

Interactions between the international system and political parties in the conduct of foreign policy: the case of the Prespa Agreement

Andreas Belegris

The Prespa Agreement was a turning point in Greek foreign policy and sparked intense political and social debate. This paper looks at the Agreement, focusing on how the international system and political parties interact, with a special focus on the role of SYRIZA as the ruling party. The project is part of a broader theoretical effort to understand foreign policy not as an exclusive product of the state, but as the result of a complex relationship between internal and external factors. The study attempts to transfer theoretical tools of interstate relations analysis to the party level, attempting a synthetic theoretical approach. The article challenges the traditional state-centric view of international politics, noting that ideological appeal is a factor of power and highlighting the importance of political parties as links between national sovereignty and international reality. In this light, the importance of political parties as links between national sovereignty and international reality sheds light on the Prespa Agreement not only as a diplomatic development but also as a political act with theoretical value.

Theoretical Framework

According to Kenneth N. Waltz's International Policy Theory the structure of a system "determines the kind of player who is likely to prosper" (Waltz 1979, 92) . By extension, according to the Neorealists, the adaptability of states in the international system is a prerequisite for success in the anarchic environment. Thus Waltz connects the system to the units through a theory that emphasizes the importance of the adaptability of states, but without being or presupposing a theory of foreign policy. Christopher Hill, in criticizing the Neorealists, points out that as long as our field of study is policy making, a gap between the processes that link actors to the system arises that must be filled (Hill 2016)

Political parties are at the heart of the internal political processes in a state, in the sense of claiming and exercising political power. After all, in a liberal democracy only parties are the organizations that claim power and, according to Huckshorn, the main functions of parties are related to power. For the ruling party it is the responsibility

to exercise governance and for the opposition parties it is a) to propose alternatives to governance and b) to criticize the governance weaknesses of the ruling party. At this point Huckshorn emphasizes that the purpose of parties is: "making nominations, contesting elections, gaining control by capturing public offices, and organizing the government." (Huckshorn 1984, 21) . Thus parties through their purposes and functions are the main levers of a state's connection to the international system, whether they govern or not. Of course, in a liberal state there are other actors that play an important role in this connection, such as non-governmental organizations, citizens' groups (for the protection of the environment, human rights, etc.), big business, systemic banks, media, independent personalities, etc. However, all these actors neither claim the vote of the citizens nor manage political power on their behalf to set the direction of public policies. Therefore, in a first approach, the conduct of foreign policy, as part of public policies, is determined by the ideological character and objectives (programme implementation, victory in the next elections) of an elected political party in power.

Through the governance of a state a political party enters the international environment. For example, executives who until that moment had little contact with political actors from other countries, heads of international organisations and foreign observers, scientists and journalists are confronted with the constraints imposed by international reality and are called upon to seek solutions that often go beyond the programmatic proposals of their party while in opposition. Moreover, a governing party, while in power, is confronted with new problems of an international nature for which it was not prepared. In such a context, in the analysis of a country's foreign policy in a particular period by a particular party, we believe that another dimension should be included, beyond its ideological character and its declared goals, the dimension of the party's position in the international political system, through its ability to adapt to it. Finally, when a party is in opposition, it expresses its positions on international issues with limited dynamism: through visits to other countries, meetings with delegations of ideologically similar parties, interviews in international media, taking part in activist actions and, if it were a European party, in the European Parliament. However, through these activities it clarifies its political positions on contentious issues of international relations in the context of internal political competition. Thus, a party's positions on foreign policy issues are part of its strength.

Political parties as units of the international system

In this paper, in order to concretize this objective, we will return Kenneth N. Waltz's International Policy Theory. In his theory, Waltz seeks relations between system and unit (in this case the state). In order to simplify his theory Waltz gets rid of the unit from its ideology, its properties, its behavior and its interaction with other similar units and focuses on the context of action. In this context he sets survival as the primary goal of the unit, while emphasizing the relationship of the unit to the international system. It is necessary to clarify that the international system has two characteristics: a) it is anarchic and b) it is a self-help system. Also with regard to the notion of the *relationship* between the system and the units, specifically for smaller units - states, Waltz's Theory notes that for smaller units the cost of avoiding a dependency relationship may prove to be greater than the cost of entering into a dependency relationship. In general, loose interdependence relations in the international arena are interpreted by the fact that political interest translates into a security guarantee. Note that small and large units are identified on the basis of the distribution of power (political, economic, military). The greater the power, the greater the security margins for a unit

A key way in which the structure of the system affects the actors is socialisation. In particular, the socialisation of a group pushes its members to obey its rules. With respect to those members who appear to exhibit deviant behavior, he observes: "Socialization brings members of a group into conformity with its norms. Some members of the group will find this repressive and incline toward deviant behavior. Ridicule may bring deviants into line or cause them to leave the group" (Waltz 1979, 75-76) .

In any case, international systems are based on the existence of independent units, such as states in modern times, and their continued existence, prosperity or even collapse depends on their ability to rely on their own strengths. Within such a self-help system, units adjust their behavior based on the need to protect themselves. And when faced with the dilemma between safety and potential benefit, they choose their survival as a priority.

