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# The Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy towards the Republic of North Macedonia

Europeizacja polityki zagranicznej Grecji wobec Republiki Północnej Macedonii

**Abstract:** The article's objective is to analyse the process of Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy towards North Macedonia. The author has attempted to present the main conceptual assumptions regarding this process, pointing to the multiplicity of definitions and research directions, and has subsequently highlighted the evolution of Greek foreign policy towards North Macedonia in the context of the Europeanisation of Greek diplomacy. In the conclusions, the author has emphasised that this particular Europeanisation is somewhat sinusoidal and is conditioned upon a number of factors, including the nature of relations between the Greek political elites and the society of that country. The article has also highlighted that Greece has gradually been shaping its image as a Europeanised country with a credible and predictable foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Greece, North Macedonia, FYROM, European Union, foreign policy, Europeanisation

**Streszczenie:** Głównym celem artykułu jest analiza procesu europeizacji greckiej polityki zagranicznej wobec Macedonii Północnej. Autor starał się przedstawić główne założenia konceptualne dotyczące procesu europeizacji polityki zagranicznej, wskazując na jej różnorodność definicyjną oraz kierunki rozwoju badań. Następnie została opisana ewolucja polityki zagranicznej Grecji wobec Macedonii Północnej w kontekście europeizacji greckiej dyplomacji. We wnioskach autor podkreślił, że europeizacja ta ma charakter sinusoidalny i jest uwarunkowana wieloma czynnikami, w tym m.in. charakterem relacji między greckimi elitami politycznymi a społeczeństwem tego kraju. Wskazano także, że Grecja stopniowo kształtuje swój wizerunek jako państwa zeuropeizowanego, w tym dysponującego wiarygodną i przewidywalną polityką zagraniczną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Grecja, Macedonia Północna, FYROM, Unia Europejska, polityka zagraniczna, europeizacja

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## Introduction

Europeanisation is unquestionably an important element of studying the European Union as well as being a concept explaining the influence of the EU on the development and implementation of the national policies of its Member States<sup>1</sup>. The study of the relationship between Europeanisation and the foreign policy of a Member State, however, constitutes a challenge in terms of research since the realm of diplomacy of individual Member States remains a sovereign decision of each government and is subject to the right of veto in the EU decision-making process. This means that the institutions of the European Union cannot use legal coercion in this matter and no disciplinary measures can be enforced<sup>2</sup>. As far as the EU's influence on the foreign policy of a Member State is concerned, principles resulting from universal European values can be applied, for example: solidarity and cooperation with regard to safeguarding common security, maintaining peace in its neighbourhood, refraining from the use of armed force, or respecting international law<sup>3</sup>. It should be recalled that one of the foundations of European integration, which began after the most tragic experiences of World War II for Europe, was the renouncement of the catastrophic policy of nationalism and totalitarianism and the desire to strengthen peace and achieve a sense of security<sup>4</sup>.

Greece, which was admitted to the European Communities in 1981, is a specific case illustrating the impact of Europeanisation on the development and implementation of a Member State's foreign policy. The country's decision to accede was mainly political and was a form of reward for Greece for overthrowing the military junta in 1974 and restoring democracy, but also an attempt to anchor it in the Western countries. The specificity of Greece as an EC member was the fact that it was a peripheral country that did not have common borders with

- 1 J. Kamińska, *Europeizacja polskiej polityki zagranicznej*, "Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs" 2008, no. 3, p. 23.
- 2 A. Cianciara, *Wzory europeizacji zewnętrznej: mechanizmy, uwarunkowania, rezultaty*, "Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs" 2013, no. 3, p. 14.
- 3 O. Barbarska, *Europeizacja jako instrument polityki zagranicznej Unii Europejskiej w zakresie promocji demokracji*, "Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs" 2020, no. 1, p. 10, DOI: 10.33067/SE.1.2020.1.
- 4 O. Barbarska, D. Milczarek, *Historia integracji europejskiej w zarysie*, Dinkograf, Warsaw 2013; D. Milczarek, O. Barbarska, *Past and Present of European Integration. Poland's Perspective*, ASPRA-JR, Warsaw 2015.

other members of the organisation. What is more, the country is located in an immensely unstable region between the Balkans and the Middle East. Greece's direct neighbours to the north were communist states, while to the east the country bordered Turkey, which the Greeks considered the greatest threat to their existence, despite both countries' membership in NATO. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that there was a sense of insecurity among Greek society. Greece's historical experience differs from other states in the European Communities and its political tradition is the result of nearly 400 years of Turkish occupation. In addition, it is culturally and religiously distinctive and was the first country of the Communities where Orthodox Christianity prevailed, and the church dominated social and political life<sup>5</sup>. Greece was also an economically underprivileged country, additionally burdened with enormous military expenditure for fear of Turkey. Greece's main asset, however, was its legacy of Antiquity and its role as the cradle of European democracy<sup>6</sup>.

