

NATO's Continuing Enlargement Aims at Further Weakening of Russian Influence in the Balkans

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Of the 29 NATO member states, 22 have already ratified the accession protocol of North Macedonia into the anti-Russian alliance. The ratification process will likely be completed before the end of NATO's summit taking place in London this week, which will make North Macedonia the newest country in military alliance.

This now appears even more likely since U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave his endorsement, [saying on Twitter](#):

"Pleased to announce the United States deposited its ratification of North Macedonia's NATO Accession Protocol. One step closer to welcoming North Macedonia as NATO's 30th Ally!"

This will make North Macedonia the fourth country out of the six successor states of Yugoslavia to become a NATO member, following Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro. With Bosnia effectively a NATO satellite, this leaves Serbia as the bulwark of anti-NATO and pro-Russia sentiment in the region, especially as the other fellow Balkan countries, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, are also NATO members.

The confusing Macedonia question was a key priority for Russia's Balkan policy – North Macedonia is an overwhelmingly Orthodox and Slavic country that had the potential to become another pro-Russia state in the Balkans, alongside neighboring Serbia. However, North Macedonia since its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 pursued a pro-Western policy and joined the NATO program Partnership for Peace as early as 1995 and became a European Union candidate a decade later.

This had not discouraged Russian efforts to push North Macedonia out of the NATO sphere of influence. The governments in Athens and Skopje have competed over the name Macedonia since North Macedonia became independent from Yugoslavia, as Greece's northern region is also confusingly called Macedonia. Effectively, as North Macedonia was continuously vetoed by Greece from joining NATO and the EU because of the name dispute, Russian efforts to radicalize Macedonian identity was encouraged. The strategy to [radicalize Macedonian identity](#) to be more anti-Western and pro-Russian was an effort to avoid a situation like the Prespa Agreement that brought a finalization to the Macedonian name dispute in 2018, opening the way for North Macedonia to join NATO and the EU, without a Greek veto.

The Prespa Agreement, named after a lake that traverses the borders of Greece, North Macedonia and Albania, defined exactly what was meant by "Macedonia" and

“Macedonian.” For Greece, according to the agreement, these terms denote an area and people of Greece’s northern region, who continue the legacy of the Ancient Macedonian Hellenic civilization, history and culture, as well as the legacy of Alexander the Great. In reference to North Macedonia, these terms denote the modern territory of North Macedonia, Slavic language and Slavic people with their own history and culture unrelated to the Ancient Macedonians. The agreement also stipulates the removal of North Macedonian irredentist efforts against Greek territory and to align them with UNESCO and Council of Europe’s standards.

The radicalization of an independent Macedonian identity was in the hope that North Macedonians would reject the name change, despite the [scholarly and historical consensus](#) that the Ancient Macedonians were Greek. This hoped North Macedonian denunciation of the West was on the basis that resolving the name dispute goes against North Macedonian nationalist doctrine as any name change must support the historical reality that the Ancient Macedonians were Hellenes. This was a bad calculation that encouraged the North Macedonians to concentrate their efforts and resources on historical revisionism on not only Hellenic legacy, but also Bulgarian and Serbian, as historical figures like [King Samuel of Bulgaria](#), Ilyo Voyvoda, Aleksandar Turundzhev, Yane Sandanski, Hristo Batandzhiev and many others are claimed by both North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and the unrecognized and schismatic Macedonian Orthodox Church separated in an ugly divorce from the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1967.

This historical revisionism meant ignoring serious ambitions for a Greater Albania that expands into the western territories of North Macedonia. Ignoring efforts for Albanian expansionism, something that has been partially achieved with the Albanian control of Kosovo, has undermined North Macedonian security and opened the gates for it to become a major puppet of NATO to preserve their territorial integrity. As argued in a previous [article](#), because the overwhelming [majority](#) of Albanians want a Greater Albania, it is unlikely to be achieved with Washington’s backing in Greece, Montenegro and North Macedonia as they do not pose a threat to U.S. hegemony in the Balkans, but rather serve it, by resisting Russian influence in the region.

As long as Skopje remains loyal to globalist agendas, the U.S. will not back Albanian expansionism in the country. However, the U.S. can certainly use the Albanian minority as a destabilizing force, as seen with Kosovo’s illegal declaration of independence and the 2001 Albanian uprising in North Macedonia. In addition to Washington having the option to use the Albanians as a destabilizing factor, the Albanians themselves may formant instability without U.S. backing as 53% of the approximately 500,000 Albanians in North Macedonia believe in a Greater Albania.

With Russian influencers failing to invigorate anti-NATO sentiment in North Macedonia, there comes the reality that the Balkan country, confident after the finalization of the name dispute, can now march into the hands of its new NATO puppet masters. It is for this reason that a senior Russian Foreign Ministry official said that:

“Russia’s position regarding the expansion of NATO is well known: it is a destructive process that undermines confidence and stability in Europe, leads to increased antagonism.”

According to the official, it is not a military threat that North Macedonia would pose to

Russia but a set of risks to European security that “must be guaranteed by totally different methods, instead of involving this [Balkan] country in military planning of the Alliance and in an anti-Russian policy.”

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