For this paper, Kenneth N. Waltz's theoretical framework, described above, feeds concepts and ideas into the two levels: the international system and the party. In order to construct a theoretical model for the analysis of party foreign policy, we believe that, with regard to the international system, we need to identify the condition (a specific event or a general crisis) that puts pressure on the parties of a state, and in particular on the ruling party. We then look for the international context in which the ruling party operates (power distribution and alliances).

Before referring to the level of party units, it is necessary at this point to make a methodological clarification regarding the proportional reasoning we are attempting. As Hesse argues (Hesse 1963), analogical reasoning is central to scientific explanation. Theories can be extended beyond their original domains through structured analogies, enabling anagogic application—a method that seeks to transpose conceptual tools across different levels or units of analysis in international relations. Ensuring methodological continuity, it is worth noting Waltz's observation that "theories developed for one realm may with some modification be applicable to other realms as well" (Waltz 1979, 80). Hence we accept a number of laws of probabilistic character that follow from the theories we have examined above: a) the international system is governed by anarchy and is a self-help system; b) political parties are the basic units of a political system of a state; c) the survival of a party is its primary goal; d) power determines the margins of safety of a party; and e) parties in order to succeed practice a policy of adaptation to the international system.

As far as (a) probability law is concerned, it remains the same as in the case of Waltz's Theory. As to (b) we referred above to Huckshorn's approach.

For (c) the assumption of governmental responsibilities is at the core of a party's survival in a twofold way. We give two versions to the term "survival": i) to its survival as a ruling party, i.e., remaining on the pedestal of power, either by avoiding defeat after elections or by falling after losing the confidence of the national parliament; and ii) its dissolution due to its government policies. In this sense, survival for a party through the exercise of political power is the key stake.

Regarding (d), the basic strength for a party in a liberal political system is its electoral/parliamentary power, which is based on the appeal of the party's ideology. In other words, a party's ideology takes on characteristics of ideological direct power. The economic power of a party supports the transmission of its broader positions, but does not translate into direct benefits for citizens, while a party in a liberal democracy does not have an army at its disposal. According to Alex Roberto Hybel in his work "The Power of Ideology: from the Roman Empire to Al-Qaeda" (Hybel 2010) ideology functions as a means of expressing the interests of a group, a social class, a state or an empire, while containing a proposal for political, economic or social action. At the international level Hybel agrees with Waltz that the international system is in a state of anarchy. But he disagrees with Waltz on the Neorealist position that power involves only material elements and, subscribing to Gramsci's view ideological hegemony, Hybel argues that ideology and power are interrelated concepts. He notes that "it is a fallacy to argue that ideology and security are mutually exclusive and, thus, that they function as alternative terms of explanation" (Hybel 2010, 29). With regard to ideas,

Hybel refers again to Waltz and in particular to his work "The Man, the State and War", where he argues that nationalism was identified with a common political form, which took the shape of the state. But nationalism, according to Hybel, is not the only idea to which political leaders resort. Thus, he adds, returning to Gramsci, that the ultimate goal of an ensemble is ideological hegemony. However, according to our assumption above, the main objective of a state or a party is primarily survival, as long as it is in some kind of danger. Combining all the above, we claim that the basic goal of a unit in a system is ideological survival, since through it passes the maintenance of its power, or even the very endurance of its organizational existence.

Finally, with regard to the political adaptation of a party, (d), remaining in the context of a foreign policy prism, it is worth noting that two of the four objectives of a party identified by Rosenau are its survival through time and its ability to cope with the pressures of external factors and demands. Staying only with external factors, as in this paper we are limited to foreign policy, a party's interaction with external demands result in constant fluctuations in its structures. Thus Rosenau defines adaptation as follows:

"Keeping these fluctuations in the enduring patterns that comprise a political organism within limits acceptable to its members is what I mean by political adaptation, and the practices, efforts and mechanisms that do (or do not) insure the maintenance of acceptable fluctuations can thus be viewed as a politics of adaptation" (Rosenau 1981, 3) .

The assumption of the governance of a country by a new leadership, irrespective of its ideological positioning, objectively constitutes a historical breakthrough, which proves to be sometimes deep, sometimes shallow, over time. The conduct of foreign policy, in addition to a state's already established relations with other states, the government bureaucracy and political leadership (Allison and Zelikow 1999) , is also determined by the ideological strength, organizational culture and the position of a party that comes to power. In particular, each party's ideological and political tradition creates constraints, but also leaves room for flexibility of movement. For example, with regard to the limitations concerning the name issue, the first Greek Prime Minister to be called upon to address it, Konstantinos Mitsotakis, head of the right-wing New Democracy party, points out in his biography: 'the Greek right (...) traditionally does not know, with few exceptions, how to conduct foreign policy. It does not dare to make policy. It does not dare, the Right is afraid to pursue foreign policy" (Papachelas 2019, 232) . In terms of the room for flexibility of movements, this paper

examines the case of SYRIZA as a party in power and the management of the Name Issue

The key, therefore, to understanding the context in which a ruling party moves when foreign policy decisions are taken, depends not only on the political environment in which it operates, whether it is the international environment or the domestic one, but also on its ideological strength. So the pool of issues where a party has demonstrated *consistency* over the years is extremely important. And it is important for ideological strength that a consistent position has been confirmed internationally and domestically.

