

Geopolitics of the Prespa Agreement: Background and After-Effects

Biljana Vankovska

To cite this article: Biljana Vankovska (2020) Geopolitics of the Prespa Agreement: Background and After-Effects, Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 22:3, 343-371, DOI: [10.1080/19448953.2020.1739880](https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2020.1739880)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2020.1739880>



Published online: 12 Apr 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 86



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Geopolitics of the Prespa Agreement: Background and After-Effects

Biljana Vankovska 

International Relations and Peace Studies, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Macedonia

ABSTRACT

The Prespa Agreement (PA), which allegedly resolved the name dispute between Athens and Skopje, has been commended as an unparalleled triumph of Western diplomacy and a proof of maturity on the part of the two states involved. This article sheds light on one of the deal's least explored aspects—its geopolitical motives. The starting premise is that the agreement is a product of arm-twisting for the sake of advancing NATO, i.e., predominantly USA interests in the region. This article argues that instead of resolving a dispute, the PA is likely to grow into an additional source of regional destabilization. This article handles the PA, the conditions under which it was made possible and its aftermath, as an empirical case that may expose some important points about how neo-imperialism organizes matters in the region and beyond.

1. Introduction

In this article, the so-called name dispute between Athens and Skopje is intentionally bypassed as something that may have been the seeming reason for, but not the essence of the Prespa Agreement (PA).¹ Also, the agreement is not seen as a whole as an act/event but rather as one in a series of past and future developments. In this author's view, the importance that is attached to the need for deciphering the regional and global background of the PA derives from the following premises: first, the PA was meant as a signal that the US was back in the Balkan region that it had somewhat neglected in previous years. With Russia taking the lead in the Middle East, and Chinese economic penetrating into many areas, the Balkans obviously re-gained their importance for US foreign policy. Showing off muscular diplomacy to Russia and China may have been the primary goal, but at the end of the day this exercise of strong influence in the Balkans produced effects, whether intentional or not, on the EU enlargement policy. Second, the 'solution' to the name dispute has been motivated by geopolitical 'urgency' i.e., a need to solidify NATO on the Balkan 'frontline' in the context of Second Cold War prospects.² Third, although a relatively trivial dispute by itself (if understood in narrow terms as a mere name change), its 'resolution' was supposed to serve as a prelude to solving a far more important geopolitical issue—the Belgrade/Pristina relationship. Rewarding the Republic of Macedonia for the 'sacrifice' of its name could be seen as an encouragement for Serbia to follow suit. Fourth, the obvious

disregard of the negative chain of effects streaming from the PA for Macedonian society indicates that the West (particularly the US) is willing to sacrifice one unimportant pawn for a greater geopolitical interest even if it means state disintegration and renewed regional upheaval. In view of its internal weaknesses, and its location in an area where inter- and intra-imperial interests collide, Macedonia remains a tinder box in the Balkans.³

This article explores the PA's real-life context in what is now known as North Macedonia. The article is structured in such a way as to reveal the geopolitical crux of the PA and its consequences on post-Prespa Macedonia and its relationships with the EU, NATO, Russia, China, and to some degree to its Balkan neighbourhood.⁴ It argues that the PA's *Realpolitik* essence has been hidden from view by a joint consensus among NATO and EU leaders on a seemingly liberal narrative over finding a solution to the name dispute. Now, while the consensus is real, if only because EU and NATO elites are the same or largely intersect, the considerations that govern it are less than liberal. The immature and inept diplomacy of the Lilliputian state failed (or did not want) to recognize that the European politicians who encouraged them to sign the PA were wearing 'two hats'—simultaneously as leaders of both NATO and EU member-states.

The analysis of this case suggests that mainstream (liberal and realist) IR theories have lost much of their explanatory power in an Orwellian world. A critical-school perspective can therefore be useful, especially when analysing the dominant academic discourse on the PA and its alleged benefits. Robert Cox's dictum that 'theory is always for someone and some purpose' rings truer than ever.⁵ Thus it is necessary to look closely at all allegedly unbiased theoretical explanations and pose the crucial question: *who* or what is it *for*, or whose *interests* does it serve? Among the theoretical inquiries into the PA's ins and outs so far (let alone domestic and Western media propaganda on the topic), a majority serve as justification and legitimizing tools of Western policy in the region. Even the slightest critique of the PA is routinely labelled as 'nationalist' or even 'extremist', and in some cases as pro-Russian by default. To disprove that view, this article will attempt to elaborate a critical perspective of the PA as further evidence of the West's mismanagement of the Balkans since 1991 as well as its imperial pursuits in the region and beyond.

The geopolitical approach of this analysis can be justified in two ways. Although it may not be the alpha and omega of the PA, by addressing the influence of global power politics on this specific empirical case, it factors ulterior motives and national interests of the power centres and/or of the countries directly involved. In spite of the insufficient time and distance from the event/process analysed (thus many details remain unknown or uncertain for any researcher), the dominant positive narrative that surrounds the PA, especially in the Macedonian public view, tends to hide the inconvenient geopolitical reality. It is geopolitics in denial. On the other hand, the advocates and active proponents of the PA had it both ways: while promising peace and prosperity within NATO (and eventually the EU), they pointed to geopolitical risks and emphasized anticipated security threats for the small country should the dispute remain unsettled. Thus, the basic premise of this article is that the PA was, *among other things*, the result of a 'push involvement' of Western powers for the sake of their geopolitical interests, including the class interests of the West's neo-liberal/ordo-liberal expansion.⁶

2. The Macedonian quandaries from the Cold War to the multipolar world

Macedonian statehood was the result of favourable geopolitical circumstances. Its birth was the product of two landmark developments almost half-a-century apart. The first was in 1944 when Macedonia's right to self-determination was confirmed and it subsequently joined federal Yugoslavia on an equal footing with other nations/republics on the basis of a constitutional formula which guaranteed its 'right to self-determination *including secession*'. The second arose in September 1991, as Yugoslavia was falling apart,⁷ when a referendum on state independence was organized, in which the vote to secede prevailed overwhelmingly. Yet in 2020, there is a lingering impression that it is an unfinished (or even unviable) state. For one thing, continuous 'horse-trading' between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians led to successive redefinitions of the political system within the power-sharing model introduced after the short but violent conflict of 2001.⁸ For another, the geopolitical insecurity generated by great-power clashes in the multipolar microcosm in the so-called Western Balkans did not help. Retrospectively, the combination of the external and internal constellations looks like as a recipe for disaster.

Statehood materialized (at least in embryo) in the dawn of the post-WWII bipolar international system, and reached fully fledged status within the 'safe zone' of a federal Yugoslavia that was one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁹ The regional and international challenges were a matter for the federal state to deal with. The tiny republic could enjoy gradual emancipation in its national 'bubble'. Though relieved of worries about the outside world, its geopolitical positioning remained—to put it mildly—precarious: it bordered with a NATO member state (Greece), a Warsaw Pact state (Bulgaria) and a self-isolated dictatorship (Albania).¹⁰ That balance of power in the south of Yugoslavia provided for the republic's safety. Full independence was gained in the 1990s, on the eve of the so-called 'unipolar moment',¹¹ seemingly as a by-product of Yugoslavia's implosion rather than as a result of a premeditated plan.

The Republic of Macedonia was an unlikely survivor due to the combination of external and internal challenges. Some ascribe its survival to the wise leadership of the first president Kiro Gligorov in handling the peaceful divorce from Yugoslavia, but it's more likely that the state's existence was implicitly guaranteed by the US. First, the Americans needed at least a temporary pacification of the potential Balkan rivalries, and wished to avert a revival of the old Macedonian Question, and further complication of the Balkan crisis.¹² One could argue that the only superpower at the time saw an interest in keeping a pawn in the *divide et impera* game, as it opened the possibility of controlling the timing of possible future complications if needed.

Second, the new state was a convenient base from which to observe and possibly control developments in Milosevic's Serbia (mostly over Kosovo) and neighbouring Albania. Hence, what used to be historically dubbed 'an apple of discord' hence miraculously turned out into an 'oasis of peace', at least until 2001. The advent of the 1992/1995 UN preventive diplomacy missions UNPROFOR and UNPREDEP¹³ had more than just a symbolic meaning, especially with a few hundred US soldiers on the ground. One could argue that these were relatively small missions, but it was a clear message to Milosevic that Serbia would not be allowed to take control of a territory that was home to a significant number of Albanians. Yet without the support of Russia and China, both of which recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name, the UN mission would

have not been possible.¹⁴ One could question the motives that kept the US from recognition of peaceful Macedonia, which *de facto* (un)intentionally left the state in geopolitical limbo, while it did recognize Bosnia on the eve of its collapse into a war.¹⁵ Recognition by the US came only after the signing of the 1995 Interim Accord between Skopje and Athens. According to a Macedonian diplomat, the key player in the name dispute was never Greece but rather the US in pursuit of its geopolitical interests.¹⁶ Last but not least, preserving (the image of) an alleged 'oasis' amidst a region engulfed in unprecedented bloodshed was a face-saver for the so-called international community and its disastrous intervention in Yugoslav wars/conflicts.

In later years, with practically no foreign policy capacities, the small state kept wavering between the sometimes divergent views and injunctions of the West's two power poles of the West, Brussels and Washington. Loyalty to Washington prevails.¹⁷ The leadership (like all state leaderships in the so-called 'new Europe') has always been more fascinated by (and scared of) the US power, while also deeply aware that in American eyes the Albanian factor is of special interest. As seen from Skopje, it was inadvisable to oppose the world's strongest imperial power.

On the other hand, the EU's inept treatment of the predictably volatile situation in Macedonia¹⁸ was just one more example among several others of European conflict mismanagement in former Yugoslavia.¹⁹ Some authors rightly make a step further claiming that the disintegration of Yugoslavia and its aftermath could hardly be comprehended without understanding the role of the Western powers in helping to produce and channel the crisis.²⁰

Europe's ability to deal with problems in its own backyard was *inter alia* tested and found wanting in the name dispute. Though it is this author's stated intention *not* to get into one more elaboration of the dispute as such,²¹ it seems pertinent to recall the then European Community's early positions on this problem. Disregarding the findings of its own Arbitration (Badinter) commission, the 1992 Lisbon summit made the state's recognition conditional upon the choice of a 'name which does not include the term Macedonia'.²² Eventually Macedonia was finally admitted to the UN in 1993 under a 'temporary' (*sic*) designation as the 'former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', in clear breach of the UN Charter.²³ Since then the EU has been trying to wash its hands out of the complex Balkan issue and leave it to the UN mediation effort auspiciously carried out by the US diplomat Matthew Nimetz. The 1995 Interim Accord provided a framework for normalization of the Greek-Macedonian relationships up to 2017, when the Prespa process got off the ground in earnest.

