkan countries regarding their potential EU integration, it did reaffirm the union's future commitment to the region. This was a sign of success for the Bulgarian government, since it managed to not only bring forth this highly problematic region of Europe, but it also succeeded in ensuring the EU's continued focus on it, evident in Article 16 of the Sofia Declaration. According to Ministry Employee 1, Sofia was able to assume the mantle of the regional EU leader for its fellow WB states, thereby accomplishing one of its unofficial goals (Interview 1). Nevertheless, the major issue that Bulgaria unofficially attempted to tackle throughout the entire duration of its Council Presidency was also acknowledged, albeit indirectly, in the official press release. Article 5 of the Sofia Declaration discursively referenced the ongoing negotiations between Greece and Macedonia, by stating that the EU supported the finding and implementation of "definitive, inclusive and binding solutions" to the regional bilateral disputes (European Council, 2018). Thus, the international pressure exerted over Athens and Skopje to find a solution to the name dispute increased even more. According to both the three Ministry Employees, as well as Ms. Pavlova, the role which the 2018 Sofia Summit played in the resolution of the MND was undeniable, because it managed to bring the leaders of the two countries together. Thus, despite not being officially announced during the Sofia Summit, the resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute arguably took place in Bulgaria's capital.

#### *5.4 The End of the Macedonian Name Dispute*

The Prespa Agreement, signed on 17 June 2018, officially ended the 27 years long Macedonian Name Dispute. It took place exactly one month after the end of the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia which, as discussed in the prior section, managed to bring together the Greek and Macedonian Prime Ministers, to facilitate their negotiations, thereby making the signing of the historic Greco-Macedonian agreement possible. However, all of these events would have arguably not taken place, at least not that quickly, if it was not for the 2017 Friendship Treaty between Bulgaria and Macedonia. The influence of this seemingly unrelated Bulgarian-Macedonian treaty over the Prespa Agreement is undeniable. According to the Bulgarian MEP Mr. Angel Dzhambazki, “the Prespa Agreement would have not been possible without the existence of the Friendship Treaty” (Interview 4). His opinion was also shared by the Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency Ms. Lilyana Pavlova, who argued that the reconciliation and rapprochement between Sofia and Skopje gave impetus to the negotiations that led to the conclusion of the MND (Interview 5).

The significance of the 2017 Friendship Treaty in the context of the 2018 Prespa Agreement cannot be understated. The influence which the former has had over the latter, both direct and indirect, is undeniable. The indirect role of the agreement between Skopje and Sofia was already discussed in detail in the prior sections. Yet, they also do share a lot of similarities in their wording, originating in the closely related issues the two documents were aimed at resolving. Article 3 and 4 of the Prespa Agreement are almost identical to Article 11 of the Friendship Treaty. Both ensure the territorial integrity of the signatories, thereby ending any and all fears Athens has had over the years. Furthermore, Article 4 of the Prespa Agreement reaffirms Skopje’s commitment that no sections of its constitution can be interpreted as a basis on which potential irredentist claims could be made in the future, similar to Article 11 Paragraph 5 of the Friendship Treaty, both of which address the already amended Article 49 of the 1991 Macedonian constitution. Finally, Articles 7 and 8 of the Prespa Agreement directly resolved the historical and identity aspects of the MND. They underline the lack of connection between today’s North Macedonia and the Ancient Kingdom of Macedon’s history, language and culture. Thus, ending the debates surrounding the attempted cultural appropriation by Skopje. It is

important to note that Article 8 Paragraph 5 of the Prespa Agreement outlined the establishment of a “Joint Inter-Disciplinary Committee of Experts on historic, archeological and educational matters”, identical to the already existing one, bearing the same name, between Bulgaria and Macedonia, created by Article 8 Paragraph 2 of the Friendship Treaty. This is yet another example of the direct influence which the 2017 accord signed between Sofia and Skopje had over the historic Greco-Macedonian treaty. Furthermore, it also solidifies the argument of Mr. Dzhabazki, who unequivocally stated that without the existence of the Friendship Treaty, the Prespa Agreement would have not been possible.

