

Republic of Macedonia
erga omnes

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A note about the author: I am not Macedonian. I am an American of Hungarian ethnicity (half with the rest a European mixture, and I grew up in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. In the fall of 1992, a variety of circumstances conspired to put me into the orbit of the countries of Southeastern Europe. I began working with a firm in Washington, D.C. which represented the country of Croatia, followed, in rapid succession, by Bosnia and Herzegovina and then Kosovo, among other clients. In the spring of 1996, I became acquainted with and involved in Macedonia, and in the summer of 1996 I had an opportunity to travel to Macedonia to live and work for three months. I stayed for seven years, through the middle of 2003 and then spent the majority of the rest of the 2000s there. Since 2010, I have continued going back and forth each year, often several times in a year. In 2009, I produced a documentary film about Macedonia and its name and identity, [*A Name is a Name*](#), with a team of talented professionals from Macedonia and other European countries. I have written over 625 columns for Macedonian newspapers, magazines, and websites since 2001, and been involved in many other ways that will not be mentioned here for the sake of brevity.

Key takeaways

► The current Government of Macedonia, led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), has pledged that they will hold a referendum on the name. As Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov said this summer, “There will definitely be a referendum.”

(Background: the idea of a referendum was introduced by the previous government, led by VMRO-DPMNE.)

► The official Greek position has been reiterated numerous times, stating that the issue must be resolved before Greece lifts its de-facto veto on Macedonia’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union (EU).

► We have known as far back as 2008 that this issue is more than just an issue about the name. A leaked US Embassy cable from 2008 notes that “Greek Foreign Minister Kofi Annan viewed Nimetz’s latest proposal as entirely unacceptable to Greece, primarily on the issues of scope of use of a new name and the use of ‘Macedonian’ as the adjective to describe national identity.”

► Any compromise that Macedonia makes on its name (through a referendum or other means) **will fundamentally alter the Macedonian identity**, both inside and outside of the Republic of Macedonia, extending to all who identify as Macedonians. This will also extend to all that is currently named “Macedonian” – the language, church, culture, currency, literature, sports, etc. – literally, everything; **even the Internet domain suffix of “MK” will likely change.**

► As long as negotiations continue, Greece creates an illusion that the state calling itself the Republic of Macedonia is not actually a permanent state with a permanent people – a dangerous proposition for Macedonia, Greece, the region, and the EU. At the end of the day, however, Greece does not care if the state called the Republic of Macedonia is in, or is out, of NATO or the EU. It never has. **Greece’s starting and finishing position has always been that there is no Republic of Macedonia and there are no Macedonians other than Greeks who identify as such. In essence, they claim a monopoly on the name and the identity.**

► Even if the Macedonian government holds a referendum which agrees to a “new” name for international usage while “allowing” Macedonia to retain its constitutional name—Republic of Macedonia—and identity—Macedonian—for use within the country, this is still problematic because of four key issues all having to do with the adjective and the identity.

► One issue lies in the reality that the United Nations’ (UN) Secretariat, tasked with giving advice on the adjectival use for nations, would adopt whatever the Greeks demanded—making this the official UN description of how to refer to the people. It would then be adopted by all other international organizations and the individual nation-states of the UN. It would be something akin to “citizen of the Republic of Northern Macedonia” instead of “Macedonian” or, if the agreed name for external use was “Republic of Vardarska Macedonia,” then “Vardarskian.” It would be the same with a reference to the Macedonian language which would then become “the language of the Republic of Northern Macedonia” or, as in the other example, “Vardarskian.”

► At the end of the day it is not 100% necessary for Macedonia's survival – or even for Macedonia's success – to be in both organizations, or even one (NATO and the EU). **It is false** to say *Macedonia in the clubs makes it an automatic success* or *Macedonia not in the clubs makes it an automatic failure* but this is what the US, EU, NATO and others have continually stated and insisted.

So, to begin....

In an [AFP news article](#) from August 7, 2017 headlined “Macedonia aims to solve protracted name row with Greece” Toni Deskoski, a Skopje law professor, posed the question: “What is the price of joining the club?” The clubs he was referring to are those of NATO and the EU, and the price he is questioning is that of Macedonia's very name and identity. It is an excellent question, and goes to the core of a more than two decade-old conundrum. For while the Republic of Macedonia was able to peacefully declare and achieve independence from Yugoslavia on September 8, 1991, it has yet to gain the ability to join the clubs it wants or to assert, without question, its legitimate right to its name and identity. In this paper, I seek to explore some of the concerns surrounding what has been called the “world's dumbest issue.” To the uninitiated the issue appears ridiculous. But to the Macedonians, it is existential...

The issue in brief

The essential facts are:

- The Republic of Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia on September 8, 1991 and peacefully separated.
- When Macedonia applied for membership in the UN, Greece objected to Macedonia entering as the Republic of Macedonia. After negotiations, Macedonia agreed to enter the United Nations under the provisional and temporary reference of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” under UN Resolution 817, adopted on April 7, 1993. It is important to point out that this is **not** a name but a “provisional reference” and it is “for purposes within the United Nations” meaning it is not obligatory for other countries or institutions to use. Unfortunately, other countries and institutions have followed the lead of the UN (notably the EU and NATO, among others) by adopting this reference. This has resulted in linguistic gymnastics when it comes to the adjectival use of “Macedonian” in referring to the people; any new “name” will do the same.
- Despite their agreement, in 1994 Greece placed an economic embargo on land-locked Macedonia insisting that it change its flag, constitution, and name. Faced with international pressure on Greece, and following concessions by Macedonia, including a changed flag and constitution, Greece lifted the embargo. Macedonia has already gone two-thirds of the way; Greece has yet to go the final one-third.
- On September 13, 1995, Macedonia entered into what is known as the “Interim Accord” with Greece, which essentially agrees to a series of confidence building measures including economic, cultural, commercial, legal, environmental, international, regional, multi-lateral, and treaty

relations and pledges that the two countries will work together at finding a mutually acceptable name. This Interim Accord was scheduled to last seven years. In addition, in this Accord, Greece pledged that it **would not block** Macedonia's membership in international organizations if Macedonia applies under the provisional and temporary reference.

- Since then, the two sides have sat down, on occasion, to talk with a UN-appointed mediator (the current negotiator is Ambassador Matthew Nimetz) to come to a mutually acceptable solution.

- On November 4, 2004, the United States reversed its position and began referring to the Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name.

