

# Whose "Macedonia" is it, Anyway?

*A Balkan powderkeg ignites a Greek uproar. Symbolism, Nationalism, and old-fashioned Politics have fomented a witches brew that threatens regional stability.*

By Anastasia Tsioulcas

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC of Macedonia [FYROM] sought international recognition of its independent nationhood this past year. The response to this request was not universally positive, nor was recognition an easy achievement for the new state. The problems stem from the issue of creating a national identity, which is always a delicate matter in the Balkans. The Greek government in particular has been instrumental in delaying the new nation's international recognition.

Specifically, the use of the name "Macedonia," the new country's proposed flag, and other national symbols are all historically problematic for the Greek nation. Often, the international press and foreign governments have dismissed Greek objections as being semantic nitpicking. The main spokesman for the Greek case has been Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, a man often dismissed internationally as virulently xenophobic, or at least unsympathetic to foreign concerns. However, Hellenic protests deserve to be heard internationally. In an era in which Balkan "ethnic cleansing" and military invasions in the name of "ethnic union" are unhappy realities, it is a wise course of action to consider all possible repercussions of actions that involving sensitive national and ethnic boundaries.

"Macedonia" is a name currently used in the southeast of the former Yugoslavia, southwest Bulgaria, and northeast Greece. Both historically and currently, the region reflects the story of much of the Balkan peninsula. It has a rich background of various ethnic communities living together in close contact, albeit often in bitter conflict and as a result of invasion. This past has fueled the fires of current debate, and it is necessary to know some of the area's history in order to understand more fully the present-day tensions.

The ancient Macedonian Empire is

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known best for its son the conqueror Alexander III, or Alexander the Great. The empire of which he was part was founded in 338 BCE, and lasted until the year 168 BCE. Alexander the Great's family was Greek, and the sixteen-pointed star that is to be used on the new Republic's flag was the royal symbol of Philip of Macedonia, Alexander's father. Scholarly writings from earlier in this

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century conclude from the language and names written on the remains of the region's tombstones that the ancient Macedonian empire's subjects were also Greek. After the fall of that dynasty, the area was made a Roman province in 148 BCE. Parts of Macedonia were also incorporated by Bulgarian and Serbian empires during following eras. Later, in the fourteenth century, the entire Balkan peninsula fell to the Turkish Ottoman empire, and the region known collectively as Macedonia gained independence from the Turks only some four hundred years later, in 1912.

Following Macedonia's liberation from the Ottomans, three separate nations laid territorial claims to the region: Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Military conflicts arose as a result of these claims, eventually leading to the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. A settlement of the various stakes did not come until 1919, after the end of the first World War. The agreement reached was the formation of a territorial boundary between Greece and Yugoslavia, with Bulgaria excluded completely. Skirmishes between Greece and Bulgaria continued, and a tripartite settlement was finally made in 1926 by the League of Nations.

Although the matter then seemed to be

settled from an international point of view, the territorial question was never laid to rest within the Balkans. Politicians used Macedonia to agitate for both military action and political change. For example, Marshall Tito, the Yugoslav head of state from 1943 until 1980, often spoke of the importance of uniting "Greater Macedonia." To this end, Yugoslav maps of the Balkans published during his regime included the upper one-third of Greece as part of Yugoslavia. If Tito had ever carried out his plan of "union," Yugoslavia's area would have increased by roughly twenty percent to about 120,000 square miles, while Greece would have been reduced to approximately 31,000 square miles. Officials in the Greek government claim that the idea of a "Greater Macedonia" is still alive. They say that the preamble to FYROM's constitution implies a commitment to the establishment of a "Greater Macedonia" that would include Greek territory, and that maps in textbooks published currently in Skopje recall Tito's ideal Balkan geography. (Moseley 1994)

Fears of just such an invasion from the north prompted many political struggles in Greece, and led perhaps most notably to the military coup of 1967. The generals who led this fascist junta claimed to be following the guidelines of an emergency North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] plan to be used in case of Communist invasion from the north, i.e., from Yugoslavia. The leaders used this military action as the justification for a rule marked by the widespread torture, exile, and censorship of Greek citizens until order was restored in 1973. It should be noted, however, that the feared Communist and/or Yugoslav invasion never occurred.