3. The name issue as a geopolitical currency: backstage rivalries

The alleged 'end of history' did not give birth to a new world order; furthermore, it did not even mean a coherent Western policy in global affairs. The Yugoslav wars/conflicts were the practical proof of that. As John Peterson puts it, the US has always been engaged in pressuring, cajoling and manoeuvring its European allies 'in the direction of unity and in a way that chimes with wider US objectives'.²⁴ At the same time, the European Community was pretending to play the role of mediator early in Yugoslavia's dissolution, while some of its member-states (mostly Germany) had already got involved into easing the separation process and protecting their ulterior national interests. Peter Gowan

rightly noted that the US policy towards the Yugoslav crisis was 'principally governed by its concern to ensure the imposition of shock therapy on the country as a whole via the IMF'.²⁵ Ironically, it was the UN Security Council that has gradually become 'an institutional enabler' for international financial institutions' involvement into post-conflict reconstruction through its issuance of resolutions that condone the promotion of markets (or 'marketization') that indelibly influences the orientation of post-conflict states.²⁶

In terms of military security, the US got involved in the Bosnian war but Germany also took part in the 'no fly zone' operation. The 1999 Kosovo war was a turning point, and ever since the EU has started its transformation from Venus into a Tomboy (if not Mars) through strengthening its foreign and security policy i.e., militarizing it. It was no longer enough for the US to fight the wars and leave it to Europe clean up the mess. Its greater involvement in the Balkans made Carl Bildt exclaim: 'the new empire [in the Balkans] is the EU'.²⁷ Yet it has become an *empire in denial*.²⁸ Susan Woodward rightly argues that while most attention on Balkan interventions is given to the diplomatic (and occasionally military) actors and activities, the more intrusive (and even coercive) actions of domestic ordering and the politics of this dynamic interaction have been economic.²⁹ The EU has embarked on a state-building policy through the conditionality and enlargement policy mechanisms. The results are a series of semi-protectorates faking democracy in political terms,³⁰ and a sub-periphery in socio-economic terms after their unconditional surrender to (economic) neoliberalism.³¹ As Srećko Horvat and Igor Stiks rightly point out, the applied approaches are varied: certain members (Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia) were disciplined and punished; in other cases (Montenegro, Serbia and Albania), bilateral membership negotiations involved reward and punishment; Bosnia was managed, Kosovo was practically governed; Macedonia, mired in its name dispute with Greece, was ignored.³² What is common for all these societies is that public space was squeezed, while their peoples became depoliticized (i.e., politics has become irrelevant).³³ Michael Pugh's research has proven that public space in many post-Yugoslav societies has been increasingly squeezed by monetarism, privatization and limitation of the state's economic role.³⁴ One of the key aims of the West has been opening up the Balkan economies to western multinationals and financial institutions and outcompeting the local enterprises, both public and private. The transformation of the political economy of public space has been a purposeful strategy of territorial administration and social management by missionaries from outside.³⁵ Balkan societies have become objects of a neoliberal agenda of political economy as part of a civilizing mission to introduce a 'liberal peace' to war-torn countries, which has made them both vulnerable and helpless.³⁶ The eventual economic rise of China and Russia and their attempts of economic penetration have never been welcomed by Brussels and Washington out of fear that it would translate into political and security influence.

Having been deprived from any influence on their everyday lives in the socio-economic sphere, citizens have become disempowered in the political sphere as well. The only meaningful function of formal politics has been transformed into a protection of one's (ethnic/identity) group interests from other groups. Such an understanding of local politics has transformed political participation and resulted in high election turnout governed by fears and emotions.

In such a context, the name issue was conveniently (mis)used by all sides involved in light of their domestic and foreign interests. Despite its negative effects, the name issue was hardly the crux of the matter. Indeed, the dispute has never been (only) about the state's name and to this day few have been willing to dig deeper and tackle the root causes of a conflict that simmered for decades. Nationalism and debates over the name served to divert attention from the ordoliberal/neoliberal medicines imposed on both Greece and Macedonia.

Ever since the 1990s, Macedonia's key strategic goals—i.e., NATO and EU membership—seem to have been not only a beacon of hope but also the glue that has kept its problematic society together. With the state's compass always pointing to the West, its foreign policy goals have served to provide internal cohesion for the ethnically divided society rather than to position the state in the international system. Meanwhile, NATO and EU membership have turned into a secular religion, a dogma that must not be questioned at all.

The name dispute was allegedly the key obstacle on the road to Euro-Atlantic and European integration due to Greece's veto power in both organizations. In fact, it served as a fig leaf to cover the awkward reality: first, it conveniently helped Western powers keep a poor and undesirable relative at arm's length, while encouraging hopes and reforms. Greece could be implicitly pointed at as the main culprit, with the ready excuse that a sovereign state with veto power could not be circumvented. Second, the dispute helped successive Macedonian governments to cover their inherent impotence to deliver any concrete progress for its citizens: the finger pointing towards the unjust neighbour and unfair international politics afforded them the luxury of not taking responsibility for internal deficiencies. In return, the Greek reaction inadvertently favoured the rise of Macedonian nationalism, thus whipping up sentiment and creating ethnic security dilemma on both sides of the country's internal Macedonian/Albanian divide. From outside perspective, the dispute *de facto* made the small and unknown part of the Balkans discernible, although few took it seriously: most of the time it was referred to as a most absurd or ridiculous problem in international relations—until the power centres decided to classify it as a European security issue as a function of their own interests, and to increase pressure on Skopje.

In close view the dispute between the two states was (and is) anything but explosive. Except for the trifling and annoying procedures at border controls, the citizens of the two states have been in peaceful and tolerable communication. The border was never an obstacle for tourism, seasonal work and the movement of capital. If it were not for the NATO/EU membership bids, the dispute would not be a burning issue at all. The two states/societies have co-existed rather easily, especially since Greece was enjoined by the EU's internal rules from imposing sanctions and/or embargoes on its neighbour.

The name dispute has served as 'small change' for some geopolitical transactions between great powers. For instance, the US allegedly 'recognized' the Republic of Macedonia's constitutional name on the eve of the 2004 referendum on municipalities' borders. Washington played on the emotions of the Macedonians in order to sabotage their opposition to ethnically gerrymandered local self-government (one puzzle of the power-sharing bargaining between the two major ethnic communities). The idea was to appease (i.e., to dangle a carrot in front of) ethnic Macedonians. On the Greek side, almost on any sign that the US or European capitals may show some understanding for

the neighbour's position over the name, a generous and unnecessary purchase of military equipment would follow. At the end of the day, the great powers would have their way at the expense of two Balkan states whose societal and social security have been gradually decaying. Yet, the political leaders of those two deeply indebted and practically bankrupt states living under an (in)visible international protectorate place priority on the state's military security rather than on their citizens' wellbeing: Macedonia is hoping for NATO membership (i.e., for direct protection), while Greece seeks security vis-à-vis its major regional rival Turkey, through a military build-up. However, both Greece and Macedonia scarcely match Turkey's geo-strategic importance for the West (even when Turkey becomes an erratic NATO member). Security sought by Greece and Macedonia is but a mere delusion; yet persistent fears (real or imagined) serve Washington's purpose in cultivating it as it sells masses of military hardware to both Greece and Turkey (and since recently to Macedonia as well). Furthermore, the arms race and militarization of the Balkan region accelerates.³⁷

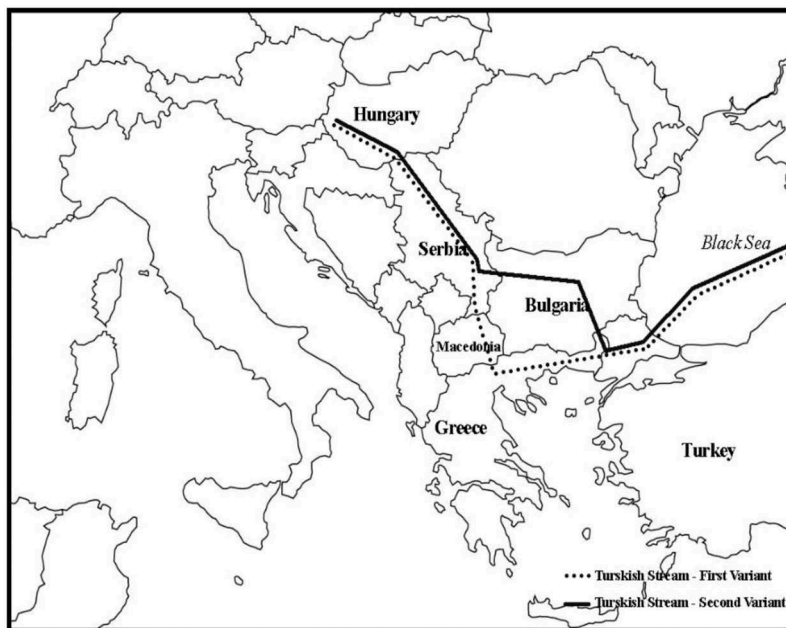
The alleged resolution of the name dispute was made possible by a specific international context and timing. First, the countries concerned are positioned in a region where the inter- and intra-imperial forces meet and cooperate or collide. In other words, the geopolitical fault lines meet in the Balkans. The current international system offers a hybrid character but scholars disagree about its definition: is it a uni-multipolar system in which the US still dominates over the rest of the world due to its military, economic and technologic supremacy, a bi-multipolar system with USA vs Russia in military and political terms, or USA vs China in terms of economic supremacy, or it is no one's international system? While this author does not intend to go any further into such debates here, the basic premise here is that although the Balkans may not command centre stage in the contest for the next world order (to paraphrase Kaplan),³⁸ it still has critical importance for global security. It may be considered a microcosm of multipolarity.

A rough sketch of the Balkan geopolitical moment displays the following features: first, there is a deepening rift between the Western allies, i.e., a process of disintegration of Euro-Atlanticism under the disruptive economic ascendance of China.³⁹ In this particular chess-game, the US still has the strongest militarily hold in the Western Balkans, especially after the EU's failure to revive its enlargement policy. German and Austrian capital and banks dominate the Western Balkans, including Macedonia, so the economic overview gives a different perspective about the power and motives of the actors. For instance, one could say that France makes obstacles to the EU enlargement among other things because as seen from Paris, the Balkans is a German sphere of economic interest. Namely, Germany has proved to be the ultimate winner in economic terms of the enlargement so far. Its economic influence goes far beyond the EU core and periphery so no wonder Germany is the most significant economic partner of Macedonia to the degree that one could argue of the country's deep dependence on Berlin.⁴⁰ Second, Russia pursues its 'multi-vector' foreign policy, allowing the Russian government 'to use a very elastic, opportunistic and pragmatic approach in its relations with other nations'.⁴¹ Although Russia was one of the first powers that recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name, the Macedonians do not harbour warm feelings and great expectations from Moscow like some other Balkan nations. Moscow has *de facto* shown no particular interest in Macedonia's affairs although the Western propaganda claims the

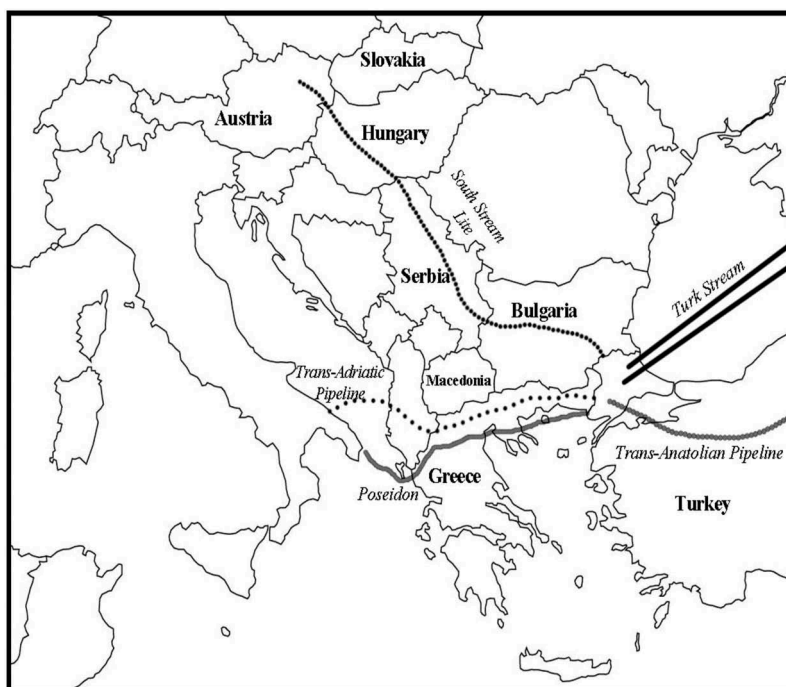
opposite.⁴² Moscow had nothing to gain or lose in the Prespa process so it limited itself to some declaratory phrases and paid lip-service to those who expected its more resolute action in the UN institutional system. Obviously, the stakes in Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Hungary, especially in the field of energy, are much bigger and more important.⁴³ While doubling the capacity of North Stream pipeline across the Baltic Sea to Germany in spite of the threat of US sanctions, Russia has also strengthened its presence in Bulgaria and Serbia through the Turkish Stream project.⁴⁴ During Nikola Gruevski's government, Macedonia also hoped to be a part of the ill-fated South Stream (due to the EU opposition) (See [Map 1](#)). In the meantime, however, Macedonia has been bypassed by all pipeline projects in the region, including the Turkish Stream (see [Map 2](#)).

