Doves against Hawks: Symbolic Politics in Greece and the Macedonian Question

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Abstract
The article examines why issues of mainly symbolic significance often overshadow problems of potentially higher security risk for a country. To answer this question, it looks at Greek public reactions to the use of the name “Macedonia” by the neighbouring republic from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s to the June 12, 2018 agreement. The article utilizes debates from the Hellenic Parliament as the main source of empirical evidence to illustrate how the “name issue” became a major priority in Greek politics, sidelining arguably more threatening and urgent disputes in its region. It investigates the constraints of nationalist framing in the Balkans and examines how moderates have achieved two breakthroughs in the 1995 Interim Agreement the Comprehensive Agreement of June 2018.

Keywords: Elites, framing, parliament, nationalism, Greece, Macedonia, peace agreements

Introduction

Scholars have noted that the concepts of symbolic politics and issue framing have gained considerable currency across disciplines, citing a proliferation of studies on cultural framing and collective action frames (Benford & Snow, 2000; Kaufman, 2008; Ross, 2008). Even leading neo-realist thinkers such as Stephen Krasner have come to acknowledge the role of framing ideas in public policy, emphasizing that the critical issue in policy is not analysis in the way political scientists conduct research aiming to explain past events with more or less full information but how ideas are
framed (2007). Krasner’s acknowledgment reflects the power of communication in enhancing, modifying and restraining politics in the modern world. Various studies have shown that public opinion depends on framing, and that even small changes in the wording of question choices can produce different preferences among respondents (Iyengar, Peters & Kynder, 1982; Iyengar, 1991; Kynder, 1998). Current literature moreover has demonstrated how elite framing becomes embedded in political institutions and processes of decision-making, particularly in crisis-prone societies (George, 1980; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993; Lustick, 1993; Schimmelfennig, 2001). Yet few studies have attempted to decouple framing processes from security or other concerns.

This article aims to examine framing as a theoretical concept by looking at a highly symbolic dispute which captured the imagination of the Greek public despite other competing priorities facing the country. As the conflict between the Greeks and their ‘Northern Macedonian’ neighbors suggests, a close look at communication and framing strategies becomes important in highlighting and understanding patterns of moderation and contention. Drawing from Benford & Snow (2000), the article examines the concept of elite framing and proposes a methodology of selecting and analyzing parliamentary debates, highlighting the significance of framing processes in explaining Greek crisis behavior on the Macedonian issue. It goes on to demonstrate the implications of framing in guiding policy and the generalizability of the findings to other crisis-prone countries.

1 The article uses the terms ethnic Slav Macedonians and Macedonian Republic/FYROM to refer to the state officially recognized by the United Nations as FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). The normative/legal analysis of the contemporary Macedonian dispute, over which nation in the Balkans is entitled of the name of “Macedonia”, is beyond the purpose of the article, although the implicit
Framing Processes

Framing is generally understood as a conscious strategic effort to shape shared understandings about a group, its environment, entitlements, and range of possible actions, whether cooperative or adversarial (Goffman, 1974; Gamson, 1992; Kynder, 1998; Benford & Snow, 2000). Goffman uses the concept of framing to denote “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Goffman, 1974: 21). Following Goffman, Klandermans defines framing as a process in which social actors, media, and members of a society jointly interpret, define, and redefine states of affairs (Klandermans, 1997: 44). What distinguishes framing from other cognitive structures is the degree of strategy involved in negotiating a shared meaning of a given situation (Benford & Snow, 2000: 612; Busby, 2007; Zald, 1996: 261).

Frames reflect the work of social agents, whether political leaders, civil society movements, or media. In other words, frames imply agency, deliberation, and even manipulation in the construction of new “realities” (Snow & Benford, 1988). Frames should conform with reality, but not necessarily perfectly, nor as the only possible conceptualization of reality (Krasner, 2008). Frames most often build on a pre-existing cultural stock drawn from the symbolic politics of a community (Desrosiers, 2008; Kaufman, 2008; Ross, 1997, 2008). Moreover, by their nature, “frames are constraining; by directing us to perceive and interpret an event in a particular way, they reduce our options of seeing the event in other ways” (Gamson & Herzog, 1999). Frames become embedded in institutions and symbolic politics recommendation here is that both sides in the conflict will benefit by finding ways to constructively share the name and symbols of the region.
thereby reshaping the meaning of security, national entitlement and opportunity for mobilization and violence.

Generally speaking, frames determine what a group considers possible or impossible, natural or unnatural, problematic or inevitable (Lustick, 1993: 6). In shaping foreign policy, hawks aim at monopolizing political thinking and marginalizing pacifist forces or ethnic antagonists, thereby determining patterns of adversarial behavior at both state and civil society levels. Doves on the other hand, frame messages of peace and reconciliation and oppose violence on the not only on moral and humanitarian grounds but also on the basis of solid political reasoning (Cortright, 2008: 4). Hawks and doves often rely on similar strategies such as mobilizing core constituencies, drawing alliances and marginalizing rival forces. Overall, framing by doves and hawks guides decisions and links ideas with policymaking, a central theme in the theory and practice of International Relations (George, 1980; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993).