The first decade of Greece's presence in the European Communities should rather be perceived as a process of the westernisation of the country<sup>7</sup>, which meant Greece's modernisation along with its anchoring in the family of Western European countries as well as the eradication of the pro-communist tendencies still existing in Greek society since the end of the bloody civil war. As late as the 1990s, pro-EU tendencies were established in Greek society, which began to see and appreciate the benefits of EU membership in various dimensions of life. Therefore, this period marks the beginning of Greece's extensive Europeanisation process<sup>8</sup>.

The 1990s was an extremely difficult period for shaping Greek foreign policy in the context of the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation, which led to the formation of new states. This was a great

5 O. Terzi, *Europeanisation of foreign policy and candidate countries: A comparative study of Greek and Turkish cases*, "Politique Européenne" 2005, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 120; S. Stavridis, *The Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy: A literature review*, LSE, 2003, p. 10, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/5692/1/Stavridis-10.pdf> [23.07.2023].

6 P. Kazakos, P. Ioakimidis (eds.), *Greece and EC membership evaluated*, Pinter, London 1994.

7 S. Stavridis, op. cit., p. 14.

8 O. Anastasakis, *The Europeanisation of the Balkans*, "The Brown Journal of World Affairs" 2005, vol. XII, issue 1, p. 78; Ch. Tsardanides, S. Stavridis, *The Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy: A critical appraisal*, "European Integration" 2005, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 219.

challenge for the government in Athens, which had to completely re-define its policy towards the Balkans. Greece was required to develop new bilateral relations and to seek support among the European Union Member States to pursue its own objectives and political interests. The development of post-1992 relations with a new state in the form of the Republic of Macedonia (currently the Republic of North Macedonia) was a further test for Greece in terms of the Europeanisation of its foreign policy.

## **1. Europeanisation in terms of foreign policy – a theoretical approach**

Defining the concept of Europeanisation entails serious research quandaries. There are numerous definitions of this phenomenon, which became the subject of study in the 1990s, and its evolution has steadily progressed. In broad terms, Europeanisation can be understood as a gradual transfer of values and standards from the level of the European Union to the level of its Member States, which results in their implementation and subsequently translates into tangible results. Europeanisation may, therefore, have various aspects including legal, political, economic, and cultural, which were initially associated in scientific study mainly with the internal dimension of the European Union. R. Riedel thus defines Europeanisation as an “internal adaptation to the process of European integration”<sup>9</sup>.

According to C.M. Radaelli “Europeanisation consists of processes of the a) construction, b) diffusion, and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, “ways of doing things”, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures, and public policies”<sup>10</sup>. This definition emphasises the influence of the European Union on a Member State (top-down European-

9 R. Riedel, *Europeizacja – koncepcje i agenda badawcza*, [in:] A. Paczeński, R. Riedel (eds.), *Europeizacja – mechanizmy, wymiary, efekty*, A. Marszałek, Oslo-Toruń-Wrocław 2010, pp. 22-26.

10 C.M. Radaelli, *Europeanisation: Solution or problem?*, “European Integration Online Papers” 2004, no. 8(10)/October, p. 6, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5015009\\_Europeanisation\\_Solution\\_or\\_Problem](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5015009_Europeanisation_Solution_or_Problem) [24.07.2023].

isation) and this perception of Europeanisation was dominant during its initial study. A different approach to Europeanisation is presented by J. Olsen, who emphasises that it is a process of European integration not only within its area and its members but also a phenomenon that goes beyond the borders of the EU, affecting its neighbours both close and distant<sup>11</sup>.

Publications dedicated to Europeanisation also highlight several Europeanisation categories distinguished due to their mechanisms<sup>12</sup>. One such category is so-called “bottom-up” Europeanisation, meaning that the integration impulse is transferred from regions or Member States to the level of European institutions<sup>13</sup>. Referring this category to foreign policy, it means a “projection of national interests to the European level and the foreign policy outputs of the EU to achieve national goals more effectively (so-called ‘uploading’)”<sup>14</sup>.

