



THE SECURITIZATION AND DE-SECURITIZATION OF THE NAME ISSUE BETWEEN GREECE AND NORTH MACEDONIA: A NORTH MACEDONIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the securitization (1991-2016) and de-securitization (2016-2018) of the 27-year-old name issue between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. The securitization period is further divided into sub-periods based on the varying degrees of securitization in Skopje's discourse due to internal and external developments. Accordingly, between 1991 and 1993, fearing that the state's survival is in jeopardy, North Macedonian authorities engaged in a lower degree of securitization. After gaining UN membership in 1993, in a relatively safe position, they preferred a higher degree of securitization until the late 1990s. The degree of securitization once again lowered in the early 2000s as the country nearly slid into civil war in 2001 and ruled in its aftermath by weak coalition governments that were unable to deal extensively with foreign relations issues. In this period, North Macedonia also behaved like a good international citizen to reap some benefits in the form of progress in the EU and NATO membership. A higher degree of securitization in the discourse started in 2006, with the election of the right-wing nationalist Nikola Gruevski and lasted until 2016.

Keywords: Macedonian Name Issue, Securitization Theory, Greece, Prespa Agreement.

YUNANİSTAN VE KUZEY MAKEDONYA ARASINDAKİ İSİM SORUNUNUN GÜVENLİKLEŞTİRİLMESİ VE GÜVENLİK DIŞILAŞTIRILMASI: BİR KUZEY MAKEDONYA PERSPEKTİFİ

ÖZ

Bu araştırma, Yunanistan ve Kuzey Makedonya arasındaki 27 senelik isim sorununun güvenikleştirme (1991-2016) ve güvenlik dışılaştırma (2016-2018) süreçlerini incelemektedir. Araştırma ayrıca, isim sorununun güvenikleştirme dönemi, Üsküp'ün iç ve dış gelişmelere bağlı olarak güvenikleştirme söyleminde meydana getirdiği farklılaşmalar üzerinden alt dönemlere ayrılmaktadır. Kuzey Makedonyalı otoriteler, isim sorununu devletin bekasının tehlikede olduğu 1991-1993 yılları arasında düşük seviyede güvenikleştirmiştir. Güvenikleştirme söylem ve pratiklerinin tonu, BM üyeliğinin elde edildiği 1993 yılından 1990'ların sonuna kadar, nispeten güvenli bir ortamda, yüksek bir seviyede seyretmiştir. 1990'ların sonundan 2006 yılına kadar, önce iç savaşın eşiğine gelen, sonra da zayıf koalisyon hükümetleri tarafından yönetilen Kuzey Makedonya, bir yandan da Avrupa ve NATO entegrasyonu süreçlerini hızlandırmak amaçlı uluslararası platformda uzlaşmacı bir tavır sergilemiştir. Dolayısıyla bu dönemde Kuzey Makedonyalı otoritelerin güvenikleştirici söylem ve pratiklerinin seviyesinde düşüş gözlemlenmiştir. 2006'da ise sağcı popülist Nikola Gruevski'nin Cumhurbaşkanı seçilmesiyle isim sorununda yüksek düzeyli bir güvenikleştirme dönemine girilmiş ve bu durum 2016 yılına kadar devam etmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Makedonya İsim Sorunu, Güvenikleştirme Teorisi, Yunanistan, Prespa Antlaşması.

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Introduction

The Macedonian name issue is part of a complex diplomatic controversy between Greece and North Macedonia over historical narratives, identity, culture, and symbols. Felt threatened by the constitutional and historical claims of the newly established Slavo-Macedonian state to the name Macedonia and the legacy of the Ancient Macedonians, Athens adopted a hard-line policy toward Greece's northern neighbor. On the other hand, the response of Skopje was no less extreme. The two neighbors hardly compromised on their initial positions of claiming the name Macedonia and the legacy of the Ancient Macedonians as their own while both accusing the other of pursuing an irredentist and confrontational agenda, which further increased tensions.

The uncompromising stance taken by consecutive North Macedonian and Greek governments after 1991 caused the conflict to evolve into a long-standing protracted crisis in the heart of the Balkans. Greece began its diplomatic measures to bring Macedonia to its knees by blocking international recognition of the new state, constitutionally named "the Republic of Macedonia". It also imposed an economic embargo on North Macedonia's exports from the region, and blocked its admittance to the United Nations (UN) and integration into NATO and the European Union (EU). Although the international community frequently tried to mediate, the dispute remained politically and legislatively unresolved until the signing of the Prespa Agreement in 2018.

As part of their international diplomatic struggle to prove the legitimacy of their diverging narratives over the name Macedonia, both countries' authorities conducted assertive campaigns across multiple media platforms. Both parties also developed offensive media strategies to deliver their version of historical 'truths' regarding the historical heritage of the name to international and domestic audiences. Consequently, hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Skopje, Athens, Thessaloniki, and several other cities, to support their government's position, which further provoked a securitized environment.