Whether aiming at peace or war, frames have essentially two components: a diagnostic component which includes grievances, threats and more generally a definition of the problem and its source, and a prognostic component, focusing on the identification of appropriate opportunities and strategies for redressing the problem (Snow & Benford, 1988; Entman, 1993; Alimi, Gamson & Ryan, 2006). For Homer-Dixon, these two components, motivation and opportunity, dominate explanations of civil violence but “one or other isn’t enough by itself; lots of both are needed to generate upheaval” (Homer-Dixon, 2006: 255). And in explaining war, Van Evera emphasizes the coincidence of victimization and power, arguing that this combination brings together the motive and the capacity to make trouble (Van Evera, 1994). In other words, it is necessary to see how elites and followers come to see previously
legitimate and unimportant relationships as now illegitimate and important, and how confrontational action suddenly becomes a possible and manageable option. A number of studies show how frames influence such political outcomes by becoming embedded in social norms, public identities, and definitions of national interest (Schimmelfennig, 2001; Lustick, 2006). Yet few studies have examined the connections between analysis of framing and analysis of political institutions. More specifically, most studies have generally ignored how issues are debated at the core institutions of parliamentary democracies.

*The Hellenic Parliament*

The Hellenic parliament has acted as the central site/institution in the formulation and reformulation of Greek nationalism for almost two centuries. Since the creation of the Greek state in the 1830s when more than half of Greeks lived under Ottoman rule, political elites have addressed war and peace in their political rhetoric, thus accumulating a rich cultural repertoire of contention and moderation (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1993). The most prominent historical example is that of *Megali Idea*, the principle of territorial and cultural expansion of the 19th-century Greek Kingdom. It was articulated and presented as a viable political program in 1844 during a discussion on the amendment of the third article of the Greek constitution on the rights of ethnic Greeks born outside the Greek Kingdom (Kitromilides, 1979).

Although not the only place to study how elites think and act, a country’s parliament has several advantages over other sources, such as local newspapers, evening news reports, or interviews with experts. In contemporary Greek politics parliamentary debates provide accessible links between elite framing and policymaking, with both constituting a representative sample of thinking at the
highest echelons of the government and the major opposition forces. Unlike the information gleaned from interviews, records of parliamentary debates are easily accessible, and therefore, findings can be confirmed and re-tested. Second, unlike interviews which might take place years after a given event, parliamentary debates, particularly those occurring at times of crisis, do not allow participants to rethink and to reconstruct their positions. Finally, even though citizens might not directly follow most parliamentary debates, it is possible for research purposes to identify “high impact” sessions cited in the international press (a selection process based on the assumption that international media will show a preference for the most influential debates). References and citations in newspapers provide a consistent measure for selecting the most influential debates, although admittedly citations are not the only possible way of evaluating the importance of a particular debate.

*Alternative Explanations of the Macedonian Puzzle*

The historical context of the Macedonian issue is important in situating how the conflict is understood in the Greek parliament and in Southeast Europe in general. The Greeks arrived in the region in the 12th century BC, and the ancient Macedonian Kingdom had organic cultural ties with the Greek cities in the South long before the arrival of the Slavs in the Balkans in the 7th century AC (Stavrianos, 1958; Rossos, 2008). Nonetheless, Macedonia hosted many different cultures for centuries, and its inhabitants considered themselves Macedonians, regardless of language or nationality. At the heart of the contemporary dispute since the 1990s is the name and the cultural symbols of ancient Macedonians and whether one of the ethnic groups in the region could monopolize them, either on the basis of ancient cultural ties (Greek Macedonians) or recent presence and statehood (ethnic/Slav Macedonians) or
alternatively whether the names and symbols could be constructively shared by all the groups in conflict (Danforth, 1995; Ramet, 2005a, 2005b; Rossos, 2008).

Macedonia, particularly the “name issue,” dominated ethnic politics in Greece in the early 1990s. In their narrative, the Greek side points to memories of the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, Bulgarian occupation of parts of Greek Macedonia in WWII, the Yugoslav involvement in the 1944-1949 Greek civil war, and recent territorial claims by ultra-nationalists in the neighboring republic (Kofos, 1964; Koliopoulos, 1999). While Greeks resent any attempts or claims to redraw their northern borders, in their own historic narratives ethnic Macedonians lament the 1913 partition of geographic Macedonia (Rossos, 1981). As in many conflicts around the world one nation’s partition of a historic homeland is another nation’s legitimate border, thereby any normative judgments by third parties are extremely difficult (Lustick 1993, O’Leary 2007). More importantly, in the recent decades ethnic Slav Macedonians have pointed to the negation of the Macedonian national identity by all neighbors, primarily the Greeks, and the involuntary assimilation of Slav Macedonian speakers into the Greek national community (Danforth, 1995; Rossos, 1996, 2008).

Although Greeks have legitimate historical concerns in Macedonia concerning Bulgarian and Yugoslav territorial ambitions, Greek mobilization in the 1990s targeted the new Yugoslav republic which arguably could not be held primarily accountable for crimes committed in the name of Bulgarian or Yugoslav “expansionism.” Even if the principle of “collective punishment” were to be endorsed in this instance, it will be an exaggeration to extend it to include the inhabitants of the new Republic in order to legitimize sanctions for Bulgarian or Yugoslav war crimes committed decades ago in a completely different historical context.
Civil War grievances are also a weak explanation for the current conflict. Slav Macedonians fought with the losing side of the Civil War (the Greek Communists) while Asia Minor refugees predominantly supported the Greek Right. However, as Kalyvas argues the civil war was by no means an ethnic war (Kalyvas, 2006: 312) and despite its pronounced ethnic character particularly in the Slav speaking areas of Greece it has not been understood as such in the Greek or Balkan historiographies (Ibid; Kofos, 1964; Rossos, 1996).

