

# Identity Politics in Times of Populism: The Conflict over the Macedonia Name Change deal

## Panel to be proposed to Section 23: Identity and Populism

- **Panel Chair:** Dr. Anna Kurpiel (Willy Brandt Center for German and European Studies, University of Wrocław, [kurpiel@wbz.uni.wroc.pl](mailto:kurpiel@wbz.uni.wroc.pl))
- **Panel Co-Chair:** Dr. Aleksandra Maatsch (Willy Brandt Center for German and European Studies, University of Wrocław, [maatsch@wbz.uni.wroc.pl](mailto:maatsch@wbz.uni.wroc.pl))
- **Panel Discussant:** Dr. Asimina Michailidou (ARENA Centre for European Studies)

## Abstract

June the 12<sup>th</sup> 2018 marks a turning point in the contemporary history of the Balkan Peninsula. The Greek and the Macedonian Prime Ministers signed an agreement on changing the name of the country from the *Republic of Macedonia* to the *Republic of North Macedonia*. The goal of both Prime Ministers was to resolve the decades-long Greco-Macedonian conflict burdening not only the national, but also the European and global politics of the signatory states. In particular, Greece vetoed Macedonia's accession to the EU and NATO arguing that the name applies exclusively to its northern province.

The historical dimension of the conflict is extremely complex for it concerns both tangible and intangible issues. First, in the territorial dimension *Macedonia* has been associated with the geographical region which entails territories of contemporary Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia. There are also historical records of an ancient Macedonian Kingdom composed of contemporary territories of Greece and Macedonia. At the same time, the contemporary administrative division of Greece entails a region called Macedonia. The conflict also has a symbolical dimension. The authorities of both states claim right to such symbols as the Vergina Sun or the figure of Alexander the Great. Finally, the concept of Macedonian identity remains contested as it is defined in different ways.

Given the complexity of the conflict, the Prespa agreement has been widely recognized as a historical success. The importance of the agreement clearly goes beyond the bilateral dimension. In particular, the agreement constitutes a template for resolving identity and border conflicts among European member and candidate states. The agreement also has a strong geopolitical relevance as it demonstrates that the EU is an attractive option in the region where other actors compete for influence as well.

And yet, the historically important agreement proved to be heavily contested in the signatory states. The agreement deeply polarized the political and social discourses in Greece and Macedonia along the identity line. While in Macedonia the right-wing party VMRO-DPMNE proclaimed the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev a traitor, in Greece people took to the streets in order to protest against the use of the word "Macedonia" in the country's new name. Furthermore, the name dispute generated questions beyond the bilateral, Greek-Macedonian, dimension for it became highly relevant for the European and global politics.

The goal of this panel is therefore to shed more light on the contemporary conflict between Greece and Macedonia in an *interdisciplinary* and *multidimensional* perspective. We particularly welcome papers that

- a) explain social and political domestic sources of the conflict (and the attempts of its resolution);
- b) investigate the role of the media in the conflict (state-controlled, independent and social media);
- c) analyze political and social discourses concerning the name change agreement;
- d) investigate and explain the outcome of the referendum in Macedonia and the vote outcome over the name deal in the Macedonian and Greek parliaments;
- e) examine the European dimension of the name dispute (i.e. within the European Parliament).

To submit a proposal, you will need to provide:

- your name, academic affiliation and email address
- a title for your paper
- an abstract of up to 500 words.

For further information or to submit a proposal, please contact Anna Kurpiel ([kurpiel@wbz.uni.wroc.pl](mailto:kurpiel@wbz.uni.wroc.pl)) or Aleksandra Maatsch ([maatsch@wbz.uni.wroc.pl](mailto:maatsch@wbz.uni.wroc.pl)) by 14 February