- On April 3, 2008, Greece effectively vetoed Macedonia's membership in NATO at the [NATO Summit](#) in Bucharest. Fellow applicant countries Albania and Croatia were granted membership. The Editorial Board of the *New York Times* [opined](#) in a piece titled "Shame on Greece," that the "decision shames Greece and it dishonors NATO."

- In November of 2008, the Macedonian government sued Greece at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for their veto of Macedonia's membership in NATO, a breach of the Interim Accord. On December 5, 2011, the ICJ [ruled in favor](#) of Macedonia. The ruling, however, is unenforceable.

- Today, over 135 countries recognize the Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name, including four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (US, UK, Russia, China) and use it in bilateral relations. The majority of EU governments recognize the Republic of Macedonia in their bilateral relations.

Where we are today; now introducing a referendum

With the most important facts noted above, it is best to begin a discussion of the current situation with the installation of the current government led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), the successor to the League of Communists of Macedonia. SDSM, together with their coalition partners, the Macedonian-Albanian parties, took over the Macedonian government in early summer 2017, and since then there has been a concerted effort on their part to address this issue. On July 13, Nikola Dimitrov, Macedonian foreign minister and former negotiator on the issue of Macedonia's name and identity, gave an [interview to Reuters](#) on the sidelines of the Western Balkans Summit in Trieste. Dimitrov explained that Macedonia must have a "process" to arrive at a "national position" on the issue: "Asked if Macedonia would one day be open to changing its name, Dimitrov said: 'It's a very complex issue that involves emotions and identity. For us, to tackle the issue, we need to have a process that will create a national position on the issue. There will definitely be a referendum.'"

The current strategy of the government appears to consist of fine language and attempting to acquiesce to Greek demands. In presenting itself as reasonable, and in using kind words and pleasant rhetoric, Macedonia hopes to win the favor of Greece and change their minds about their position toward Macedonia. The problem with this strategy is that the current government

of Greece and all their past governments, as well as much of the elite and intelligentsia (and many within the citizenry) has not bought and will not buy into this for one simple reason: **they do not believe that a Macedonian people exist**. This is an inconvenient but all too true fact. Therefore, Greece will do whatever it can to eradicate these so-called Macedonians. This is why they will insist on a name change before there is any talk of lifting their veto. But now that Dimitrov has said “there will definitely be a referendum,” why should Greece change its position?

We do not know what form of question – or questions – will be asked in such a referendum. We do not know if the government will consider it binding or merely consultative. We do not know if the referendum will pose a question in a positive or negative way – for instance “I support changing Macedonia’s name for international usage from ‘former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ to ‘Republic of Vardarska Macedonia’” or, “I do not support changing Macedonia’s name for international usage from ‘former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ to ‘Republic of Vardarska Macedonia.’”

Even if the negotiations result in a slightly altered position for the Greeks in which they “allow” Macedonia to keep its name and identity for internal purposes, the government will propose a referendum that addresses the issue of what the country will be called for external purposes. Remember, any agreement to change the name (for external purposes) will be adopted by the UN, which will then recommend that all other countries and international institutions accept it. The identity will change, too, based on that “new” name. It is important to point out that any name change for internal use would require a two-thirds vote of parliament; however, if Macedonia chooses to allow the rest of the world to call it by another name, that merely requires informing the UN that it has accepted a new name for international use, and no referendum or vote in parliament is required for that.

More on this, below.

The Greek position

Let’s first review the Greek position with their most recent statements in response to the Macedonian initiative. Greek Prime Minister Tsipras [reiterated](#) on July 13 Greece’s well-known position: that the name issue must be resolved *before* Macedonia can receive an invitation to join NATO or the EU. The Greek position on Macedonia is further expanded on by the Greek Foreign Ministry website on bilateral relations where Macedonia is [listed under the capital letter](#) “T.” The Ministry explains that “A compound name with a geographical qualifier for use in relations to everyone (erga omnes)” is “the best possible basis for finding an honest, mutually beneficial compromise.” The geographical qualifier would need to be placed before the word “Macedonia,” and “erga omnes” is Latin for “towards all” *meaning everyone, including Macedonia*. On July 16 Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias chimed in and emphasized Greece’s hardline position, telling [Euractive](#) “The problem with Skopje is not that it has one or another opinion. The problem is something that Europe itself needs to understand. Europe must ‘educate’, in the good sense, Skopje’s leadership to the concept of political compromise and the culture of political consensus. When I became Minister of Foreign Affairs, I told all sides that in the way ‘you spoil them’, not only do they not behave properly to us, but they will apply the

same concept of politics domestically.” No amount of nice words and fawning statements will overcome an attitude like that.

According to the [Macedonian Information Agency](#), a slightly obscure Greek website, *Difernews*, stated in early November 2017 that “A solution that includes Slavic terms for the identity and language might offer a way out.” Talking this through with several individuals in Macedonia in the know, this could equate to a push to make the name (in Latin letters) something akin to “Republic of Makedonija” with the adjective “Makedonski” (or however best transliterated) applying to the identity, language, culture, etc.; I’m not sure then if Greeks would still want geographical qualifier in front of Makedonija or not.

Finally and most recently, Thessaloniki Mayor Yannis Boutaris told Austrian newspaper *Kurier*, in an interview on November 25, 2017, that Prime Minister “Zaev wants a compromise on naming: Republic of New Macedonia or Republic of North [or Northern] Macedonia.” “With the new name” he continued, “Macedonia could ‘find a *new identity* for itself and for the people.’” [italics mine]

The Albanian position

Macedonia’s ethnic Albanians are not wedded to the name “Macedonia,” nor the identity, and yet it is vital to remember that the Albanian political parties in coalition with the SDSM-led government are **demanding** a say in any negotiations over Macedonia’s name, something that SDSM will give them. The [Tirana Platform](#) laid out their demands for participating in any Macedonian government in January of 2017, and clearly states them in point number five of the platform. They seek the “resolution of the name issue, in conformity with European values and the principles of international law,” with “European values and the principles of international law” being whatever the powers that be determine them to be. Under that point it further states, “Adoption of a Joint Binding Resolution in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia which shall oblige the Government of Macedonia to commit to actively work toward a solution to the name dispute,” and “Inclusion of Albanians in the working group for direct negotiations with Greece.” The Albanian political parties in Macedonia will be willing to agree to any “name,” and therefore identity, that Greece wants.

