



Australian Hellenic Council (NSW) Inc

A coordinating body for the Australian Hellenic community

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Position Paper

Support for the Federal Government's position regarding diplomatic recognition of the FYROM.

This paper outlines the arguments of the Australian Hellenic community in support of the Australian Federal Government's position regarding recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Since 1994, this position has been recognition of the FYROM under that name until Athens and Skopje achieve a mutually acceptable agreement.

Diplomatic Recognition

In 1994, the Federal Government announced official recognition of the independence of the southernmost republic of Yugoslavia. The Australian ambassador to Belgrade was given non-resident accreditation to Skopje. Shortly afterwards, Skopje opened a diplomatic office in Sydney, followed by the opening of an embassy in Canberra in 2004, and a Consulate-General in Melbourne in 2008. There are also Honorary Consulates-General in Perth and Sydney.

United Nations' nomenclature

In 1993, the new state acceded to the United Nations' Organisation as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The following year, Australia formally recognised Skopje's independence from Belgrade. In 1995 the United Nations' brokered an interim agreement between Athens and Skopje. According to the terms of this agreement, the United Nations' Organisation and its member-states would use the nomenclature Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

This name was, and remains, an INTERIM measure, designed to soothe tensions and open the way to a permanent agreement.

According to a statement by then-Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Senator Gareth Evans, the 1995 interim agreement was "developed under United Nations auspices and puts to one side for the time being the issue of the future name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

In addition to the Hellenic Republic (Greece), Australia, and Cyprus almost 100 United Nations' member states use the name FYROM, including:

- EU and NATO members Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, as well as;

- Chile, India, Ireland, Israel, South Africa and the Holy See (Vatican), and; international organisations such as the International Olympic Committee, FIFA and UEFA.

The Australian Hellenic community looks forward to a final resolution being reached by Athens and Skopje, a resolution that is acceptable to both sides. This has been the position of the Australian federal government and federal opposition since 1994. The Australian Hellenic community believes in the maintenance of this principled position.

Former Yugoslav Republic

During the existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1944-1991), the territory around Skopje was administered as one of the constituent republics of the Yugoslav Federation. This is why the United Nations' mediators opted for the compromise name FYROM to enable the newly independent state to join the world's international organisation.

The Evidence of History

Historical evidence from antiquity to the present indicates that the Macedonians of antiquity considered themselves Hellenes. There is an unbroken chain of archaeological and literary evidence identifying the inhabitants of Macedonia since at least **Homeric times** with Hellenic civilisation. The names of ancient Macedonians, as well as ancient Macedonian texts such as the **Pella Curse Tablet** and the **Derveni Papyrus** (both of which date to the late third century BC) all testify to the fact that the ancient Macedonians spoke a Hellenic dialect and considered themselves Hellenes.



Above: A coin issued by King Alexander III of Macedon (the Great; 330s BC), bearing the Hellenic inscription **ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ** (of Alexander).

In his **Epistles to the Thessalonians** (the people of Thessaloniki, Macedonia's largest city), **St Paul** used the Hellenic language. It was Hellenic that the first European Christians used to worship and to spread the 'Good Word' in Roman-ruled Macedonia. The medieval Christian churches and cathedrals that adorn Macedonia bear dedicatory and religious inscriptions in Hellenic.

With the Ottoman Turkish invasion and conquest in the 1300s, came a wave of Muslim converts and settlers. Even after five centuries of Muslim Turkish rule, the majority of Macedonians (speaking different languages) identified as Hellenes. The Balkan Wars (October 1912-February 1913) brought about the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire and independence to Macedonia. The 1913 Treaty of Bucharest set the boundaries between the Hellenic, Yugoslav and Bulgarian states. Greece's province of Macedonia was formed and today has a population of some 2.6 million people. **It remains an integral part of the Hellenic Republic and of Hellenic civilisation.**

Personal and National Identity

The Slavomacedonian community in Australia claims to have an exclusive right to the use of the names *Macedonia* and *Macedonian*. This is an effort to exclude Hellene Macedonians (who number some 200,000 in Australia) from identifying themselves as Australian Macedonians. This despite the fact that they have identified themselves as Macedonians and formed Macedonian organisations in Australia since the 1920s.

The Australian Hellenic community supports the right to self-determination and self-identification for all Australians. It must always be kept in mind that identity is multi-dimensional. People who originate from the geographic region of Macedonia have the right to use the name *Macedonian*.

The geographic region of Macedonia has always been home to a diverse range of languages and cultures, with Hellenic the dominant one. The only way to distinguish between the different Macedonian groups is through the addition of prefixes such as the federal government introduced in 1994. For those Macedonians who identify with Athens, **Hellenic Macedonians**; for those who identify with Skopje, **Slavomacedonians**.

Racism and Expansionism

A regular feature of Slavomacedonian protests, publications and presence in Australia are additional claims of an expansionist and anti-Greek nature. For example, illustrations of their version of maps of "Makedonija" include parts of northern Greece, refuting a number of international treaties. On 24 May 2008, the Slavomacedonian community in Australia held a demonstration (in Melbourne) to pressure the Australian federal government to formally recognise the FYROM by its "constitutional name".

Particularly prominent at the rally were **Hellenic flags with the Christian cross replaced by a Nazi swastika**. The identification of Hellenes with the genocidal Nazi regime is highly offensive, calculated to be provocative. The offence is heightened when it is remembered that Australians and Hellenes fought side-by-side against the Nazis and that Greece suffered the highest loss of life *per capita* of any country involved in World War Two.

Large banners declaring **"Solun Will Be the Capital of Macedonia Again!"** accompanied by numerous depictions of a **"Macedonian" state incorporating the whole of northern Greece** are also calculated to be provocative. "Solun" is the Slavic name for the city of Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city.



Melbourne, Saturday 24 May 2008

The Slavomacedonian community, with the active support of the government in Skopje, does not seek “human rights to self identity and [a] democratically voted for constitutional name”. (Media Release of the organising committee of the 24 May 2008 demonstration) **The Slavomacedonian state and its diaspora are seeking the abrogation of international treaties and the redrawing of borders in southeastern Europe.**

The images displayed at public demonstrations, in publications and in Slavomacedonian community centres around Australia illustrate the aggressive stance of elements of the Slavomacedonian community towards the Australian Hellenic community and the Hellenic Republic. Such claims and images only serve to deepen divisions in Australian society, through the use of racially vilifying material.

Within a culturally diverse Australia, respect for national symbols and multiple identities has been a crucial part of the relative social cohesion all Australians enjoy. Political protest is acceptable. Racial vilification is not.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this paper outlines the political, historical and cultural arguments of the Australian Hellenic community in support of the Australian Federal Government’s position regarding diplomatic recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is the firm belief of the Australian Hellenic community that this policy should not change until Athens and Skopje have arrived at a final agreement.

Prepared by Dr Panayiotis Diamadis, AHC (NSW) Secretary, June 2009