Another category is top-down Europeanisation, where we are dealing with the process in reverse. It refers to a top-down (so-called “downloading”) transfer of European values and standards from the level of EU institutions to the Member States and their implementation in national political systems<sup>15</sup>. This applies not only to legal regulations but also to adopting models and standards of political behaviour. In the foreign policy dimension, this is visible when Member States accept solutions and interests common to the entire EU when implementing their national foreign policies<sup>16</sup>.

Another category is ad extra Europeanisation, in which the influence of European integration is perceived not only internally but also in non-EU countries. This type of Europeanisation is related to the

11 J. Dyduch, *Europeizacja polskiej polityki zagranicznej w perspektywie realizmu strukturalnego*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2016, pp. 50-51; J.P. Olsen, *The many faces of Europeanisation*, “JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies” 2002, no. 5.

12 K. Featherstone, C. Radaelli (eds.), *The politics of Europeanisation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003.

13 J. Ruzskowski, *Europeizacja. Analiza oddziaływania Unii Europejskiej*, Difin, Warsaw 2019, p. 137.

14 A. Chrysogelos, *Still Europeanised? Greek Foreign Policy During the Eurozone Crisis*, “GreeSE Papers” 2017, no. 118, p. 5, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Hellenic-Observatory/Assets/Documents/Publications/GreeSE-Papers/GreeSE-No118.pdf> [27.07.2023].

15 T. Börzel, T. Risse, *When Europe hits home: Europeanisation and domestic change*, “European Integration Online Papers” 2000, vol. 4, no. 15, [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/1696/00\\_56.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/1696/00_56.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [26.07.2023].

16 A. Chrysogelos, op. cit., p. 5.

export of its political model and system of values outside the EU<sup>17</sup>. It undoubtedly contributes to strengthening the role and position of both the EU and its Member States in the international arena. (The principle of conditionality is of significant importance here, i.e., making the development of EU relations with a given country dependent on its compliance with certain principles of Europeanisation)<sup>18</sup>. One of the main effects of ad extra Europeanisation in terms of European security is the prevention of international conflicts, solving crises through the implementation of peacekeeping missions and the pacification of situations in destabilised regions<sup>19</sup>. Such Europeanisation helps to implement the liberal, pacifist foreign policy of the European Union<sup>20</sup>.

It should be highlighted that there is also ad intra Europeanisation, not yet adequately studied, in which the subject of the research is the influence of the international environment on integration processes within the European Union<sup>21</sup>. It is essential to take this factor into account because, as J. Ruskowski points out, Europeanisation means an “interaction of the EU with its internal and external environment”<sup>22</sup>.

The Europeanisation of foreign policy denotes a process in which we observe changes in the foreign policy of states resulting from the processes taking place as part of European integration. To identify these changes, it is necessary, first and foremost, to ascertain how a given country’s foreign policy has changed in general under the influence of its membership in the EU. Secondly, it is essential to determine how this has affected the policy of a given country towards the European Union itself. Thirdly, how does its presence in the EU affect the diplomacy of this state towards other Member States. And finally, what impact does this have on developing the foreign policy of this country towards third countries<sup>23</sup>.

17 F. Schimmelfenning, *Europeanisation beyond Europe*, “Living Reviews in European Governance” 2007, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 3-5.

18 A. Cianciara et al., *Europeizacja partii politycznych i grup interesu w wybranych krajach Partnerstwa Wschodniego i kandydujących do Unii Europejskiej*, Warsaw 2015, p. 30.

19 J. Ruskowski, op. cit., p. 195.

20 R. Wong, Ch. Hill (eds.), *National and European foreign policies: Towards Europeanization*, Routledge, New York 2012, p. 8.

21 J. Ruskowski, op. cit., pp. 195-196.

22 Ibid., p. 35.

23 O. Terzi, op. cit., p. 116.

Member States of the European Union should clearly define their international identity in order to be adequately perceived by other EU members and third countries. This requires Member States to clearly define themselves as EU members who, influenced by their presence in this organisation, redefine their particular national interests and goals to be able to constructively cooperate and create positive interactions with other EU countries<sup>24</sup>. This also means, especially following the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (in the Maastricht Treaty) and granting the European Union the status of an international organisation (in the Lisbon Treaty), that states should limit themselves in formulating their interests, bearing in mind the interests of the entire community.