The US, NATO, and EU position

The position of these governments and organizations is also well-known and amounts essentially to a tired reiteration that the two countries must come to a “mutually acceptable solution” and that since “Greece is in the club, and Macedonia is not,” the burden is on Macedonia.

What others are suggesting

Right now, as the issue heats up once again, there is renewed interest from many quarters. The European Stability Initiative, a think-tank whose major [core funding](#) came from George Soros and his Open Society Foundation network, has recently re-floated on social media and in policy circles an old proposal of theirs from 2012 titled, “[Breaking the Macedonian deadlock](#).” They propose, among other things, “RM changes its constitution to say something like this: ‘From the

day the Republic of Macedonia joins the European Union, the international name of the country will be XYZ, used erga omnes in all languages other than the official languages of the country.” Bizarrely, if not gratuitously, the authors then suggest “Leaders in RM replace one name their citizens do not like (referring to a state that has disappeared decades ago, Yugoslavia) with another name they do not like, both used in the same way.” Other institutions and organizations, some sincerely, some with other motives, have tried to offer their suggestions through the years but at the end, all fall short.

It is interesting to note, however, that former UN negotiator on the name, British diplomat Robin O’Neil, has said that negotiations have failed and it is time for Macedonia to assert itself. In 2013 he was [quoted saying](#) “It’s due time for the Macedonian government to tell the world that after 20 years the mediation process is complete failure and to address the UN with a request for admission under its constitutional name.” He also “criticised Greece for negotiating with bad intentions and without any desire to come to an agreement with its neighbour Macedonia.”

To conclude this section, it is important to note the fact that Macedonia has been negotiating its existence these past 20 years is not in dispute. However, the process of negotiating should never have started in the first place. To paraphrase the late Senator Barry Goldwater on an entirely different subject, by agreeing to negotiate Macedonia’s name – and thereby its identity and, by extension, its very existence – Macedonia has agreed that Macedonia’s right to call itself Macedonia, and its people, language and culture Macedonian is, in fact, negotiable. With history as hindsight, none of these things were negotiable in the past but now they are, *for as long as Macedonia stays in the negotiations*. By agreeing to negotiate in the first place, Macedonia tacitly acknowledged the inadequacy of its position, and the world, or at least the West, embodied by the EU and NATO and certain Western governments, now expects Macedonia to adjust its name and identity as proof of Macedonia’s good faith. Macedonian governments from the left and right share the blame on this.

But *it is* about identity

That the whole manufactured issue is about identity should be more than obvious at this point. But let us go back almost ten years ago to a US Embassy cable from October 2008, written by then US Ambassador Phil Reeker and leaked by Wikileaks that clearly shows the Greeks will never allow the adjective “Macedonian” to be used or acknowledged. According to the [leaked cable](#) “Greek FonMin Bakoyannis viewed Nimetz’s latest proposal as entirely unacceptable to Greece, primarily on the issues of scope of use of a new name and the use of ‘Macedonian’ as the adjective to describe national identity.”

The Wikileaks cable is rife with mentions of “identity” – something that Western leaders, Nimetz, progressives in Macedonia, and others deny is even being negotiated – and useful for other insights into the past and the present. For instance it states “[Nikola] Dimitrov told us he believes Gruevski and Crvenkovski have a fundamentally different view of the negotiations and, more importantly, Macedonia’s future. Dimitrov portrays the President as believing the country has a bleak future if it is not a NATO and EU member, thus he believes the GoM must quickly make deal on the name in order to integrate as quickly as possible.” But this belief in a “bleak future” outside of NATO and the EU has been proven patently false: here we are in late 2017,

almost ten years after that memo, and Macedonia not only exists outside of the EU and NATO, but is thriving and moving forward on many levels (Nikola Gruevski was prime minister at the time, Branko Crvenkovski was president, and Nikola Dimitrov, the current foreign minister, was the negotiator on the name).

The cable also points to the fact that back in 2006 Nikola Dimitrov **knew** he was negotiating Macedonia's identity. Reeker writes, "Dimitrov sees Gruevski as more motivated by the fear of going down in history as the leader who lost Macedonia's name **and identity**; these are more crucial than Euro-Atlantic integration." **This cannot be stressed enough: You can't lose something unless you are negotiating it and have the possibility of negotiating it away.**

Delving again into the past, I found something from April 2008 right after Greece vetoed Macedonia's membership at the NATO Bucharest Summit. Ana Petrusseva of IWPR and Balkan Insight reports in a [blog from Athens](#) the following (it is worth reading her entire post), which is insightful because it betrays the true feelings of Greek Government officials, journalists, and probably not too few Greeks themselves:

"One Greek diplomat told me last night that the NATO outcome would not be that bad – cause they want us into NATO but under their conditions- saying "let's make a deal over the name and you can get in, it doesn't have to be in a summit but the issue must be resolved".

Naturally I asked what they wanted. A composite name like Upper or New Macedonia which goes back to their earlier demands and sounds very much like some newly invented country in Africa.

But what about our identity I asked – how would I be called? "An upper Macedonian," he said. I don't regard myself as a nationalist and have always said we need to find a common ground with the Greeks even when proposals of compromise were easily labelled as treason.

But there is a red line one cannot cross. And I for one would never accept to be an Upper Macedonian nor think anyone should be asked to change identity cause the bully next door does not like it."

So when Foreign Minister Dimitrov says that the name and identity [must be separated](#), he's fooling himself and attempting to fool others – either deliberately or out of ignorance. In an interview given on October 1, he stated that identity issues should be extracted from name issues – but it should be obvious they cannot because they are intertwined.

Ambassador Matthew Nimetz and his role

As referenced above, the affable Ambassador Matthew Nimetz has been tasked by the United Nations as the "negotiator" between Macedonia and Greece in an attempt to "solve" the issue. While he has been the subject of sporadic media attention through the past 23 years, the most recent piece took a deep dive into the issue, published by the BBC on August 2—the celebration of Macedonia's most important holiday, Ilinden. Titled ["The man who has focused on one word for 23 years,"](#) the article provides some useful insight into Nimetz's thinking. For starters,

Nimetz is quoted as saying “I have probably thought about it more than anyone else - including in the country.” He may be sincere in saying that, but it is a bit conceited. To believe that he thinks more about the name and identity of Macedonia than most Macedonians beggars belief.