This paper focuses on the interest in the international environment and the ideological strength of the party. Thus decisions depend on the interaction of a political space with external actors and their strategies. This does not mean that internal stability within the national political system is removed as a priority.

In the context of international relations, the strength of a strategic decision depends on how deep and multilayered the interaction of units with the system or with other units is. Restoring a unit's relationship with the system brings about a reformulation of objectives that will enhance the unit's institutional image externally and reposition it in the institutional context.

As far as interaction with other units is concerned, two ideologically similar governing parties of two different countries in the European space maintain traditional relations, participate in joint political Summits within the EU and their representatives exchange visits while in opposition. A framework of mutual assistance and understanding is often formed, which when they find themselves at some point in their countries' governance influences foreign policy issues. This will be particularly evident if an international issue is particularly important to one and less important to the other.

In any case, the re-legitimation of a party in the international system and party/ideological alliances follow and reinforce the alliances of states. In other words, one has to take into account how the national interest is defined at a given moment and what a party's survival strategy is.

Methodological remarks

Beyond the analogical reasoning mentioned above, this study uses rational choice theory and causal structural explanation as a type of explanation in order to link systemic and national/social structures such as political parties. According to Daniel Little, a structure has continuity over time, functions independently of individuals, and

imposes constraints on them. Furthermore, Little adds that structures push actors to adapt, bringing about specific results each time, and adds that there is no inconsistency between rational choice theory and structural causality, as rational choice theory outlines the mechanisms of transmission of causal forces (Little 2012).

Thus, in this paper, we will attempt to answer the following research question: "Does the interaction of a governing party with actors of the international system (major states, international organizations) influence the foreign policy of the state?"

Finally, it should be emphasized that in order to conduct our research, we have resorted to newspaper archives, speeches by politicians, academic articles, and unstructured interviews.

The evolution of the name issue (1990 - 2015)

The Greek-Northern Macedonia name issue¹ had systemic causes, as it was born with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It was, of course, an outgrowth of the Macedonian Question that had arisen as early as the 19th century, but it was not until the early 1990s that it took the form of a problem concerning the name of an independent and internationally recognized state - and with it the name of the citizenship and language of the citizens of that state.

The Yugoslav crisis acted as an accelerator of chaos in South-Eastern Europe and soon the region was gripped by conflict, ethnic rivalries and instability. At first all Greek parties, faced with the possibility of revising the borders, perceived the developments as a direct threat to the region of Greek Macedonia. The prevention of this threat was linked to the political choice not to recognize the new state with a name that would include the term "Macedonia".

The international community appeared to be divided on how to handle the crisis: the US, the EEC, but also Russia initially aligned themselves with the line of maintaining the unity of Yugoslavia and conveyed respective messages to the parties

¹ Today's North Macedonia, as a federal state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was named the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. After its declaration as an independent state in 1990, it adopted the constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia" for its bilateral relations until the signing of the Prespa Agreement. In 1993 it was admitted to the UN under the provisional name "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", which was used internationally by states and organisations that did not recognise its constitutional name. Following the 2018 Prespa Agreement, the country was renamed "North Macedonia" and went through a revision of its Constitution. For the sake of consistency and clarity, this paper uses the name "North Macedonia" for all time periods, except where explicit reference is made.

concerned². After a series of declarations of independence by the Yugoslav federal states, the international community shifted from its initial position.

On 2 December 1991, Kiro Gligorov sent a letter to the leaders of the European Union member states requesting recognition of the independence of North Macedonia (Gligorov 2000, 176-177). On 12 December 1991, during the meeting of Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis with US President George W. Bush, the latter assured that the United States would not directly recognise the former Yugoslav republics and, for his part, Mitsotakis supported the need to maintain some form of unity in Yugoslavia and expressed fears of transferring the war to the south if North Macedonia was separated from Serbia (Jimas, 2018).

On 16 December 1991, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the EEC adopted the decision, setting three conditions for the recognition of the former Yugoslav republics. These conditions, formulated after Greek intervention, required the provision of guarantees of the absence of territorial claims and the avoidance of hostile propaganda, with emphasis on the use of a name that could raise territorial claims³, implying the case of North Macedonia. On 15 January 1991, Slovenia and Croatia were recognised by the Community, but not North Macedonia. The European Council Conference in Lisbon in June 1992 confirmed the official European position that a name including the term "Macedonia" would not be accepted.

At the same time, the international scene has made the stability of the Balkans a priority. The escalating conflicts in Bosnia, the refugee crisis, and the risk of escalating hostilities in Kosovo made the existence of a neutral and stable North Macedonia indispensable. On 10 March 1992, during the meeting of Greek Foreign Minister Antonis Samaras with his American counterpart James Baker in Brussels, the change in the United States' attitude towards the former Yugoslav republics was confirmed in relation to the position it had taken in November 1991. Baker underlined the risk of destabilisation in case of excessive inaction and stated that the US, seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis, considered it necessary to recognise those states

² In his memoirs, Kiro Gligorov argues that, by the autumn of 1991, the international community - and especially the major powers - had chosen to leave the EEC to manage the Yugoslav crisis and its implications for European security. On the basis of his meetings with Jacques Delors and Jacques Santer in May 1991, he concludes that both the United States and the EEC were in favour of maintaining the unity of Yugoslavia. This attitude was confirmed by his contacts with the US and French foreign ministers, respectively, and his talks with the Russian ambassador in Belgrade, which demonstrate Moscow's identification with the policy of non-dissolution (Gligorov, 2000, pp. 167-169).