While all the Balkan neighbours (Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia) seem to have understood that the world has changed not only due to the absence of one centre of power, but also because there are not well-defined centres that divide friends from enemies, Macedonia seems to still lag behind unable to grasp the new realities. Shlapentokh rightly stresses, the current powers could be foes in one context, neutral in another and friends in a third.⁴⁵

China is silently and determinedly expanding its economic influence (through its Belt and Road Initiative—BRI) in the region⁴⁶ but had to retreat slightly since Zaev's government took power in Macedonia and called into question all Chinese projects in the country.⁴⁷ Pavlicevic's claim that Brussels has reformulated its agenda so as to bind the Balkan states to its own policies and objectives, constraining their ability to independently shape their relationship with Beijing⁴⁸ rings true in Macedonia too. Turkey is a loose NATO member who has its own (historical, economic and political) interests in the region and beyond. It has traditionally been seen as a good friend of Macedonia not only



Map 1. Turkish Stream Variant.



Map 2. Pipeline Projects Crossing the Balkans.

because of the footnote supporting international recognition under its constitutional name,⁴⁹ or the existence of a Turkish minority in the country.⁵⁰ Of greater significance is that Turkish investments in Macedonia as well as political closeness may be a source of aggravation for Athens.

Complex in their own right, the regional dynamics also heavily depend on the games that great powers play in the area.

4. Clearing the path to Prespa: whatever it takes!

The path to Prespa, i.e., to the document with a long and curious name *Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as Described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Parties*, was nowhere to be seen on the horizon. It was hard to believe that the dispute could not be resolved if Washington wished it to be. Once the diplomatic machinery was put in motion, i.e., when Zaev's cooperative government came to power, everything went smoothly and miraculously fast. Bearing in mind that the crux of the solution (the so-called Nimetz packages, or set of ideas) had already been examined many times before during the exhausting mediation process, the key questions read: what had changed in the meantime to such an extent that the proposed compromise now became acceptable (even if it was the worst offer put on the table in years), and why was it suddenly so urgent to accept it—even at the cost of basic principles of international law, constitutional limitations, overt

violation of the rule of law principle and against the people's will (as expressed on the referendum of 30 September 2018)?

The dispute between Athens and Skopje was such that it could have lasted indefinitely.⁵¹ The variables that enabled its resolution concerned two aspects: the regime change in Macedonia and the West's need for a quick fix. Internally, the key obstacle so far had been Prime Minister Gruevski's strong (political) position and his stubbornness not to retreat from the defined (informal) 'red lines' (no change in the constitution, no use of the imposed name in the internal affairs, and consultation with the electorate through a mandatory referendum), which made an agreement with Athens all but impossible.⁵² Paradoxically, this 'strongman' (who soon appeared to be a paper tiger—yet smart enough to negotiate his freedom and safe haven in Hungary) had originally been a creature of the West.⁵³ The disillusionment from the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest was a turning point for the otherwise obedient government⁵⁴: George W. Bush's impotence to honour the promise of NATO membership was a traumatic event. It looked as if the US was not as powerful as it claimed, while the European allies proved to be indifferent.⁵⁵ Gruevski was *de facto* given free rein. This 'Bucharest moment' enabled the conservative (VMRO-DPMNE- Albanian DUI coalition) government to take advantage of the gross national disappointment to initiate a specific identity policy.⁵⁶ As the White House was in the middle of a transition to the next administration, no help could be expected from that quarter in due time. Both NATO and EU stuck to the same old message: 'They [the Greeks] are in, and you are out! So, accept any compromise in order to move ahead.' To Brussels' great surprise, Gruevski launched a procedure before the International Court of Justice. Aware that the legal arguments were on the plaintiff's side, EU officials responded symptomatically: they warned of negative consequences, while the Commissioner on Enlargement, Oli Rehn, and the High Representative, Javier Solana, co-authored an open letter entitled 'It's time for Statesmanship'. The key message was that use of judicial means is not part of the European tradition; and the essence of Europe is to resolve differences through dialogue.⁵⁷ In other words, the Brussels establishment implicitly defined the name issue as a political one, and even as a security matter. Macedonia had won a crystal-clear legal victory but the opposition vociferously evaluated it as a Pyrrhic one, while the government did not have the courage or capacity to use the verdict as a bargaining chip. Brussels made it clear that the IJC's ruling would not have any impact on NATO position.⁵⁸ More importantly, from that point on, Gruevski became wilful and emancipated himself from the Western power centres. Externally, he tried to make a few incursions in the changing world of international geopolitics. Among other actions, he tried to negotiate the inclusion of Macedonia in the South Stream project with Russia, opened the country to Chinese investments, invited billionaires from non-Western countries (a few disputable ones such as the Indian Subrata Roy), and attempted to constitutionally guarantee tax haven zones, which together with flat tax rates, already introduced, and other measures were meant to privilege multinational investors. The relationships with Turkey had never been better, and Macedonia did not follow the West's requests to join sanctions against Russia over Ukraine and Crimea.

By doing so, the now renegade Prime Minister triggered alarms. Washington and Brussels did not hide their growing dissatisfaction, while overtly favouring the opposition leader Zaev. Even prior to the 2015 'bombshell campaign' (following a public broadcast on phone interceptions),⁵⁹ a 'revolution' was in the air: the opposition forces had been referring to the country's 'Ukrainisation' ('Macedonian EuroMaidan') or even to a local

form of an ‘Arab Spring’. Zaev managed to mobilize them effectively, and with external support the scene was set for another ‘coloured revolution’ which eventually ended Gruevski’s rule. Zaev failed to win a majority in the early 2016 elections but garnered enough votes to form a coalition government with the Albanian parties, on the basis of a list of ethnic demands articulated in the so-called Tirana platform. According to media reports, Italy was indirectly involved in getting together Zaev and the drafters of the Tirana platform. *La Verita* newspaper argues that there had been an agreement between Matteo Renzi, Edi Rama and Barack Obama to jointly support Zaev’s ‘colourful campaign’ and to bring him to power.⁶⁰ The protracted crisis (including popular protests of different colours i.e., nationalist red & yellow ones) culminated on 27 April when protesters stormed into the Parliament building. The highly disturbing event made Zaev a martyr and paved the way for his government.⁶¹

Once Gruevski and his party colleagues were charged with various criminal misdeeds through the Special Prosecutor’s office imposed by the West-mediated Przhino process, Zaev could turn to a few small populist measures and embark on a key course of action leading to alleged resolution of the two major bilateral disputes—with Bulgaria and Greece, both concerning Macedonian national identity. The PA was a follow-up of the previously ratified Agreement with Bulgaria, which was supposed to overcome the bilateral dispute over the Macedonian language, history and identity. The so-called Friendship treaty between Skopje and Sofia was signed in August 2017, just months after Zaev’s coming in power. In a haste, the media rushed to proclaim it as a landmark agreement that allegedly brought the two countries closer through an EU-oriented partnership. Unlike the widely known dispute over the name issue, the Skopje-Sofia disagreements had never got any visibility or importance in the European or global arena. A typical Balkan-like identity ‘dispute’⁶² was far less troublesome as Bulgaria never explicitly vetoed Macedonia’s association to NATO and EU as Greece used to do. Apparently, a less problematic deal was concluded as the first clear success of Zaev’s neighbourhood policy. Once the deal was sold to the public with no major disturbances, the government was ready to embark on resolving what looked as a more sensitive problem—i.e., the name issue with Greece. The Treaty with Sofia went below the radars of the national sentiments, although in identity terms it bears much more burdens for the ethnic Macedonians than the PA, which followed a year later. The political opposition was in free-fall after the criminal charges and the events of 27 April, while the public was still trustful and hopeful that Zaev would bring positive changes. Few have ever read the details of the Agreement with Bulgaria, which also applies to the PA. In terms of the identity entanglement, the Bulgarian demands look more assertive than the Greek ones, which mean even tougher conditions on the path to EU membership.⁶³ On top of that, a significant number of Macedonian citizens opted for dual citizenship due to economic reasons (and gaining access to the EU labour market).

In less than a year and a half, Zaev delivered everything that was expected from him: both agreements (with Sofia and Athens) were concluded under the veil of secrecy, with no public or expert debate, and at the expense of the rule of law principle.⁶⁴ The PA was signed on 17 June 2018 in the little village Psarades (Nivici in Macedonian) on the Greek side of Lake Prespa, endowed with special symbolic meaning since the Greek Civil War.⁶⁵

5. Mars and Venus in action: the godfathers of the Prespa deal

The history of Western interventionism in the territory of former Yugoslavia displays a certain pattern: the EU being incompetent or divided over certain conflicts in its backyard, then the US intervenes in order to settle uncontrolled tensions on the ground (as illustrated by its role in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia). The name issue had gradually been securitized by external factors,⁶⁶ in accordance with the West's geopolitical interests and not because of any change in the issue's conflict potential.