Drawing on insights from the analytical framework of the Copenhagen School's (CS) securitization theory, the main argument of this article is that the 27 years of name issue between Greece and North Macedonia have witnessed periods of securitization (1991-2016) and de-securitization (2016-2018). The securitization period is also divided into sub-periods based on the evolving securitization patterns of the North Macedonian leaders due to the internal developments and changing international circumstances.

More specifically, between 1991 and 1993, fearing for the state's survival, North Macedonia engaged in a lower degree of securitization. In this period, the name issue, was securitized in the discourse of the North Macedonian leaders as an existential threat to the collective identity of the Macedonian people. After gaining admission to the UN in 1993, the securitization discourse has continued to dominate the relations and it became less compromising. However, compared to the previous period, the discourse of existential threat to the collective identity was lowered if not totally eliminated. Then, after the 1998 general elections, North Macedonian leaders once more softened their discourse of securitization and became more compromising, however, the name issue hardly came to the agenda as the country nearly slid into civil war in the early 2000s and ruled in its aftermath by weak coalition governments that were unable to deal extensively with foreign relations issues. After the settlement of the internal dispute, the North Macedonian leaders decided to behave like a good international citizen to gain from moves towards European and NATO integration and adopted a more conciliatory approach through their readiness for dialogue. In 2006, the discourse of securitization has come to dominate the major policy domain after the election of right-wing nationalist Nikola

Gruevski. This period coincided with turmoil in North Macedonia due to the impacts of the Eurozone crisis and Greece's veto on Macedonia's NATO and EU membership in 2008 and 2009, respectively. This situation continued for a decade until Gruevski stepped down in 2016 and was replaced in 2017 by a social democratic government under the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) led by Zoran Zaev who worked to de-securitize the conflict and normalize relations with Greece.

There is an extensive literature on the name issue and Macedonian identity which have tried to establish a connection between the two (e.g. Danforth, 1993; Cowan, 2000; Balalovska, 2004; Vankovska, 2010; Manzinger, 2020; Kalampalikis, 2020). The relevant literature has also traced the roots of the name issue in Macedonian history of nationalism (e.g. Kofos, 1986; Zahariadis, 1994; Parkas, 1997; Pettifer, 2001; Floudas, 2002; Rossos, 2008; Stawowy et al. 2008; Loizides, 2020). For instance, according to Kofos (1986, p. 170-172), the choice of the name Macedonia was intentional and served as a catalyst in the identity building process of North Macedonia. Disputes over ethnic origins led Macedonia's Slavs to trace their roots back to ancient rulers like Philip and Alexander the Great. Other studies have focused on the dispute's security dimension (e.g. Jano, 2009; Lamovska, 2012; Xheladini, 2016). Yet, despite examining the dispute in these terms, these studies have not analyzed the securitization of the name issue from North Macedonian point of view and through discussing North Macedonians as securitizing actors. Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the securitization of the name of 'Macedonia' to unravel how and why this name has been securitized by the North Macedonian authorities.

To lay the foundation for this argument, the first section gives a theoretical framework (Copenhagen School's securitization theory) to describe and analyze the name issue. The second part explains how the specific dispute emerged between North Macedonia and Greece and discuss the former's phases of securitization narrative until 2016. The third part describes the subsequent de-securitization and other improvements in relations that enabled the signing of the Prespa Agreement. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings.

The Copenhagen School and the Securitization Approach

The changing nature of the global context, interstate relations, and particularly the structure of conflicts towards the end of the Cold War required new approaches for the study of International Relations that embraced new visions and tools. In this regard securitization theory, which is associated with the Copenhagen School of Security Studies found its way into the security studies as a new framework. In this context the CS have taken away the security studies from its traditional focus and methods, and broadened the concept through introducing a body of new ways to rethink security and understand how issues become securitized (Emmers, 2013, p. 132).

Accordingly, prominent members of the CS, such as Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, developed a new view of security in which they emphasized the role of language in threat depictions which became known as "securitization theory" (Emmers, 2013, p. 131). Inspired by social constructivism, the CS members believe that (in) security, including the sense of threat and vulnerability, is socially constructed and intersubjective (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 57). Anything can become a security threat, whether or not it is "real" or "exists", if it is named as such by a security actor and matched with a speech act (a security act that solicit approval from the audience) (Higoshiro, 2004, p. 349). Securitizing actors in international relations are usually state representatives, governments or lobbyists who represent an issue as an existential threat to the referent objects who prioritize and project a designated threat as a security challenge. Their

presentation of the issue as a threat allow them in the domestic politics to go beyond the established rules in dealing with them (Higoshiro, 2004, p. 349). In foreign policy, the process results with an escalation that reduces the chances of resolving the problem between the conflicting parties (Buzan et al. 2003, p. 491)

Guzzini (2011, p. 335) argues that securitization is not intermittent but rather a continuous process of constructing social reality, which allows for higher or lower levels of securitization. He further claims that the level of securitization can change due to a “whirlpool effect”. This explains the accumulation of various developments, such as the inclusion of actors with different social identities, or domestic or international developments that fundamentally change the socio-political and economic structure of the society where the referent objects live. Ultimately, such developments can either increase or decrease the level of securitization. This paper apprehends securitization as a continuous process with higher and lower degrees of securitization.

