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# **Unfinished Business: The Importance of NATO Membership for Macedonia**

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## **Introduction**

The Republic of Macedonia has served as a beacon of democracy, liberty, and economic freedom in Southeastern Europe for over twenty years. However, despite its success, it remains unable to join NATO or the European Union (EU) due to Greece's objections to Macedonia's constitutional name. In an effort to score domestic political points and silence the ethnic Macedonian population in northern Greece, the Greek government has used this so-called "name dispute" to prevent Macedonia from entering NATO and the EU.

Looking towards the west, it has long been a goal of the Macedonian government to attain membership in NATO. Since 1993, the Macedonian government has worked steadfastly in pursuit of that goal, enacting all the necessary reforms. Macedonia has also established itself as an unwavering ally of NATO and its member states.

Despite meeting all technical criteria for membership for the last four years, Greece's blockade continues to prohibit Macedonia from joining the Alliance. This blockade has been ruled illegal under international law by the International Court of Justice, as per its December 5, 2011 ruling on Macedonia vs. Greece.

Macedonia deserves to be offered membership in NATO at the upcoming Chicago Summit on May 20-21. Macedonia has proven itself to be an integral military ally of NATO with its participation in NATO missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo. Given the changing security needs of Europe, Macedonia's membership would be of great benefit not only to Macedonia, but also to NATO.

## **Background**

Macedonia gained its independence in 1991, the only former Yugoslav state to democratically attain its independence without bloodshed. The government worked quickly to align itself with the western, democratic community, and in December 1993, the Macedonian Parliament voted unanimously to take the necessary steps to join NATO.

The first milestone was achieved in 1995, when Macedonia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). Under this agreement, Macedonia entered into a bilateral partnership with individual NATO member states, stabilizing Macedonia's government and diminishing potential threats to peace in the region. As a result of the PfP, cooperation blossomed, allowing for joint air force exercises, collective defense systems, and cooperative security arrangements.

Once part of the NATO framework, Macedonia proved to be an effective and valuable ally. NATO members agreed it was time to bring Macedonia fully within the Alliance. During the 1999 NATO Summit in Washington, Macedonia was officially granted candidate status, where a Membership Action Plan (MAP) was outlined, detailing the steps required for membership.

### **Components of MAP**

- Willingness to settle international, ethnic or external territorial disputes by peaceful means
- Willingness to contribute to NATO's defense and missions
- Devotion of resources to armed forces to meet the commitments of membership
- Securitization of sensitive information
- Making domestic legislation compatible with NATO cooperation

Since attaining MAP in 1999, Macedonia has achieved all of the required reforms. For instance, Macedonia amended its domestic legislation, allowing their troops to deploy on NATO missions without prior legislative approval. Compulsory military service was abolished, making the Macedonian Army the first in the region to employ a completely professional fighting force. All the while, the Macedonian government continued to increase defense spending. Macedonia is the only country in Southeast Europe to have full-demarcated borders with all of its neighbors, thus having no-border disputes. By the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Macedonia had met all technical qualifications for membership, and it appeared as if they would be allowed to join with Albania, who had gained its MAP alongside Macedonia in 1999, and Croatia, who had gained its MAP in 2002.

Greece openly threatened to veto Macedonia's membership in the days, weeks, and months preceding the 2008 Bucharest Summit over the so-called "name dispute." To the consternation of the Macedonian people, the Macedonian government, and vast majority of NATO members at the Bucharest Summit, only Albania and Croatia were invited to join, leaving Macedonia outside of the Alliance. Historically, such disputes did not affect a country's ability to gain membership (as perhaps best exemplified by the land dispute between Slovenia and Croatia that taken outside of the alliance in order allow Croatia's membership). However, this did not stop Greece from using its veto power to block Macedonia's membership.

### **An Established Record of Success**

The benefits of Macedonian accession to NATO are clear, as Macedonia has played a key role in aiding multiple NATO and UN-led missions, while maintaining stability and democracy in Southeastern Europe. Yet, notwithstanding Macedonia's numerous contributions to NATO, they are not given the same opportunities that other NATO candidates seeking membership are given. Macedonia is allowed to protect the tent of NATO, however, not able to sleep in it.