Contrary to the widespread version that the respective leadership of the two Balkan nations have shown immense maturity in overcoming a long-lasting dispute, the reality is that the incentive for the PA came from abroad. The media speculated on various names of US experts⁶⁷ suspected of having helped draft the agreement, but none were big enough fish to pass as credible godfathers of the draft. James Pettifer argues that 'the 20 page "agreement" [...] seems to have been written by an unknown junior operative in a think tank not widely known for Balkans expertise.'⁶⁸ The facts show that the US' (quiet) diplomacy was directly involved into the success despite the fact that all credits were publicly given to the local politicians. The diplomatic offensive was led by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Aaron Wess Mitchell, and supported by US ambassadors in Athens and Skopje. During a visit to the region in March 2018, Mitchell stated that conditions for reaching a compromise were 'better than they have ever been.' Other senior figures included US Defence Secretary Mattis, Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton. It is usually said that special credit goes to Matthew Nimetz, who served as the UN Special Representative, but he can hardly be dissociated from US power circles. The EU stepped up its engagement more resolutely on the eve of the agreement, as did the leaders of individual countries (mostly German Chancellor Merkel and UK Prime Minister May). In a widely discussed interview in Macedonian press, Vassilis K. Fouskas notes:

The Agreement has been baked in the Pentagon and Berlin and as such it serves, first and foremost the interests of the USA and Germany. In both countries, Greece and Macedonia, I stand with that part of the public that recognizes this reality, namely, the geopolitical and cultural drives of NATO and Germany-led Europe to exclude Russia from the Balkans [...] Imperial powers never solve problems. They only fix them.⁶⁹

In an attempt to give the PA more legitimacy (and, should the case arise, wash their hands of its possible failure), the great power leaders involved spared no effort to make it appear that the PA had been a result of great statesmanship on the part of the two Balkan neighbours' rulers. Although a number of high-ranking international officials and dignitaries attended the ceremony, unlike the Ohrid Agreement, neither the EU nor the US formally appeared as a co-signatory or a guarantor of the Agreement. It seems as if they chose to stay on the margins and leave the whole glory to be harvested by the local leaders. Yet the presence of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mogherini and Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Hahn as well as the official support for the PA gave the process a more European than American flavour. Mogherini's office issued a statement declaring the following:

The European Union and the two of us personally have been accompanying this process step by step. We are here today, first of all to thank the two sides, because they make us all Europeans proud of the capacity to find—through diplomacy, through dialogue—a win-win solution for a problem that was long-standing for too many decades. It makes Europe more peaceful, more united and that also opens the way for the entire region of the Balkans to live in a different kind of atmosphere.⁷⁰

Given that the Junker Commission had precious few successes to be proud of, no wonder it seized the opportunity to list the PA among the EU top achievements in 2014–2019. While arguing that the deal ‘would not have been possible without the EU’s work in the country and the new incentive and impetus of the Western Balkan Strategy in 2018’—it makes a factual mistake saying that the deal was signed by Prime Ministers Tsipras and Zaev (instead of their foreign ministers).⁷¹ Indeed for some analysts, such as Angelos Chrysogelos, the agreement was both a geopolitical victory for the EU and a vindication of its vision of how international politics should work. Chrysogelos argues that ‘the deal represents all that is good about multilateralism and the rules-based international order at a time when these values are under attack by nationalism and populism in Europe, and by President Donald Trump and Russia further afield’.⁷² Objectively speaking, despite the grand ideas about the EU as a global actor (which failed due to the deep internal crises that shook it ever since 2008) one could hardly speak of any EU geo-strategy or geopolitical interests, which does not prevent the EU politicians and analysts from using such rhetoric. Avoiding to mention the role of the US in the deal-making is understandable but the EU remains dependent on the US military power. On the other hand, the PA may be seen as an economic victory for Germany and the EU.

Nevertheless, the European ‘soft power’ approach had a veiled Machiavellian logic to it: while ‘saving’ the region from populism (especially from the alleged Russian threat) and invoking a rules-based international order, the Union turned a blind eye to all the breaches of international law (including the Vienna Convention) being committed, as well as to the potential negative medium- and long-term effects. Seen from the 2020 perspective of shattered illusions not only because the EU did not keep its promise but also due to the earth-shaking scandals and general political deterioration in Macedonia, one can only wonder why the EU had opted for a ‘quick fix’ in a very sensitive matter deserving of a more careful approach, which is usually typical for the US approach to international problems. Francis Boyle was assured that the 20 page agreement basically drafted by the US State Department that would take a professional international lawyer quite some time to figure out what it means and what would be the consequences for Macedonia: ‘As we Americans say, Macedonians will be getting the proverbial “pig in the poke” if you vote for this agreement in the forthcoming referendum. The Americans have never cared about constitutional requirements when they are trying to get people to swallow an agreement.’⁷³ As expected, the popular sovereignty and basic democratic principles were totally disregarded in two key occasions: the referendum and the constitutional revision.

On that occasion both Mars/USA and Venus/Europe (to paraphrase Robert Kagan) alike showed how little they cared about popular sentiment or even the pretence of direct democracy (which comes as no surprise after the 2015 referendum in Greece). The public was under unprecedented pressure for months, while foreign dignitaries were parading in front of the government building in Skopje, the Macedonian capital, and a huge

amount of money was dished out on propaganda. The EU Delegation in Skopje was overtly engaged in a campaign entitled 'Imagine the Future Together' displaying a child's happy face.⁷⁴ The Zaev government used the services of a UK PR firm, which was funded by the UK Foreign Office, and made no secret of it: 'Stratagem International is a resource for the referendum task force (Yes Campaign)'.⁷⁵

The referendum of 30 September 2018 itself was a cross between a very expensive public opinion poll and a reality show. It failed to reach the constitutional census of 50% +1 (less than 37 % of the electorate cared to vote), which was confirmed by the State Electoral Commission. The constitutional revision procedure was even more scandalous but again the West turned a blind eye in the name of a higher (geopolitical) good. In legal terms, the PA's signing was an *ultra vires* act⁷⁶; it was never ratified in accordance with the law, while its entering into force upon publication in the *Official Gazette* only with one signature (that of the speaker of the parliament) represents a crime under the Criminal Code. Chrysogelos rightly points out that Brussels has chosen to 'ignore problematic aspects of a ratification process that has challenged constitutional norms and rule of law principles in both Macedonia and Greece. Pushing through the deal in both countries has required political bargaining that has pushed the limits of legality.'⁷⁷ Pushing the limits of legality actually amounted in this case to a promotion of illegality as long as it was politically useful and guaranteed politicians' impunity for such a major breach of the law.⁷⁸

The ramming through of the agreement was possible due to the infamous encouragement of EU Commissioner Hahn to Zaev to carry on with the PA regardless of the referendum failure, suggesting a 'combination of the Balkan and rational approach' in securing the 2/3 majority necessary for the change in the Constitution and ratification of the PA.⁷⁹ The process was completed in such a way that the whole idea of rule of law was sacrificed on the altar of (geo)political effectiveness: by intimidation and 'reconciliation' with eight opposition MPs who had been charged by the Special Prosecutor's office or the regular state prosecutor (for the events of 27 April), including a fast change in the Criminal code to provide them with guarantees that they will not be charged in the future.⁸⁰

The treatment reserved for Macedonia in the process was little short of colonial in style. The Macedonian side was an outsider and bystander in its own dispute with no say in anything important, including its constitutional sovereignty. As for the Greek position, there is a disagreement between some observers. For instance, while Stavros Mavroudeas argues that the agreement was imposed upon both countries by the US and the EU in order to secure the area in the Western sphere of interest and potentially against Russia,⁸¹ Alexis Heraclides argues that although the PA is asymmetric/lopsided, favouring Greece, as far as the latter is concerned, it was not imposed in any way by the US, NATO or the EU.⁸² On the other hand, he claims that the Prespa Agreement reminds one of the state of play in the nineteenth century, when the infamous distinction existed between 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' states, a distinction which led to unequal treaties, with the 'less civilised' states 'less equal', with less sovereignty and lacking the ability of intervention.⁸³

How can one account for such haste and carelessness in the resolution of the 27-year long dispute that did not exhibit any sudden explosive potential? Things became urgent for NATO once the geopolitical constellations changed more significantly, and Macedonia proved too much of a nuisance standing in the way of the Western geopolitical design for the Balkans. In February 2015 the US State Secretary John Kerry told the

Senate's foreign affairs committee that 'Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia are the new front line between Russia and the West'.⁸⁴ This statement coincided with the beginning of the political crisis that led to the coloured revolution. Eventually Zaev's government also used the urgency argument because 1) the country's security and its very existence were at stake, and 2) that it was the last opportunity for Macedonia to join NATO and the EU and thus secure the wellbeing the people want. This thesis combining (exaggerated) geopolitical (in)security imperatives (or rather, fear-mongering) and the prosperity and wellbeing of a poor country is quite contradictory and even Orwellian.⁸⁵ The Macedonian IR experts have always been trying to amalgamate real-politik with neoliberal ideals in a way that politicians usually do. The dictum 'the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must' have always been the alpha and omega of the Macedonian IR scholars.⁸⁶ Ex-foreign minister, and IR professor, Denko Maleski argues that the 'Macedonian question' and the Balkans are in the centre of world politics due to the big tectonic shifts in the relations between Russia and the West. More precisely, 'the name deal has become an urgent question for the national security of the US and the Western Allies'.⁸⁷

There is not much that the poor Macedonian state could contribute to NATO, but its incorporation into the Western bloc amounts to a symbolic victory over Moscow, just as the building of a military base (Krivolak) in a central position is a response to potential Serbian and Russian incursions. The US would like to prove its hegemonic role in the Balkans, and get closer to Serbia,⁸⁸ a big Balkan country that maintains good political, economic and military relations with Russia and China.

6. From compromise to zero-sum game: Macedonia lost in the transition

The entire narrative over the PA, jointly devised by the Western powers and the local elites (including media pundits, scholars, and NGO activists), has centred on one word: compromise! However, in the local version the compromise was supposed to mean 'more, better, richer'—while the national concessions were totally downplayed. Compromise is rarely a successful way of conflict resolution,⁸⁹ and the politics behind it are usually a politics of subordination of the weaker side to the more powerful. The picture of Europe offered in that narrative resemble a fairy-tale—despite the warnings about Europe's challenges and the analyses pointing to parallels with the 1930s.

As could be expected, the idyllic picture of Europe and of the allegedly 'historic' deal and 'win-win' solution of the name dispute (initially supported by the global academic elite as well)⁹⁰ shattered into pieces after the first serious blow—the French *Non* at the EU summit in October 2019. Not only did North Macedonia, as now known, gain nothing (i. e., the promised progress in the accession process that has been stalled since 2005) but it also found itself coupled with Albania—a country with serious internal problems, which did not need to make any sacrifice comparable to the Macedonian one. It resulted into another 'Bucharest moment' of gross disappointment and pathetic lamentations. The pattern of NATO and EU enlargement that argues that first a country becomes a NATO member and then an EU member has been both false and imposed upon only states from the former Communist bloc. However, the Macedonian President Pendarovski exclaimed that NATO is not to be seen as a consolation prize but as a key achievement of the Prespa process.⁹¹

This analysis, rather than dwell on these purely internal aspects, finds it far more important to debunk the myth of Prespa's alleged great significance for the wider picture. The road to Prespa and the efforts invested in it by the West only deepened the crisis and rivalries within and among the power centres. The US is not only a superpower in relative decline at the global level but it also suffers from internal divisions and power battles. One may argue that this is nothing unique since all states suffer from internal divisions and socio-political struggles, or to put it in Poulantzas' terms there is no necessity for class interests and the functions of the state always to coincide,⁹² but the significance of the US case derives from its role in the international system. The reverse is also true: the changes at the international level (i.e., the relative economic decline of the US and the power-shift to China, Russia, India etc. have intensified the internal struggles, especially at the elite level. The US administration, in particular the State Department and the Pentagon, has never been one coherent entity, and it is even less so now under the Trump presidency. The best example is to be found in the US attempts to resolve the Kosovo problem with Belgrade, with two envoys using different rhetoric and reporting to different bosses.

NATO, aware of its critical dependence on the US and their willingness to keep it alive as long as it serves the US imperial interests, is also in a deep existential crisis. The EU is facing a 'make or break' moment. The Euro-zone crisis is far from being resolved, while the consequences of the UK's leaving the Union are hard to predict. This put a real strain on the EU as a viable undertaking based on neo-ordo-treaties. The US—Europe axis has not fared well for quite some time due to the effects of the centrifugal forces. In the face of frequent calls to abandon NATO from various quarters within the US establishment, the EU has been working on a project of setting up a European army—to little avail so far. The EU is additionally suffering from the internal power games between Berlin and Paris as a result of Germany's hegemonic ascendancy and France's ambitions to remain a power centre. However, what many analysts do not see is that the EU has hardly been a neutral set of governing bodies, institutions and practices. As Costas Lapavistas rightly points out, it is structured in a way that favours the interests of capital and against labour.⁹³ Seen from this perspective, even the positive outcome of the PA in terms of starting EU accession negotiations with Skopje would not translate into any fulfilment of unrealistic expectations of prosperity and wellbeing. The best scenario would see North Macedonia join Greece and Bulgaria, among others, in the European periphery under the auspices of the ordo-liberal project of enduring austerity.