The Prespa Agreement officially renamed the then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia *erga omnes*, thereby ending the name dispute and clearing Skopje’s path towards its much-desired Euro-Atlantic integration. The conclusion of the MND was met with great excitement among the international community. High ranking officials from all over the world congratulated the two Prime Ministers for their political bravery and determination. The UN Secretary-General remarked that “even seemingly intractable issues can be resolved through dialogue and political will”, while his counterpart from the Regional Cooperation Council<sup>28</sup> Goran Svilanovic stated that the agreement represented an encouragement for the entire Western Balkan region, “showing that the most difficult issues can be resolved if there is determination and vision of the better future”(Guterres, 2019; Svilanovic, 2018). In addition, the High Representative of the EU, along with the Commissioner for Enlargement, both of which were present during the signing of the historic Greco-Macedonian treaty, noted that the EU’s support proved that the power of diplomacy was able to resolve even “the most difficult of issues” (Mogherini & Hahn, 2018). The remarks of these officials only underline the significance of the Prespa Agreement. As discussed in the prior chapters, the Balkan peninsula is infamous with its volatility and abundance of ethnic conflicts and disputes. The resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute arguably gave hope to both the region, as well as the international community, that the prediction made by John Agnew, according to whom “the Balkans can never win”, will not come to fruition (Ibid, 2009, p.436). Unfortunately for Sofia, many of the international observers did not directly correlate its actions, efforts and role to the resolution of

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<sup>28</sup> The RCC is a regional organization whose goal is to promote the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries from the Balkan peninsula.

the MND. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the nearly three decades long name dispute provided new hope for the region, by demonstrating that the local actors have accumulated enough political capital and maturity that had enabled them to abandon the usage of hard power in the resolution of their disagreements. The rather clever usage of the EU's soft power by Sofia, in conjunction with the political will demonstrated by Athens and Skopje, provided a solid foundation for an optimistic outlook for the future of the Balkan peninsula, a future which has shed the shackles of the zero-sum game, confrontational, nationalistic policies of the past that had made the region Europe's powder keg.

## ***6. Conclusion***

The Macedonian Name Dispute was by far the biggest obstacle in front of the young Balkan state on its path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The protracted and bitter feud with Greece, that lasted for 27 years, challenged many of the foundations on which modern nation states are based on. This thesis aimed at presenting the reader with a detailed examination of some of the many aspects of this complicated and very sensitive issue. In order to do so, however, it needed to establish the historical context of the larger Macedonian Question, thereby positioning all the important players, which would serve as the basis for the following analysis. The main aim of this work was to explore the role which the 2017 Friendship Treaty and the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU had over the resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute and the signing of the 2018 Prespa Agreement. Based on the findings presented in the analytical sections of this study, the overall definitive conclusion that can be derived, is that both the Friendship Treaty and the Bulgarian Council Presidency had a significant impact over the positive and timely resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute.

Stemming from the scope of this work, it was not possible to explore all the details of the name dispute. Thus, fellow academics might find aspects of the MND which this thesis was not able to analyze in detail. Unfortunately, one of the limitations of this study was the inability to include the opinions and analyses of either Greek or Macedonian officials, which could have greatly complemented the arguments that were presented. In addition, the personal relationships between the three Prime Ministers, are a facet of the MND that this study was not able to explore in more detail. Thus, their analysis could further deepen the scholarly understanding of their role not only in the resolution of the name dispute, but in intergovernmental relations as a whole. Furthermore, a more detailed examination of the impact of Zoran Zaev would greatly benefit the field, since his undeniable central role was of paramount importance for the rapprochement between Skopje and both of its EU neighbors. Also, a similar analysis of the political will and determination displayed by Alexis Tsipras, to his own domestic political detriment, would give a new perspective over the dynamics of the MND. Finally, a more in-depth examination of the overall influence of the EU over the name dispute would be very appropriate. Although, this study referenced the rather indirect impact which the union had over the name dispute, it was

nevertheless focused primarily on Sofia's role in facilitating the Greco-Macedonian reconciliation. Thus, an investigation of the effect of the "Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee" of the European Parliament, along with the other tools the EU has at its disposal, could potentially shed some light onto the actions of not only Macedonia, but Greece and Bulgaria as well.

The goal of this thesis was not to give a definitive answer regarding all the questions and factors that led to the resolution of the name dispute, rather it only attempted to present the reader with an analysis of one of the many factors that were involved in the successful resolution of the 27 years long dispute. As remarked by Mr. Angel Dzhambazki, "the Prespa Agreement would have not been possible without the existence of the Friendship Treaty" (Interview 4). Thus, the overall conclusion of this study is that Bulgaria, through its actions and policies, managed to contribute significantly for the signing of the Prespa Agreement and the overall resolution of the Macedonian Name Dispute.