For instance, given its shared border with Kosovo, Macedonia has been a key ally in supporting NATO's efforts there, helping the country move towards a peaceful future. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1999, Macedonia received over 360,000 refugees from Kosovo. To put that massive number into context, the Kosovar refugees increased Macedonia's overall population by over 16%. Additionally, Macedonia has hosted the logistics headquarters for the NATO-led KFOR mission, proving to be invaluable in the continuation and execution of that mission. Macedonian companies are now some of Kosovo's largest investors.

Macedonia's assistance has not been limited to its neighborhood. Macedonia is one of the leading contributors to NATO's ISAF mission, providing 225 troops, one of the largest troop commitments per capita, and the fourth largest. Macedonia's presence has been vital in securing stability for the Afghan government, preventing attacks by insurgent groups, and protecting ISAF headquarters in Kabul.

Macedonian armed forces have also played key roles in other NATO and UN missions in Bosnia and Lebanon, as well as aiding in the United States-led mission in Iraq with combat troops. Overall, these actions have helped to make Macedonia a net exporter of security.

“[The Macedonians] have an excellent understanding of sniper employment and dismounted operations. This allowed Delta Company the ability to maneuver in mountainous terrain, and to provide forward observers.”<sup>1</sup> – Capt. Scott Langlands describing the invaluable assistance of the Macedonian Rangers in Afghanistan

“My only reservation about the Macedonians, is that we don't have more of them”<sup>2</sup> – Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Joseph Gleichenhaus

### Macedonia's Missions Abroad After Acquiring MAP<sup>3</sup>

Operation	Organizer	Dates
Althea, Bosnia	EU	July 2006 – Present
Iraqi Freedom, Iraq	USA	June 2003 – December 2008
ISAF, Afghanistan	NATO	August 2002 – Present
KFOR, Kosovo	UN	April 2005 – Present
UNIFIL, Lebanon	UN	May 2007 – June 2009

### The so-called "name dispute"

The Greek government has been at odds with Macedonia's name since Macedonia gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Greece's campaign of nationalist rhetoric culminated in a three-year illegal trade embargo of Macedonia, which was found in violation of EU rules and regulations by the European Commission. This hostile act, in combination with UN-mandated sanctions against Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia, left the fledgling country teetering on the brink of collapse, with unemployment spiking to almost 70 percent. Despite this hostile action, in September 1995, Greece and Macedonia managed to formalize bilateral relations with an Interim Accord under the authority of the United Nations. Under the Accord, the Republic of Macedonia made a variety of highly controversial concessions, including changing the national flag in order to appease objections from Athens. Macedonia also removed certain clauses from

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/rakkasans-team-up-with-macedonian-rangers.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://iraq.usembassy.gov/iraq\\_in\\_focus\\_06022008.html](http://iraq.usembassy.gov/iraq_in_focus_06022008.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.morm.gov.mk/>

its constitution related to showing concern for Macedonian communities outside of the country's borders, which Greece had falsely described as "irredentist."

However, Greece was far from satisfied with those appeasement measures, and, in the context of the early 90s, and the bloodshed that terrorized the former Yugoslavia, the Greek government's trade embargo was threatening Macedonia's very survival and crippling its entire economy. Eventually, the Macedonian government was coerced into accepting a temporary reference as "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in the United Nations and other international institutions, until Greece's "name dispute" was "resolved." The "temporary reference" has lasted almost 20 years, and Greek government's position is as recalcitrant as ever.

To date, 133 countries fully recognize Macedonia by its rightful, constitutional name, including sixteen NATO members, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Canada. The majority of the world's countries, representing the vast majority of the world's population, fully respect Macedonia's sovereignty and right to self-determination, which includes the right to choose its own name.

Considering the context at the time, and the power imbalance between the two countries, Greece agreed to very few concessions of its own under the Interim Accord. However, one of those few concessions it did make, under Article 11, was that it would agree to neither block nor object to Macedonia's membership in international bodies, provided that Macedonia used the temporary appellation agreed to in the Interim Accord.

In a disappointing gesture of intransigence and bad faith, Greece unilaterally reneged on this important commitment in 2008 at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, and blocked Macedonia's bid to join the Alliance.

Immediately after the veto, the Macedonian government sued Greece before the International Court of Justice, on the grounds that it had broken its commitment and had violated international law. Three years later, on December 5, 2011, the ICJ ruled 15-1, unequivocally confirming that Greece had, in fact, violated international law by blocking Macedonia's bid to join NATO in 2008.