The time of "the colonels" remains fresh in the Greek national memory, and the government remains wary of encouraging any invasions from the north, regardless of whether or not such a threat actually exists. The current Prime Minister of Greece, Andreas Papandreou, was one of those exiled in the late 1960s. Not only was he a "dangerous" leftist politician, but he came from a prominent, politically involved family: his father,

**George Papandreou**, was also a Prime Minister until 1965. During his exile in Sweden and in Canada, Papandreou stayed involved in the Greek political scene. He organized the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement [PASOK], which has been in power almost continuously since 1980, when he was elected Prime Minister.

Since his return to Greece, Papandreou has been accused of making anti-American and "anti-imperialist" com-

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ments publicly that achieve little more than provoking the world's attention. One notorious example of this was comments made to the Greek press in 1977, after the hijacking of an Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Entebbe, Uganda. At the time, Papandreou praised Idi Amin, the Ugandan leader, by saying: "He is a fighter of the metropolitan centers of the West and he himself is their target. This by itself places him on the global chessboard in the area of the anti-imperialist forces" (Ta Nea 1977). On another occasion in that year, Papandreou visited Colonel Qaddafi's Libya and declared that the country "was not a military dictatorship. The contrary is true. It is governed on the model of the demos of the ancient Athenians." Reports in both the Greek and foreign press alleged that Qaddafi helped fund PASOK's 1980 campaign, in which Papandreou was elected (Kaplan 264).

While Papandreou's statements and behavior seem outrageous at first glance, they are perhaps more understandable when viewed in the context of late 20th-century Greek history and his personal history. His anti-American attitude was shaped largely by US actions during the military junta. According to recent reports, one of the leaders of the Greek junta had been on Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] payrolls for fifteen years prior to the start of the regime, and President Richard M. Nixon provided essential financial support to the colonels

(Zepezauer 32). US support for the junta diminished only after a well-publicized massacre of demonstrating university students on November 17, 1973. President Lyndon Johnson reportedly advised the Greek Ambassador, "You tell Papa-what's-his-name [junta leader George Papadopoulos] to release the other Papa-what s-his-name [Andreas Papandreou]." (Kaplan 262)

The past five years have been very difficult for Greece: the nation has struggled against severe domestic and international economic downturn and has been rocked by serious financial scandals. Upon his reelection to the post of Prime Minister in October of 1993, the New York Times noted his return with sur-

Throughout the 1980s, Mr. Papandreou ran up huge public deficits that spread social benefits but failed to generate wealth, siphoned billions of dollars in aid from the EC to his political supporters, and tilted frequently at the JS and its now-reduced military presence [in Greece]. (Cowell 1993)

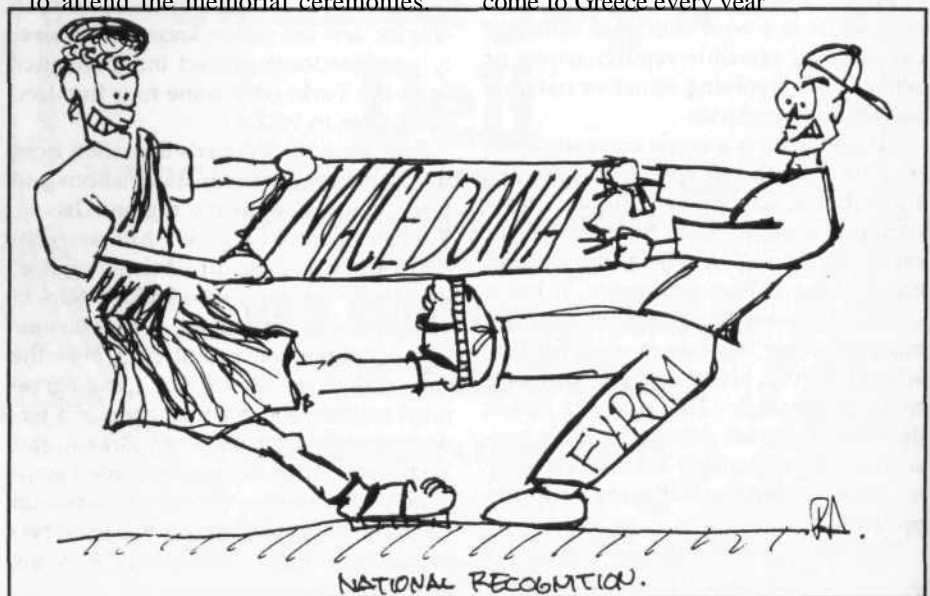
In recent years, the aging Papandreou's personal marital woes have not escaped scrutiny either. One incident in particular fueled both Papandreou's divorce from his wife Margaret and public consternation:

September 13, 1987, was the first anniversary of an earthquake in the southern Greek town of Kalamata that left twenty people dead and over 300 injured. Papandreou, pleading a heavy workload, said he had no time to attend the memorial ceremonies.