A. Chrysogelos presents an interesting interpretation of Europeanisation in terms of foreign policy. The author associates this issue with the process of “the de-politicisation of national policymaking via its transference to a supranational setting occupied by political and administrative elite networks”<sup>25</sup>. This refers to a situation when the elites shaping the foreign policy of a given country notice that they become hostage to the irrational position of a sizeable part of their own society in relation to foreign policy. In such a situation, the best method would be to gradually transfer the problems to be solved at the EU level, which would “cool down” internal political emotions and show that one’s own goals will be achieved more promptly thanks to effective policies at the level of EU institutions.

## **2. The Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy towards the Republic of North Macedonia**

The collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation came as a great surprise to both Greece and the Euro-Atlantic structures. Athens focused their attention on the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, which declared its independence in September 1991 as the Republic of Macedonia. At that time, Greek politicians

24 B. Tonra, *The Europeanisation of National Foreign Policy: Dutch, Danish, and Irish Foreign policies on the EU*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2001.

25 A. Chrysogelos, op. cit., p. 3.

tried to block the recognition of this new state on the international arena, arguing that its emergence could threaten the Balkans' future security. Greece consistently denied the existence of the Macedonian nation and language, claiming that the northern neighbour could not call itself the Republic of Macedonia since this name belongs to the historical heritage of Greece and has nothing in common with the Slavic culture to which the inhabitants of the new state belong<sup>26</sup>. In addition, Macedonia chose as its emblem the Sun of Vergina, which is the symbol of Greek Macedonia. The first version of the new state's constitution also incorporated a provision on the protection by the Macedonian state of the status and rights of the Macedonians residing in neighbouring countries, which was interpreted by the Greeks as Skopje's desire to interfere in the internal affairs of Greece<sup>27</sup>. These feelings were magnified by the Greek Orthodox Church and the media, and they were also quickly applied by populist politicians from the ruling New Democracy party, which translated into the adoption of a specific course in foreign policy<sup>28</sup>. As a result, in December 1991, Greek foreign minister Antonis Samaras declared in the Council of Ministers of the EC that Greece would never accept any country name including the word "Macedonia"<sup>29</sup>.

Greek politicians tried to impose their policy towards Macedonia in the European Communities, and, at least at the beginning, it worked. In December 1991, Macedonia applied for the recognition of its statehood to the Council of Ministers of the EC, which, however, due to Greece's opposition, postponed its decision in time. Also in bilateral relations, no EC Member State recognised Macedonia's sovereignty, sympathising with the Greek position at that time. Athens also tried to obstruct the admission of its northern neighbour to the United Nations<sup>30</sup>, however, Macedonia's lack of a stable internation-

26 S.L. Szczesio, *The policy of the George H.W. Bush's administration toward Macedonia*, "Politeja" 2014, no. 4.

27 D.A. Floudas, *A name for a conflict or a conflict for a name? An analysis of Greece's dispute with FYROM*, "Journal of Political and Military Sociology" 1996, vol. 24 (Winter), pp. 298-304.

28 D. Mitropoulos, *Greek foreign policy and mass media: Subordination, emancipation, indifference*, [in:] P. Tsakonas (ed.), *Contemporary Greek foreign policy*, Sideris, Athens 2003.

29 D.A. Floudas, op. cit., pp. 293-294.

30 K. Koźbiał, *The Greek-Macedonian conflict and its impact on the European integration process in the Balkans*, "Visnyk of the Lviv University. Series International Relations" 2020, issue 48, p. 57.



al position and the risk of another conflict in the Balkans caused the UN Security Council to recommend admitting it to the UN under the technical name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 1993<sup>31</sup>. The UN decision enabled the process of recognition and establishing diplomatic relations with other states and organisations. In December 1993, FYROM was recognised by some EU states, and, in February 1994, it was recognised by the US<sup>32</sup>.

All this resulted in a gradual change in the position of European states regarding the international recognition of FYROM, even more so since there was the risk of an outbreak of a bloody conflict involving this country<sup>33</sup>. European partners increasingly distanced themselves from Greece's position, believing that its policy towards Skopje could lead to dangerous consequences for the entire European Union. Athens' rigid and uncompromising policy has led to Greece's self-isolation on the international arena, and thus to a decline in its role and position as a stable and predictable partner within the EU and, at the same time, a leader in the Balkans.