The article continues, stating that Nimetz “thinks part of the way out is to encourage people not to see this as a question of national identity. ‘One ordinary citizen in Skopje once said to me: ‘When I get up in the morning and I’m shaving, I look in the mirror and say, *I’m a Macedonian*. Well, tomorrow, when I’m shaving, do you expect me to say, *I’m a New Macedonian* or *I’m an Upper Macedonian*?’ I told him his concern is understandable, but it’s the wrong way to look at this. We are only talking about the formulation of the name of this state for diplomatic purposes. It won’t impact the average person. We’re not negotiating identity. If we were, I’d be out of here.’” That statement, however, is a blatant dodge and there are several problems with the above statement.

Firstly, once again, the ***name and the identity are intertwined*** and cannot be separated. For starters, ***if*** Macedonia were to change its name, you can be assured that Greece would be working overtime to have the world recognize the Macedonians as *something other than* Macedonians, as I have made clear above. Essentially, the Greeks would begin a campaign without end; they would demand that the UN Secretariat, tasked with giving advice on the adjectival use for nations, adopt whatever the Greeks demanded. This would then become an official UN description of how to refer to the people – adopted by all other international organizations and individual nation-states of the UN at the insistence of Greece. And make no mistake – the UN will make a recommendation. The “Working Paper” of October 8, 2008, presented by Ambassador Nimetz to the Macedonians and the Greeks makes this abundantly clear – point nine states “For purposes of official usage within the United Nations organization the Secretariat will adopt appropriate terms of adjectival usage for the Second Party [Macedonia] in accordance with its usual processes.” It’s interesting to note that a recent interview with Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias essentially affirmed this. In an early November interview with Greek newspaper [Kathimerini](#) he stated “I believe this issue must be settled within the first half of 2018. If it’s not, there will be major difficulties. If it gets resolved, it will then be a matter of three to four months of bureaucracy at the United Nations. As a result, it should wrap up by the end of 2018.” Those “three to four months” will be used by the Greeks to “help” the UN Secretariat develop the “appropriate” adjectival use of the new name. To revisit Ambassador Nimetz’s statement above, yes, the Greeks will demand that the UN Secretariat issue advice (which will be followed) calling the people of the country “Upper Macedonians,” “New Macedonians,” “Northern Macedonians,” “Vardarskians” or some other configuration. And knowing the Greeks, it could easily be something as empty as “Uppers,” “Northerners,” or even “Newbies.”

Secondly, passports and other official documents of ***identification*** would then have this recommended adjectival use, because again, the Greeks would demand it, the UN would recommend it, and others would adopt it. It would be something akin to “citizen of the Republic of Northern Macedonia” instead of “Macedonian,” “Vardarskian,” or some such device. It would be the same with a reference to the Macedonian language which would then become “the language of the Republic of Northern Macedonia,” “Vardarskian,” or something similar. And then, any time Macedonians appeared at international events, or even just bilateral events with

other nations, the Greeks would demand that all official documentation and references to the Macedonians be labeled as such.

Thus, when Ambassador Nimetz says “We’re not negotiating identity,” he is correct according to the letter of the law, but devastatingly wrong according to the spirit of the law. **Macedonia’s identity will be part and parcel of any agreement Macedonia and Greece negotiate – this cannot be stressed enough, and any referendum the Macedonian government eventually puts before citizens will likely not include a reference to the identity but will, in the final negotiations between Macedonia and Greece, become international law.**

This leads us to a discussion of Nimetz’s worldview. According to the BBC article referenced above, “He does recognise that identity is important, though - despite being ‘a great believer in globalism.’ ‘I believe there’s a tribal aspect to us as a species,’ he says.” In other words, while he gives lip service to the idea that the identity of people is important, he is at heart a globalist and, in all likelihood, a “citizen of the world” as too many breezily assert. To borrow a local phrase from the region, he is “sitting on two chairs,” an impossible task. One cannot hold too tightly to one’s national identity, and be a citizen of the world at the same time. One identity must take priority over the other, and subordinate it. As a result, the other identity suffers and will eventually die out.

As the interview continues, BBC asserts that Nimetz is “‘optimistic that the timing may be right for this dispute soon.’ This is partly due to ‘new’ leadership in Macedonia - the Social Democrat Zoran Zaev became prime minister this year, breaking a long political deadlock in the country. But also because Macedonia needs to find a solution so it can get closer to its goals of joining NATO and the EU. ‘Doing that would give them reassurance, legitimacy, economic opportunities... and a sense of permanence,’ Nimetz says. It also might ease tensions in the country between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, who make up a quarter of the population. In 2001, such tensions brought the country to the brink of civil war.”

Any tensions that exist between Macedonians and Macedonian-Albanians have nothing to do with the name or identity (and there are other minorities in Macedonia who are quite happy being Macedonians and whose opinion the media continues to ignore). Second, “reassurance, legitimacy, economic opportunities and a sense of permanence,” already belong to Macedonia and the Macedonians in spades – economic figures, the world diplomatic stage, and even the UEFA Super Cup match this past summer – all point to the fact that Macedonia is here to stay. Third – and polls show that the vast majority of Macedonians agree with this – if giving up their name and identity is the price of joining the EU or NATO, then they are not willing to do so. Some things in life are infinitely more important than mere money or club membership.

Again, while Nimetz states he is not technically negotiating the identity, any final agreement will be subject to the authority of the UN Secretariat – who will then advise the rest of the UN (and therefore the EU, NATO, the world) on what adjective to use.

What are the options?

Here we come to the crux of the issue—how to proceed. There are only a handful of options for this situation – if not for “solving” the situation then at least for getting beyond the current status quo. Before I dig into these, however, I want to reiterate – any compromise that Macedonia makes on its name (through a referendum or other means) **will fundamentally alter the Macedonian identity**, both inside and outside of the Republic of Macedonia and extending to all who identify as Macedonians. This will also extend to all that is currently named “Macedonian” – language, church, culture, currency, literature, sports, etc. – everything. Something to consider.

#1 Give in to Greek demands by changing the name – and the identity

This is a really a non-starter for the vast majority of Macedonians, though the proposed referendum that Nikola Dimitrov and the SDSM government have promised could lead to Macedonia simply giving up and giving in to Greek demands. It depends, in varying degrees, on the wording of the referendum, whether it would be binding or merely consultative, worded in a positive or negative manner, the threshold for it to pass electorally, and other factors such as pressure from the international community (especially the Western embassies in Skopje), Albanian political parties and their leadership in Macedonia, and others. It would also depend on whether the Macedonian government agreed with Greece that the name must change internally (meaning a two-thirds vote in parliament to change the constitution) or if the Greeks would back off this demand and “generously allow” the Macedonians to retain their own name for internal purposes. If the name is changed for the rest of the world, but kept internally, then a change of the constitution would not be necessary and a vote in parliament would not be necessary. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia would simply inform the UN that it is happy to now be known as the “Republic of Vardarska Macedonia” or something else.

