
MACEDONIA, GREECE SIGN 'HISTORIC' NAME DEAL

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The Macedonian and Greek Foreign Ministers, Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias, in the presence of their countries' Prime Ministers, Macedonia's Zoran Zaev and Greece's Alexis Tsipras, signed a historic agreement aimed at ending the long dispute over Macedonia's name on Sunday.

The UN "name" mediator, Matthew Nimetz, as well as other ministers from both countries attended the ceremony, as did the EU enlargement commissioner, Johannes Hahn, the EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, as well as the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo.

The ceremony took place in the border region of Lake Prespa, in the Greek village of Psarades, after which both delegations headed to the Macedonian side of the lake, to the village of Oteshevo, for a celebratory lunch.

Macedonia's Prime Minister Zaev said the deal put an end of the barren policies of the past that focused on isolation and self-isolation.

Today we put an end to the dispute. We put an end to the long-standing differences which have put up a wall that made friendly relations difficult between neighbours, Zaev said.

The agreement brings us a friend that many said was an irreconcilable enemy.

Greek Prime Minister Tsipras called the agreement patriotic, and one that respects the fundamental values of both countries, adding that both governments now need to work on its implementation.

To reach a compromise over such a tough dispute takes political leadership, courage and strategic thinking. These leaders showed that they possess these qualities, UN mediator Nimetz said in his address.

The signing ceremony was protected by a heavy police presence on both sides of the border as opponents of the agreement in both countries had announced protests.

In tandem with the signing ceremony, Macedonia's main opposition VMRO DPMNE party planned a protest march in the southern town of Bitola.

Greek right-wingers also announced rallies condemning the deal in the regions near the Greek-

Macedonian border.

News of the eagerly-awaited breakthrough came on June 12 after the two sides stepped up UN-sponsored talks at the start of this year, after Zaev's Social Democratic Union, SDSM, took power in Macedonia in 2017.

Under the agreement, Macedonia is to change its name to Republic of North Macedonia in exchange for swift accession to NATO and a start to EU accession talks.

The definition of the countrys language will remain "Macedonian", as Skopje insisted in the talks. The peoples nationality will be defined as "Macedonian/Citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia".

However, the new agreed name, the Republic of North Macedonia, will be used both internationally and domestically, an issue that was a priority for Greece.

Skopje hopes that with a solution in hand, NATO will extend a membership invitation and that the EU will allow the start of accession talks as early as this summer.

The signing ceremony was only the beginning of the end of one of the toughest bilateral disputes in Europes recent history.

Several further steps for its practical implementation will follow throughout the rest of this year.

They include the still uncertain ratification of the deal by both parliaments and an even riskier referendum on the deal in Macedonia, which will put Zaevs government to the test.

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