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A no-brainer: NATO and the EU should not facilitate aggression and expansionism in South East Europe

By Marko Attila Hoare, 26th March 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. By allowing Greece to veto Macedonia's accession to NATO and the EU over the unresolved 'name dispute', Western governments have given the green light to Slovenia similarly to use its veto to blackmail Croatia to make territorial concessions. This is creating a dangerous precedent facilitating aggressive nationalist demands by rogue NATO and EU members.

2. We cannot afford to allow the integration of Eastern and South

Eastern Europe into Euro-Atlantic institutions to be held hostage by bilateral regional disputes, let alone encourage such disputes by privileging the states that initiate them.

3. In the interests of the entire Western alliance, It is time to bring real pressure to bear on Greece, Slovenia and, where necessary, other rogue NATO and EU members to drop their aggressive designs on their neighbours.

One of the biggest arguments in favour of the European Union is that it has, along with its precursors, helped to keep the peace in Europe for nearly sixty years, turning previously hostile neighbours into partners in a common supranational, democratic European project. Meanwhile, NATO defended democratic Europe from Soviet expansionism. Today in the Balkans, however, both institutions are playing the opposite role: they are aiding and abetting regional predators in the pursuit of aggressive policies against neighbouring states. This is happening despite the fact that these aggressive policies are undermining both Western security and regional stability, and are contrary to the common interests of the EU and NATO member states. It is happening because existing members of both organisations enjoy the right to veto the accession of new members. Such a veto would be somewhat less problematic if all existing members were genuinely democratic states with no aggressive or expansionist ambitions. But unfortunately, this simply is not the case.

Last April, Greece vetoed Macedonia's entry into NATO's Membership Action Plan, because of the unresolved 'name dispute' between the two countries. Greece objects to Macedonia's constitutional name, 'The Republic of Macedonia', and demands that Macedonia change it. The reason is that Greece does not recognise the existence of a Macedonian nation. In 1912-13, Greece conquered the portion of the Ottoman territory of Macedonia that today comprises Greek Macedonia. Since then it has pursued a policy of forced Hellenisation of the territory, involving varying policies of extermination, expulsion and forced assimilation of the non-Greek

population. Thanks to these measures, a territory that was barely over two-fifths ethnic Greek in 1912 is today almost ethnically pure. This policy of enforced ethnic homogenisation has involved denying the existence of an [ethnic Macedonian minority](#) in Greece. When Yugoslavia broke up in the early 1990s, Greece expanded this policy to try to wipe the newly independent Macedonian nation-state, which had emerged from the former Yugoslavia, off the map, by forcing it to change its name, a policy whose pettiness was noted by [David Cameron](#), currently leader of Britain's Conservative Party, in a defence of Macedonia he wrote back in 2003. Consequently, Greece is blocking Macedonia's entry into NATO.

Greece is a [regional troublemaker](#) of long standing that has repeatedly acted against Western interests in South East Europe. Its veto of Macedonia's NATO bid was a violation of an international agreement, the [Interim Accord](#) of 1995, whereby Greece had undertaken not to block Macedonia's entry into international organisations under the provisional name 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. Macedonia has proven a better ally of the democratic world than Greece, contributing the same number of troops to the allied forces in Afghanistan as Greece, despite being a non-NATO country with a fifth of Greece's population. The exclusion of Macedonia from Euro-Atlantic structures threatens to destabilise this fragile state, with potentially catastrophic consequences for Balkan regional stability. Yet by meekly acquiescing in Greece's misuse of its veto, NATO effectively endorsed an act of petty Balkan nationalist aggression.

With Greece threatening to exclude Macedonia from the EU as well, the lesson had not been lost on other regional bullies. Slovenia is now threatening to keep Croatia out of the EU unless Zagreb cedes it territory on both land and sea. Because there is no actual legal validity to Slovenia's territorial claims against Croatia, Slovenia is rejecting the idea that the case be resolved by the International Court of Justice, unless the latter's decision is based on factors other than international law. As Xinhua News Agency diplomatically [put it](#): 'Slovenia has opposed taking the border issue to the ICJ unless the court uses the equity principle (ex equo et bono) in coming to a decision. This means the court can include any kind of

circumstances, even if the valid international law does not [sic] (like historical facts), in order to reach a fairer verdict.' Put simply, the Slovenes feel that because they don't have much of a coastline, and Croatia has a long one, the Croats should give them some of theirs. Rather like demanding, on the principle of 'fairness', that someone who is richer than you are should hand over to you part of their savings. Since its territorial claim is political rather than legal, Ljubljana naturally [prefers](#) the idea of EU mediation to an ICJ legal ruling. Although not on an equivalent scale, this has disturbing echoes of the way in which Slobodan Milosevic successfully enlisted EU mediators such as David Owen and Carl Bildt to pressurise Bosnia's leaders to accept an unprincipled settlement to the war of the 1990s. Great Serbia and Great Croatia have failed to come into being, but we may yet see the establishment of a Great Slovenia - thanks to the fact that Slovenia, unlike the expansionist Serbia and Croatia of the 1990s, is in the EU.