³ See. Valentinakis, Yannis, and Sotiris Dalis. *The Skopje Question*. Athens: I. Sideris, 1996. Gligorov, Kiro. *Memoirs*. Athens: Courier, 2000. pp. 52

that met the relevant conditions in order to avoid further strengthening of instability (Zacharakis 2008, 296) .

In the context of political efforts to settle the issue, on 1 April 1992, the Portuguese Foreign Minister João de Deus Pinheiro presented a proposal for a settlement of the North Macedonian name issue, taking into account for the first time Greek security concerns. The so-called "Pinheiro Package" included: a guarantee of the existing EU and NATO borders, constitutional amendments to eliminate irredentist references, and a letter renouncing any claim to a Macedonian minority in Greece. In addition, a new name with an aggressive designation was proposed, with the proposed name being "New Macedonia". In Greece, the Council of Political Leaders on 13 April 1992 rejected any solution that would have included the word "Macedonia" in the name.

Fear of destabilisation of North Macedonia led the UN on 11 December 1992, with Resolution 795⁴ , to authorise the deployment of peacekeeping forces within its territory to ensure that ethnic or external conflicts are prevented. This move implicitly acknowledged the existence of the new state and reinforced the view that international recognition should go ahead, even if only with a temporary compromise.

Indeed, from January 1993 an international marathon of contacts and consultations began with a view to the country's accession to the UN. Finally, after intense negotiations, the UK's proposal (in cooperation with France and Spain) for the country's accession to the UN under the name "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM) was accepted by both sides. UN Security Council Resolution 817/1993 was a diplomatic balance between the need for recognition and stability and the Greek insistence on preserving national sovereignty and historical identity .⁵

The provisional name solution does not resolve the issue, but "freezes" it, making it clear that the final solution will come from bilateral negotiations. The name is now linked not only to issues of historical continuity, but to the very survival of the two states in the international system. North Macedonia joined the UN on 8 April 1993 as the 181st member, but the dispute the country's name remains unresolved.

The following period, from April 1993 to September 1995, is one of the most critical in the history of the conflict, with successive failures, external interventions and finally the achievement of the Interim Agreement. Sensing the danger of Serbia's

⁴ United Nation, Security Council resolution 795 (1992), 11 December 1992, S/RES/795(1992), available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/155227?ln=en&v=pdf> [retrieved 4 April 2025]

⁵ United Nation, General Assembly - Forty-Seventh Session (1993), 8 April 1993, A/RES/47/225 (1993), available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/UNMembers%20ARES%2047%20225.pdf> [retrieved 13 April 2021]

military expansion, six European countries (Germany, France, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy) diplomatically recognized North Macedonia in December 1993, bypassing the EEC's decision to take a collective stance. On 9 February 1994 the USA proceeded to recognise North Macedonia under the provisional name FYROM, provoking a strong Greek reaction. A week later, Greece announces a trade embargo, closing the consulate in Skopje and the port of Thessaloniki to the movement of goods.

In March 1994, the new US President Bill Clinton appoints Matthew Nimetz as Special Envoy for the name issue. The US takes an active role, mediating directly between Greece and North Macedonia. Through repeated meetings and pressure at bilateral and multilateral levels, Washington attempts to set "milestones" in the negotiations. During 1994 and 1995, successive trilateral negotiations were held under the UN and with the participation of the US, without reaching agreement on the key issue of the name. While solutions are approached on the issues of symbols, constitution, diplomatic initiatives, the rigidity of both sides on the name remains. The US is testing alternative models, including a "triple name" that would involve different usage at the bilateral, international and domestic levels. The proposals are not accepted, but pressure from the US side is intensifying.

The Srebrenica massacre in July 1995 and the new bloody attack in Sarajevo in August of the same year serve as a bellwether for the West. The US, seeing the Balkans as a possible new front of instability, activates the NATO Operation Deliberate Force and at the same time launches new pressures on the name issue as well, setting the stabilisation of the Southern Balkans as a priority. US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, who now plays a leading role in diplomatic initiatives, notes years later in his autobiography that the US was the only country that could compel all sides to find a solution (Holbrooke 1998) .

On 13 September 1995, after intensive American mediation and direct involvement of the US and the UN, Greece and North Macedonia sign the Interim Agreement. Greece recognizes the state under the provisional name FYROM, lifts the embargo and pledges not to impede its accession to international organizations, while North Macedonia withdraws its flag with the Sun of Vergina and provides for amendments to its Constitution. The Interim Agreement does not resolve the name issue, but Greece - albeit temporarily - recognises North Macedonia with a composite name. In practice, the Interim Agreement lays the foundations that will lead, two decades later, to the Prespa Agreement.