However, if Macedonia did give in to Greek demands, one thing is certain: Greece would achieve its goal of exclusivity and a monopoly over the name “Macedonia” and all of its uses. They would work to enforce its ownership of it, and deny all of Macedonia – in the government, private sector, and others – the usage of the name and its meaning.

#2 – Both sides come to a compromise

While the West has been insisting on this from the beginning, it is still highly improbable though not impossible. The problem however, as I see it, is that there are hidden challenges which will not be addressed in any compromise agreement but will arise later when it is too late. These unforeseen challenges would negatively affect Macedonian identity *now and long into the future*.

But assume, for a moment, that the Greek’s drop their demands and insistence that Macedonia change its constitution to accommodate a new name, and the Macedonian government is able to get a referendum passed that is in line with this—one that agrees to a “new” name for international usage but “allows” Macedonia to retain its constitutional name – Republic of Macedonia – and identity – Macedonian – for use within the country. Even if all of that happened (unlikely), it remains problematic because of four key issues all having to do with the

adjective and the identity. As we have seen above, Nimetz has stated that he is not negotiating Macedonia's identity. And while technically true, it's still a dodge.

First, international conferences within Macedonia. Macedonia hosts many international conferences and other events – think diplomatic events or international sports or arts and culture – in which Macedonians would want to be identified – *in their own country* – as Macedonians. But a problem arises here too, and the most recent example is from a women's [handball match](#) between Macedonia and Greece, *held in Skopje*, where the Greeks objected to the Macedonian team's display of the word "Macedonia" on their uniforms.

Second, bilateral relations. Macedonia, of course, has bilateral relations with most countries. But if the foreign minister of the UK, for example, is hosting the foreign minister of Macedonia in London, would Macedonia and the minister and his or her team be required to be identified by the new name – and identity? The UK, for instance, states "Republic of Macedonia. This is the name used by the state itself and is used by the UK for all bilateral purposes," according to the [Permanent Committee on Geographical Names](#). But even if the constitutional name remained, the Greeks would work overtime to pressure every other country to recognize, in their bilateral relations, the "new" name. If the Macedonians insisted on using their constitutional name, would this then give the Greeks reason to call foul? The answer, of course, is yes.

Third, there are Macedonians living in Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and other countries. What becomes of them when the name and identity are changed? For that matter, ethnic Macedonians from around the world have property claims in these countries; would those be valid?

Fourth, what happens to the usage of the name and identity outside of government? Think of everything that is *not* government: business and commercial transactions, private communications, NGOs, faith institutions, media, academia, sports, culture and arts, etc. – what governs the use of "Republic of Macedonia" and the adjective "Macedonian" or even the abbreviation of "MK" or "MKD?" **To say nothing of the Internet domain suffix of "MK."** The Greeks will slowly (or perhaps rapidly) demand internationally-compelled speech by all parties, government and private, to adhere to any agreement they are party to, including possible EU and NATO accession. And then there is the issue of other governmental identification marks such as passports (which have the constitutional name of Macedonia *both inside and on them*), Macedonian bank notes, postal stamps, and other such items that are used outside of Macedonia.

To recap, the Greeks would demand that the United Nations' Secretariat tasked with giving *advice* on the adjectival use for nations adopt whatever the Greeks demanded and this would then become an official UN description of how to refer to the country and people – it would then be adopted by the individual nation-states of the UN and then by international organizations. Secondly, passports and other official documents of *identification* would then have this recommended adjectival use, because again, the Greeks would demand it, the UN would recommend it, and others would adopt it. Abbreviations would change, such as the "MK" Internet domain suffix, as well as other uses of "MK" and "MKD." And then any time Macedonians appeared at international events, or even simply bilateral events with other nations, the Greeks would demand that all official documentation and references to the Macedonians be

stated and referred to as such. You will either become known as “Vardarskian,” “a citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia”, or whatever the name might be, or, even more likely knowing the Greeks, “a northerner” or some such nonsense. Whatever it is, the Greeks will continue to put international pressure on Macedonia so that Macedonians are *never* called Macedonians, for the simple fact that Greece does not recognize Macedonians as Macedonians and cannot abide the rest of the world recognizing Macedonians as such.

There are some Macedonians within the Republic (and a few outside) who view themselves as sophisticates, urbane, cultured and very, very, smart. They tell themselves, “Well, in my heart, I’ll always be a Macedonian, even if we change our name and the world recognizes us by that name change.” What they don’t understand is that, first, the identity begins to change, slowly, and then over time, that spirit of being a Macedonian will die. To adopt such an attitude is to adopt a Keynesian, and frankly conceited, attitude of “In the long run we are all dead.” Well yes, we all do die, but what about our children, grandchildren, and future generations? That spirit of being Macedonian must be passed down to them, and when the world denies that you are a Macedonian and you must hide the fact or tell it to yourself in front of a mirror while shaving and in hushed tones, then over time that too will fade away. You might call yourself a “Macedonian” but it will be in your mind only.

While the Government of Macedonia – and particularly Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov – are now stating that the name and identity issue will be and must be separate, the Government will likely present a referendum on the name. If it passes, Greece – and the internationals – will say, in effect, “Bravo, we can now begin the NATO accession process” whereby the parliaments of all 29 member states will begin ratification. But somewhere along this process – or even perhaps after all other states but Greece have ratified this, the Greeks will then go to the UN secretariat charged with giving advice on adjectival use of the name. They will come up with something other than “Macedonian” for use for all time and all peoples, countries and institutions. If the Macedonians object – and they would be dangling NATO membership and the final step in front of the Macedonians – well, we all know what will happen.

#3 Withdraw

A future government – it would have to be a future government – could withdraw from the negotiations, **but would need a strategy in place to do so first**. Article 23 of the Interim Accord allows for either party to walk away stating “either Party may withdraw from this Interim Accord by a written notice, which shall take effect 12 months after its delivery to the other Party.”

