

## Macedonia name dispute rages on

Written by Martin Banks on 15 June 2018 in News  
News

The proposed resolution for Macedonia's name dispute has been plunged into confusion after the country's President said he would not agree to it.



General view from the top of Mount Vodno in Skopje, Macedonia | *Photo credit: Press Association*

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Under the deal, Macedonia would become formally known as the Republic of Severna (Northern) Macedonia.

It is currently known officially at the United Nations as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. [The agreement reached by Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras was seen as a chance to end the decades-long dispute between Skopje and Athens](#) [1].

However, the process was thrown into chaos on Thursday after Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov

said he would not sign the landmark deal reached with Greece on changing his country's name.

His comments appear to dash hopes of a swift end to a diplomatic dispute that has blocked Skopje's bid to join the European Union and Nato.

The President, who must approve the deal, is backed by the nationalist opposition VMRO-DPMNE.

VMRO-DPMNE is strongly opposed to the accord and can veto it. Its leader Hristijan Mickoski said the deal was "an absolute defeat for Macedonian diplomacy."

On Wednesday, Ivanov said, "My position is final and I will not yield to any pressure, blackmail or threats. I will not support or sign such a damaging agreement."

The Macedonian President also told a news conference that Macedonia's possible future membership of the EU and Nato was not sufficient excuse to sign such a "bad agreement."

In Greece too, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras faced a barrage of criticism and the prospect of a no-confidence vote against his government.

The deal must be approved by Macedonians in a referendum and the parliaments of both countries.

Before the new setback, the name change had been greeted by both European Council President Donald Tusk and Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as a chance to help in the process of speeding up the Republic of Northern Macedonia's accession to the EU.

A statement issued by Stoltenberg said he "warmly welcomed this historic agreement" which, he said, was "testament to many years of patient diplomacy, and to the willingness of these two leaders to solve a dispute which has affected the region for too long."

"I now call on both countries to finalise the agreement reached by the two leaders. This will set Skopje on its path to Nato membership. And it will help to consolidate peace and stability across the wider Western Balkans."

Further comment came from Tusk who said it was a "unique opportunity to relaunch the wider Western Balkan region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration."

Tusk added, "This agreement sets an example for others on how to consolidate peace and stability across the region."

## **About the author**

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