For the next thirteen years there is no substantial progress on the issue. Until the mid-2000s the international scene was characterised by unipolarity. In this context,

North Macedonia tried to align its strategy with US aspirations, signing a series of bilateral agreements with the US, such as on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in 2004, but also on non-surrender to the International Criminal Court in 2003, in which North Macedonia was listed under its then constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia", provoking a reaction from Greek diplomacy. The culmination of this trend occurred in November 2004, when the US - a few days before the crucial referendum on the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement - announced the recognition of the country under its constitutional name. This action was aimed at stabilising ethnically divided North Macedonia, according to US Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza⁶, but was interpreted in Athens as a unilateral provocation and caused tension in US-Greece bilateral relations.

At the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008, another chapter in the evolution of the name issue was written. There, Greece, although it had already accepted the principle of a composite name with *erga omnes* geographical designation, threatened to veto the accession of North Macedonia, claiming that there was no solution to the name issue. The veto was supported by other member states, such as France and Germany, mainly due to parallel objections on Ukraine and Georgia. The absence of consensus was reflected in the Conclusions of the Summit: "Therefore we agreed that an invitation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached"⁷.

The following year, North Macedonia appealed to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, accusing Greece of violating the Interim Agreement. Matthew Nimetz, who in the meantime had become the UN Secretary General's special envoy on the issue, pointed out in an interview with the author of this study that the pending court case gave the Skopje government an excuse not to negotiate seriously because the case was pending, and it also gave Athens an excuse not to negotiate seriously since their northern neighbor was involved in a court case against it (Nimetz 2020). The Court's December 2011 ruling found that Greece had violated Article 11, para. 1 of the Interim Agreement, while rejecting North Macedonia's requests concerning future actions. The decision did not trigger international pressure on Greece. International interest had now shifted to the economic crisis and Greece was at the centre of international developments for different reasons.

⁶ Op. cit. in To Vima, 13 April 2008, p. 31

⁷ See. Organization, North Atlantic Treaty. "NATO." <https://www.nato.int/>. April 03, 2008. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm (accessed April 29, 2025)

The attitude of the Coalition of Left, Movements and Ecology/SYRIZA in the evolution of the name issue (1990 - 2015)

The birth of the name issue in the early 1990s found the Greek Left in a phase of searching for a compass. The collapse of the Soviet Union for a large part of the Greek Left also meant the loss of international references, where they drew political ideas and theoretical tools for interpreting the international environment. The confusion that was created extended to the positions concerning Greek foreign policy in all Greek parties. Within this bipartisan confusion, there was no lack of voices of intellectuals who from the very beginning saw international developments in a different light. Nikos Mouzelis had from the very beginning set a different political and theoretical framework from the one that prevailed at the time. In a series of articles in *Vima der Kyriakiaki*, later published in a volume entitled "Nationalism in Late Development", he had pointed out that "Greece's demand that Skopje not be recognized not only as "Republic of Macedonia" (which is logical), but also as a mixed name (which is absurd) contradicts basic democratic rules" and, in another article he added that through another strategy Greece could play a leading role in development issues in the Balkans and "create the kind of economic cooperation with Skopje that would lead to the mitigation or elimination of the paranoid elements of nationalism in this tiny country" (Mouzelis 1994, 68,51) .

In the early 1990s the Coalition of Left, Movements and Ecology (hereafter: Coalition) was born as a result of the split with the Communist Party of Greece. On 15 January 2004 it was renamed as the Coalition of Radical Left (SYRIZA), which was a new political fold in which Synaspismos was the main component.

The attitude of the Coalition towards the name issue during the 1990s and 2000s was at one point in time an example of an alternative political approach within the Greek party spectrum. As we shall see below, the Coalition appears to have been consistently in tune with the messages of European institutions and states throughout most of its evolution.

In 1991 the international community makes efforts to prevent the break-up of Yugoslavia. After the split of the Coalition and the KKE, now two different parties in the political system, and before the Coalition's founding congress in the summer of 1992, a debate on regional developments is held in the Greek Parliament at the level of political leaders. Coalition President Maria Damanaki describes the situation in the Balkans as follows:

"It is a fact that in the Balkans there is a general situation of destabilisation. It is a fact that our country is threatened by the situation in Yugoslavia, as it is developing, by the possible emergence of new unstable state entities on our northern border. It is a fact that in the Balkans there is exploitation of minorities for expansionist purposes. It is also a fact that there is intervention of extra-Balkan powers in order to promote specific goals and create zones of influence" (Damanaki 1991, 0330) .

Prior to the founding congress of the Coalition in June 1992, on 16 December 1991, the EEC Council of Foreign Ministers had set three conditions for North Macedonia to recognise its independence, one of which was that the name of any state born out of the break-up of Yugoslavia would not refer to territorial claims. Combined with the conclusions of the Lisbon Summit of European leaders six months later, in June of that year, it was clear that at that time the prevailing view in European political circles was that the newly created state on the northern border of the Greek frontier should reject the name Macedonia. This sentiment permeated political circles in Greece and, in particular, the Coalition.