De-securitization, on the other hand, means redefining the issue from being an emergency to being part of the ordinary public space. As described by the CS (1998, p. 4) it is “the shifting of the issue out of the emergency model and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 4).

The Name Issue and the Period of Moderate Securitization (1991-1993)

During the early 1990s, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, one of the six constituent republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, took steps towards independence. On 25 January 1991, the parliament of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia unanimously adopted a motion declaring the republic sovereign territory and on 16 April 1991, amended the constitution to change the country’s name to the Republic of Macedonia. On 8 September 1991 a referendum was held regarding independence. On the eve of the referendum, the first elected President of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, then a member of the Macedonian Forum for Preparation of a Macedonian National Program, made a statement which was one of the early signs of the name issue:

In these territories, different Balkan states have made their own arrangements for Macedonia. To all, we need to say today what Macedonia truly is, why it needs to be an independent and sovereign state, so that everyone understands that these people in these spaces will never renounce their state, and be without name, or language, or be the object of assimilation and of the conquering aspirations of other states (as quoted in Balalovska, 2004, p. 197-198).

As clearly seen in the statement by Gligorov, the existential threat rhetoric in the name issue related matters has been extricated from the realm of normal politics as early as the pre-independence period. The aspect that was most consistent in Gligorov’s discourse, and also consistently used by other North Macedonian leaders was the notion that the name issue was a threat to collective identity of the Macedonian nation. Although Gligorov spoke generally without reference to Greece, Athens was obviously the addressee.

According to the results of the referendum, North Macedonia’s independence was approved with 96.4 % of the votes on a 75.7 % turnout. On 25 September 1991, the country declared independence under the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia. Finally, on 17 November 1991, the controversial constitution of North Macedonia was adopted by the parliament.

During the early years of the Yugoslav crisis, Greece, then Socialist Yugoslavia’s southern neighbor, was concerned with maintaining the regional status quo and

preventing the recrudescence of Macedonian nationalism. As Yugoslavia began disintegrating, Athens initially supported maintaining its territorial integrity before joining other European Community members in mid-1992 in recognizing the three of the former Socialist Yugoslav republics, namely Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Zahariadis, 1994, p. 661).

However, it refused to recognize the Republic of Macedonia. On 4 December 1991, the Greek government presented a series of objections to the constitution of the new republic, among which was the constitutionally adopted name of the republic. According to them, the name "Republic of Macedonia" was implicitly suggesting territorial ambitions to northern Greece, therefore had to be changed (as cited in Tziampiris, 2012, p. 154). Greece's other most widely stated objections concerned article 3 (territory and borders), and article 49 (status and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian nation in neighboring countries) of the 1991 Constitution of North Macedonia both of which according to Greece had irredentist aspirations.

Confronted with these demands, the new state pursued a modest discourse towards Athens and only moderately securitizing the conflict due to an ever-growing concern about state's survival. It was important for the young state to obtain international recognition, so President Gligorov contacted Brussels seeking Macedonia's formal recognition of by the European Community (EC). However, Greece persuaded the EC to refuse Skopje's demands (Rossos, 2008, p. 268). On 15 December 1991, during a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the EC introduced a set of criteria for the new republic's recognition including that: "...it will conduct no hostile propaganda activities versus a neighboring Community State, including the use of a denomination which implies territorial claims" (Council of the European Communities, 1991). As clearly seen in the statement by the EC, North Macedonia's securitizing acts with regard to the name issue with Greece had its limits, and a tougher stance would lead to the non-recognition and endanger the new republics survival.

To appease Greece, the new republic introduced constitutional amendments (articles 3 and 49) which reinforced the renunciation of territorial claims, however, it refused to compromise on its choice of constitutional name. On 2 May 1992, following these amendments, EC foreign ministers this time declared that they were ready to recognize the new state under a name acceptable to all interested parties. Despite North Macedonian concessions EC was surrendering for a second time to the Greek maximalist demands (Kofos, 2001, p. 239). In response, President Gligorov said: "to comply with the Greek demand that Macedonia change its name would mean that the people of that republic would also lose their name, from which it would further stem that these people have no right to a state at all" (as cited in Rossos, 2008, p. 269).