Moreover, following the Civil War Greece enjoyed a close relationship with both Tito’s Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Strategic priorities and worsening of relations with Turkey after the invasion of Cyprus in 1974 as well as rising tensions in the Aegean in the 1980s dictated closer ties with northern neighbors (Heraclides, 2001). During the 1987 Greek-Turkish Sismik crisis, PM Andreas Papandreou dispatched his Minister of Foreign Affairs and current President of Greece Karolos Papoulias to Bulgaria to secure the country’s support (Cowell, 1987). More interestingly, as Ramet notes, even when Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonis Samaras was accusing Bulgaria of “endangering security” by recognizing Macedonia in 1992, agreements for military cooperation were being made by Greece and Bulgaria, including close contact between combat units in the two countries (Ramet, 1992).

Further to this, a close look at the 20th-century history of Macedonia suggests that Greeks were on the “winning side” in Macedonia, unlike conflicts with Albania and Turkey, where Greeks had grievances, some of which were more visible, and in the case of the latter documented by international organizations (e.g. UN resolutions condemning Turkish actions on Cyprus). Moreover, when compared to conflicts with Albania or Turkey in the same period, the Macedonian issue had little potential to endanger Greek security. The new Republic had no current or future military
capabilities while Greece maintained both short-term and long-term strategic, political and military advantages.

Yet the conflict roused the Greek public and led to a tough-resolve political approach to the situation in the early 1990s. As Michas argues, “It would not be an overstatement to say that Greece’s foreign policy during the first half of the last decade was dominated by a single issue: Macedonia” (Michas, 2002: 42). What is more intriguing is the engagement of ordinary citizens in the making of foreign policy, through petitions, demonstrations, and consumer boycotts against EU countries supporting the new republic (Smith, 1992: 10). Two major demonstrations, one in Thessaloniki (February 14, 1992) and the other in Athens (December 10, 1992) attracted at least a million people each. No other issue related to Turkey or Albania has received this type of attention from ordinary citizens, despite collective memories, recent ethnic antagonisms, and an alleged “civilizational divide” (Kaplan, 1993). More importantly, no other issue has provoked official government embargoes by two consecutive Greek governments on both the left and right. In the South of Greece, the Macedonian issue was virtually unknown, and unlike comparable cases of ethnic conflict (Kaufman, 2001, 2008; Ross, 2008), the escalation of Greek-Macedonian conflict cannot be attributed to a straightforward elite or mass mobilization of existing memories and symbols.

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2 For informal figures, see Alexandri (1992) and Toronto Star (1992).
3 The Mitsotakis government introduced an oil embargo against the landlocked republic between January 1992 and September 1992, while Andreas Papandreou introduced a seven-month frontier embargo (excluding food and medicine) on February 16, 1994 (Agence France Presse, 1994; see also Hislope, 2003: 136).
4 There is plenty of evidence showing that both the average Greek citizen and key experts had little knowledge of the Macedonian issue. For example, Greek politicians had no idea of how many Greeks lived in the Macedonian republic/FYROM; a brief sampling elicits the following estimates: Christides, 10,000; Zoulas, 250,000;
In fact, other incidents during the same period reinforce the observation that it is not always possible or desirable to “stir up nationalist passions” (Levy, 1989; Brubaker, 1998: 275, 289). For example, despite the diversionary potential of Greek-Turkish crises at a time of political instability, the Mitsotakis government managed to break the cycle of confrontation with the Turkish minority in Thrace in the early 1990s (Anagnostou, 2001: 103). Further, the country’s general policy towards Albania was generally cooperative, despite incidents involving the Greek minority in Southern Albania and difficulties associated with the arrival of almost half a million new Albanian immigrants. Nonetheless, the Greek government failed to use its EU credentials to help stabilize its former Yugoslav border in the North, choosing, rather, to follow a course of collision that destabilized Greece domestically. The course of events eventually led to the fall of moderate Constantinos Mitsotakis and the return to power of populist Andreas Papandreou in 1993 (Barber, 1993; Ottaway, 1993: A12).

Alternative explanations of Greek reactions to the use of the name and symbols of “Macedonia” focus primarily on the role of identity and memory. In their efforts to explain the issue, scholars have explored a number of explanations, variables and theoretical avenues, including social identity theory (Triandafyllidou, 1998; Kotsovilis, 2005), collective memory (Mazower, 1995; Roudometof, 2002; Tzanelli, 2006), the unresolved wounds of the Greek Civil War (Pettifer, 1999), ethnic...
nationalist ideology (Danforth, 1995; Michas, 2002; Karakasidou, 1997; Rossos, 2008), political manipulation (Zahariadis, 2005), and the influence of the media (Demertzis, Papathanasopoulos & Armenakis, 1999).

Framing highlights interactive processes such as the contest between “hawks” and “doves” which often takes a life of its own overshadowing proximate or background conditions. Hawks usually draw from grievances, hatred, and security dilemmas (Gurr, 1970, Jervis, 1978; Kaufman, 2001; Petersen, 2002), while doves point to transcendent identities, mutually-hurting stalemates and opportunities for compromise, and the need for reconciliation (Zartman, 1995; Kelman, 1999; Heraclides, 2001). Many of these variables result from a “mixture of objective and subjective factors” (Homer-Dixon, 2006: 255) which are hard to be quantified or compared in isolation. Framing analysis on the other hand is a tool for integrating variables that are otherwise hard to isolate or define based on “objective” criteria. Framing analysis synthesizes a vast array of theoretical concepts and variables into a simple but also coherent explanation of the dynamics of ethnic politics and foreign policy (Desrosiers, 2008; Kaufman, 2008; Ross, 2008). As the analysis of parliamentary speeches demonstrates below, the explanation for the Greek reactions on the Macedonian issue lies primarily in the early framing of a nationalist consensus in the country’s important political institutions.