On 14 February 1992, a large rally is organised in Thessaloniki against the use of the name "Macedonia" by the neighbouring state. After the end of the rally, the historical leader of Synaspismos and MP for Thessaloniki, Leonidas Kyrkos, stated that the rally was characterized by "strong sensitivity towards any attempt to question the borders of Greek Macedonia, to falsify history, to question the Greek heritage"⁸ .

Four days after the rally, on 18 February 1992, the then President of the Republic, Konstantinos Karamanlis, called a meeting of political leaders at the Presidential Palace. On the side of the Coalition, the party's President Maria Damanaki participated. The Presidency's communiqué, issued after the meeting and agreed upon by all political leaders, states that on foreign policy issues "the spirit of national responsibility with which the political leadership of the country deals with these issues was confirmed" and that "it was noted that the situation in which our national issues find themselves poses certain threats to the country which require constant vigilance and national cohesion"⁹ . On 13 April 1992, at the second meeting of the political leaders, the Coalition, together with New Democracy and PASOK, agreed on a communiqué of the Presidency of the Republic, according to which "Greece will recognise the independent state of Skopje only if all three conditions set by the EEC

⁸ Cited in Ta Nea, 15 February 1992, p. 13

⁹ Cited in Kathimerini, 19 February 1992, p. 3

on 16 December 1991 are met, with the obvious clarification that the name of this state will not include the word Macedonia"¹⁰ .

The first Coalition Congress (26-28 June 1992) was followed by the Lisbon Summit (26-27 June 1992), where European leaders ruled out the newly created Balkan state from including the term "Macedonia" in its name. ¹¹The political decision of the Conference makes a separate reference to the European decisions.

Following the accession of North Macedonia to the UN with a provisional composite name, it appears that the Coalition, under its new leadership of Nikos Konstantopoulos, is not sticking to its rejection of the adoption of the term "Macedonia" by Greece's neighbouring country. On the contrary, after the 1995 embargo, it opposes the strategy of isolating North Macedonia.

On 18 December 1994 Nikos Konstantopoulos and members of the Coalition visited Skopje and became the first Greek party delegation to go to North Macedonia. As reported in the newspaper Ta Nea, Foreign Minister Stevo Chervenkovski, during his meeting in Skopje with Coalition President Nikos Konstantinopoulos, said that "direct dialogue is a decisive element in overcoming the current deadlocks", and described the visit of the Greek delegation as a "good opportunity for improving the climate". The initiative of the Coalition, although initially causing some caution and embarrassment, since it is the first Greek party delegation to visit Skopje, was generally well received by FYROM's political leadership and was described by Foreign Minister S. Cevernkovski as "a good opportunity to open up the prospect of improving the climate". During his discussions with government and party officials, Nikos Konstantopoulos avoided discussing issues of substance and handling of Skopje nor, as he stated, is he a bearer of any message¹² . After the Greek embargo, the President of the Coalition would say: "We are becoming part of the crisis"¹³ .

At the second Coalition Congress (renamed the Coalition of Left and Progress), on 14-17 March 1996, the Political Decision includes a separate reference to the name issue, quite different from the first Congress, following the internationally changed climate. The prospect of resolving the Question is described, which 12 years later would become a "national line", i.e. a position commonly accepted by the whole Greek political spectrum. There is talk of "resolving the name problem by seeking and finding a commonly accepted composite name, from which the geographical term Macedonia

¹⁰ Cited in Kathimerini, 14 April 1992, p. 2

¹¹ See. Coalition of Left, Movements and Ecology. "<http://www.syn.gr/index.htm>." The political decision of the 1st Coalition Congress. June 25, 1992. <http://www.syn.gr/gr/keimeno.php?id=13386> (accessed April 18, 2025).

¹² Cited in Ta Nea, 20 December 1992, p. 5

¹³ Cited in Ta Nea, 17 February 1992, p. 12

or its derivative will not be excluded"¹⁴ . The above position would be the firm position of the Coalition, and later of SYRIZA, which would fuel the Prespa Agreement 18 years later.

SYRIZA in power and the Solution (2015-2020)

The period 2015-2020 was the most crucial and decisive stage in the resolution of the Greek - North Macedonian name issue. NATO countries' relations with Russia after the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 were once again going through a turning point. It was the time when Greece was in another deep phase of its economic crisis, during which the political system that had been formed since the collapse of the dictatorship in 1974 had been overthrown. In the elections of 25 January 2015, SYRIZA, within a few years, went from a party receiving single-digit percentages to take over the government of the country (in cooperation with the small right-wing party ANEL).

From the beginning of the crisis and, especially from the May 2012 elections until the compromise with its partners in the summer of 2015, SYRIZA had engaged in a campaign of intense questioning of the fiscal programme and the "support mechanism", which stemmed from the agreements between Greece and the Institutions (International Monetary Fund, European Commission, European Central Bank), often personified in the person of the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel¹⁵ . The economic crisis has been an area where SYRIZA since its inception in the early 1990s has been frontal to key EU principles. In the elections of May 6 (May) 2012, SYRIZA became the first ever opposition party in Greece. Unable to form a government, its second place in the Greek political system was confirmed in the elections held almost a month later, on 17 June 2012. On the other hand, leaders of major economic powers of the eurozone and international organizations stressed the

¹⁴ See. Coalition of the Left and Progress. "<http://www.syn.gr/index.htm>." Political Resolution of the 2nd Congress of the Coalition of Left and Progress. March 14-17, 1996 . chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<http://www.syn.gr/downloads/apofasi2ou.pdf> (accessed April 17, 2025).