Gligorov's statement was an explicit continuation of North Macedonia's securitization discourse on the name issue. He consistently used dramatic language in describing the name issue in order to highlight the societal threat that it posed. However, the North Macedonian leader was also tasked with preventing the bloodshed in Bosnia from spilling to his country therefore couldn't take a more confrontational line. However, he was also aware of the fact that the survival of the new republic amid the ongoing civil war in the close neighborhood was not only concerning him but also the international society including the US and the EC. This is why Gligorov's hands were not totally tied and he a space to maneuver even after the Greek veto in the EC.

Finally, he came forward with a dual name formula according to which a provisional name such as "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" would be used in bilateral relations with Greece and the constitutional name is retained for all other purposes, which

was rejected right away by the opposition parties. The nationalist opposition party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) which won the most parliamentary seats in 1990 was against the dual name formula.

Gligorov's compromising attitude was also not supported by the members of the governing coalition. The members of the government from the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) shared the same uncompromising attitude with the opposition towards the name issue. The then North Macedonia's Prime Minister from the SDSM, Branko Crvenkovski's discourse, in an interview in 1993 was more dramatic and alarming than President Gligorov: "The very moment we give up our name ... the question will arise: if you are not Macedonians, then what are you?" Crvenkovski added, "It is the name of the people, which means if you give up your name, you give up your national identity" (as quoted in Craven, 1995, p.200). His discourse focused to highlight the threat of the name issue using alarming examples such as the loss of collective identity. As clearly seen in Crvenkovski's statement, other North Macedonian authorities were keen on securitizing the discourse on the name issue through linking it to North Macedonia's identity crisis.

The Period of Increasing Securitization in the Discourse (1993-1998)

The conflict turned into a confrontation in 1993, after the beginning of negotiations in the United Nations (UN) on the admission of North Macedonia to the organization. Greece issued a memorandum to the UN stating its opposition (Stawowy et al. 2008, p. 234). In spite of Athens' objections, the Security Council recommended the admission of Macedonia to the UN under the provisional name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and two days later on 9 April 1993, the Republic of Macedonia was admitted to the international organization. The UN Security Council (UNSC) members agreed the settlement of the name issue through a dialogue between the two states under UN mediation. The UN negotiators, Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, introduced a plan covering all aspects of the dispute and proposing alternative names for the state, including Nova Makedonija. However, Athens refused to negotiate an agreement on the basis of their recommendations and the negotiations under the UN mediation failed (Tziampiris, 2012, p. 155). In 1993 the survival of the Macedonian state was ensured through its admission to the UN and the stationing of US and UN troops in countries northern borders prevented the spilling over of the civil war in Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, there was a visible increase in the support of the international community to North Macedonia. The US and Australia recognized the country and the International Money Fund extended loans to stabilize its economy. All these developments meant weakening of the diplomatic position of Greece, who will feel increasing pressure to find a compromise on the name issue. Adopting a new diplomatic approach, North Macedonian authorities repeatedly tried to refuse negotiating over the name issue with Greece. In this new discourse, the references to name issue as a threat to collective identity were minimal if not totally absent. North Macedonia's insistence on the use of Alexander the Great associated 16 rays Vergina Sun on its state flag, turned into an excuse for Greece to impose a trade embargo to its northern neighbor (Rossos, 2008, p. 271). The 1993 declared embargo had hard-hitting consequences for Skopje, which told Athens in 1994 that it wished to negotiate a settlement of the name issue. However, the name issue remained as a red line area even under harsh economic conditions. Meanwhile, the developments were strengthening the hands of Gligorov who now had the opportunity to continue his securitization discourse with an increasingly confrontational tone.

This also caused an abrupt break with the old discourse which emphasized the threat that the name issue posed to the Macedonian identity. The new discourse of the North Macedonian leaders included no reference to the societal threat. In February 1995,

Foreign Minister Chervenkovski declared that the name Republic of Macedonia was not negotiable because 'it is the quintessence of the Macedonian nation'. He added that his government would only withdraw the flag displaying the Vergina Star if Greece accepted the constitutional name (Macedonian Heritage). Likewise, on 21 March 1995, commenting on the prospective resumption of talks at the UN, a government spokesman in Skopje stated that direct dialogue with Greece under the shadow of the embargo was unacceptable and ruled out any discussion about the name issue. These statements were thus a continuation of the previous discourse on the name issue with the same uncompromising language.

The long-awaited rapprochement between Greece and Macedonia came after four years of the conflict with the signing of the Interim Agreement on 13 September 1995. This ended the trade embargo and enabled both sides to reinforce bilateral relations (Tziampiris, 2012, p. 155). Greece lifted the embargo in return for concessions from North Macedonia, including a constitutional amendment and a redesigned national flag of a yellow, eight-branched sun on a red background. However, the normalized relations have not contributed to the resolution of the name issue. It was only agreed that the provisional name, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), would remain the official name until the dispute was resolved under UN mediation (Phillips, 2004, p. 59). The interim agreement was a great achievement for North Macedonia as one of its provisions obliged Greece not to object to Macedonia's admission into international organizations under the name of "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (Article 11, paragraph 1). In particular, North Macedonia was now closer to joining the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (Rossos, 2008, p. 272). Ultimately, the agreement pleased everyone, at least for a while. Ljubčo Georgievski, leader of the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE described the new situation as a "small miracle" (as quoted in Tziampiris, 2006, p. 365).