One result of withdrawing could be that the international community would place all of the blame on the Macedonians for not “wanting to be in the clubs.” So, a strategy would need to be in place that articulates that while Macedonia does indeed “want to be in the clubs” there is a *price that it cannot pay* for that membership. At the same time, that strategy would need to spell out exactly what Macedonia intends to do to get as close as possible to both the EU and NATO (technically, it already is as close to NATO as possible) and how this would benefit Macedonia. Remember, the US and EU will continue to insist (per Reeker’s words) that the “benefits outweigh the risks”—something that is patently false. Macedonia would also need to

prepare and brace itself for the backlash of Macedonia's Albanians. This would include reminding the Albanians of their status within Macedonia as equals before the law, the rights they have been given, and the wrongs that have been righted, but would also need to insist on their respect for the identity of the Macedonians. The last thing anyone would want would be for the Albanians to "take to the hills" with their guns – as they have done before. Would they do this – or would they demonstrate maturity? Granted, as a sovereign state, the EU and US should respect Macedonia's decision and work to ensure that Macedonia's Albanians show their maturity while working to ensure that Macedonia's neighbors, notably Albania and Kosovo, also demonstrate the maturity that the international community has come to expect, and rightly demand. As for Macedonia's many other ethnic minorities, they do not have a problem as identifying as Macedonians and would be encouraged to rally around this strategy. A further point here needs to be made: under the Trump Doctrine, the United States respects the sovereignty of other nations. As President Trump [said](#) in his address to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 19, 2017, "As President of the United States, I will always put America first, just like you, as the leaders of your countries will always, and should always, put your countries first. All responsible leaders have an obligation to serve their own citizens, and the nation-state remains the best vehicle for elevating the human condition....If we desire to lift up our citizens, if we aspire to the approval of history, then we must fulfill our sovereign duties to the people we faithfully represent. We must protect our nations, their interests, and their futures. We must reject threats to sovereignty..."

Greece, of course, would be apoplectic. Why? Because first and foremost, the negotiations, for Greece, are an opportunity to force Macedonia into denying itself as a state calling itself the Republic of Macedonia and an opportunity to deny the existence of a distinct group of people calling themselves Macedonians. As long as negotiations continue, Greece creates an illusion that the state calling itself the Republic of Macedonia is not actually a permanent state with a permanent people, a dangerous proposition. At the end of the day, Greece does not care if the state called Macedonia is in, or is out, of NATO or the EU. Greece's starting and finishing position has always been: there is no Republic of Macedonia and there are no Macedonians. For Macedonia to politely withdraw denies the Greeks this opportunity. Over time, if Macedonia withdrew and refused to continue negotiating, this situation would become the norm just as the situation since 1993 has "become the norm." Nerves would calm, Macedonia would focus and expend its efforts on what is important – the economy comes to mind – and move on.

There are several countries in Europe which are not in the EU or not in NATO. Granted, they are ahead of Macedonia economically speaking, and they have completely different histories and situations overall. There is also the issue of the [Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation](#) which former Macedonian Ambassador and name negotiator Zoran Jolevski was instrumental in negotiating, and signed between Macedonia and the United States in 2008: this document should be revisited and beefed up to include security guarantees for Macedonia if it does come under attack (there are numerous examples of such guarantees offered by the US to other countries). This could be the basis of a new and enhanced relationship as Macedonia continues to wait for NATO membership.

At the end of the day, however, it is not 100% necessary for Macedonia's survival – or even for Macedonia's success – to be in both organizations, or even one. **It is a false choice** to say

Macedonia in the clubs makes it an automatic success or Macedonia not in the clubs makes it an automatic failure but this is what the US, EU, NATO and others have continually stated. In that leaked Wikileaks cable noted previously, then-US Ambassador Reeker states “We have continued to press the point publicly and privately that Macedonia’s future lies inside these organizations (*meaning the EU and NATO*); any other path will bring significant risks.” Three points. **First**, in this, Reeker demonstrates the soft totalitarianism of those who insist there is only one way, their way, and the idea that to be outside of that one way is to be on the “wrong side of history,” and that they will brook no deviation from their one way. This is what we are warned about by Polish philosopher, author and MEP Ryszard Legutko who writes in [*The Demon in Democracy*](#), “both the communists and liberal democrats have always upheld and continue to uphold the view that history is on their side.” **Second**, compare this with Crvenkovski’s belief, above, in a “bleak future” for Macedonia outside of NATO and the EU – it hasn’t happened and won’t happen. **Third**, why is it wrong to allow the Macedonians – who know their own people and place in the world better than some unelected and unaccountable American diplomat – to take those *supposed* risks and do what they think is best for themselves? Remember, no matter what he insists on, Reeker is thinking of *his* best interests, not of *Macedonia’s* best interests, a very paternalistic, even colonial, attitude. The same goes for all other Western diplomats insisting on this. And there is yet another aspect to this, something very much overlooked. Diplomat Henry Kissinger has said “To Americans usually tragedy is wanting something very badly and not getting it. Many people have had to learn in their private lives, and nations have had to learn in their historical experiences, that perhaps the worst form of tragedy is wanting something very badly, getting it, and finding it empty.” This is called “buyer’s remorse,” and one can see it in individuals....and in nations.

The option of withdrawing is also the position of the United Macedonian Diaspora (UMD) the largest Macedonian diaspora group in the world. [Their position](#), taken since their creation in 2004, has been to call “upon the Macedonian government to cease the ongoing UN talks.”

#4 – Do nothing

A final option is to do nothing. Patiently explain to both the Macedonian citizens and the world that Macedonia already has many of the benefits and obligations of EU membership, without being part of the oppressive regulatory regime that comes with it (witness, Brexit), and that, as in the third option, above, de facto membership in NATO has already been achieved.

This last option would allow Macedonia to drop the name issue to the side, and would reduce tensions and anxiety on both sides as both countries would no longer be under the proverbial hammer of having to make concessions (especially Macedonia). Insisting on “solving” the name issue through actual and perceived attempts to pressure Macedonia to change its name and identity have actually eroded trust and support for both NATO and the EU (according to polling) and have created enormous distrust in the US and EU. Continuing to chase an impossible and illusory chalice risks further losing the hearts and minds of the Macedonian people. But this option would also require the US, EU, NATO and others stop insisting that Macedonia change its name and identity and simply allow Macedonia to be Macedonia.

Finally, there is always the extremely faint hope that a more reasonable government will come to power in Greece. After all, Greece has had 185 prime ministers in the past 194 years. The current government, a far-left party, SYRIZA (literally, Coalition of the Radical Left) has deep Russian ties and a party goal to remove Greece from NATO. It won't be there forever.

