

The following submission was made to the Hill-Blog in response to a Skopjan posting

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The commentary, "[Congress should help Stabilize the Balkans](#)" by Metodija A. Koloski overstates the importance of FYROM to the United States while undermining Greece's far superior strategic contributions to the Western Alliance. The token contributions of Skopje to Afghanistan are minor compared to the contributions and sacrifices made historically by Greece as an ally of the United States in two World Wars, the Cold War, and Korea. More recently, Greece crushed a domestic terrorist threat comprised of Marxist extremists, and in 2004 just three years after the 9/11 attacks Greece successfully defied international terrorists by hosting the Olympic Games in a climate of safety for foreign athletes and visitors.

Mr. Koloski seeks to minimize the hostility of the anti-Greek propaganda that been manifested against Athens by Skopje by referring to one textbook. The truth is that after Yugoslavia fell apart, elements in Skopje distributed maps depicting the Greek province of Macedonia as occupied territory. Furthermore, FYROM adopted the ancient Macedonian Sun of Vergina for display upon its flag. In addition, Skopje depicted the Tower of Thessaloniki on its currency. Mr. Koloski evades the root of the problem by referring to the City of Alexandria, Virginia. The residents of that American City do not claim to be the

descendants of Alexander the Great, nor do they have a history of making repeated claims to the Greek province of Macedonia.

Mr. Koloski adds fuel to the fire by defending Skopje's decision to name its airport after Alexander the Great. This is not an innocent gesture as Mr. Koloski implies, it is a provocative

act that clearly implies that the Slavs who were not even present during the time of Alexander's life are his descendants. Greece desires reconciliation with its Slav neighbors, and supports preservation of its territorial integrity. Gre

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established diplomatic relations with

Skopje

, and Greeks have supported its neighbor economically. Greek demands are both moderate and reasonable.

They simply demand that Skopje cease and desist from disseminating hostile claims and propaganda, and that Slav leaders from Skopje sit down with their Greek counterparts to resolve this problem by adopting a new name that accurately reflects the Slavic and Albanian identities of its citizens.

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Congress should help Stabilize the Balkans

By: Metodija A. Koloski [*](#)

The Republic of Macedonia is one of the U.S.'s staunchest allies, yet several members of Congress support efforts by Greece to destabilize Macedonia and the Balkans.

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Greece initiated a baseless "dispute" 16 years ago over the Republic of Macedonia's name and identity. Unfortunately, over 100 Representatives and Senators, including Senator Barack Obama, a presidential candidate who has plans to lead our country one day, support proposed resolutions in each chamber -- H. Res. 356 and S. Res. 300 -- that recite Greece's churlish anti-Macedonian stance and call for an end to nonexistent Macedonian "hostile propaganda."

Greece's claims of "hostile" and/or "irredentist" propaganda by Macedonia, claims echoed in the resolutions, are baseless. Not only do citizens of the Republic of Macedonia have a right to their name and identity, but Greece's shenanigans over Macedonia's name run counter to U.S. and, ironically, even Greek interests in the region.

Macedonia, faced with an illegal Greek trade embargo after it declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and fighting for survival, agreed to admission to the U.N. under a temporary provisional reference – "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," not "FYROM." Greece insists on the use of the acronym "FYROM," although this is not in any U.N. documents.

While the provisional reference is demeaning to all Macedonians and is analogous to the United States being forced to call itself "The former British Colonies of America," or "FBCOA," it allowed Greece and Macedonia to normalize relations by signing an Interim Accord in 1995. The Accord ended the embargo and committed the two nations to U.N. brokered talks to resolve the dispute. The Accord also forbids Greece from vetoing Macedonia's accession to international bodies, such as NATO and the EU, under the provisional reference.

Today over 120 countries -- including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Russia, and China -- recognize the Republic of Macedonia under its actual name.

As to irredentism in the dispute, the only irredentism has recently come from Greece. Last month two leaders of the state-sponsored Greek Orthodox Church each called for Greek annexation of the Republic of Macedonia's southern territory. Macedonia, however, foreswore territorial claims against Greece by amending its constitution in 1995.

Greek claims of Macedonian "hostile propaganda" based on a map in a book and on the naming of one of Macedonia's airports after Alexander the Great are baseless. These claims, which are repeated in the resolutions, are without merit. The book in question was in the Macedonian Military Academy's collection, was never used as textbook, and contains historical maps of geographic Macedonia. As for Alexander, his impact on numerous nations and cultures is still felt today. Naming an airport after him is therefore hardly "hostile."

Accusing Macedonia of engaging in "hostile propaganda" based on an incidental book at the Macedonian Military Academy is like accusing the United States of "hostile propaganda" based on the contents of books in the library at West Point. Likewise, if Greece views the naming of any thing or any place after Alexander by any nation other than Greece as "hostile," then surely Alexandria, Virginia, may soon be accused of "hostility" towards Greece.

Greece objects to Macedonia's name only because of Greece's abhorrent treatment of its Macedonian Minority; any other proffered excuse is a proverbial red-herring. The ongoing denial of basic human rights to Greek citizens who identify as ethnic Macedonians is well documented by the State Department, the European Court of Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other international institutions.

U.S. recognition of Macedonia's constitutional name shows the close bond between the two nations. Macedonia is currently participating in military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Lebanon

anon

. By contrast,

Greece

often opposes

U.S.

policies, and was recently identified as a "Russian Trojan horse" by the European Council for Foreign Affairs because it often defends, along with

Cyprus

, "Russian interests in the EU system" and is "willing to veto common EU positions."

Desperate to gain an upper hand in the dispute, Greece is threatening a veto of Macedonia's NATO membership in violation of Article 11 of the 1995 Interim Accord. Despite mounting criticism of its threats,

Greece

continues its war against

Macedonia

's name without considering whether regional stability can be maintained if

Macedonia

is denied NATO membership. Such a veto would embolden radical elements in the Balkans and send a wave of instability throughout the region that will affect Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia, Serbia and, even Greece itself.

Macedonia's concessions and proposed solutions to the dispute are only met with Orwellian accusations of Macedonian "intransigence" by Greece. Instead of supporting Macedonia

while its soldiers fight alongside American troops in

Iraq

and

Afghanistan

, Congress is considering two resolutions that will only alienate a staunch ally to placate a less committed one.

Greece should end the farcical "dispute" if for no other reason than regional stability. Congress should pressure Greece to do just that, or at the very least, address the name dispute by

considering both sides and encouraging the parties to resolve their bilateral differences through the U.N. process to which they agreed. Undoubtedly, the passage of either H. Res. 356 or S. Res. 300 will not influence the dispute. It will only destabilize the delicate negotiations being undertaken by both nations and will alienate Macedonia despite its staunch support of the United States.

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