“An Exclusive Homeland for the Greeks”

The degree to which the presence of “ethnic others” is acknowledged, opposed, or misrepresented in the national narrative of a dominant group provides a taste of a particular type of nationalism. In the Greek parliamentary debates, for example, Greece has been seen as the exclusive homeland of the Greeks. Thus, any
expression of cultural diversity, especially with respect to Macedonia, has been instantly linked with past threats against the country’s territorial integrity (Kostopoulos, 2000). During the period 1978-1991, ethnic Slav Macedonians who were forced to leave the country after the Greek Civil War were at the center of this discourse. For instance, in a 1980 speech, MP Stephanopoulos (future President of the Hellenic Republic) revealed the following:

You know there are regions in this country with sensitive population balances. You know there are regions with older and modern history and you know that there are people there with reduced national consciousness. Whoever understands, understands. I cannot say more and I imagine everyone understands what I say. (Greek Parliament Debates, 14 April 1980: 3763)

In contradiction with international norms on minority rights and even Greek positions on refugees in Cyprus, Stephanopoulos added that if Civil war refugees were allowed to resettle in Greece, the country would face a major national threat (Greek Parliament Debates, 14 April 1980: 3763). Further, parliamentarians labeled anyone supporting the “propaganda” of the ethnic Slav Macedonian minority as a traitor to Greece, making it clear that “such traitors existed in the country.” As MP Athanasios Kontaxis argued in 1984, “Only Greek traitors that have betrayed Greece – and continue unfortunately even today to exist – could have supported the propaganda of the Skopjian, Slavomacedonian, Macedonian State” (Greek Parliament Debates, 10 May 1984: 6484). Such treatment of dissent by Greek officials was reflected in many occasions. In fact, one of the saddest aspects of the Macedonian crisis in the 1990s was the vicious attack on Greek academics and human rights activists (Karakasidou, 1993; Dimitras et al., 1996). As Lustick argues in his influential work, the treatment of dissent as evidence of treason, criminality and insanity rather than contrary opinion is part of hegemonic politics that help sustain conflicts around the world (2002).
Moreover, in the parliament MPs narrated horror stories from their visits to Melbourne or Toronto, noting the advances of ethnic Slav Macedonian “propaganda” there (Greek Parliament Debates, 23 April 1986: 6378). To this point, MP Ioannis Varvitsiotis accused the government of appointing as the press officer in Australia a person lacking any skills required to confront the “unacceptable, incomprehensible and undocumented propaganda” (Greek Parliament Debates, 23 April 1986: 6483) on the Macedonian issue. This comment suggests a demand to preserve a practice in Greece and elsewhere in conflict-ridden societies of appointing national-minded individuals in key government positions, therefore embedding and preserving nationalist worldviews through a country’s bureaucratic institutions.

Even moderate politicians fell into the trap of speaking of minorities as threats. Such references were adopted by moderates like PM Mitsotakis and Secretary of the communist Coalition of the Left, Leonidas Kyrkos. While pointing to the many gaps in Greek policy towards minorities (a rare admission in the parliament), Kyrkos warned that minority issues were barrels of gunpowder (Greek Parliament Debates, 12 February 1991: 5973, 5981). Mitsotakis challenged Kyrkos to acknowledge that there was no Slavomacedonian minority in Greece, something the leader of the communist party did (Greek Parliament Debates, February 12, 1991: 5975).

The communist left could have challenged this elite consensus on the Macedonian issue. During the civil war, ethnic Slav Macedonians “fought along” with Greek communists; at the time, the party emphasized equality and protection of national rights of ethnic Slav Macedonians in Greece (Rossos, 2008: 190). Yet as Rossos argues, even when they needed each other during the Civil War, ethnic Slav Macedonians and Greek communists acted as “incompatible allies” (Rossos, 1997) aiming at different objectives from the civil war. In Slav Macedonian nationalism, the
communists saw elements of disloyalty to the Greek state, while in their Greek
comrades’ nationalism, the former saw a betrayal of their national rights (Rossos,
2008).

After 1974 and following the fall of the junta, Greek communists (and the
socialist left) appropriated leftist resistance, adding a nationalist twist by emphasizing
resistance against Nazism. The Greek communists implicitly dropped any references
to ethnic Slav in ‘exchange’ for their own participation in normal democratic politics.
Moreover, Greek communists were allowed to return from exile while non-Greek
Macedonians refugees were denied the right of return (Kostopoulos, 2000). For the
left any association with ethnic Macedonians could have delegitimized its nationalist
credentials and more importantly reopened the unresolved wounds of the Greek Civil
War (Pettifer, 1999: 22). Thus, Greek democratization did not benefit ethnic
Macedonians but paradoxically buried their own concerns under the new consensus of
the democratizing Greek elites.

