



## BALKANS & EASTERN EUROPE March 2018

### **Greece-FYROM: positive signals for the future**

The resolution of the issue concerning the dispute over the name of Macedonia between Greece and FYROM is fundamental in the context of access to the Community structures by the countries of the Balkan area. The possibility that the issue can be resolved quickly and with the consensus of all the actors in the field, could give an acceleration towards the process of Macedonian accession to the EU and NATO structures. As often happens, Macedonian membership could also lead the way to other Balkan states on their path to the Western structures.

In this sense, the recent meetings of Greek and Macedonian foreign ministers seem to provide positive signals to a diatribe that has for too long blocked relations between the Balkan states. Indeed from the meeting of March 23<sup>rd</sup> Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias said he and his Macedonian counterpart made progress toward reaching a settlement in the decades-old dispute over the name of the former Yugoslav republic. "Today, we made steps to solve the problems we inherited," Kotzias told a joint news conference in Skopje after the meeting with Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov. "We are committed to resolve them and contribute to the friendship between the two peoples, to stability and security, the development of both countries and the whole region," he said. Media have reported that compromise solutions include adding extra elements to Macedonia's name, such as Upper Macedonia, New Macedonia, or Northern Macedonia [*Greek, Macedonian Officials See Progress In Name Dispute*, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 23/03/2018].

However, mass protests in both countries are an indication of popular resistance to any compromise. On March 4, about 10,000 people took to the streets of the Macedonian capital to protest a possible change to the name of the country. A demonstration in Athens drew tens of thousands of people a month earlier. Kotzias' flight to the Macedonian capital was the first direct one from Athens to Skopje in more than 10 years. Greece objects to the former Yugoslav republic's use of the name Macedonia, which Athens says could imply territorial claims over its own northern region of the same name. As a result of the unresolved dispute, Greece blocked Macedonia's NATO membership in 2008. It has also blocked the start of Macedonia's EU accession talks, despite several positive annual reports from the European

Commission on the country's progress [Sinisa Jakov Marusic, *Macedonian, Greek Ministers Sound Upbeat on Name Deal*, BalkanInsight, 23/03/2018].

Progress also demonstrated by the expulsion of the Russian diplomat not only because of solidarity with the United States and Britain in the case of Skripal, but also because he was a spy, FYROMacedonian authorities said. Decision that does not agreed all the authorities, such as President Gjorge Ivanov, but which proves how the Republic of Macedonia, as a candidate country for EU membership, follows the EU's policy. Some analysts emphasize that FYROMacedonia as a candidate for NATO membership must follow its strategic priorities and show solidarity with the countries in which company it wants to be [Nezavisen Vesnik, *Ivanov: The MFA's decision to expel the Russian diplomat is 'hasty'*, Independent Balkan News Agency, 28/03/2018]. The path taken seems to be clear, its realization will be the real success.

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