Thus, by colluding in Greece's blackmail of Macedonia, Western leaders have given a green light to Slovenia's blackmail of Croatia. Indeed, the far-right Party of the Slovenian People' has been [campaigning](#) for Slovenia to veto Croatia's entry into NATO as well, though so far [without success](#). The Slovenian leadership has retreated from its own threat to obstruct Croatia's entry into NATO under [pressure](#) from the US, which has, on this occasion, stood up to the local troublemaker for the sake of the Western alliance. This shows that, where there is a will on the part of the major NATO and EU states, a rogue member of the alliance can be pressurised to desist from its bullying of an aspirant member.

The unwillingness of the NATO and EU states, therefore, to exert enough pressure on Athens and Ljubljana to end their obstruction of Macedonia's and Croatia's Euro-Atlantic integration stems from a lack of will. In the case of Greece, its determination to keep Macedonia out of NATO and the EU has been bolstered by the [opportunistic support](#) of French President Nicolas Sarkozy - presumably an expression of his Mediterranean ambitions and of a residual Gaullism that conflicts with Washington's [support for Macedonia](#). Yet there has been no contrary support for Macedonia from within EU ranks. A sign of the unprincipled, pessimistic times is that even the International

Crisis Group, once a voice of principled moderation, has advocated a [Macedonian surrender](#) in the name dispute in return for a Greek recognition of the Macedonian national identity.

It is, of course, easier for Western leaders simply to go with the flow, and appease the unprincipled nationalist demands of rogue NATO and EU states. Yet the more such appeasement occurs, the more problems are generated for the Western alliance. Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader has taken the [principled position](#), that Croatia will not obstruct Serbia's entry into the EU as Slovenia's has obstructed Croatia's: 'Croatia will not be to Serbia what Slovenia is to us'. Yet if EU diplomacy does result in a Croatian cession of territory to Slovenia, there is nothing to prevent an embittered Croatia from reversing Sanader's position, and imposing territorial or other unreasonable demands on Serbia, Montenegro or Bosnia - all of which possess territories that Croat nationalists have traditionally claimed. With Albania set to join NATO and significant ethnic-Albanian minorities present in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, Tirana could, if it so wished, create a veritable nightmare for the Western alliance by making issues out of the latter. There are already enough obstacles in the way of the smooth Euro-Atlantic integration of the remaining Balkan states, without us encouraging those who might wish to create more of them. Then there are Cypriot objections to Turkey's EU membership; potential Ukrainian and Moldovan differences over Transnistria; differences between Turkey and Armenia and between the Transcaucasian states. The national - or to be more accurate, nationalist - veto of new NATO and EU members by local rivals that are already members represents a very dangerous barrier to European unity and handicap for the Western alliance. If we ignore the problem, it will only get worse. NATO and the EU, which are supposed to act - and in the past have acted - as solvents of nationalist conflicts, will increasingly threaten the stability of the wider European world, by providing one side in a nationalist dispute - usually the side that's in the wrong - with an unassailable advantage over its victim.

The Western democratic world faces serious opponents and enemies, from the regimes in Moscow, Tehran and Pyongyang to the Taliban and al-

Qa'ida. We are faced with serious questions of how to organise our defence against these threats; how to reconcile the demands of security with the principle of civil liberties; how far to proceed with European integration; how to assimilate diverse religious and ethnic minorities to ensure the functioning of our multiethnic nation-states; how to protect the environment; and so forth. It beggars belief that our ability to respond to these challenges should be hampered by selfish members of our alliance that do not appear to understand the meaning of post-nationalist democracy upon which our Euro-Atlantic institutions rest.

Britain, the US and their friends should exert sufficient pressure - be it diplomatic, political or other - on Athens, Ljubljana or any other rogue member of our alliance, to desist from their unreasonable nationalist demands. We should furthermore be working, as the Henry Jackson Society has [advocated](#), to abolish the right of individual NATO and EU states unilaterally to veto the membership of aspiring members. The dog should wag the tail, not vice versa.

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