Being on NATO's frontline is not a comfortable or secure position, and in that regard the Macedonian establishment is either blindfolded or careless, to say the least. The project of using the NATO umbrella to anchor Macedonia in the West has elicited contrasting attitudes from at least a few European states—most importantly Germany, Italy, and France—whose starting positions were influenced by hidden agendas dating back to a period of a hundred years ago or more, when their national interests prevailed. These countries then resorted to the bandwagon technique to persuade Macedonian voters that the sacrifice would be worth it. Namely, while ostensibly using the tools of the EU normative power policy (and making unrealistic, or better fake promises about free education and social welfare), a number of European politicians were *de facto* wearing NATO hats, or simply had national agendas on their minds. The gradual disintegration of the European project (and the rise of new authoritarianism)⁹⁴ has brought national self-interest back to the foreground. Germany has always needed to deepen its influence

in the Balkan region (i.e., the periphery of the EU's periphery). Italy, as Albania's old ally and sponsor, still cares about its historic ties and influence on Albanian politics and the region (more than 60% of fixed capital investment in Albania is of Italian origin). France may be seen as a traditional ally of both Greece and Serbia. In stark contrast, without any historic or present allies, Macedonia seems stuck in limbo.

At the same time, while strictly prohibiting pawn states such as Macedonia from developing any economic or energy cooperation projects with Russia and China, all these European states benefit from their bilateral relations with Russia and China, but also with India and Turkey.⁹⁵ Situated in a multipolar regional microcosm, (North as well as previously the Republic of) Macedonia has been forced—often at the expense of its own vital interests—to behave as if the whole world is limited to the West. It regards it as its own master, despite the fact that the West is no more than an abstraction and does not exist as an entity except for rhetoric use when needed.

For the deeply divided and internally weak Macedonian state, the deadlock over the EU's enlargement policy (and the substitution for it in a form of the so-called Eastern partnership) results in a precarious situation. It seems that the compromise over its name and constitution has brought no reward at all, at least in terms of what the country's most urgent needs call for. Macedonian elites appear lost in the multipolar dynamics of their own region, with a compass which shows no cardinal points other than the West. Russophobia is strongly encouraged locally by Western-funded media and NGOs. Falsely egged on by the country's NATO membership, the Macedonian political elite is prone to making enemies rather than friends, and has yet to learn how to cooperate with others when it is in the nation's best interest.

China is a silent, patient power bent on long-term planning. On the surface it seems as if landlocked Macedonia is too small and insignificant to be of any particular interest—and furthermore, its territory could be easily bypassed if necessary. But a closer look displays a different picture: for quite some time China has had an idea of building a regional north-south high-speed railway, which in its final stage would link Thessaloniki to Budapest via Skopje and Belgrade, which comes in parallel with another plan to construct a water connection between the rivers Vardar, Morava and Danube. Both plans have been halted due to German opposition and the lost political will in Skopje. The consolation prize came from the so-called Berlin process (2017 Trieste summit), which envisaged financial support (through grants and loans) for a 34 km. slow speed railway between Skopje and Sofia (Corridor 8).⁹⁶ Contrary to what aggressively pro-Western media propaganda stated, there's little Moscow and Beijing had to lose or gain from the name deal. Russia remained quiet on the issue throughout the Prespa process, or was content with giving mere lip service: it issued official statements finger-pointing at Western pressure, but that was all. Except for a few marginal political figures, a majority of the populace does not trust Russia for historic reasons: it did nothing to support Macedonia's struggle for autonomy or independence in the days of the Ottoman empire, and Moscow is traditionally felt to be too close to Belgrade and Athens for comfort). China and India appear too distant for short-sighted Macedonian diplomats.

7. Conclusion

Macedonian statehood was recognized thanks to the favourable geopolitical circumstances and the implicit consent of the great powers. Thus, one may not completely

disregard the other scenario: should the small and poor state be seen to be unviable, major geopolitical players may decide that sustaining it is of no interest to anyone. The PA has been presented through propaganda tools as a 'voluntary compromise'—and the fact is that it has not generated a mass revolt so far (the reasons for this quiescence are manifold, and would in its own right deserve another full-length study). If the pessimistic scenario comes true, it is quite possible that another 'voluntary agreement' will come about, this time with a final solution to the Macedonian Question—the state's disappearance from the world political map. If the process of internal federalization, which is already underway, shows more progress, it will be a confirmation of moving into the direction of that final scenario thus annulling the significance of the PA.

The official version of the Prespa process was premised on the game theory notion that it would produce a 'win-win' situation, i.e., a best-scenario variety of a non-zero-sum game in which every player stands to gain everything from an agreement. The real outcome looks more like an 'ordinary' non-zero-sum game—one in which overall gains exceeded overall losses, but some lost or gained more than others. Analysis shows that nearly all parties (and even the bystanders such as Russia and China) have gained (even if less than initially hoped for), though such gains have been mitigated by some losses or disappointments. For instance, while the US achieved its goal in regards to Macedonia's addition to NATO's membership list, the hopes it had pinned on Prespa's positive effects on Serbia have been disappointing. Greece has been relieved from the position of culprit in the NATO and EU integration process, and allegedly gained a lot (in terms of the identity policy)⁹⁷ but the PA does not help in resolving other substantial issues. Russia has no stake in this game and practically lost nothing but it strengthened its position with Belgrade, while not losing anything in good relations with Athens. The same applies to France and the UK, which have no special interest in Macedonia but are in a relative win-situation with regards to their national interests. Italy has gained through its very involvement in the 'coloured revolution', and its influence on Zaev's government and the Tirana platform, i.e., by exercising renewed political clout vis-à-vis Albania and improving its standing in US eyes within the alliance. The EU's score card is a mixed one at best: whereas it can brag about effectively helping engineer the PA, it will take some time before the trust placed in its promises is restored in the region. The dire bottom-line is that the only real loser is what majority of the people of Macedonia wanted: the Republic of Macedonia. If this analysis is correct, the PA's consequences for its internal stability are worrisome. Macedonians gained almost nothing which would ensure the survival of their state. At a round table on EU integration and Western Balkans held in New York in September 2019, Zaev argued that deals like the PA are usually signed after wars⁹⁸ (indeed, after a capitulation).⁹⁹ It may be just a collective perception—but perceptions (and frustrations) matter especially when it comes to societal security.

Post-Prespa Macedonia is possible only as an authoritarian (indeed, Orwellian) state, that is if its internal divisions do not lead, as is likely, to its final disintegration along ethnic lines with its elites pursuing a ruthless policy of austerity and devastation. The viability of the Macedonian state was obviously not the main concern of the PA's engineers: they only cared about the wider geopolitical balance of power in the region. So far North Macedonia seems like an acceptable (yet transitory) 'solution' of the Balkan puzzle because its southern part fits the 'turbulent frontier' metaphor in the Western strategic agenda. Woodward gets it correct (once again) arguing that the current regulatory regime is largely only an

institutionalization of patterns of international practice in the Balkans since the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ North Macedonia may look like the newest country in the world¹⁰¹—yet, there is nothing new under the (Western) sun.

Notes

1. The text of the agreement is available at <<https://vmacedonia.com/politics/macedonia-greece-agreement.html>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
2. The notion of Cold War II has entered the academic and political narrative during the Ukrainian crisis. In general, it refers to the new confrontation between the West and Russia, NATO eastward enlargement, and competition of the two allegedly ideologically opposite blocks over their influence on some regions of critical importance (such as Middle East, Mediterranean, the Balkans). Some authors question even the notion of the First Cold War as a geopolitical construct and challenge the thesis that the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin wall. Vankovska argues that the Cold War I had merely spread an ideological fig leaf over a far older contest, the Cold War II is nothing but misnomer to hide the power politics as usual. ('The Cold War II: Just Another Misnomer?', *Contemporary Macedonian Defence*, 14(26), June 2014, p. 49, available at <<http://www.morm.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Sovremena-makedonska-odbrana-br.26-en.pdf>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). Similarly, Fouskas argues that the Cold War has not really 'ended' and that all the major Cold War actors fighting for diverse geo-political and geo-economic interests are still around ... (*Zones of Conflict US Foreign Policy in the Balkans and the Greater Middle East*, Pluto Press, London, 2003, p. 5).
3. According to some analysts, there are also regional imperialisms with regards to Macedonia. For instance, Victor Freedman refers to the Bulgarian language imperialism, while Zarko Puhovski mentions the Greek one. (See: 'Akademik Fridman: Ova e bugarski jazicen imperijalizam—razlikite megu dvata jazika se na sekoe lingvisticko nivo' [Academic Freedman: This is a Bulgarian linguistic imperialism—the differences between the two languages are to be seen on every single level], *Alsat M TV*, 16 December 2019, available at <<https://360stepeni.mk/video-akademik-fridman-ova-e-bugarski-jazichen-imperijalizam-razlikite-megu-dvata-jazika-se-na-sekoe-lingvistichko-nivo/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020); 'Puhovski: Bosna i Hercegovina postupno propada' [Puhovski: Bosnia and Herzegovina is gradually failing], *RFE*, 10 June 2019, available at <<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/29991732.html>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
4. The regional puzzle is complicated *per se* and does not necessarily have a geopolitical background but it is rather a consequence of the old Great powers' games in the Balkans, which nowadays gets an outlook of a territory overburdened by unresolved historic hatreds and ethnic issues. Due to the limited space, we shall make only some references to the Macedonian-Bulgarian relations.
5. R. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 10 (2), 1981, p. 128.
6. While many scholars debate and compare the concepts of economic neoliberalism and ordoliberalism, the Balkan societies and their actors are rarely aware of this differentiation in theoretical and/or practical terms. One could say that the Balkan region is a place where two conceptions meet and collide, as the US (Anglo-American) and the EU (primarily German) interests usually do. See more: the special issue of *Critical Sociology*, 45(7–8), 2019.
7. Socialist Yugoslavia (or Second Yugoslavia) was a country full of contradictions but it was not ancient hatreds among its constituent nations that brought to its end. Woodward offered persuasive proofs for the thesis that it was the Western interference, particularly through its financial institutions such as IMF that played a key role in the country's disintegration. According to her, especially since 1970s, the Communist regime legitimacy rested on the living standard that were much higher than elsewhere in the socialist block, i.e., internal social peace *inter alia* was bought by foreign credits as a result of the Yugoslav

leaders' Faustian bargain (See: *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1995; also: *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1995). As the economic crisis deepened and transformed into a societal crisis, the ruling elites swiftly used nationalist narrative as a trump card for renewed legitimacy. (Z. Puhovski, *Socijalistička konstrukcija zbilje* [Socialist Construction of Reality], RS SOH, Zagreb 1990.

