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It Is Past Time for Macedonia to Join NATO

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At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, NATO affirmed that Macedonia would become a fully fledged member of the alliance once its bilateral name dispute with Greece is resolved. Nearly two years later, Greece continues to block Macedonia's NATO membership and has extended its obstructionism to Skopje's ambitions to accede to the European Union, despite widespread support in the region and from the broader Euro-Atlantic community.

The Adriatic-3 countries—Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia—have successfully completed their Membership Action Plans, and as a result, Albania and Croatia have taken their seat at the alliance's table. It is well past time for Macedonia to join them. The United States must work with Macedonia's allies within NATO to push their accession up the agenda and pressure Greece to abide by NATO's long-standing precedent that one country does not block another's membership on a purely bilateral matter.

Greek Obstructionism. Despite the fact that more than 120 countries have recognized Macedonia by its constitutional name, Greece asserts that the Republic of Macedonia gives the nation a territorial claim over Greece's northern region of the same name.¹ Under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, all decisions on NATO enlargement must be made by unanimous consent, so Greek opposition alone is enough to block Macedonia's entry to NATO. However, bilateral disputes have traditionally been resolved outside of the alliance (such as Slovenia's border dispute with Croatia) so that one

member alone does not block the consensus decisions of the others.

Greece undoubtedly has the upper hand, unashamedly wielding its veto power over Macedonia's accession despite a 1995 interim accord between the two nations agreeing not to do so. Instead of using its power to advance the stability of the transatlantic alliance, Greece is abusing its dominant position to advance its own narrow aims, which will invariably impact regional security.

Macedonia's patience is not inexhaustible, and it continues to bear the costs of courting NATO without enjoying the full benefits of membership. It will inevitably become costlier politically for Skopje to justify the time and expense of chasing NATO accession as well as its increased commitment to NATO missions such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Iraq. Further, Macedonia—having recently increased its troop commitment to 250—currently has more troops serving under NATO in Afghanistan than does Greece.

The Way Forward. The U.N.-mediated talks, supporting bilateral negotiations, should continue separately from the issue of Macedonia's accession to NATO. Therefore significant diplomatic pressure will have to be applied to Athens to overcome their

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opposition. Macedonia has a number of powerful advocates within the alliance to push the issue, including Austrian Minister for European and International Affairs Michael Spindelegger, Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor, and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Significantly, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's political advisor, Ambassador Lawrence Butler, is a former U.S. ambassador to Macedonia. And American leadership on this matter is essential.

Both U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder and President Obama have also been vocal supporters of NATO enlargement. NATO expansion has traditionally enjoyed strong bipartisan support in the United States, and the Obama Administration should rally congressional support for NATO's Open Door Policy, specifically pushing for the accession of Macedonia in time for the 2010 Lisbon Summit at the end of the year. Ambassador Daalder should also use the U.S.'s diplomatic channels in Europe, in concert with his colleagues in Athens, to increase international pressure on Greece to resolve this matter expeditiously.

A Fair Solution. NATO expansion has been a major success story for the alliance and has played a crucial role in stabilizing and reforming large parts of Europe. Greece was itself brought into the alliance in 1952 on the first wave of enlargement to advance Europe's strategic reach in southern Europe. Macedonia has chosen a Euro-Atlantic path for its future and met its obligations to qualify for future membership, liberalizing its economy and professionalizing its military. It has shown itself to be capable of providing—not just consuming—security and has constitutionally mandated that it has no territorial aspirations against its neighbors.² Its membership prospects must finally be advanced before the window of opportunity closes.

NATO must send a clear message that it remains open for business and that accession is possible for all free, democratic nations in Europe.

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1. Macedonian Information Agency, "Macedonia, Kosovo Establish Diplomatic Ties," October 18, 2009, at <http://www.mia.com.mk/default.aspx?vid=68382988&lId=2> (January 28, 2010).
2. Matthew Becker, "Greek PM: We Must Meet Skopje Halfway," *The Washington Examiner*, January 4, 2010, at <http://www.examiner.com/x-27426-Volusia-County-Foreign-Policy-Examiner~y2010m1d4-Greek-PM-We-must-meet-halfway-over-name-row> (January 27, 2010).