When, in October 1993, a new Greek government led by PASOK party leader Andreas Papandreou, was formed, the Macedonian issue became even more politicised. Greece escalated its dispute with Macedonia by imposing a trade embargo on the country in order to force the government in Skopje to accept Greek terms of negotiations<sup>34</sup>. This step was negatively assessed by other Member States as well as the US<sup>35</sup>. This caused the international situation of Greece to deteriorate and the politicians of the ruling PASOK party became increasingly aware of the need to redefine their foreign policy. Their statements

31 P. Sioussiouras, *The process of recognition of the new independent states of former Yugoslavia by the European Community: The case of former Socialist Republic of Macedonia*, "Journal of Political and Military Sociology" 2014, no. 1, p. 12.

32 J. Paquin, *Managing controversy: U.S. stability seeking and the birth of the Macedonian State*, "Foreign Policy Analysis" 2008, no. 4, pp. 447-448.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 447.

34 Th. Veremis, *Greece and the Balkans in the post-Cold War era*, [in:] V. Cofoudakis, H.J. Psomiades, A. Gerylomatos (eds.), *Greece and New Balkans. Challenges and Opportunities*, Pella, New York 1999, pp. 44-45.

35 Th. Dokos, *Greece in a changing strategic settings*, [in:] Th.A. Couloumbis, Th. Kariotis, F. Nellou (eds.), *Greece in the Twentieth Century*, Frank Cass, London–New York 2003, p. 52; E. Kofos, *Greece's Macedonian adventure: The controversy over FYROM's independence and recognition*, [in:] V. Cofoudakis, H.J. Psomiades, A. Gerylomatos (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 380-381.

began to include arguments that the nationalist approach in the current policy should be replaced with a more flexible and realistic one<sup>36</sup>.

As a result, in September 1995, the Interim Accord between Athens and Skopje was signed in New York, lifting the embargo and enabling the establishment of proper relations with the government of Skopje. Under the agreement, the Republic of Macedonia abandoned the image of the Vergina Sun in its emblem and removed irredentist provisions from its constitution. Both countries reaffirmed the integrity and inviolability of their borders. Macedonia also committed not to use symbols belonging to the cultural heritage of Greece, and Greece, in turn, declared that it would not hinder the endeavours of its neighbour, under the name FYROM, from joining international organisations.

Greek politicians finally realised that it was in their best interest to support the statehood of their Macedonian neighbour, as weakening the government in Skopje and keeping their country in a state of both international uncertainty and fragile territorial integrity may pose a threat to Greece's security. The changes that took place in Greek foreign policy also resulted from Costas Simitis, the new PASOK leader, who assumed power in 1995. He decided to put an end to the current policy associated with nationalism and populism and the perception of the international environment as a threat<sup>37</sup>. Greece was supposed to be a stable, predictable country that based its presence in the Balkans on European Union membership<sup>38</sup>. The government in Athens was ambitiously committed to promoting peace and stability in a Balkans underpinned by the guarantee of existing borders and constitutional order in the countries of the region as well as supporting multilateral cooperation. This shift in Greek policy was to end its image as a trouble-making Balkan country and transform it into a Europeanised, predictable state that contributes to solving international problems. Athens also began to strive for the image of the most effective advocate of the integration of the Balkan states with the European Union<sup>39</sup>.

36 F. Stephen Larrabee, *Greek security concerns in the Balkans*, [in:] V. Cofoudakis, H.J. Psomiades, A. Gerylomatos (eds.), op. cit., p. 323.

37 D. Keridis, *Greece and the Balkans: From Stabilization to Growth*, Hellenic Studies Unit at Concordia University in Montreal, 2006.

38 Th. Dokos, op. cit., p. 51.

39 S.V. Papacosma, *NATO, Greece, and the Balkans in the post-Cold War era*, [in:] V. Cofoudakis, H.J. Psomiades, A. Gerylomatos (eds.), op. cit., pp. 60-61.