¹⁵ A characteristic example is the election speech of Alexis Tsipras on 14 June 2012, where, referring to his political opponents, he noted: "They plundered Greece and then they lowered the Greek flag and handed it over to Angela Merkel". In the same year, the German government gave the German flag to Angela Merkel and then gave it to Angela Merkel. Speech of SYRIZA/ECM Alexis Tsipras at the central pre-election rally in Athens. June 16, 2012. <http://www.syn.gr/gr/keimeno.php?id=27375> (accessed April 22, 2025).

need to respect Greece's commitments to the institutions. The distance between SYRIZA and the international system at that time was chaotic. This distance did not seem to improve much over the next three years, until the summer of 2015, when Alexis Tsipras, now Prime Minister of Greece, called a referendum proposing the rejection of the new 'support mechanism' that the Institutions had given to the Greek government. In view of the referendum, Alexis Tsipras appears to be clearly softening his intentions towards the Institutions, while the partners appear to insist on respecting what has been agreed. After the referendum, and after SYRIZA had won it, on 13 July the Greek government and its partners proceed to a compromise agreement.

Throughout this period, the issues of Greek foreign policy did not show any change or progress, and the name issue remained "frozen". However, in the light of the theoretical framework in this study, the emergence of SYRIZA as the first governing party in Greece played a decisive role in the developments on the Name Issue.

After the first elections of 2015, in the debate in the Parliament on the programmatic statements of the new government, the new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras repeated the "national position", without any further reference.¹⁶ Alexis Tsipras stated in the Parliament. We were at a point where attention was focused on the new government's negotiations with the institutions. Nine months later, Greece held early elections on 20 September 2015, after the referendum and compromise. In that election, SYRIZA again emerged as the leading party. Indicative is the fact that economic issues have overshadowed foreign policy, because in the debate in the Parliament on the programmatic statements of the re-elected government, the new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras does not include in his speech any reference to the name issue.

At the same time, from the first days of 2015, the new Foreign Minister of Greece, Nikos Kotzias, had spoken of a multidimensional foreign policy. Kotzias in an interview with the author of this study underlined that the focus of his policy was two points: first, Greece must solve the problems with its own initiatives so that it can concentrate on the issues with Turkey and second, Greece must end the negative agenda in order to deal with the positive agenda which was the main motif of its foreign policy (Kotzias 2021) .

In the two years that followed the implementation of the fiscal policy stemming from Greece's agreement with the Institutions in July 2015, Greek diplomacy avoided

¹⁶ See. Speech of Prime Minister A. Tsipras at the Government's programmatic statements. 8 February 2015. <https://www.primeminister.gr/2015/02/08/13322> (accessed April 27, 2025).

the rhetoric of isolation and chose to promote Confidence Building Measures, gradually strengthening bilateral relations between Greece and North Macedonia.

Since 2017, diplomatic contacts have accelerated. A series of internal political developments, such as the holding of elections and a period of prolonged political instability, suspended the progress of diplomatic processes in North Macedonia until 31 May 2017. On that date, a new government was formed and a new Prime Minister was sworn in, led by Zoran Zaev, leader of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), a centre-left party with similar ideological characteristics to SYRIZA and traditional links from the past. The new Foreign Minister of North Macedonia, Nikola Dimitrov, visited Athens, marking the beginning of a new phase.

The meetings of the Foreign Ministers intensified, while the UN mediator, Matthew Nimetz, reappeared and presented in January 2018 a package of proposals with a realistic basis for negotiation. The Tsipras-Zaev meeting in Davos on 24 January 2018 was decisive: it confirmed the commitment of the two sides to seek a solution within the next few months, using the composite name with geographical designation and *erga omnes* as a vehicle. It was the beginning of the first time at the leaders' level that a) the position that Greece had been advocating since 2008, b) the position that the Coalition/Syriza had been advocating since the mid-1990s and c) the position of North Macedonia¹⁷ met for the first time on a common ground. In an interview with the author of this study Mathiew Nimetz noted that Davos was a decisive meeting "when I was doing this when Zaev indicated, and in Davos he indicated, that a name had to include Macedonia but some type of modifier could be considered" (Nimetz 2020) .

In the period that followed, the process accelerated. There was a continuous exchange of plans, legal comments and political parameters, and summits were repeated. On 17 June 2018, the Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia was signed in Prespes. The Agreement :¹⁸

- establishes the official name of the country as the "Republic of North Macedonia";
- ensures that the name will have universal effect (*erga omnes*);
- regulates the issue of citizenship (Macedonian/citizen of North Macedonia) and language (Macedonian, of Slavic origin);
- requires an amendment to the Constitution of the neighbouring country;

¹⁸ See. "Final Agreement for the settlement of the differences as described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Pa." Prespa Agreement. Prespes, 17 June 2018.

- explicitly renounces irredentism, safeguarding international borders and non-interference in the internal affairs of the other state.