After the ruling, the Foreign Minister of Macedonia stated, "[t]he decision of the Court marks a further step down the road to membership [in NATO and the EU]". Greece's only official reaction was to state it was "reviewing" the ICJ's decision. Meanwhile, the NATO Secretary-General announced: "[the ICJ ruling] does not affect the decision taken by NATO Allies at the Bucharest Summit in 2008. We agreed that an invitation will be extended to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached." Thus, Greece willfully reneged on its promise and ignored international law, and then NATO high command acquiesced to this deeply irresponsible behavior.

## Military Spending As Percentage of GDP<sup>4</sup>

Rank	Country	% of GDP	Date of Information
1	Oman	11.4	2005 est.
2	Qatar	10	2005 est.
3	Saudi Arabia	10	2005 est.
4	Jordan	8.6	2006
5	Iraq	8.6	2006
6	Israel	7.3	2006
7	Yemen	6.6	2006
8	Eritrea	6.3	2006
<b>9</b>	<b>Macedonia</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2005 est.</b>
10	Syria	5.9	2005 est.

### Solution

The Republic of Macedonia has lived peacefully in a region that has a long history of conflict, partisans, and war. Indeed, Macedonia has been an example to its neighbors. It is the only country to gain independence from Yugoslavia without war. As a model of democracy in the region, Macedonia has worked tirelessly with Greece to find some kind of middle ground. Unfortunately, Greece has continued to drag its feet by insisting on prolonged negotiations without any intention of backing down from its original stance. Greece continues to engage in this posturing at the expense of NATO, and its mission of a more secure world. Given Greece's unwillingness to settle, it is incumbent upon the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and NATO Allies to use their influence to finally bring a resolution to this grandstanding on the part of Athens.

The United States' allies in Europe will have to shoulder a greater burden for their security in the coming century. The current global financial crisis has prevented many NATO members from honoring the minimum spending commitments required by NATO on military procurements. NATO membership for Macedonia will play a key role in ensuring a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

At the 1999 Washington Summit, Macedonia was presented with its Membership Action Plan (MAP), which began the process of Macedonian accession to NATO. Over the years, Macedonia has worked hard to meet all obligations and enact all necessary government and social reforms. The preparations are now complete.

Politically, Macedonian governments have shown an enormous capacity for patience and flexibility, in the face of Greece's ongoing refusal to negotiate in good faith. Macedonia even capitulated to Greece's objections over the design of the Macedonian flag, and accepted a temporary reference in international organizations. These controversial decisions were not made

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<sup>4</sup> Between the years 2005 and 2006. CIA World Factbook

lightly, and one of the only reasons they were made at all was to move forward with the NATO membership process.

Macedonia has made tangible contributions to NATO, and its soldiers have risked their lives on NATO missions. Despite non-membership, the Macedonian Army has been a great ally to the Alliance, sending hundreds of combat troops to ISAF in Afghanistan, hosting the NATO logistics command for the KFOR, and various other important missions. Macedonia also made major progress in domestic security issues, attaining Tier I status in the fight against human trafficking. Macedonia is now a net exporter of security in the world, and will be an invaluable asset to NATO. Going forward, Macedonia's membership will also be vital to the stability of the Balkans.

NATO membership will also have domestic benefits for Macedonia. First and foremost, Macedonia will finally have a seat at the table in Brussels when major decisions are being made. Macedonia has remained committed to the Alliance, but has remained outside the decision-making structures, leaving them politically disenfranchised. Membership will ensure the unitary, territorial integrity of Macedonia and lay to rest many worries about future conflicts. Finally, NATO membership has historically allowed for an increase in foreign direct investments, something which will allow Macedonia to continue to grow going forward, overcoming the terrible effects of Greece's economic embargo, which have a lasting effect till today. Macedonia's current unemployment rate ranges between 33-36%, down from around 70% during Greece's economic embargo.

## **Conclusion**

Macedonian membership will create a new momentum for integration across the Western Balkans, which is currently lacking. Since 1993, Macedonia has worked extremely hard to become a full member of NATO, meeting or exceeding all requirements. The Macedonians are firmly committed to enshrining their position as an essential part of the western, democratic community.

As such, we strongly urge NATO to accept Macedonia's membership at the upcoming NATO Summit in Chicago. Macedonia has shown that it clearly deserves to be a part of NATO. Greece's veto was illegal under the Interim Accord, and as a result, other NATO members must step in and urge Greece to no longer inhibit Macedonia's membership, and allow Macedonia to finally take its place at the table in Chicago. Macedonia has done its part, now it is the time for NATO to do theirs.