Moderates on the right also unintentionally contributed to the shaping of a
nationalist consensus. Mitsotakis played down the importance of the name issue with
the Macedonian Republic/FYROM but did so by pointing to what he considered the
real problem, the “creation” of a new minority issue in western Greek Macedonia. He
later argued that “with an open Cyprus issue and the stalemate in Greek-Turkish
relations if one could add a Slavomacedonian minority issue to the many problems of
the Muslim minority in Thrace, then the situation will become unbearable for Greek
foreign policy” (Mitsotakis, 1995: 3). While these statements might appear
contradictory with contemporary norms on minorities and cultural diversity, Greek
politicians at the time still operated with the painful memories of Cyprus where a
'minority issue’ has led to the Turkish occupation of the northern part of the island (Heraclides, 2001: 43)

Such a view of minorities, shared by most Greek politicians, led to an interpretation of human rights reports as acts hostile to the nation’s territorial integrity. For example, a US Department of State report in early 1991 on human rights in Greece (one of the first to mention the presence of ethnic Slav Macedonians) triggered the unprecedented ire of Greek parliamentarians (see Greek Parliament Debates, 12 February 1991; see also 1990 Human Rights Report, Greece 1991; US Department of State, 1 February 1991). Overall, the Greek case demonstrates what Alexander George defined as “consensus politics” to describe how policymakers often make wrong decisions on the basis of what most people want and will support rather than attempt to master the cognitive complexity of the problem by means of analysis (George, 1980).

**Greek Victimization and Threat Framing**

More generally, the theme of a victimized Greece was a prominent element in Greek elite framing. As Kyrkos stated in Parliament, “. . . we had 500,000 dead in WWII. A huge loss of blood. And Turkey, what did it have? Not even one dead. Who was the one who benefited from the war and afterwards?” (Greek Parliament Debates, 12 February 1991: 5974).

The parliamentary debates also provide evidence of conspiratorial elite framing concerning the intentions of neighbors and third countries, including traditional Greek allies. In fact, on many occasions, the disagreement is not whether the country is facing a threat, but *what type* it faces. In a debate aimed at defining the threat facing Greece after the collapse of Yugoslavia, Andreas Papandreou said,
“Today a new axis is in the making Ankara-Skopje-Tirana and there is also Kosovo” (Greek Parliament Debates, 12 February 1991: 5969). Prime Minister Mitsotakis replied: ‘There is an axis in the making. Not the way Mr. Papandreou had described it. But one that starts from the north Bosnia-Herzegovina and ends at the so-called Macedonia of Skopje” (Greek Parliament Debates, 12 February 1991: 5977).

What adds to the durability of these threat perceptions is that they are not falsifiable; one could either believe them or reject them and depending on the credibility of the framer (Millas, 2001). Moreover, threat perceptions could persist even when the ‘objective’ conditions ceased to exist (Kaufman, 2008). Benford and Snow (2000) argued that among the criteria for a successful framing is the ‘credibility of the proffered frame’ which is based on frame consistency, empirical credibility and more importantly the reliability of the frame-maker (620). When a critical mass of actors endorses these threats then those become a self-fulfilling prophecy instigating actions that transform the overall external environment thus feeding back to all three key criteria for successful framing.

Interestingly, the “common religious bond” between Orthodox Greeks and ethnic Slav Macedonian was effectively disregarded even by the clergy themselves while Skopje and Ankara were portrayed as a “joint threat for Hellenism” in contradiction to Huntington’s civilization boundaries and expected alliances. Moreover, this point demonstrates the complexity in identity formation and what IR scholars often portray as diversionary framing (Levy, 1989 & 1994). Gurus of frame analysis describe a similar process as frame alignment where individual issues and frames are linked in innovative ways and to each other complementing each other’s gaps and bringing into being more credibility and frame resonance (Snow & Benford, 1988). Thus by ‘transferring’ grievances and threats from Turkey to Macedonia,
Greek hawks succeeded in mobilizing nationalism on the Macedonian issue where opportunities for success were more visible.

Even more surprisingly, Greek politicians repeatedly claimed that a small multiethnic society could not survive in the Balkans (Michas 2002: 44-45), an argument contradicting key tenants of Greek foreign policy on Cyprus. Moreover, Greek elites held contradictory beliefs, accusing the West on the one hand for its lack of support while pointing to their advantageous position of their country in the European Union and NATO.

These contradictions added more urgency to Greek mobilization. In fact, what happened in Greece after 1992 was anticipated a year earlier in a comment made by one of the most hawkish MPs, Stelios Papanastasiou pointing to a narrow window of opportunity in dealing confrontationally with the neighboring republic: “Skopje is a disorganized multiethnic mess, without state entity, economy, or bread. Greece should impose its will by demonstrating strength…. If we do not act now it will be difficult to change an accomplished fact tomorrow” (Greek Parliamentary Debates, 22 November 1991: 1574). While Papanastasiou’s views represent the most extreme version of the Greek framing at the time, for the most part Greek leaders shared a ‘minimum of nationalist views’ on the Macedonian issue that helped ignite the conflict in the early 1990s.

**Reframing the Macedonian Issue and the 1995 Interim Agreement**

Elite consensus on the Macedonian issue made adaptation to new conditions in the 1990s more difficult and allowed hawkish framers to sustain what Brubaker describes as a nationally “primed” frame of mind for long periods of time (Brubaker 1998: 289). Further, a predominantly adversarial framing resulted in or exacerbated an already
narrow way of defining national interest and priorities. In the case of Macedonia, a portion of the Greek leadership ignored evidence which might have led to other ways of defining the issue.