This conclusion, however, should not be interpreted as being the definitive answer to all the questions surrounding the Greco-Macedonian feud. Rather, it should be regarded as a small contribution to the overall academic knowledge on the subject, which presented only one of the many aspects that led to the resolution of the MND. The hypothesis based on which this thesis was conceived, considered the role mainly of Bulgaria as a third party in the bilateral dispute between Greece and Macedonia, and to a lesser extend the indirect influence of the EU and other non-regional actors. The rationale behind this decision was the central historical role of Sofia in the creation and development of the larger Macedonian Question, a part of which was the name dispute. As described in the historical context chapter, Bulgaria was the state most heavily invested in the MQ throughout most of its duration. Sofia lost its central role to Greece only after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Macedonian state, which led to the official start of the MND. Nevertheless, Bulgaria retained its key role in the dispute through its support, direct or indirect, for either of the two belligerents. This became especially prominent following the country's accession into the European Union in January 2007, which also coincided with the start of the ten-year rule of the former Macedonian PM Nikola Gruevski. As described in the literature review, this was the time when the relationship between Sofia and Skopje dramatically worsened and marked the, albeit unofficial, siding of Bulgaria with Greece



in the name dispute. The following ten years for Macedonia were described by Mr. Dzhambazki as “being lost”, due to the lack of progress in either the name dispute or the country’s integration into the EU, the latter of which was dependent on the former (Interview 4).

The event that sparked the breakthrough of the ten-year impasse and served as the starting point for the analysis presented in this thesis, was the signing of the 2017 Friendship Treaty between Bulgaria and Macedonia. This agreement shifted the balance of power in the MND by depriving Greece of its major ally in its dispute with Macedonia. The following Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the country’s focus on the integration of the Western Balkans only exacerbated Athens’ politically unfavorable position vis-à-vis Skopje. The mounting international pressure, along with the then upcoming EU-Western Balkans Summit on 17 May 2018, precipitated the negotiations. It is also important to note that the personal relationships and the existing rapport amongst the three leaders, namely Zaev, Tsipras and Borisov, also greatly contributed for the rather swift reconciliation between Greece and Macedonia. Thus, following nearly three decades of tension, mistrust and confrontation the Macedonian Name Dispute received its fitting conclusion near the shores of lake Prespa, on 17 June 2018.

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## **Appendix 1**

### ***List of interviews:***

Interview 1; Ministry Employee 1; Conducted in person on 17 April 2019 in Sofia, Bulgaria; Duration: 30 minutes.

Interview 2; Ministry Employee 2; Conducted in person on 8 May 2019 in Sofia, Bulgaria; Duration: 30 minutes.

Interview 3; Ministry Employee 3; Conducted in person on 13 June 2019 in Sofia, Bulgaria; Duration: 40 minutes.

Interview 4; Angel Dzhambazki; Member of the European Parliament; Conducted in person on 10 June 2019 in Sofia, Bulgaria; Duration: 30 minutes.

Interview 5; Lilyana Pavlova; Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU; Conducted in person on 13 June 2019 in Sofia, Bulgaria; Duration: 45 minutes.

## **Appendix 2**

### ***Interview Questions:***

1. In your opinion, what was the overall role of Bulgaria in the Macedonian Name Dispute?
2. What influence did the more active regional Bulgarian foreign policy had over the dispute between Athens and Skopje?
3. In your opinion, to what extend did the 2017 Friendship Treaty between Bulgaria and Macedonia contributed to the rapprochement between Athens and Skopje?
4. How important was the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU for the signing of the Prespa Agreement?
5. What was the role of the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May 2018 for finalizing the negotiations between Athens and Skopje?



### Appendix 3



Universiteit Leiden

#### Interview Consent for International Relations Master Thesis

The research project is on Bulgaria's role in the Greco-Macedonian name dispute, carried out by Asen Voynov, a student in the MA International Relations degree programme, specializing in European Union Studies, at Leiden University. The interviewer (the investigator) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and answer any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed form.

#### **Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Asen Voynov from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the Greco-Macedonian name dispute and Bulgaria's role in its resolution.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue may be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

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Signature

Date

---

Signature of the Investigator                      Date

For further information, please contact:

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