

## Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: still awaiting the green light for enlargement talks

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia obtained the status of candidate country in December 2005. The European Commission's annual progress reports since 2009 have consistently recommended the opening of negotiations. However, the name issue still appears the main stumbling block. The dispute arose in 1991, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia seceded from Yugoslavia and declared independence under the name "Republic of Macedonia".

### The report at a glance

In October 2013, the European Commission again proposed the launch of accession talks with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while noting the need to persevere with efforts to find a mutually acceptable solution to the dispute with Greece concerning the country's name. In its 62-page [report](#), the Commission stressed that the country continues to fully meet the criteria for starting accession negotiations with the European Union (EU), though urged further progress in areas such as independence of the justice system, the fight against corruption, media freedom, electoral reform, and the protection of minorities.

### The name dispute

The name issue still poses the main obstacle to the start of accession negotiations. The Commission report noted that the country continues to take part in the UN-mediated process coordinated by Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz. Press sources [indicated](#) that "substantial differences" still surround the compromise formula - reported to be "Upper Republic of Macedonia" - put forward by the UN Envoy in April 2013. The Commission report further emphasised that participation in negotiations to find a mutually acceptable solution remains "essential" and required a "constructive approach" to relations with neighbouring countries and an avoidance of actions or statements that might have a negative impact on good neighbourly relations.

However, prospects for the settlement of the name dispute [seem](#) pretty gloomy. In a recent declaration in the press, the country's Prime Minister Nicola Gruevski, blamed the current stalemate in the discussions on the Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, accusing him of moving to "one of the most radical positions that Greece has adopted in the history of the problem". For its part, the Greek Government [argued](#) that the issue with the name resided in the promotion of territorial ambitions through the "counterfeiting of history and usurpation of Greece's national and historical heritage". Deputy opposition leader Radmila Šekerinska [observed](#) that the two prime ministers were equally to blame and described them as "brothers in crime" for politically manipulating the issue while keeping the two countries hostage.

The development of the [controversial architectural project](#) "Skopje 2014", whose cost has allegedly run into several hundred million euros, has also added fuel to the fire. In particular, it features statues of Alexander the Great and his father, Philip II of Macedon, represented as symbols of the new state, whereas the two historical figures are regarded in Greece as ancient national heroes.

In December 2013, EU Ministers for Foreign Affairs [insisted](#) on the importance of bringing the discussions on the name issue to a definitive conclusion, but did not suggest a date for the opening of accession talks. Greece currently holds the Council Presidency, in the first half of 2014. Its [priorities](#) do not include enlargement issues.

### European Parliament

In January 2014, the Foreign Affairs Committee [backed](#) the [recommendation](#) to open negotiations, drafted by Richard Howitt (S&D, United Kingdom). MEPs stressed that further delay could put at risk inter-ethnic relations and insisted on more concrete results in establishing good neighbourly relations.

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