Having signed the interim agreement with Greece in September 1995, North Macedonia's leaders continued their diplomatic struggle through a more uncompromising discourse, increasingly devoid of any middle ground. From the Interim Agreement onward the proposals to solve the name issue by compromise, including the most reasonable ones, were met with the refusal of the North Macedonian governments. Between 1995 and 1998, the name issue was frequently raised in speeches and interviews of the Macedonian leaders, in which they have taken a more offensive stance. Defending the rights of the North Macedonian Minority in Greece became a consistent feature of the leaders of North Macedonia, which they had remained silent about before 1995. Skopje abandon efforts for an arrangement within the UN-sponsored negotiation process which led to an impasse in the bilateral relations. On 23 July 1996 North Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafted a paper in which the Greek authorities were criticized for violating the terms of the Interim Agreement. The then Foreign Minister of North Macedonia, Frckovski from the SDSM party declared that his country was preparing to pursue the official recognition of its constitutional name under the UN (Tziampiris, 2005, p. 231).

On 6 August 1996, North Macedonia accused Greece at the UN of 'inappropriate behavior' regarding the implementation of the Interim Agreement. The criticism largely focused on Greece's opposition to North Macedonia's admission to international organizations as the 'Republic of Macedonia' (Macedonian Heritage). By the time Greek leaders were making statements in which they were saying that unless an accord was reached, Greece might hinder Macedonia's accession into NATO and the EU.

In December 1996, addressing the North Macedonian parliament, President Gligorov mentioned that "the struggle to put an end to the irrational demands and pressures upon the citizens of 'Macedonia' not to call their country by its only true and eternal name, i.e.

'Republic of Macedonia', goes on" (Macedonian Heritage). In May 1997, during an interview to Greek journalists, Prime Minister Chervenkovski, in an attempt to outmaneuver international pressure to negotiate the name issue with Greece further, stated that "the only one who can decide on a state's name is the people themselves" (Macedonian Heritage) while Foreign Minister Frtskovski, also speaking to Greek journalists, declared 'the last concession which we can make on the name issue is to let Greece to call us however it wishes' (Macedonian Heritage). On 16 July 1997, Foreign Minister Hadjinski stated that North Macedonia could only repeat its proposal, recently submitted to the UN mediator, to call the country 'Republic of Macedonia' internationally while allowing Greece to choose another name for its own use (Macedonian Heritage). He added, "I think the knowledge that our name, which we had for centuries, is connected with our identity, is ripening and nobody has the right to demand changes to the constitutional name of the country" (Sedada, 45). These statements thus maintained North Macedonia's official position on the name issue, but with a tougher if still moderate securitization language.

Interviewed on state television on 23 July 1997, President Gligorov argued that "a solution to the naming dispute must respect the dignity of the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonian people's right to choose its name". On 4 March 1998, in an interview with Puls newspaper, he confirmed that his country would make no concessions to Greece on matters of "national dignity and preservation of national identity" (Macedonian Heritage). On 18 May 1998 during a visit to Canada, Tito Petkovski, Speaker of the North Macedonian Parliament, declared that attempts to deny his country the right to use its constitutional name would immediately increase the appetites and territorial views of certain of its neighbors (Macedonian Heritage). On 26 June 1998, while addressing the congress of resistance fighters, Gligorov said that the name issue had not been resolved and that Macedonians, wherever they lived, "would fight for their freedom or at least for the realization of their minority rights in accordance with international rules" (Macedonian Heritage). On 31 October 1998, leader of VMRO-DPMNE party, Ljubco Georgievski announced that, if his party won the second round of the general elections on 1 November 1998, one of its main priorities would be to seek UN ratification of the constitutional name Republic of Macedonia and abolition of FYROM (Macedonian Heritage).

Lowering the Tone of the Securitization Discourse (2001-2006)

In the late 1990's, a period of internal disturbances damaged North Macedonia's state capacity which caused the dissociation of the name issue from matters of state security. In view of the difficult situation that derived from the inter-ethnic conflicts and the ongoing war in the neighboring Kosovo, Skopje displayed a certain degree of preparedness to the compromise proposals put forward by the international society until 2001. As a result, North Macedonia's authorities softened their securitization tone on the name issue by making calmer statements on the name issue. Meanwhile, Skopje and Athens continued to meet in informal discussions to settle the name issue. In February 2001, prime minister Georgievski announced that:

All attempts and all ideas to come as close as possible to our constitutional name and to right the shame inflicted upon us by the previous government, namely of being called by the entire international community by the name of FYROM, are welcome. Every pragmatic solution in this direction will be accepted and discussed (Tziampiris, 2005, p. 239).