8. About the disastrous effects of the so-called Ohrid Framework Agreement that allegedly settled the inter-ethnic conflict in the country see more in: B. Vankovska, 'The Role of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the Peace Process in Macedonia', in S. Bianchini et al (eds), *Regional Cooperation, Peace Enforcement, and the Role of the Treaties in the Balkans*, Longo Editore Ravenna, Ravenna, 2007, pp. 41–63; N. Nikolovska and G. Siljanovska-Davkova, *Macedonian Transition in Deficiency from an Unitarian to a Bi-National State*, Magor, Skopje, 2001.
9. The SFRY (including the Macedonian republic) was made possible at all *inter alia* because of the country's non-aligned position in the bipolar world. Wiberg pointed out that when President Reagan issued a National Security Directive on the general destabilization of communist regimes in Europe, former Yugoslavia was not an exception. Yet in the last stages of the Cold War, there were disagreements on how this affected the region: would it lose significance because of that, or was it worth keeping for new reasons? He also notes while that the region was often ascribed high strategic significance, this has varied over time, as have the reasons (H. Wiberg, 'Former Yugoslavia in 1990: Why It Had a Bad Prognosis', in M. Hadzic (ed.), *The Violent Dissolution of Yugoslavia. Causes, Dynamics and Effects*, Centre for Civil-Military Relations, Belgrade, 2004, p. 40.) Once the Berlin wall opened the door for a radical redefinition of the international order along with a rearrangement of the socialist federations, Yugoslavia became obsolete and various actors showed, more or less discreetly, their old geopolitical appetites. Luckily for socialist Macedonia, it was still needed as a puzzle piece in the US power game in the region. As archives show, the US administration used to have a very explicit position regarding the Macedonian Question. 'This Government considers talk of "Macedonian nation", "Macedonia Fatherland", or "Macedonian national consciousness" to be unjustified demagoguery representing no ethnic or political reality, and sees in its present revival a possible cloak for aggressive intentions against Greece.' (U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations vol. vii*, Washington, D.C. Circular Airgram (868.014/26 Dec.1944). (Quoted from the Greek FMA's web-site <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/fyrom/dilosi_stettinius_dec_1944.pdf>) (accessed on 6 February 2020).
10. An interesting episode of Yugoslav foreign and security policy took place in the critical period of Tito- Stalin split in 1948. In order to protect its sovereignty, Yugoslavia sought for deterrence against possible Soviet threat. The solution of the security limbo was seen in the establishment of special tripartite relations among Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey in 1953 (the Balkan Pact i.e., the Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation signed in Ankara, and followed by a 1954 military treaty signed in Bled). Having in mind that at the time Turkey and Greece were members of NATO, some analysts concluded that Yugoslavia associated itself with NATO indirectly at least for a short period of time. See: *Balkanski pakt. Zbornik dokumenata*. Vojnoistorijski institut, Beograd, 2005; B. Heuser, *Western Containment Policies in the Cold War: The Yugoslav Case, 1948–1953*, Routledge, London, 1989.
11. C. Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment', *Foreign Affairs*, 70(1).
12. The rumours over Milosevic and Mitsotakis talks over a 'common border' between Serbia and Greece in early 1991, as well as the announcement of a 'Balkan summit' (getting together leaders of Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, i.e., the three former competitors over Macedonia in the Balkan wars of 1912/13) right after Macedonia's independence proclamation, were enough to trigger an alarm. See: D. Doder, 'Macedonia now coveted by 3 nations Yugoslav breakup draws new suitors', *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 September 1991, available at <<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-09-13-1991256033-story.html>> (accessed on 3 November 2019).

13. UNSC resolution 795 of December 1992 authorized the Secretary-General to deploy a presence of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the border areas of Macedonia. In 1995 it was restructured and renamed into UNPREDEP.
14. On the eve of the 1999 NATO intervention, the Macedonian diplomacy made a blunder by recognizing Taiwan (allegedly for a huge provision and behind Gligorov's back). As a result, China vetoed the continuation of UNPREDEP mission, so the US-led mission of OSCE (Kosovo verification mission) took over the control on the ground. Soon the scene was set and Macedonia's territory served as a ground base for the NATO forces during the intervention.
15. In the background of the Yugoslav federation's demise there had been growing rivalry between the US and the European powers that were trying to protect their old and new geopolitical interests in the Balkans. According to some analysts the US involvement and intervention, among other things, were motivated by the wish to stop (united) Germany's drive (especially in Croatia).
16. R. Nikovski, *Ulogata na SAD vo makedonskite golgoti (1991–2013)* [The Role of USA in the Macedonian Golgothas (1991–2013)], e-book second edition, Risto Stefov Publications, 2014, available at <<http://www.pollitecon.com/html/ebooks/risto-stefov/Ulogata-na-SAD-vo-Makedonskite-Golgoti-2.pdf>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
17. The two most illustrative examples, among others, are the bilateral agreement over the International Criminal Court and the support provided for the US-led Alliance of the Willing, which was particularly obvious during the Iraq intervention.
18. Wiberg rightly argues that there were three powder-kegs in Yugoslavia, and the third one concerned the so-called Serbian/Albanian/Macedonian complex, with the potential of spilling over to Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. ('Societal Security and Explosion of Yugoslavia', in O. Waever *et al.* (eds), *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1993, p. 100–101.) In other words, Brussels should have been aware of the conflict potential.
19. J. Oberg, 'Peace-prevention: Western conflict management as the continuation of power politics by other means', *Yugoslavia: What Should have been done (blog)*, June 2004, available at <<https://yugoslavia-what-should-have-been-done.org/2004/06/30/peace-prevention-western-conflict-management-as-the-continuation-of-power-politics-by-other-means/#more-160>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
20. Gowan rightly pointed out that the role of the West in Yugoslavia's turmoil had largely been overlooked in the academic literature produced ever since. Indeed few scholars and activists dared spell it out and deconstruct the hidden fight over the spheres of interest in the disintegrating federation on its death-bed. Gowan argued that the Western states' operations in the Yugoslav theatre had not been governed by any universalist norms geared to improving the conditions of the peoples of the area, but by their own *state political interests and state political goals*. Furthermore, he believed that those 'operations had been a major—some would say, *the* major—cause of many of the barbarities that have confronted Yugoslav men and women in the past.' The old rivalries and appetites of the European powers to get back what allegedly always belonged to them (as they saw Yugoslavia's spoils) pushed the country over the brink. Germany and Austria directly assisted Slovenia's and Croatia's separatist forces, Hungary was looking over to Vojvodina (in Serbia), etc. ('The NATO Powers and the Balkan Tragedy', *New Left Review*, Issue I/234, March/April 1999). Wiberg brilliantly analysed third party intervention in Yugoslavia, the incompetence and ulterior motives of the external parties involved. Referring to European Council's unsuccessful attempt to pose itself as a key mediator, he points out the following: 'This EC "monopoly" was retained throughout 1991 at least, after which it was increasingly shared with the UN, and then both of them shoved aside by various *ad hoc* constellations of great powers acting collectively or unilaterally.' (H. Wiberg, 'Third Party Intervention in Yugoslavia', in J. de Wilde and H. Wiberg (eds), *Organized Anarchy in Europe: The Role of Intergovernmental Organizations*, Tauris, London, 1996, p. 207.

21. Over the years there have been numerous publications devoted either to the 'new Macedonian Question' and/or the name dispute, but this paper will on purpose refrains from rephrasing or analysing it for purpose. Instead the author focuses on the way it was handled and resolved.
22. Lisbon European Council, Conclusions of the Presidency, Annexe II, 26–27.VI.1992. It was the zenith of the Greek success on the name front but there are a few possible scenarios about the bargaining that went on within the EC. Demetrius Floudas refers to an alleged deal: in exchange for EC support on the Macedonian issue, Greece promised to ratify the Maastricht treaty, participate in sanctions against its traditional ally Serbia, and ratify the EC financial protocol with Turkey. (See: 'Pardon? A Conflict for a Name? FYROM's Dispute with Greece Revisited', available at <<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.598.6662&rep=rep1&type=pdf>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). Wiberg points out to a slightly different scenario: 'The position of Greece in the name issue is an irritation to many EU members. It was first given a promise by Germany as payment for recognizing Slovenia and Croatia; a few years later Germany had found a lawyer trick to cheat Greece, which wisely chose Macedonia rather than Germany for retaliation. Given this irritation, it may look like a good idea to state a lot of demands and then back down from some of them in order to appear "reasonable" to the EU and get more support than it already has for pressing the remaining demands.' ('What's in the Name?', *TFF*, 27 November 2009, available at <http://www.oldsite.transnational.org/Area_YU/2009/Wiberg_MacName.html> (accessed on 3 November 2019).
23. I. Janev, Legal Aspects of the Use of a Provisional Name for Macedonia in the United Nations System, in: *American Journal of International Law*, 93(1), 1999, p. 155.
24. J. Peterson and M. A. Pollack (eds), *Europe, America, Bush: Transatlantic Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London and NY, 2003, p. 96.
25. P. Gowan, *op. cit.*
26. K. E. Boon, "Open for Business": International Financial Institutions, Post- Conflict Economic Reform, and the Rule of Law", *International Law and Politics*, 39(3), Spring 2007, pp. 515–516.
27. Quoted in *Financial Times*, 29 March 2000.
28. D. Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-building*, Pluto Press, London, 2006.
29. S. L. Woodward, 'The long intervention: continuity in the Balkan theatre', *Review of International Studies*, 39(5), 2013, p. 1170.
30. Chandler's excellent description of Dayton Bosnia applies on post-Ohrid Macedonia too when it comes to the results, and despite the differences between the two states. See *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton*, second edition, Pluto Press, London, 2000.
31. S. Horvat and I. Stiks, *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism. Radical Politics after Yugoslavia*, Verso, London, 2014.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
33. According to Cox, politics is about depoliticizing people, by removing the economic determinants of everyday conditions from political control: 'The sense of civic efficacy is removed; and many people, the most disadvantaged, are left in the futility of alienation.' (R. W. Cox, A useful synopsis of Cox's views on the post-cold war order is in his John Holmes memorial lecture to the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS), 'Globalization, Multilateralism, and Democracy', 1992.)
34. M. Pugh, 'Transformation in the political economy of Bosnia since Dayton', *International Peacekeeping*, 12(3), 2005, p. 449.
35. *Ibid.*
36. M. Pugh (ed.), *Regeneration of War-Torn Societies*, Macmillan, London 2000.
37. B. Georgievski, 'Balkanot masovno se vooruzuva' [The Balkans is getting massively armed], *DW in Macedonian*, 31 July 2019, available at <https://www.dw.com/mk/a-49822402?fbclid=IwAR1uD4DsRFmPMi6pdcI_Ppu14_7uEvZqm2Xo9Q8FKXZZB9jxM82ceV1VBg> (accessed on 6 February 2020); 'Balkan is in arms race; Neighbours, beware!', B92 (source: *Deutsche Welle*, 7 November 2019, available at <https://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2019&mm=11&dd=07&nav_id=107486> (accessed on 6 February 2020).