The culmination of Greece's role and position in the region was reached in 2003, when, during its EU presidency, the first summit between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans was organised in Thessaloniki<sup>40</sup>. An important declaration was adopted at the summit, in which it was confirmed that the future of the Western Balkan countries lies in European Union membership. According to R. Panagiotou, the Greek presidency managed to place the European future of the Balkans on the main agenda of EU policy and thus confirm the role of Greece as the leader of the Balkan states and the main advocate of the European ambitions of the countries of this region<sup>41</sup>. Both Brussels and Athens perceived Greece as a bridge between the EU and the Western Balkans and as a model for carrying out reforms that would prepare countries interested in EU membership<sup>42</sup>.

The name of the Macedonian state, however, remained a problem. Greek politicians hoped that their role as an advocate of Skopje's Euro-Atlantic ambitions would be appreciated, and, thus, that the dispute over the name of this country would be resolved in line with Greece's demands. It turned out, however, that since 2004 significantly more countries began to recognise the country under the name of the Republic of Macedonia. The example was set by the United States and was followed by a number of other countries, including EU Member States. Once again the Greeks felt betrayed by their allies, which caused the reappearance of nationalist slogans<sup>43</sup>. The same happened in Macedonia, when, in 2006, Prime Minister Gruevski took power. Nationalist tendencies strengthened as a result, and the policy of referring to Antiquity in search of Macedonian identity was revived, which violated the provisions of the Interim Accord of 1995.

As a result, in 2007, Greece started warning Skopje that FYROM's accession process to NATO and the EU would be dependent on resolv-

40 A. Adamczyk, *Prospects for extending the European Union to the countries of the Western Balkans*, "Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs" 2018, no. 4, pp. 125-148.

41 R. Panagiotou, *Greece's EU Presidency and the Challenge of Western Balkan enlargement policies in light of the crisis*, "Centre for Southeast European Studies Working Paper" 2015, no. 12, p. 5.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

43 Y. Kechagiaras, *Why Did Greece Block the Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia? An analysis of Greek Foreign Policy Behaviour Shifts*, "GreeSE Paper" 2012, no. 58, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe LSE, pp. 16-17.

ing the country's name dispute<sup>44</sup>. A crucial event was the veto by the Karamanlis government of FYROM's invitation to join NATO at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest<sup>45</sup>. It also meant blocking the country's membership of the European Union in the future, which recognised the need to resolve this dispute as one of the prerequisites for accession<sup>46</sup>. This, in turn, translated into the growth of nationalism and populism in Macedonia and the abandonment of the reforms required as part of the process of integration with the EU<sup>47</sup>. Gruevski's government began to drift towards authoritarianism, violating the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

When, in October 2009, the PASOK party returned to power in the Greek government, George Papandreou became the new Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. He considered strengthening relations with the Balkan states as one of the priorities of Greek diplomacy, including solving the problem of the name for FYROM<sup>48</sup>. He announced the "Agenda 2014", which assumed that by the next Greek EU Presidency in 2014 the process of accession negotiations of all the countries of the region with the European Union would have been completed. It was supposed to be a symbolic gesture of reconciliation between the Balkan states as well as the culmination of the peace process on the 100th anniversary of the commencement of World War I, which had broken out in the Balkans. The Greek Prime Minister hoped that by 2018 at the latest, all countries of this region would have joined the EU – for the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. These ambitious plans, however, collided with harsh realities and did not stand the test of time. The main reason for this was the huge financial and economic crisis that hit Greece in 2009. The government in Athens struggled with an economic downturn for the following years and was unable to implement an effective foreign policy.

44 Ibid., pp. 13-14.

45 A. Chryssogelos, op. cit., p. 9.

46 A. Adamczyk, M. Karadzowski, *Wyzwanie dla tożsamości międzynarodowej Macedonii – grecko-macedoński spór o nazwę państwa*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2019, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 333-350.

47 B. Vankovska, *The Prespa Agreement, Ethnicity and Nationality*, "Yearbook of the Faculty of Philosophy" 2019, p. 2, [https://www.academia.edu/39390181/THE\\_PRESPA\\_AGREEMENT\\_ETHNICITY\\_AND\\_NATIONALITY](https://www.academia.edu/39390181/THE_PRESPA_AGREEMENT_ETHNICITY_AND_NATIONALITY) [11.07.2023].

48 J. Bastian, *Greece in Southeast Europe. Political opportunities and economic challenge*, International Policy Analysis Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2010, p. 2.