Recommendation

Yes, to the Republic of Macedonia, *erga omnes*, all those who want to recognize the right of Macedonia and the Macedonians to call themselves the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonian people, are welcome. This is not to deny that there are individuals in Greece who call themselves Macedonians – that is their absolute right. Unlike Greece, Macedonia makes no claim of exclusivity or a monopoly on the name. Nor is it to deny the government of Greece its right to call Macedonia whatever it likes. This can be achieved through option number three, as outlined above, but it will take guts, a solid strategy, time, and perseverance. But it's worth it because Macedonia is worth it. At the end of the day, the Republic of Macedonia is the name and the name remains the same.

Appendices

I've written roughly dozens of columns since 2001 on issues related exclusively to the name and identity for Macedonian newspapers and magazines. Three important ones are included here. They have been lightly edited.

The Verbal Identifier

March 23, 2015

Over the past almost four years I've written 14 columns for *Dnevnik* dedicated solely to the name and identity issue, examining various aspects of why they are of utmost importance to the continuation of Macedonians and Macedonia. I've examined several issues including the idea that the ability to name things or people gives one dominance over them, starting with examples from God Himself – in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God names the light “day” and gives Adam the right to name the animals, thus signifying dominance over both. For giving their children 18 years (plus an initial nine months) of food, clothing and shelter – to name the basics – parents get to name their children. We name mountains, rivers, valleys, inventions, products, art, and an uncountable number of other things that we either have dominion over or create. So I thought I had examined all of the potential ways of discussing names and identity but recently – and happily – I found a new angle which I want to share with you.

Consider the following family names: Boeing, Disney, Nestle, and Van Hool, all globally, recognized family names. As most readers probably know, these are also global brand names, known for making quality products and, in the case of Disney, products and entertainment. (An interesting side note. Some additional global brand names you are familiar with are also from family names. IKEA is taken from the initials of the founder, Ingvar Kamprad, and the property and village he grew up in, Elmtaryad Agunnaryd).

Most people, when they hear these names, make mental associations with what these names represent: Boeing is synonymous with passenger planes, Disney with children's entertainment (and now Star Wars), Nestle with chocolate and food and Van Hool with busses. These names are “verbal identifiers” and if I say the name “Boeing” an image of the venerable Boeing 747 might pop into your head. But as we all know names are much more than verbal identifiers. If you have ever flown a Boeing or know something about the company and its planes, an entire history of thoughts and experiences might flood into your head when I say that name. As a frequent flyer, I can tell you quite a bit about what comes into my mind when you say the word “Boeing.”

Thus a name is infinitely more than merely a verbal identifier; it's so much more than what we think of than just a single image or images. Because *within* a name is the *essence* or *significance* of the thing or person you are naming. A name calls us to the *essence* or *significance* of that person or thing that we can wrap our head and our heart around. Try this exercise for a moment right now as you are reading this. Say the name of someone you love – mother, father, spouse, son, daughter, brother, sister, relative, friend....and then visualize some images, history,

experiences and emotions. Now do it with something other than a person – say the name of something or someplace that you love. All kinds of thoughts, experiences, histories and emotions come to mind.

Now say the words Macedonia, Macedonian, Macedonian language, Macedonian culture, and more. What comes to mind? A rich history. A detailed and vibrant culture. A plethora of experiences. The Macedonian name and the Macedonian identity are much more than verbal identifiers. The name Macedonia and the Macedonian identity are the *essence* or *significance* of who you are, who your children and grandchildren are or will be and who generations yet to be born will be.

Many (but not all) progressives, post-modernists, intellectuals, elected politicians and unelected bureaucrats, intelligentsia and academics around the world no longer believe in the essence or significance of names or identity. They think of names as only verbal identifiers for a couple of reasons. First, their names and identities are more than likely already secure and not threatened. Second, they take their names and identity for granted and, in fact, *are bored by the identity they have*. Third, the identity they have offers them very little or nothing – nothing to live for, nothing to die for, nothing to strive for, nothing at all. Emptiness. Therefore, if identity is empty and unimportant to them, they figure it should be unimportant to you. (One good thing is that the majority of people – not those mentioned above – still do believe in their identity. That, however, is outweighed by a more important bad thing: that the ideas of leaders, good or bad outweigh the ideas of followers, generally speaking. And too many leaders around the world today don't care much for their names and identities. And they make the decisions).

The EU and NATO want Macedonia to be a full member of both. They say that in order to become members of both you must, essentially, give up your name (and your identity though they don't phrase it that way). For many reasons, I do not believe Macedonia should become an EU member though I do believe it is important to become a NATO member. And Macedonia is a NATO member in all but, ironically, name. In the end, Macedonia cannot and should not reject who it is. Remember and never forget: you are who you say you are. You are Macedonia. You are Macedonians. Hold on to that. Embrace that. Never let it go.

Eight points on the name and identity

June 13, 2016

I've written about the name and identity issue many times before and, as a part of my remarks to the United Macedonians Organization of Canada earlier this year I addressed this subject. Today, I'm turning those remarks on the name and identity into a column; it's always useful, I believe, to review your arguments in support of your side. First, the name and identity are intertwined and cannot be separated. So when politicians, foreign diplomats, media, think-tanks and others talk about separating them, remind them that it is impossible. Second, 135 countries recognize the name and identity. It's perfectly normal to say Macedonia and talk about the Macedonian people, language, church and culture, so don't even bring up the name issue unless someone else brings it up.

Third, UN Resolution 817 of April 7, 1993 allowed Macedonia entrance into the UN because Greece objected to its name and identity. In one paragraph in the resolution we read that Macedonia will be “provisionally referred to for all purposes within the United Nations as ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ pending settlement of the difference that has arisen over the name of the State.” Note the way Macedonia is referred to: it is provisional meaning it only exists only for a temporary time; it is a reference – it is not a name; and it is for all purposes within the UN meaning it applies only to the UN: not to the EU or NATO even though they use it. The resolution does not prohibit other states from calling Macedonia, Macedonia, nor does it prohibit Macedonia from calling itself, Macedonia. The “name” is *not* “FYROM” *nor* is the name “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.”