38. R. D. Kaplan, 'Center Stage for the 21st Century. Power Plays in the Indian Ocean', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009, available at <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2009-03-01/center-stage-21st-century>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
39. V. Fouskas and B. Gökyay, *The Disintegration of Euro-Atlanticism and New Authoritarianism*, Plagrove, London, 2019.
40. According to Anastas Vangeli, German businesses and their business associations are important stakeholders in the economic, political and social development of Macedonia, whose voice matters for the domestic policymaking in the country. ('German-Macedonian Economic Relations: Recent Developments', *Weekly Briefing*, China-CEE Institute, 18(2), May 2019.
41. M. Y. Omelicheva, 'Russia's Foreign Policy toward Iran: A Critical Geopolitics Perspective', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(3), September 2012, p. 341.
42. For claims that allegedly the Russian efforts to stop the political solution to the Greek-Macedonian name dispute and sabotage the PA were unmistakable, see more: J. Deimel (ed.), *External Actors in Focus: Russia, Southeast Europe in Focus*, no. 1, 2019. In general, the Western power centres tried to dismiss the authentic Macedonians' resistance to the PA either as something cooked up in Moscow or as extreme and nationalist movements (i.e., as a counterpart to the pro-fascist Golden Dawn in Greece).
43. From a Western perspective the most disturbing is a Moscow-Belgrade military cooperation, and particularly the 'muscle showing' in the late 2019 military exercise that involved air-defence S-400 missile system. See: 'Russia sends state-of-the-art air defense system to Serbia', DW, 25 October 2019, available at <<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-sends-state-of-the-art-air-defense-system-to-serbia/a-50979688>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
44. G. Gotev, 'Additional line to Turkish Stream would face US sanctions', *Euroactiv*, 30 December 2019, available at <<https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/additional-line-to-turkish-stream-would-face-us-sanctions/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
45. D. Shlapentokh, 'The Ankara-Moscow relationship: The role of Turkish Stream', *Middle East Policy*, 26(2), Summer 2019, p. 72.
46. Unlike Macedonia, Serbia has expanded its cooperation with China in infrastructure construction and connectivity fields, one of the latest ones being construction of the Milos Veliki Motorway, the Belgrade Bypass Road and the Belgrade-Budapest railway. See: S. Bjelotomic, 'Mihajlovic: Serbia will ask China's Exim Bank for help with implementing the National Investment Plan', *Serbian Monitor*, 21 January 2020, available at <<https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/mihajlovic-serbia-will-ask-chinas-exim-bank-for-help-with-implementing-the-national-investment-plan/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
47. Vangeli comprehensively analyses the mechanics of China's symbolic power in action, and its consequences in the 16 countries of Central, East, and Southeast Europe (including Macedonia), dubbed '16 + 1'. He rightly concludes that for those who 'uphold the banner of the Washington Consensus, increased and successful influence will definitely be bad news, which would compel them to counter it. However, for others, China's influence may elicit a sense of emancipation, and help produce a much needed alternative way of thinking.' (A. Vangeli, 'Global China and Symbolic Power: The Case of 16 + 1 Cooperation', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(113), 2018, p. 687.) In another piece, he notices that 'the discourse on China in Macedonia greatly mirrors the discourse on China in the West', i.e., that there is 'no authentic Macedonian discourse on China that would thoroughly analyse China's trajectory and the meaning for Macedonia'. (A. Vangeli, 'North Macedonia external relations briefing: Shaping the Perceptions of the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China in N. Macedonia', *China-CEE Institute Brief*, 24 October 2019, available at <<https://china-cee.eu/2019/10/24/north-macedonia-external-relations-briefing-shaping-the-perceptions-of-the-70th-anniversary-of-the-founding-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-in-n-macedonia/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). Indeed, US officials visiting Macedonia regularly repeat the narratives of strategic competition between the West and China (and Russia), and warn Macedonian leaders to be cautious when pursuing cooperation with China.

48. D. Pavlicevic, 'Structural power and the China-EU-Western Balkans triangular relations', *Regional Security, Asia Europe Journal*, 17(4), 2019.
49. Before the changes introduced by the PA, Turkey was insisting on recognition of Macedonia under its constitutional name through a footnote in all NATO documents. The antagonism with Greece surely had its role in this decision.
50. According to some analysts, Erdogan has used Albanians as a trump card in his plans to spread his neo-Ottoman wings and make Macedonia a Turkish satellite. Allegedly, the Besa Movement (a new political party of ethnic Albanians) was founded in November 2014. Although the leaders deny having direct links with Turkey, they openly follow Erdogan's line. According to the World Bank, in 2016 Turkey's exports to Macedonia totalled \$378 million and imports amounted to \$82.6 million. The Turkish Statistics Institute (TÜİK) reports that around 100 Turkish businesspeople currently have investments worth €1.2 billion (\$1.47 billion) in Macedonia. These investments are focused on the parts where Macedonians live, while in the Albanian side Erdogan has invested in religious institutions to promote his Islamic agenda. (A. Ben-Meir and A. Xharra, 'Erdogan's "Trojan Horse" In Macedonia', *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 June 2018, available at <<https://www.jpost.com/Blogs/Above-the-Fray/Erdogans-Trojan-Horse-In-Macedonia-560006>> (accessed on 6 November 2019).
51. G. Merlicoo, 'La Grecia e la Macedonia (del Nord): Storia, Politica e Geopolitica di una Contesa Balcanica', *Rivista di Studi Politici*, anno XXX, luglio-dicembre 2018, p. 157.
52. The conservative government of Gruevski in coalition with the Albanian partner Ali Ahmeti (the former UCK leader from 2001 and political leader of the Democratic Union for Integration) lasted for almost a decade, until the regime change of 2016. The demise of Gruevski followed a so-called Colourful revolution (2015/2016), vastly supported from all corners of the Western power centres. Although VMRO-DPMNE did not lose 2016 parliamentary elections, it was unable to form a coalition government with DUI due to being pressured by the US and other European power centres. Gruevski was charged for a number of serious criminal deeds, including high-level corruption and illegal tapping of the opposition, but on the eve of his serving a prison sentence, he managed to escape to Budapest. According to some speculations, the negotiations with the eight MPs from his party who supported the PA included striking a deal for his freedom. See: I. Cvetanoski, 'Macedonia, the Gruevski's escape', *OBCT Newsletter*, 20 November 2018, available at <<https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/North-Macedonia/Macedonia-the-Gruevski-s-escape-191277>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
53. The alleged shining example of Zaev's government started falling apart almost simultaneously with the failure to deliver an opening date for the EU negotiation process in summer/fall 2019. The scandal over misuse of the 'telephone bombs' for racketeering and infringement of justice involves the Special Prosecutor, Katica Janeva, and TV channel owner Bojan Jovanovski. What started as a case 'Racket 1' soon got an extension in a follow-up case 'Racket 2', which involves a few high ranking officials from Zaev's party. The investigation is ongoing and the final outcome will be known in a few months, but the Macedonian public has a déjà vu feeling of going back to square one: one regime only replaces another, and except for the switch between Gruevski and Zaev (and their respective parties) literally nothing has changed. See: F. Lukic, 'The Fallen Anti-Corruption Heroine—Katica Janeva', *European Western Balkans*, 3 September 2019, available at <<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/09/03/the-fallen-anti-corruption-heroine-katica-janeva/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). Interestingly, Janeva and her colleagues from the Special Prosecutor's Office, once dubbed 'Charlie's Angels' in the Western media, did not attract such attention at their infamous fall. One could hardly find any insightful analysis or information on the ongoing scandals that shed the light on Zaev's possible involvement as well.
54. Up to that moment the Macedonian government followed all instructions from Washington, but most importantly those regarding the implementation of the Ohrid agreement for the sake of meeting the Albanians' demands, the deal with Kosovo over the borderline, recognition of Kosovo even at the cost of worsening the relationships with Serbia, and taking part in US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

55. Actually, Greece was not alone to abstain. Among others, she got implicit support from France's Sarkozy.
56. Guevski's rule was strengthened through the so-called *antiquization* policy (a term coined by the Western-financed NGOs and widely used by the media). Professor Proeva was among few who used the right term *anticomania*. The physical embodiment of such a policy was the 'Skopje 2014' construction project. It fuelled not only support for the internal opposition but also gave gunpowder to Greece. In the end, it hit the government back as a boomerang, but also endowed the Prespa process with unexpected facets that were apt to raise a wry smile or two (such as brushing the symbols off manhole covers).
57. The electronic archive of *Dnevnik* is not available any more. For a reference see the author's own translation of the column, *PCDN Blog*, 29 November 2009, available at <<https://pcdnetwork.org/blogs/newspaper-column-by-mr-solana-and-mr-rehn/>> (accessed on 6 November 2019).
58. See: Statement by the NATO Secretary General on the ICJ ruling, *Press Release* (2011) 151. Issued on 5 December 2011, available at <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_81678.htm> (accessed on 6 November 2019).
59. The intelligence officers who delivered the audio-material to Zaev had allegedly been given security guarantees from Italy and Germany.
60. L. Gaiser, 'Conte sui Balcani si inchina alla Ue', *La Verita*, 27 October 2019, available at <<https://www.laverita.info/conte-sui-balceni-si-inchina-alla-ue-2641117228.html>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
61. The event of 27 April 2017 inter alia witnessed the presence of the French ambassador and a Serbian intelligence officer in the immediate vicinity.
62. Bulgaria's denial of the existence of a Macedonian nation, and especially a Macedonian language, has its historical roots since so-called San-Stefano Bulgaria (1878) if not earlier, i. e., Greater Bulgaria which included most of Macedonia and extended to the Danube and from the Aegean to the Black Sea (at least on paper). Even today 3 March, the day when the Treaty of San Stefano was imposed on the Ottoman Empire by Russia, is celebrated as Liberation Day.
63. See: S. J. Marusic, 'Bulgaria Sets Tough Terms for North Macedonia's EU Progress', *BalkanInsight*, 10 October 2019, <<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/10/bulgaria-sets-tough-terms-for-north-macedonias-eu-progress/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). In the view of the newly proposed methodology for EU negotiations, which gives more say to individual member-states in the process, the long shopping list of Bulgaria (and Greece—in terms of any creative interpretation of the PA) may become even longer. The fear of Bulgarian aspirations towards the Republic of Macedonia is not to be dismissed as groundless, since a number of US officials have already talked about possible change of the borders, i.e., division of the country between Albania and Bulgaria. See: T. Embury-Dennis, 'Republic of Macedonia furious after senior US Republican says it 'is not a country'' *Independent*, 8 February 2017. Furthermore, occasionally there are some calls, such as the ones of the British diplomat Less, who advocated for a total redesign of the existing state boundaries in the Balkans, on the basis of an assumption of inherently dysfunctional boundaries of some multiethnic states, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. See: T. Less, 'Dysfunction in the Balkans. Can the Post-Yugoslav Settlement Survive?', *Foreign Affairs*, 20 December 2016, available at <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bosnia-herzegovina/2016-12-20/dys-function-balkans>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). The talks over the border deal between Belgrade and Pristina, which seems to be backed by Washington, only adds to the general regional insecurity. See: 'Appointment of Richard Grenell: A signal of support for border change?', *European Western Balkans*, 7 October 2019, available at <<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/10/07/appointment-of-richard-grenell-a-signal-of-support-for-border-change/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
64. B. Vankovska, 'A Diplomatic Fairytale or Geopolitics as Usual: A Critical Perspective on the Agreement between Athens and Skopje', in Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2018*, Verlag, Baden-Baden, 2019.