An important event in developing Greek policy towards FYROM was the victory of the SYRIZA party in the parliamentary elections held in Greece in 2015. The new coalition government was led by Alexis Tsipras. Nicos Kotzias, former adviser to George Papandreou, became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Tsipras' ambition was to eradicate Greece's stigma as a "troublemaker" in the European Union and NATO<sup>49</sup>, therefore, in 2015, the new government resumed negotiations with FYROM regarding its name. The talks, mediated by an American diplomat, Mathew Nimetz, resulted in the signing of an agreement in Prespa on 17 June 2018, which put an end to a long-standing dispute between the two neighbouring countries and established the name of North Macedonia<sup>50</sup>. The new name was to emphasise the geographical distinctiveness of this country from Greek Macedonia, and the Greeks recognised the identity of the Macedonians and the Macedonian language as derived from the Slavic family. The agreement made it clear that the attributes associated with North Macedonia's statehood had nothing in common with the historical and cultural heritage of Greek Macedonia.

The SYRIZA party, however, paid a political price for its bold and sensible foreign policy by losing the 2019 parliamentary elections. The new prime minister, Kiriakos Mitsotakis, the leader of the New Democracy party, who criticised the decision of his predecessor while in opposition, gained, however, a fairly clear international situation as a legacy of Tsipras. This referred in particular to the Prespa Agreement, which resolved the troublesome diplomatic situation of Greece in the international arena, especially within the EU. Greece was able to finally rebuild and regain the image of a Europeanised, predictable, and stable state. What is more, Athens' reconsidered position made it possible for the Republic of North Macedonia to fulfil its Euro-Atlantic aspirations by joining NATO in 2020 and initiating accession negotiations with the EU in 2022.

The Greek-Macedonian dispute over the name of the country has shown that Greece's involvement in bilateral disputes prevented it

49 A. Chrysogelos, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

50 I. Armakolas et al., *North Macedonia: What's next?*, Open Society Foundation, European Policy Institute, 2019.

from both playing the role of the leader in the Balkans and reinforcing the image of a Europeanised country. The Greek political elites were right in recognising that the best method to solve the issues of a difficult neighbourhood was a policy of supporting the European ambitions of their Balkan neighbours. They saw the dangers of promoting nationalist narratives and were aware that the European Union was the only structure that could solve the problems of the Western Balkans countries by accepting them as its members. The vision of EU accession has been the best, and a widely recognised, way of mitigating international conflicts.

## Conclusions

Following the bloody breakup of the Yugoslav Federation, the Balkans were composed of separate political entities characterised by nationalist goals and hostile relations towards one another. It was somewhat reminiscent of Western Europe in the period prior to the European integration processes, which was able to overcome mutual animosities and ensure a completely new quality in mutual relations underpinned by the Europeanisation processes. Nowadays, it is the Western Balkans' turn, which undoubtedly constitutes a great challenge for the European Union as its security is dependent on full integration with this region. At the same time, Member States, in particular those bordering the Western Balkans, need to develop a suitable foreign policy since it is some form of a test of their Europeanisation, i.e., a review of their application of European values and standards in practice.

Greece was subjected to a Europeanisation test in relation to its policy towards North Macedonia. Analysing the evolution of this policy, it should be emphasised that it resembles a sinusoid. At certain stages, we could observe an increase in the level of Europeanization and an improvement in relations between Athens and Skopje, and in certain periods we could see an appeal to nationalism (in both countries) and a deterioration of bilateral relations.

In summary, it can be said that the Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy towards North Macedonia, which is the title of this article, was mainly, although not exclusively, achieved through processes which at the beginning of this paper were referred to as top-down Europeanisation. "Top-down" or "downloading" Europeanisation means

transferring European values and standards from the level of the European Union to a given Member State, in this case, Greece. It seems that the pressure exerted by the EU institutions and its Member States on the Greek political elites was primarily responsible for their attitude change to one more aligned with the spirit of Europeanisation. This applied to a much lesser extent, however, to Greek society, although there is no doubt that the processes of its Europeanisation also took place. In this context, it is worth recalling the previously cited analysis by the Greek researcher A. Chrysogelos, who, having presumably based the experience on his country, emphasised that a good method to sever from the irrational position of the society of a given country on the problems of its foreign policy is for the government to transfer them to the EU level, meaning to apply Europeanisation in practice. This was probably the case with the Greek-Macedonian dispute, and it is shameful that the process of reconciliation took both neighbours as long as it did, during which the Greeks, in particular, wasted far too much time developing their European mindset.

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