Fourth, “Loyal Unto Death” is a book by Professor Keith Brown of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island and is about the Ilinden Dossier and VMRO. In the first chapter of the book, Professor Brown states “In its simplest form, much of the historical research on twentieth-century Macedonia and its residents has come to be organized around the question ‘Who were they?’” Our documentary film, [*A Name is a Name*](#), answers the question “Who are they?” You are Macedonians, of course, and the film makes that abundantly clear. But we don’t need to constantly be talking and debating about Alexander the Great. Talk about the here and now not the then and there. It will strengthen your arguments about Macedonia today. Fifth, how often do we read about “Macedonia’s name dispute with Greece.....” Macedonia does not have a “name dispute with Greece.” It’s the way around and we need to correct the record.

Sixth, names are about dominion. We name our children because we have dominion over them. God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness, ‘night’ in Genesis 1:4 because God created them. Adam named the animals in Genesis 2:19 because man was given dominion over the earth and the animals. So when Greece wants to rename Macedonia it is attempting to exercise dominion over Macedonia. The only people who have dominion over Macedonia are the Macedonians.

Seventh, names are verbal identifiers. Boeing, Disney, and Nestle, are all globally, recognized family names. Think of a name and you associate something with that name. But a name is more than merely a verbal identifier because within a name is the essence or significance of the thing or person you are naming. A name calls us to the essence or significance of that person or thing so we can then wrap our head and our heart around it. Try this for a moment right now. Say the name of someone you love – mother, father, spouse, son, daughter, brother, sister, relative, friend.....and then visualize some images, history, experiences and emotions. Now say the words Macedonia, Macedonian, Macedonian language, Macedonian culture, and more. What comes to mind? The name Macedonia and the Macedonian identity are the essence or significance of who you are, who your children and grandchildren are or will be and who generations yet to be born will be.

Eighth: Author Natan Sharansky, a Soviet-born Israeli, in his book “Defending Identity: Its Indispensable Role in Protecting Democracy,” introduces readers to his belief that our identity as both individuals and as groups of people is vital to defending and protecting democracy and freedom. He writes: “Not only are strong identities vitally important to individuals who hope to lead a life of purpose, they are essential for the ability of a democratic nation to defend its cherished freedoms. One universal quality of identity is that it gives life meaning beyond life

itself. Identity, a life of commitment, is essential because it satisfies a human longing to become part of something bigger than oneself. Democracy asserts the value of freedom; identity gives a reason for freedom.”

So we come back to the beginning – it is about identity. The name and identity are intertwined and cannot be separated and it is in the interest of Greece and the international community that Macedonia remains secure and free. The best way for this to happen is to simply recognize the truth – the Macedonian name and identity. Many people feel that Macedonia’s very existence is under threat and that the Macedonian people, language, culture and church are under threat. And to an extent, this is true. American President Ronald Reagan once said “Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom and then lost it have never known it again.”

“He named you.”

November 2, 2017

“He named you. You must be special.” Just seven words. That’s all. This is dialogue from the film *Blade Runner 2049* and takes place between the character known as “K” (played by Ryan Gosling) and the character – with a name! – known as “Luv” played by Sylvia Hoeks. Both characters are replicants – non-humans – and replicants, if you know the story, don’t usually have names, only other identifications. Later on in the film we see actor Harrison Ford, who plays “Deckard” from the original *Blade Runner*, ask K, “Got a name?” to which K answers “KD9-3.7.” Deckard retorts, “That’s not a name, that’s a serial number.” K then answers “All right. ‘Joe.’” At this point I’ll stop giving away dialogue from the film because that would involve spoilers and if you have not seen it well, I don’t want to spoil it for you.

My point here is that names are special, aren’t they? Our given names, our family names, the names of our ethnic heritage or the place we call home....all kinds of names. When our parents name us, it is special. In most cases, our parents take time to think carefully about the names they will give us because they love us and we are special and because they want our names to be a reflection of both them, and what type of a person they hope we will grow up to become.

I’m always encouraged to find a new way to discuss names and identity, a theme I come back to again and again for the simple reason that Macedonia’s name, and the identity of the Macedonians, is under attack – and with the current government in Macedonia, it is in grave and existential danger. So I find it helpful and useful to develop solid reasons as to why names and identity should be left alone and intact as well as admired and revered.

As I’ve written before *within* a name is the *essence* or *significance* of the thing or person you are naming. A name calls us to the *essence* or *significance* of that person or thing that we can wrap our head and our heart around. Try this exercise for a moment right now as you are reading this. Say the name of someone you love – mother, father, spouse, son, daughter, brother, sister, relative, friend....and then visualize some images, history, experiences and emotions that you associate with that person and their name. Now do it with something other than a person – say

the name of something or someplace that you love or enjoy. All kinds of thoughts, experiences, histories and emotions come to mind.

Now say the words “Macedonia,” “Macedonian,” “Macedonian language,” “Macedonian culture,” and more. What comes to mind? A rich history. A detailed and vibrant culture. A plethora of experiences. The Macedonian name and the Macedonian identity are much more than verbal identifiers. The name Macedonia and the Macedonian identity are the *essence* or *significance* of who you are, who your children and grandchildren are or will be and who generations yet to be born will be.

The current government of Macedonia is developing plans for a “national process” and then a referendum on the name and therefore, the very identity of Macedonia and the Macedonians. As Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov [told Reuters](#) news agency this past summer, “There will definitely be a referendum.” What this “national process” will be like, however, is anybody’s guess. Will the governments of Macedonia and Greece agree on a name and then submit it to a referendum? Will the government of Macedonia have a public process to come to a new name and then run it by the Greeks?

No matter what happens, if you change your name, you change your identity. While you are shaving or putting on make-up in front of the mirror, you may be quietly telling yourself “Why yes, I am a Macedonian” but the Greeks will be working overtime to have the world call you anything but Macedonians while the Bulgarians will be working overtime to have the world call you Bulgarians or try to convince you that you are indeed, Bulgarians.

There are, unfortunately, a number of Macedonians, many of them in government, the media, cultural institutions, academia, think-tanks, NGOs, and of course working for foreign embassies and other international organizations, who fancy themselves “citizens of the world” without giving much thought to just how meaningless and empty that label is. At the same time, many of them are either ashamed or don’t care about their Macedonian identity. These are the ones who will push for a name – and therefore identity – change. They have been enticed by the shiny baubles of an ephemeral mirage – the false hopes of the European Union and believe – honestly or otherwise – that it is worth giving up their own name and identity for something that will not last.

Remember: once you give up your name and identity there is no going back – it is forever.