For one thing, because of their understanding of minorities as threats, Greek elites failed to acknowledge that recognizing a small minority on Greece’s northern frontier would have no negative effect on Greek security. In fact, such recognition would have had a positive effect on the country’s diverse character and created a more positive international image for the country as a whole. As the country with the smallest number of minorities, Greece could have gained from siding with international actors who advocated minority rights.

Soon though the opposite and reframed interpretation of national interest was officially put forward by a high-ranking diplomat, Ioannis Tzounis. In a memo to the Ministry, he argued that the new republic was not a threat but a “geopolitical” gift to Greece. He questioned the dominant assumptions and argued that the new neighbor gave Greece a buffer zone against conflict areas in the Balkans, such as Kosovo and Bosnia. Although the memo rejected by the government (and also leaked to the daily press in an effort to dismiss the diplomat’s credibility Skylakakis, 1995), this line of reasoning eventually influenced a policy adaptation reflected in the Interim Agreement of 1995.

As the result of an American initiative in the region, the two countries reached a compromise which called for respect for the territorial integrity and the political independence of each side, the recognition by Greece and the UN of the Republic with the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and a guarantee that the new state would not use the sun of Vergina as a flag. In addition, FYROM
made necessary assurances about its constitution’s adherence to principles of International law. Greece terminated the embargo of February 1994 and made a commitment to an open cooperative economic relationship.\(^1\) Finally both sides committed themselves to future negotiations to finalize the name issue. All of this is surprising, given the background to the issue.

In the four years before signing the Interim Agreement, the Greek position had received very little external support despite the legitimacy of some of the Greek arguments. What eventually weakened the dominant frame of reference in Greece, is that the country’s attitude was seen as ‘infuriatingly emotional,’ ‘self-defeating’ and ‘inappropriate to the country’s position in the European Union’\(^2\)

Greece could have very easily achieved a satisfactory solution in the early 1990s, if public opinion had not prevented a reasonable compromise.\(^3\) Instead, the two main political parties in Greece engaged in a damaging process of ethnic outbidding. Several factions in the ruling party Nea Demokratia used the name dispute for their political advancement; of special note here is Antonis Samaras, the young and ambitious Foreign Minister. Andreas Papandreou, who was in opposition after a decade in power in the 1980s, followed the same hard line as Samaras, arguably threatened by the idea that a populist newcomer could have replaced him as the main champion of Greek nationalism. Moderate political leaders acknowledged that the situation was very difficult but none was willing to risk a compromise (Skylakakis, 1995). In any event, Greek elites failed to calculate the risks properly and led the country to a trap prepared by its own nationalist propaganda.

With Andreas Papandreou’s return to power in October 1993, all the signs pointed to a continuation of the vicious cycle between majority nationalism and

\(^{8}\) Personal communication with Alexis Heraclides, November 2001.
confrontational foreign policy on the issue. Papandreou vowed that the name Macedonia represented Greece’s very soul, thus assuring the public of his future tough-resolve approach (Barber, 1993; Ottaway, 1993: A12). Very soon his government took a risk by introducing a full embargo against FYR Macedonia (Hislope, 2003; Agence France Presse, 2003). Mitsotakis government had instituted an oil embargo against the landlocked republic between January 1992 and September 1992, but the Papandreou government’s tougher approach led to a seven-month frontier embargo which only excluded food and medicine.

Given all these negative indicators and dominant frames, what explains the signing of the Interim Agreement in 1995? Leadership and how leaders were perceived during this crisis was of paramount importance. The Interim Agreement was an example of Richard Holbrooke’s ‘diplomatic magic’ described in detail in his own memoirs (1998: 122-127). Holbrooke initially secured the green light from President Gligorov and knowing US determination to influence the small Balkan republic, he offered Papandreou a ‘unique opportunity to make history’ (ibid, 123).

Although Papandreou played the ‘nationalist card’ (Ellinas, 2008, Kerides, 1998), he was certainly aware of the more fundamental aspects of the Macedonian issue. Not only was he an experienced politician, but also he had spent considerable time in North America, including Toronto, and he knew the Slav Macedonian diaspora first-hand. While in power in the 1980s, his government quietly allowed the return of minority Slav Macedonians, provided they declared themselves as Greek and kept their identity private (Mazower, 1996). While leaders are important, it is admittedly rare to find such larger-than-life personalities as Papandreou matched with Holbrooke-type mediators capable of seeing beyond the obvious. One might also argue that a certain amount of luck was involved: Gligorov, a moderate, was in power
when American diplomats were most anxious to pacify the Balkans. In addition, the moderates and pro-government press described the outcome as positive and the amount of pressure exercised on Greece insignificant.\(^4\)

What is more relevant for conflict resolution in general was the type of arrangement between the two nations which required significant constituencies on both sides to accept it or to learn to live with it. The agreement aimed at delinking the name dispute from the overall relationship between the two counties. The Republic was to be referred as FYROM internationally until the two countries agreed on a different name. According to UN mediator Matthew Nimetz, ‘two people or two nations could have a difference but agree that that difference will not interfere with other areas of cooperation’ (Federal News Service, 1995).\(^5\) This revised mediation strategy combined two basic innovations: first, the delinkage of the issue of the name from the wider prospect of a political settlement and second, the gradual improvement of relations between the two nations.