However, the North Macedonian government amid the inter-ethnic problem, had no power to resolve the deadlock over the name issue. The nationalist President Boris Trajkovski from the VMRO-DPMNU, the successor of Gligorov as president of Macedonia

was signaling this weakness through his words: "Constitution does not provide for a change in the country's name. This would require an amendment to the Constitution. Put to the vote in Parliament, it would require a 2/3 majority" (as cited in Tziampiris, 2005, p. 240). Eventually it was realized that the new government that was formed in 2002 by the Social Democrat prime minister Branko Crvenkovski had no power to resolve the deadlock over the name issue either.

Despite the deadlock, Skopje took clear steps towards the EU. On 9 April 2001, Macedonia became the first Western Balkan country to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU (Sorovic, 2019, p. 93-94). On 22 March 2004, when North Macedonia submitted its application for EU membership, the EU Commission recommended granting candidate status to the country (Mavromatidis, 2010, p. 52). Meanwhile, on 3 November 2004, one day after George W. Bush's re-election as president, the USA announced its recognition of North Macedonia for all bilateral relations under its constitutional name. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frčkoski, right away called for ending the negotiations with Greece:

Having recognized the constitutional name of Macedonia, the Americans ... sent a message to Greece, that they are not the EU who tolerates spoiled, egoistic and lofty nations, which do not know any other politics towards their smaller neighbors who are badly trying to create a decent democracy in difficult and multicultural conditions except the use of pressure, profit and blackmail [...] (as quoted in Vankovska, 2010, p. 454).

After US recognition of North Macedonia with its constitutional name, Greece once again used its position in the EU to state that North Macedonia's future in Europe depended on resolving the name issue. The two sides then started negotiations in 2004, which were headed by UN representative Matthew Nimetz who came forward with various proposals for North Macedonia, such as Upper Republic of Macedonia, Northern Republic of Macedonia, Democratic Republic of Macedonia, and Independent Republic of Macedonia (Fidanovski, 2018, p. 27-28). In March 2005, Nimetz's proposals were rejected by North Macedonia (Tziampiris, 2012, p. 157). However, in 2005, the Commission recommended the European Council to grant Macedonia the candidate status.

Shooting Itself in the Foot: The Period of Excessive Securitization (2006-2016)

After taking power in 2006, prime minister Nikola Gruevski and his party VMRO-DPMNE, stop the UN sponsored negotiations over the name issue. Gruevski launched a project of Macedonian identity (re)construction (Stefoska et al. 2017, p. 357), which also provoked re-securitization of the name issue. Relations between Greece and the FYROM began to deteriorate after 29 December 2006, when the new government renamed the airports of Skopje and Ohrid as Alexander the Great and Saint Paul, respectively (Tziampiris, 2012, p. 160). Between 2006 and 2017, the government also implemented identitarian 'antiquization' policies based on the supposed link between ethnic Macedonians and ancient Macedonians (Vangeli, 2011, p. 13). Fidanovski (2018, p. 37) described these developments as "Macedonia shooting itself in the foot" because it eliminated sympathy towards Macedonia as a small Balkan country being bullied by its bigger neighbour (2018, p. 31). For Fidanovski (2018, p. 38), the project dramatically weakened Macedonia's position in the name issue.

Macedonia's new approach under the VMRO-DPMNE government caused Greece to introduce new measures, including blocking Macedonia's EU and NATO integration. The EU also criticized Macedonia's new approach in the Commission's 2007 Progress Report

(Commission of the European Communities, 2007, p. 18). In September 2007, Crvenkovski, the then president of North Macedonia declared:

The name of my country is the Republic of Macedonia and will be the Republic of Macedonia.” (UN, p. 29) In November 2007, the then prime minister Gruevski made a press statement in which he said: “...there is one point, which definitely we cannot accept –the one that says that the Republic of Macedonia should accept a name different from its constitutional one for international use... (Macedonian Information Agency, 2007).

All these statements show that the position of North Macedonia on the name issue has undergone major modification. Although achieving the goals of getting approval for NATO membership and obtaining a date to start accession talks with the EU depended on resolving the name issue, negotiations failed to produce an agreement. Greece’s Prime Minister insisted that “No solution means no invitation” (as cited in Tziampiris, 2012, p. 161). Due to growing fears that Greece would use its veto in NATO, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his government agreed to use the name ‘Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)’, which they had previously rejected and Greece had approved in 2005. On 3 April, 2008, during the NATO Summit in Bucharest, the FYROM’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Milošoski, declared in a press conference: “... we are Macedonians and our country is the Republic of Macedonia which will be our name for good ...” (International Court of Justice, 2010, p. 34). Ultimately, the NATO Bucharest summit declaration stated that “an invitation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached” (NATO, 2008). From this point, Macedonia adopted more rigid policies. On 14 July 2008, Prime Minister Gruevski sent a letter to his Greek counterpart complaining about discrimination against Greece’s Macedonian minority. In 2010, Macedonia responded to NATO’s Bucharest Summit decision by appointing Martin Trenovski, an anti-NATO representative, to NATO headquarters in Brussels. Trenovski claimed that by asking Macedonia to resolve its name issue before joining NATO, the alliance was taking “a bureaucratic approach to the problem”, which then became “a political position of the alliance” (EU Observer, 2010).

