

What Now After the Veto?

By Victor Bivell

The veto over Macedonia's entry to NATO by Greece is disappointing, and the idea of a quick entry to NATO after settling the name issue is just ongoing blackmail.

But the veto also has some positives we should think about.

The Macedonian Government has been firm in saying that use of the veto would break the Interim Accord between Greece and Macedonia and the delegation's walk-out of the Bucharest Summit was a strong initial response.

I think we should encourage the Government to continue to be strong and to keep the high legal and moral ground. In 1992 *The Spectator* christened Greece the "Bully of the Balkans" for its treatment of Macedonia. The NATO veto is another example. The best response to a bully is a strong one. Here are my suggestions.

The Government should immediately and decisively end all discussions over the name. It should tell the world loudly and clearly that as Greece has broken the interim agreement there is no more negotiation over the name. Our name is Republic of Macedonia and that is final.

The negotiations were something Macedonia had to go through to be a good international citizen but Macedonia has now done that. For Macedonia to continue to negotiate with the bully - with an insecure and paranoid country - would be foolish.

The negotiations raised the status of the Greek dispute to a level higher than it deserved. The gross Greek nationalism that accompanies the negotiations has helped to feed the strong anti Macedonian prejudice in Greece and the Greek diaspora. Over such a long period of time the negotiations have helped to teach a new generation of Greeks to hate Macedonians. Ending the negotiations will remove a lot of the oxygen that feeds this process and help the whole hate-making process to slow down, hopefully until the issue becomes irrelevant, although that will likely take a long time.

There is a good reason why both Greek prime minister Karamanlis and foreign minister Bakoyannis have asked so soon for the talks to continue. They know if Macedonia pulls out they are in a weak position and then have to trade something just to resume the talks. There should be no talks until they fulfill the interim agreement and let Macedonia into NATO under the name former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as per the interim agreement.

Contrast their quick requests for talks to continue with Bakoyannis' response at the same time to US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried's statement that the Macedonian people and Macedonian ethnicity exist. "Athens will not be drawn into such debates," said Bakoyannis.

The Greeks always talk about the name but never talk about human rights and the Macedonians in Greece. Over the years the Greeks have set the agenda and Macedonia has been sucked into their game - talking about the name and not human rights. Macedonia should stop talking about the name and start talking about the

Macedonians in Greece. Other countries will then follow.

Meanwhile Macedonia should tell the world how unreliable the Greeks are, what their signature on the interim agreement is worth, and why there will be no more negotiations. It should remind the world that this is not the first time Greece has failed to honour its international agreements, in particular it failed and continues fail to fulfill the letter and the spirit of the 1920 Treaty Concerning The Protection Of Minorities In Greece.

What will more negotiations achieve? The Greeks are just waiting for a weak moment from us. They know how to wait forever. Witness Cyprus. End the negotiations and the issue will slowly die. Keep talking and it will go on forever until we lose.

At the same time the Macedonian Government should start legal proceedings against Greece to help the Aegean Macedonians from the Civil War to regain their property and rights. This way Greece gets two things to think about and to help it regret using the veto.

I also suggest a new national project called The Macedonian Genocide in Northern Greece, under which the Macedonian Government would invite every ethnic Macedonian family around the world to tell of their suffering under Greek government policies over the past 100 and more years. This could be a 10 or 20 year national catharsis for the Macedonian people, with the results placed regularly on the internet in Macedonian, English and Greek so the world has a permanent record of how the Greeks came to control half of historic Macedonia and the cultural genocide suffered by the Macedonian people.

For those Macedonians who think that an acceptable compromise can be found with Greece that does not negate the Macedonian identity, I say look to Greece's 100 year record of genocide against our people and see that short of a miracle there is no chance they will willingly back down.

Such people and countries respect only strength, so Macedonia must remain firm.

Meanwhile there can still be a bright future for Macedonia. Plenty of European countries are not part of NATO - Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Ireland etc. We are in good company.

Likewise for down the track if needed, plenty of countries are not part of the EU - Switzerland, Norway, Croatia, Turkey, Iceland, and others.

One of the best things going for Macedonia is that we have over 120 countries that have recognized Macedonia under its real name. These are our true friends with whom we should be building our political, economic and cultural links and our future.

It would be helpful to Macedonia if Macedonians everywhere could ask themselves the question - "How can I help Macedonia to remain politically stable and become economically strong?"

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