The sixty-eight-year-old Prime Minister was, it turned out, embarked on a three-day cruise with an Olympic Airways hostess, Dimitra Liani [now his wife]. Liani was an attractive brunette, less than half Papandreou's age, who was married \*the time to a senior official in

As a result of the indiscretion of Greece had needed a raising point to boost both national morale and PASOK's own political popularity. Prime Minister Papandreou has certainly found one in the Macedonian question. In a recent poll, an astounding eighty percent of Greeks support Papandreou's actions against Skopje, the new republic's capital city, including a trade embargo that prevents landlocked FYROM from receiving any Persian Gulf oil through Greek sea routes. (Moseley 1994) In a UK radio broadcast, Papandreou challenged: "Greece is in a position to isolate this country [Macedonia] economically if Greece so decides." (BBC 1994)

Encouraged by Papandreou's political rhetoric, the Greek government has begun a public campaign against Skopje signified by the motto "Macedonia was, is, and will always be Greek." Currently, this refrain is found on the backs of pay-telephone credit cards and promoted by other government-owned interests. The slogan has also been picked up by popular Greek culture, and the streets of Athens are filled with shirts, posters and bumper stickers that proclaim this message, often written in English for the benefit of the streams of tourists who come to Greece every year.



Cartoon by Raul Aviles

Besides this campaign to encourage public support, the Greek government has lobbied abroad against international recognition of a republic called "Macedonia." At the time of Skopje's announcement of its intention to seek recognition in February of this past year, Greece was serving its rotating six-month term as the head of the European Economic Community [EEC]. The Greek government made no secret of its intentions in using this position to bolster support. In an interview with members of the American press, Andreas Papandreou's son and Deputy Foreign Minister George Papandreou stated, "Greece intends to use the EC presidency to buttress its international profile, particularly on Balkan issues" (Cannellos 1993).

The Greek government refuses to recognize the state as long as Skopje uses the name "Macedonia," or decorates its flag with the ancient Macedonian star. The government, both under PASOK and its predecessor, the conservative New Democracy party, tried to pressure the remainder of the EEC nations to do the same. Similarly, the Greek government and Greek-American lobbies petitioned Washington to refrain from recognizing the republic as well.

This campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, both in Europe and in the US. Other member nations of the EEC were the first to recognize the "Republic of Macedonia" after the Greek six-month term of EEC presidency ended, and ignored the Hellenic argument: "In the view of many Europeans, Greece's...trade embargo against the republic...amounts to bullying tactics that threaten to destabilize a weak and defenseless country." (Moseley 1994) At the same time, the Greek government considered European recognition of Macedonia as a betrayal.

Washington followed suit shortly thereafter, although it is acknowledged that US recognition of Macedonia might aggravate relations with Papandreou's PASOK.

The American government postponed recognition because it hoped to retain friendly ties with Greece, but eventually declared its recognition of Macedonia. Mr. Papandreou dryly rioted this change of policy:

We know very well that no states, certainly not the superpowers, operate on the basis of personal friendship or partisan identities or positioning. They operate on the basis of strategic interests, as they interpret them. (BBC 1994)



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The reasons for the American turnaround are numerous, but military interest in the region stands out. Greece's geographical location between Europe and the Middle East makes the nation particularly important as a location for US military bases. Greece is also one of the easternmost countries involved with NATO, and maintaining good relations with Papandreou is essential to member nations.

Encouraging peace in the peninsula has been one of the most crucial justifications of Macedonian recognition. In his statement declaring recognition of the Republic of Macedonia made in February of this year, President Clinton emphasized the importance of stability in the Balkans, a region that is often politically volatile at best and a Bosnia at worst. The United States also seems to plan to provide the new country with financial support, thereby stabilizing the American, "democratic" sphere of influence in the peninsula at a time when anarchy and warfare are often the Balkan modus operandi.

Interestingly, both Greece and the United States claim to be acting in the best interest of regional stability and democratization, though their positions are diametrically opposed to each other. It remains to be seen which opinion is more conducive to peace in the region. Although the United States maintains that the unconditional recognition of the new state better serves peaceful ambitions, Greece has a strong case for refusing to recognize Skopje unconditionally: FYROM's decision to call itself "Macedonia" conjures up strong memories of Balkan bloodshed, and these recollections are too recent for the Greek national consciousness to ignore. D

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