Macedonia then took the NATO Summit decision to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), arguing that Greece had violated the Interim Agreement by preventing Macedonia from joining NATO (Tziampiris, 2012, p. 162). Greece defended its veto by accusing Macedonia of having violated the agreement’s provision on maintaining good neighbourly relations (Fidanovski, 2018, p. 37). In its judgment on 5 December 2011, the ICJ ordered Greece to stop objecting to North Macedonia’s admission to international organizations (ICJ, 2011).

During the first half of 2009, North Macedonia concentrated its efforts on EU accession. However, Greece hindered the launching of EU accession negotiations with Macedonia due to the name issue. In an interview with Forum magazine, Macedonia’s President, Cerge Ivanov, stated that “the international community should tell Greece that the idea for United Europe is much larger than the interests of one EU member country”. He also complained, “It has been usual thus far for Greece to abuse its status as NATO, EU member country in favour of its internal political goals” (as quoted in FES, 2009, p. 5).

Macedonia’s failure to join various international organizations also raised uncertainty concerning the country’s economy and security (Vangeli, 2011, p. 22). In 2011, Prime Minister Gruevski discussed the name issue at the UN annual assembly: “Imagine the virtual state that my citizens find themselves in – blackmailed, with a blocked development and perspective – because of the blockages from our southern neighbour to enter the Euro-Atlantic institutions, just because for what we are” (UN News, 2011).

Frustrated by Greece's efforts to block paths towards Euro-Atlantic integration, the government opted for a more nationalistic narrative that demonstrated its willingness to resist Athens' demands. It presented a new project in 2010, called Skopje 2014, which continued the antiquization policy that started in 2007 as part of attempts to reinvigorate Macedonian identity. The project led to new buildings and monuments in baroque and neoclassical style in downtown Skopje, including an eight-story monument to Alexander the Great (Graan et al. 2017, p. 68). Gruevski claimed that these policies were an attempt to boost national pride (Vangeli, 2011, p. 14).

In short, the tough securitization period between 2006 and 2016 significantly damaged North Macedonia's case. The antiquization policy, which was intended to challenge threats to Macedonian identity, harmed Macedonia's relations with Greece. Consequently, the name issue was mired in a stalemate for half a decade while international support for the country against Greece was weakened. In addition to the external damage, Macedonia was shaken internally in 2015 after wiretapped recordings of phone conversations between government officials indicating abuse of power were leaked (Fidanovski, 2018, p. 38). Subsequent civil unrest changed the government's priority as everyone focused on the political deadlock while attempts to secure Macedonian identity remained stalled until the crisis was resolved.

Light at the End of Tunnel: De-securitization of the Name Issue (2016-2018)

Like other countries in the region, Macedonia has been dealing with a long legacy of corruption and politicization of the state administration and the judiciary (Koneska, 2019, p. 55). However, the political atmosphere changed after the wiretapping revelations in 2015, when Social Democratic Party (SDSM) opposition leader, Zoran Zaev, accused Gruevski of eavesdropping (BIRN, 2015) and civil unrest erupted. The political crisis was finally resolved through EU efforts with the Przino Agreement. The pro-Western SDSM, led by Zoran Zaev, took power in May 2017 following elections in December 2016 (OSF, 2019, p. 1). The government's primary goals were improving the economic, social, political, and cultural life of North Macedonia's citizens.

Since 2017, the new government changed its approach by abandoning an explicit security discourse while opening a window of opportunity to resolve the country's foreign policy problems. This primarily resulted from the favorable geopolitical circumstances of increased US and EU interest in the Western Balkans in response to Russia's growing regional presence. Macedonia's authorities realized that they now could increase their chances of joining NATO by showing good will. Accordingly, they adopted a more positive and cautious tone. This was one of the major reasons why Macedonia's authorities de-securitized the name issue and repaired relations with Greece.

Zaev wanted to follow a different approach whereby he relaxed Gruevski's provocative stance (Joseph et al. 2018, p. 42). The discourse became cooperative, emphasizing Greco-Macedonian "friendship" rather than focusing on any existential threat posed by Greece to North Macedonia. To show goodwill, Zaev distanced himself from his predecessor's antiquarianism, and renamed the main north-south highway from 'Alexander of Macedon' to 'Friendship' (Joseph et al. 2018, p. 42). He made it clear that the new government would not follow the previous nationalistic and provocative policies that almost completely isolated Skopje (Voynov, 2019, p. 25). He began by renouncing his country's claim to be the sole heir of Alexander the Great's legacy, which eased relations with Greece (RFE/RL, 2017).