The Prespa Agreement went through a tough internal test in both countries. In North Macedonia, a referendum was held and an increased majority was required for the constitutional revision. In Greece, the agreement was ratified by the Parliament on 25 January 2019 amid intense political controversy and large demonstrations.

The international environment embraced the agreement. For example, NATO and the EU¹⁹, the US²⁰, the UK²¹ and many states expressed their support. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her autobiography, after referring to the deadlock at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, concludes: "It would be another ten years before the deadlock was broken, thanks to courageous and determined action by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his Macedonian counterpart, Zoran Zaev. In 2018, the two countries agreed on the name North Macedonia" (Merkel 2024, 248)

During the negotiations, no external pressure on the Greek side to conclude an agreement was noted, as was the case in 1995 before the signing of the Interim Agreement. Matthew Nimetz noted that the importance of the Prespa Agreement lies in the fact that it was reached solely by the leaders of the two countries - without external imposition, which is rarely the case in the Balkans²². For his part, George Katrougalos, former Greek Foreign Minister (15 February 2019 - 9 July 2019) and, after the 2019 elections, head of the Foreign Policy Sector of SYRIZA, in an interview with the author of this study, underlines three points. SYRIZA served the bipartisan national strategy. After the economic crisis, 's attitude towards SYRIZA due to the Prespa Agreement changed: "So when such an initiative is taken, which is the ultimate opposite of national populism, then it was obvious that these prejudices that existed in the minds of many politicians also started to change". Thirdly, SYRIZA improved its position in the dialogue with the Party of European Socialists-PES, in whose meetings it participated as an observer: "In the meetings of the Social Democrats before the

¹⁹ See. Kathimerini. "Kathimerini." kathimerini.gr. November 11, 2019. <https://www.kathimerini.gr/world/1004289/sygcharitiria-apo-nato-kai-ee-se-zaef/> (accessed April 28, 2025).

²⁰ See. Kathimerini. "ekathimerini." ekathimerini.com. September 7, 2018. <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/232407/pompeo-congratulates-fyrom-on-historic-name-deal-with-greece/> (accessed April 29, 2025).

²¹ See. "gov.uk." February 16, 2019. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-statement-on-the-republic-of-north-macedonia?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed April 29, 2025).

²² In the unpublished interview for the purposes of my research, to which I have already referred, Nemetz noted: "The thing I'm most proud of is I say this is the first agreement in the region that has been resolved by the people themselves and not by an outsider."

European Councils, this neighbouring party considered that we had taken the responsible position and PASOK the populist one" (Katrougalos 2025) .

The practical implementation of the agreement has proven to be stable and effective. On 27 March 2020, North Macedonia formally joined NATO as the 30th member. Finally, Alexis Tsipras' name was discussed by many for the Nobel Peace Prize .²³

The Prespa Agreement was recognised as historic and multi-dimensional. It not only resolved a national dispute, but paved the way for deeper cooperation in the Balkans, offered a model for resolving bilateral disputes through diplomacy, and restored the region's credibility at the institutional level. Despite the opposition, it seemed at the time that new prospects were opening up for SYRIZA, both within the Greek political system and internationally.

Conclusions

SYRIZA has achieved a number of goals through the name issue. Firstly, it returned to the path of European convergence that was a cornerstone of its political tradition, especially with regard to Greece's relations with North Macedonia. At the same time, it was promoting and implementing the so-called "national line", as it had been shaped since 2015 and confirmed by Greece's NATO partners. By solving an issue that was at the heart of another country's path towards NATO and the EU, SYRIZA presented a positive image in the international system after years, as it contributed to a solution accepted by most countries in the international community. Moreover, SYRIZA was transformed from a party that threatened political and economic stability to a party that contributed to the stability of the Western Balkans.

After a period of conflicts and compromises with the partners, the repositioning of Syriza in a logic of ideological consistency restored its relations with the external environment through active socialisation. And something even more important: from the position of the ruling party, it has shown adaptation to the needs of the present and, in institutional terms now, has regained its ideological hegemony, at least in foreign policy matters.

The origin and existence of this space depended to a large extent on developments in the international system, as did the birth of the name issue. The

²³ For example: Joseph, Edward P. "Foreign Policy." foreignpolicy.com. June 15, 2018. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/15/alexis-tsipras-deserves-the-nobel-peace-prize/> (accessed April 15, 2025).

Coalition and the Name Issue were born together in the early 1990s. The Coalition was constantly adapting to the demands of the international environment on this issue. The concept of institutional and practical adaptation to the Name Issue led Syriza to adopt views that not only stood the test of time, but were confirmed by the other parties (2008) and by reality itself.

The theoretical reading highlights how the anarchy of the international system, uncertainty and the struggle for survival shape not only the strategic choices of states, but also of parties seeking to govern. After the compromise of the summer of 2015, Syriza sought to minimise insecurity in its external relations and protect its historical legacy, using adaptation and consistency as a springboard. Thus, the name issue becomes an expression of a structural way out for the country and the party within the anarchic international environment.

In any case, Greece, facing the risk of destabilisation, had informally compromised on the Interim Agreement with the composite name and formally on the Bucharest Summit. What was missing was the actor who would put his signature to the Agreement.

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