65. The village of Nivici/Psarades, inhabited by ethnic Macedonians, bears special historic witness to many historic events, and particularly to the final bloody battles fought by the Greek partisans (many of whom were of Macedonian origin) and the their retreat to safety. One of the most ardent advocates of the PA, writer Kica Kolbe exclaimed on the eve of the referendum: 'With this Agreement the Civil war in Greece has finally come to an end. It opens the possibility for the two countries to face the common and painful past—i.e., the tragedy of the Civil war'. ('Simbolikata na Prespa kako vizija za mir' [Prespa Symbolism as a vision for peace], *DW* in Macedonian, 24 September 2018, available at <<https://www.dw.com/mk/a-45614540>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). The PA does not mention any form of reconciliation. On the contrary, it imposes a re-writing of history books in Macedonia under the auspices of the Greek officials.
66. Within the Copenhagen school, Ole Wæver developed the concept of securitization with a key premise that 'security is as a speech act', i.e., it does not matter if threats are real or not, because a certain issue can be socially constructed as a threat by so-called securitizing agents. ('Securitization and Desecuritization', in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security*, Columbia University Press, NY, 1995).
67. The most frequently mentioned name has been that of Dr. Amanda Sloat, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute (and former US State Department official) but the US Ambassador to Macedonia denied her involvement whatsoever. (See Amb. Baily video statement on <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbOpK0VE63w>>). On the day of the announcement that Zaev and Tsipras agreed over the deal, she published a piece in which she congratulated the US on its involvement in the dispute resolution: 'While successive U.S. administrations have actively supported this effort, the Trump administration deserves kudos for quiet engagement that helped push it over the line.' (See 'Diplomacy triumphs: Greece and Macedonia resolve name dispute', 12 June 2018, available at <<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/12/diplomacy-triumphs-greece-and-macedonia-resolve-name-dispute/>> (accessed on 6 November 2019). Allegedly 'Sloat was included in the draft text given on May 24 to Greek Foreign Minister Kotzias in Washington DC. The basic agreement was reached on both sides the next day in the UN.' (See 'Was she the shooter?', *Team Uzunov*, 25 September 2018, available at <<http://teamuzunovmedia.blogspot.com/2018/09/was-she-shooter-behind-prespa-agreement.html>> (accessed on 6 November 2019).
68. See: J. Pettifer, 'Should Albanians Support or Use the New Name?', *Illyria*, 27 June 2018, <<http://illyriapress.com/should-albanians-support-or-use-the-new-name/>> (accessed on 28 July 2019).
69. 'Prespanskiot dogovor e zgotven vo Pentagon' [The Prespa Agreement was baked in the Pentagon], Interview with Vassilis Fouskas, *Nova Makedonija*, 13 July 2018, available at <<https://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/politika/преспанскиот-договор-е-зgotven-во-пен>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
70. Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the signing ceremony, 17 June 2018, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-home-page/46649/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-signing-ceremony-agreement-name_en> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
71. *Europe in May 2019 Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world*, The European Commission's contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019, p. 70, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco_sibiu_communication_en.pdf> (accessed on 31 July 2019).
72. A. Chrysosgelos, 'Macedonia's Name Change Deal Is a Triumph for the E.U., But Worrying for Democracy', *Time*, 22 January 2019, available at <<https://time.com/5,508,640/prespes-macedonia-greece-eu-democracy/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
73. 'Amerikanski profesor po pravo: Dogovorot so Grcija vi e machka vo vrekja' [An American Law Professor: The Agreement with Greece Is a 'Pig in a Poke'], *Off Net*, 28 July 2018, at: <<https://m.off.net.mk/lokalno/razno/dogovorot-so-grcija-vi-e-machka-vo-vrekja>> (accessed on 3 November 2019).

74. 'EU pocna kampanja za referendumot, so najava za pomos od 150 milioni evra za opstinite'[EU launched referendum campaign with an announcement of 150 million euros for the municipalities], *Sakam da kazam*, 30 August 2018, available at <<https://sdb.mk/index.php/makedonija/eu-pocna-kampana-za-referendumot-najava-za-pomosh-od-150-milioni-evra-za-opshtinite/>> (accessed on 3 November 2019).
75. J. Purkiss, 'Macedonia name referendum: Russian warriors and British PR firms fight it out for the country's soul', *Independent*, 28 September 2018, available at <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/macedonia-name-referendum-vote-russia-uk-pr-firms-europe-nato-kremlin-a8559556.html>> (accessed on 20 August 2019).
76. D. Apasiev, 'Pravnite aspekti na referendumot za t.n. Prespanski dogovor megju Republika Grcija i "Vtorata strana"' [Legal Aspects of the Referendum on the so-called Prespa Agreement between Republic of Greece and 'Second Party'], *Yearbook of the Faculty of Law*, Goce Delchev University, No. 8 (2019), available at <<http://js.ugd.edu.mk/index.php/YFL/article/view/2987>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
77. Chrysogelos, *op. cit.*
78. The problem of illegality/invalidity of the Prespa process in Macedonia deserves a separate analysis from a legal (both national and international) point of view. This article does not go into details due to the lack of space, not lack of argument. As a reference one may see: G. Siljanovska Davkova, 'Za Prespanskiot dogovor i posiroko', [On the Prespa Agreement and Beyond], 2018 available at <<http://umdiaspora.org/tag/gordana-siljanovska-davkova/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020). Also: 'Is the Prespa Agreement Illegal? This Week, Interview with International Law Scholar Francis Boyle', *Dialogos media*, 14 March 2019, <<https://dialogosmedia.org/is-the-prespa-agreement-illegal-our-interview-with-international-law-scholar-francis-boyle/>>.
79. S. J. Marusic, 'Macedonia Starts Procedure on Changing Country's Name', *Balkan Insight*, 8 October 2018, available at <<https://balkaninsight.com/2018/10/08/macedonia-starts-procedure-for-name-change-10-08-2018/>> (accessed on 6 November 2019).
80. The usefulness of the infamous 'Eight' MPs who provided 2/3 majority for the change of the Constitution has not ceased yet. In February 2020 the US Ambassador met them in order to encourage them to vote for another controversial law on Public Prosecutor's Office, which depends on providing 2/3 majority. On 3 February 2020 Amb. Byrnes tweeted: 'Held a productive meeting with a group of independent MPs today about the importance of supporting continued reforms, including the Public prosecutor's Office Law that advances the goals of rule of law, transparency, accountability, and good governance.' Such a rash is hard to legitimize only days before the dismissal of the Parliament and issuing the call for early elections (already agreed for 12 April 2020). Far more ironic is to refer to rule of law and reforms while taking photos with the MPs who were either bribed or enforced to vote for the PA and the change of the Constitution.
81. Interview with Stavros Mavroudeas, *Press TV*, 30 September 2018, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=LWZ3VAri_g4> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
82. Author's interview with Alexis Heraclides, 4 November 2019, in Skopje.
83. A. Heraclides, *To Makedoniko Zitima 1878–2018: Apo tis ethnikes diekdikiseis stis syngrousiakes ethnikes taftotites* [The Macedonian Question 1878–2018: From national claims to conflicting national identities], Themelio, Athens, 2018, p. 328.
84. J.-A. Dérens and L. Geslin, 'No holds barred in revived cold war. Balkans are the new front line', *Le Mond diplomatique*, July 2015, available at <<https://mondediplo.com/2015/07/04balkans>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
85. Macedonia is one of the countries with longest wait at the Alliance's door (18 years). In order to illustrate the poor social standing of the new NATO army one should refer to the TV interview with the Army's chief-of-staff who said that the highest priority for the army was on purchasing new boots and uniforms for its service members. See: Interview with Metodija Velichkovski, *TV Telma*, 12 July 2018, available at <

- tema-nvs-koi-se-obvrskite-na-makedonija-po-pokanata-za-nato/> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
86. D. Maleski, 'Makedonskiot i melijanskiot dijalog' [The Macedonian and the Melian Dialogue], *Fokus*, 1 June 2018, no. 1182, available at <<https://iportal.mk/stav/kolumna-nadenko-maleski-makedonskiot-melijanskiot-dijalog/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
 87. D. Maleski, 'Sto e ona sto moze da ne pomiri?', in 'Post-Prespa North Macedonia and pre-election Europa', *Predizvici—Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, no. 3, 2019, p. 13.
 88. Serbia is *de facto* the only state in the neighbourhood with no NATO troops; instead there is a Russian military base and overt support from that quarter.
 89. J. Galtung, 'Introduction: peace by peaceful conflict transformation—the TRANSCEND approach', in C. Webel and J. Galtung (eds.), *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, Routledge, London, 2007.
 90. A group of esteemed scholars published an op-ed piece in *The Guardian* a month after the deal was signed. It has an indicative title 'Historic deal on shared Macedonian identity must be honoured', 20 July 2018, available at <<https://www.theguardian.com/global/2018/jul/20/historic-deal-on-shared-macedonian-identity-must-be-honoured>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
 91. 'Stevo Pendarovski: Povazno e clenstvoto vo NATO otkolku integracijata vo EU' [Stevo Pendarovski: NATO Membership is more important than the integration into EU], *Faktor*, 29 October 2019, available at <<https://faktor.mk/stevo-pendarovski-povazno-e-chlenstvoto-vo-nato-otkolku-integracija-vo-eu>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
 92. J. Martin (ed.), *The Poulantzas Reader. Marxism, Law and State*, Verso, London and NY, 2008.
 93. C. Lapavistas, *The Left Case against the EU*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 11.
 94. V. Fouskas and B. Gökyay, *op. cit.*
 95. Germany's cooperation with Russia and China has been scrutinized and met with criticism from some corners in the West, such as the European Council on Foreign Relations. (Y. Samrai, 'Trading with the frenemy: Germany's China policy', available at <https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_trading_with_the_frenemy_germanys_china_policy#> (accessed on 6 February 2020); M. Martin, 'Germany will make ties with China a priority during EU presidency: Merkel', *Reuters*, 17 October 2019, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-eu-china/germany-will-make-ties-with-china-a-priority-during-eu-presidency-merkel-idUSKBN1WW0WX>> (accessed on 6 February 2020); 'Nord Stream 2: Germany and Russia decry US sanctions', *BBC News*, 21 December 2019, available at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50879435>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
 96. *Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans 2017*, The Western Balkans Investment Framework, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/connectivity_agenda_2017_triESTE_summit.pdf> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
 97. Some authors argue that the PA (Article 7 paragraph 2) is a concession to Greek nationalism: i.e., its exclusive claim to a continuity myth and narrative that links together the ancient Hellenic tradition and civilization with the modern Greek identity. (See: S. Rohdewald, 'Citizenship, Ethnicity, History, Nation, Region, and the Prespa Agreement of June 2018 between Macedonia and Greece', *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society*, 66(4), 2018; A. Zenakos, 'Greece & Macedonia: negotiating history doesn't make it true', *Open Democracy*, 14 July 2018, available at <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/greece-macedonia-negotiatinghistory-doesn-t-make-it-true/>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).
 98. The video of this presentation is available on the following link (7 min.): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=460&v=H8mY79RMxfM> (accessed on 6 November 2019).
 99. The surrender has many faces—and the most significant is not necessarily what nationalists emphasize as the most crucial one. The PA's implementation is not only in the hands of the country's governing elites (both in power and opposition), but even more in those of ethnic

Albanians within, and of external actors who believe that their 'success story' is too big to fail. Just as Milosevic was once seen as the main guarantor of the Dayton agreement, and as such was supported by the West, so the same is now the case with Zaev. Under the strong external pressure (mostly from Berlin), the opposition leader Mickovski is proving not much different from Zaev—he is just as impotent and incapable of challenging the PA through political or legal action. Finally, any move in a new direction will turn on ethnic Albanian leaders' options. They are known to be loyal to their 'imagined community' as well as to Washington. And if they wish to prevent the abolition of the PA, all they need to do is to use the so-called Badinter (double majority) vote in the parliament.

100. Susan L. Woodward, 'The long intervention: continuity in the Balkan theatre', *ibid.*
101. There is still a real mess in the international media with regard to the 'newest country in the world' whose existence allegedly begins in February 2019, when the constitutional name was changed in the Parliament. See, for instance, J. Worrall, 'Inside North Macedonia, Kosovo: Two of Europe's least visited countries', *Stuff*, 26 August 2019, available at <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/destinations/europe/115174997/inside-north-macedonia-kosovo-two-of-europes-least-visited-countries>> (accessed on 6 February 2020).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Dr. Biljana Vankovska is full professor of Political Science at the Institute for Security, Defence and Peace, Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje. Guest Senior Research Fellow at Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) in 1997–2000. Faculty staff member at the European Peace University (EPU), Stadschlaining, Austria (2000–2014). Worked as Senior Fellow at the Geneva-based Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) in 2001/2002. She has published ten and edited three books and authored over 150 book chapters and articles.

ORCID

Biljana Vankovska  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9215-4183>