In an interview on 22 December 2017, he said "I give up the claim of Macedonia being the sole heir to Alexander" (RFE/RL, 2017). The statement de-escalated the issue, which enabled North Macedonia to normalize relations, such as ministerial-level visits to

Athens and Skopje to start a rapprochement. After Greek and North Macedonian foreign ministers met in September 2017, Zaev told the reporters that “It is not a solution but a big step was made over the name dispute” (EURACTIV, 2017). Through this statement, and the carefully chosen words the de-securitization discourse becomes evident. Later on, in an interview, Zaev also said, “I’m optimistic. It is very difficult; we are aware of that. But it would be smart for both sides to find a solution as early as possible” (as quoted in the Financial Times, 2018). In January 2018, Zaev made an unofficial visit to Yiannis Boutaris, Mayor of Thessaloniki in the province of Macedonia in northern Greece.

Macedonia’s good manners were reciprocated. The Greek government headed by Alexis Tsipras and his foreign minister Nikos Kotzias agreed to restart negotiations, which gave fresh impetus towards bilateral negotiations. On 17 June 2018, a breakthrough was made at the Greek-Macedonian border on Lake Prespa when Foreign Ministers Dimitrov and Kotzias, and Prime Ministers Zaev and Tsipras signed the Prespa Agreement to end over two decades of the name issue (Daskalovski, 2019, p. 66-67).

The agreement had two purposes: first, resolving the name issue; second, intensifying and enriching cooperation between the parties (Tzevelekos, 2020, p. 4). Article 1 paragraph 3 stated that the official name would be the Republic of North Macedonia, or North Macedonia for short, and that it would be used *erga omnes*. That is, the new name would be used domestically, in all bilateral relations, and all regional and international organizations. Article 3 paragraphs 1 and 2 stipulated the inviolability of borders and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of both parties. Article 6 paragraph 1 stressed that the parties wanted to avoid any hostile, irredentist, or revisionist activities while aiming at bolstering friendly relations. The deal also included recognition of the Macedonian language while making clear that the citizens were unrelated to the ancient Macedonians. Article 7 paragraph 4 defined the Macedonian language as part of the Slavic language group and emphasized that neither the language nor other attributes of Macedonia were related to the ancient Greek civilization. Finally, the agreement explicitly acknowledged the claims of Greece on the ancient tradition at the expense of other identities (Vankovska, 2019, p. 274). Athens informed the EU and NATO that Greece had no objection to North Macedonia’s applications (Daskalovski, 2019, p. 67).

On 11 January 2019, Macedonia legally implemented the agreement while Greece’s parliament approved it on 25 January 2019. Shortly after, on 6 February 2019, 29 NATO members signed an accession protocol with Macedonia (Daskalovski, 2019, p. 68) while on 25 March 2020, the European Council endorsed the decision to open accession talks with the Republic of North Macedonia (European Council, 2020, p. 3).

Conclusion

Based on the Copenhagen School’s securitization approach, this paper discussed the securitization and de-securitization of the name issue between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia, by focusing on the latter’s decision makers as the securitizing actors. It considered the 27-year-old conflict in two periods: securitization (1991-2016) and de-securitization (2016-2018). It argued that following the declaration of independence in 1991, North Macedonia, facing a challenge from Greece regarding the constitutional name of the country “the Republic of Macedonia” adopted a securitization strategy that lasted more than quarter a century. After 2016, the government in Skopje de-securitized the name issue under the leadership of Zoran Zaev. Accordingly, the securitization period is divided into sub-periods based on changes in the degree of securitization of the leaders of North Macedonia due to internal and external developments. Between 1991 and 1994, fearing for the state’s survival, Macedonia engaged in securitization that was moderate in tone and content. After gaining UN admission in 1993, the authorities gradually hardened

the tone of their securitization moves until the aftermath of the 1998 general elections. From the late 1990s until 2006, Macedonia softened its tone again as the country nearly slid into civil war in 2001, and continued to behave like a good international citizen to benefit from its moves towards European and NATO integration. This moderate securitization period ended in 2006 with the election of right-wing nationalist Nikola Gruevski, who adopted a tough rhetoric towards Greece. His tough securitization coincided with turmoil in North Macedonia caused by both the Eurozone crisis and Greece's veto of countries NATO and EU membership in 2008 and 2009, respectively. During the prolonged securitization of the name issue, none of the attempts to resolve the conflict was effective and the conflict remained as a protracted one until the second half of the 2010's. Finally, de-securitization of the dispute started in 2016 following Zoran Zaev's election victory. Under Zaev's leadership, North Macedonia stopped treating the issue as an emergency and shifted to using normal bargaining tools.

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