The logic behind this tactic in post-conflict mediations is to delink the most complicated issues from promising areas of convergence where it is easier to reach a compromise. International experience suggests several such examples of effective delinkage strategies, from Sinai Peninsula in the Camp David negotiations to environmental politics in contested Kashmir (Kovras, 2012). On the naming dispute, Nimetz and others also referred to the British-Irish example and noted how the two countries have maintained strong relations despite disputes in their use of each other’s name (Federal News Service, 1995; see also Coakley, 2009).
The 1995 Interim Agreement proved that nationalist disputes in the Balkans are not inherently intractable. Besides its impact on the Dayton Accords signed few months later, the Macedonian dispute taught political elites in Greece key lessons. The country failed to prevail in its dispute over the young Republic. At times, Greece lost external support to a country lacking international connections and membership in regional organizations such as the EU and NATO. The apparent failures on this issue led to a reassessment of the major parameters of Greek foreign policy. Before the Interim Agreement, Greece received only short-term support from its allies and partners and, more importantly, was subject to intense criticism for its lack of flexibility. Accompanying Greek frustration, however, was a realization that preferential treatment or superiority of the opponent (an argument made with regards to Turkey) could not account for all disappointing outcomes, and a new paradigm was needed to explain cause-effect relationships in Greek foreign policy. Greek policymakers, especially during and following the PM Costas Simitis’ administration, attempted to delegitimize confrontational policies by pointing out policy failures in such issues as the Macedonian and other crises, thus introducing anti-nationalist counter-frames into Greek public discourse.

This example also explains how decision-makers came to endorse specific frames and not others, or alternatively, what processes transform frames. The Macedonian crisis initiated a shift among Greek opinion-makers which Doug McAdam et al. (1996) refers to in the social movement literature as a process of cognitive liberation. With the legitimization of the public debate on the advantages of disengagement from confrontational politics, a new cognitive paradigm of cooperative
politics emerged in Greece. There was a realization that unless Greece cooperated and coordinated its policies with fellow EU members’ principles and interests, it would never enjoy the political advantages of being a member state.

The Interim Agreement of 1995 survived for more than two decades including the post-2008 financial crisis that wrecked Greek economy and society. In 2017-8, a new round of UN-led negotiations took place aiming this time for a comprehensive settlement. Conventional wisdom would have pointed to limited prospects, as PM Alexis Tsipras’ government lacked the time and energy for peace initiatives faced as it has been with a decade-long financial crisis, nervous international markets and dwindling popularity. Yet as this article implied, radical left Syriza lacked the traditional symbolic commitments of the pre-crisis Greek political parties on the Macedonian issue; in fact, its electoral basis was largely anti-nationalist, pacifist and committed to reconciliation in the Balkans. While the dispute on the ownership of the Macedonian name and heritage remained a symbolic one since no single incident of physical violence took place during this period, the issue of cultural heritage and identification retained its strong emotional undertones in public life.

Acknowledging the long and painful history of the conflict, UN mediations involved new strategies to avoid past failures to reach a compromise. Surprisingly, Nimetz retained his position as the UN special envoy during these two decades contributing *pro bono* on the issue for a salary of one dollar per annum. In 2017, Nimetz suggested alternative names using the Slavic pronunciation of the term such as Republika Nova Makedonija, Republika Makedonija (Skopje) and Republic of North Macedonia, or *Severna Makedonija*. The latter option eventually led to an

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agreement in principle reached by PM Tsipras and his counterpart Zoran Zaev on June 12, 2018.

History and its national framing played a critical role in protracted mediations. The Macedonian issue and its symbolic politics are not an exception. At the heart of any current mediation as noted above is whether one of the ethnic groups can monopolize the symbols and name, either on the basis of ancient cultural ties (Greek Macedonians), nationality (Slav Macedonians), regional identity (Greek and Bulgarian Macedonians), or recent nationhood (citizens of FYR/Northern Macedonia) or, alternatively, whether the name could be indeed constructively shared by everyone in the region as stipulated in the June 12, 2018 agreement. Same logic applies as to the language and national orientation.

By 2018 most countries have recognized Greece’s northern neighbor with its constitutional name (Republic of Macedonia) therefore until then its leadership had few incentives to compromise on the issue. Yet the intention to join the EU and NATO (a much welcome initiative in the West to contain Russia’s influence) has created new prospects for constructive dialogue. Greek consent was considered necessary for accession to both organizations. During the past decades, Skopje lost many opportunities to address this issue for example before 2008 when moderate leaders governed in Athens including former PM Kostas Karamanlis whose Greek Macedonian background gave him wider credibility on the issue.

Moreover, during this period new rallies including a massive one in Thessaloniki attracted 300,000 Greek Macedonians highlighting that any comprehensive compromise will be an uphill battle. Greeks in the region overwhelmingly consider the ancient Macedonian heritage as an integral part of their own culture and appear to disproportionately oppose in polls the use of the name by
any other groups in the region. Macedonian Greeks hold a disproportionate sway over the government in Athens and in recent decades the issue has defined winners and losers in the Greek national elections. Greek Macedonia is larger in population and geographically than its neighbor in the north and although implicitly a veto player on the issue it has no formal voice in the negotiations (except in the form of large rallies covered by the national and international media).

Yet turning crises into opportunities for peace is not unprecedented in the Balkan region. As the post-2008 Greek financial tragedy illustrates, populism and postponing solutions to problems could have dire consequences, as crises often resurfaced when least expected; and under more difficult conditions. Greece’s troubled neighborhood, Balkans in the north and Turkey in the east, have been rife with unresolved foreign policy and minority issues, and multiple opportunities for escalation continued to present themselves.

Greek PM Tsipras used these challenges and particularly the increasing escalations with Turkey to his advantage and to strategically legitimize the June 12th agreement. Even though his coalition relied on the right-wing Independent Greeks who opposed the settlement, it proved not to be as weak as it appeared. The compromise secured in principle the solid support of Syriza and at the minimum one more liberal/leftist party in the opposition therefore contributing to a new realignment in Greek politics. Tsipras also took advantage of the tangible benefits for Greece from NATO’s imminent enlargement to satisfy some of the Greek positions particularly in Greek Macedonia. Fundamentally for Greek Macedonians, the 2018 agreement secured their own cultural heritage through explicit references for ancient Greek

Macedonian and ended the de facto monopolization of the ‘name’ by their northern neighbors.

Equally interesting has been the position of the moderate administration of PM Zoran Zaev in Skopje which confronted the nationalism of its predecessors. The later wasted the past decade to enrich a small elite and construct replicas of ancient Macedonian monuments in the country’s capital. The giant bronze statue of Alexander the Great erected in 2011 in the center of the city was destined to lose friends and sympathy for the new country but more importantly it raised divisions and unrealistic expectations among its inhabitants. While the name issue had remained for at least 27 years a blind spot in the Balkan foreign policy agenda, the country has been implementing with relative success the challenging 2001 Ohrid Framework which stabilized relations with its Albanian minority.

**Conclusion and Future Options**

If unsuccessful during the ratification process, perhaps a more imaginative name option, would be one that reflects the country’s peace accomplishments and achievements as a multi-ethnic society such as the name Republika Ohridska Makedonija. This is a forward looking civic name based on the 2001 peace agreement also honoring 1000 years of major Byzantine, Slavic and European ecclesiastical traditions. It is also a promising brand name for the country, given the unique ecology and beauty of the lake Ohrid. Unlike Ilinden Macedonia proposed in 2018 by PM Zaev’s negotiating time, the name Republika Ohridska Makedonija brings to the picture history and symbolic politics as an asset rather than as a liability and has all the right ingredients in it to make it work. This could be re-packaged with or for the recognition of the Ohridska Makedonija church, identity and language an issue of
concern for Greek opponents of the June 12 agreement. Meanwhile, Greece could potentially reciprocate by adjusting its own commitments on the issue particularly facilitating the right of return for Northern Macedonian refugees from the Greek civil war (an issue of major importance for the Cyprus peace process). These potential repackaging would be win-win; an international UN-led agreement involving Greece which explicitly denies the right of return would create a negative precedent for Cyprus as well as the rights of Greek minorities in the entire region.

Meanwhile, PM Zaev will confront his own symbolic politics an additional challenge as his administration is committed not only to a parliamentary vote (as in Greece) but also a referendum on the name issue and a constitutional convention. As Cyprus, Colombia, Brexit and other cases suggest, referendums do not have the best record in resolving complex problems. This is because peace agreements are emotionally painful to endorse while their legitimacy only increases with the passage of time. To Zaev’s advantage, Albanian Macedonians comprising about a quarter of the population are likely to vote overwhelmingly in favor. Additionally, some parts of the agreement with Greece might also require a two third approval in the parliament (currently PM Zaev lacks this enhanced majority), therefore EU enlargement should aim to entice wider support through immediate benefits for the entire region through for instance a peace package for the Balkans. Notably, the Northern Irish peace process has been facilitated by aid programs aiming for peace while creating the space to transcend community and national boundaries. Likewise, the German government should follow the Namibia precedence (Loizides, 2016: 187) to contribute to the resolution of property disputes resulting from the German occupation of Greek Macedonia.
Finally, if the logic of peace processes is to serve local communities, a more participatory multi-level multi-party approach could be sought as an alternative or to enhance the current peace process. To involve local communities in the broader region of Macedonia (which also includes a Bulgarian province), a north-south forum could be agreed involving municipal and civic leaders and investigating confidence building measures such as a common travel area in the Balkans. This will take the form of a Euroregion or initiatives preceding for instance the Northern Irish peace process that enable freedom of movement. Admittedly none of these offer an easy exit from the region’s symbolic politics and decades-old problems. Hopefully, however, conventional wisdom will fail in the Balkans, this time in the direction of peace and prosperity.

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On more info on the reactions against Greece, see Skylakakis (1995) and Glenny (1995). Such a solution would have led for instance for a shared use of the name Macedonian allowing the Republic to use a double name (e.g. SlavoMacedonia, Nova Macedonia or North Macedonia).

According to Greek daily *Eleutherotypia* (1995a) Richard Holbrooke exercised more pressure on FYR Macedonia. The paradox is that in FYR Macedonia, the reaction was also insignificant given the history of the problem. The nationalist party VMRO cooperated with other parties to organize small demonstrations protesting the agreement. Demonstrators turned on ‘the betrayal of president Gligorof and his acceptance of the Greek ultimatum’ (*Eleutherotypia*, 1995b). This implies that there was a bigger potential for pressure and compromise in FYR Macedonia. In Greece the accord was acceptable to the two biggest parties of Greece; thus, the government should have insisted on the ‘large package’ which included a mutually-advantageous agreement on the name.

Interview also available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Po3wOJ0B4Wk