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GREEK ROOTS TO U.S. DEMOCRACY.
INFLUENCE OF THE GREEK-AMERICAN LOBBY OVER U.S. POLICY
TOWARD THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Eighteen months after President Clinton ordered U.S. troops to join a trail-blazing UN peacekeeping mission to the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the U.S. still has not established diplomatic relations with that country. The U.S. is thus in the odd position of having nearly 600 troops in FYROM but no ambassador or embassy there to represent its interests -- just an ill-defined U.S. "liaison office." In contrast, major U.S. allies like Germany, the UK, and France have full diplomatic and consular ties with FYROM. Indeed, the U.S. lagged behind all major European countries in formally recognizing FYROM, doing so only in February 1994, nearly two years after the Bush Administration extended recognition to the other newly independent former Yugoslav republics.

The extraordinary reticence of two successive U.S. administrations to establish a normal relationship with FYROM is a function of Greek objections. Since FYROM voted by plebiscite for independence in 1991, Greece has worked strenuously to block international recognition of the new republic under its chosen name of Macedonia.¹ The dispute with FYROM is a hugely emotional issue for Greeks, firing numerous public demonstrations -- in the U.S. as well as Greece.

U.S. hesitation in normalizing relations with FYROM, however, should not be understood as a national security interests-based decision to defer to its valued NATO ally, Greece. Support for Greece's stand on this issue within the executive branch has been weak in both the Bush and Clinton Administrations. Greek concerns over a threat from tiny FYROM are believed to be vastly overblown and Greek actions, like its ongoing trade embargo against Skopje, smack of bullying. Moreover, to the extent such Greek policies destabilize FYROM's current moderate leadership, they run counter to important U.S. interests in the Balkans.²

Executive branch decision-making on FYROM, however, strongly reflects the influence of other actors -- in particular, the Greek-American lobby and its advocates in Congress. U.S. policy actions toward FYROM which have emerged from this mix provide a graphic illustration of Graham Allison's "bureaucratic model" for national security decision-making. U.S. policy is a compromise

"resultant", victory for none, but rather an outcome "distinct from what anyone would have chosen " ³ With Allison's model for reference, this paper reviews U.S. decision-making on the modern day "Macedonian question" and concludes with an assessment of the Greek-American lobby's impact and prospects for the future.

THE PLAYERS

Executive Branch. The primary executive agencies involved in decision-making and/or gathering information on issues related to FYROM were the State Department, Department of Defense, CIA, and the National Security Council staff. Given the scope of key issues, the high level attention devoted to the Yugoslav conflict, and domestic political concerns, policy decisions were often directed to the President. ⁴

The Greek-American Lobby and Congress: As an ethnic lobby, Greek-Americans are generally considered to be second only to Jewish-Americans in terms of proven clout. ⁵ Greek-American groups are so effective in part because of the size of their constituency: approximately three million Americans are of Greek origin. Moreover, the ethnic Greek population is concentrated around certain urban centers, enabling it to vote en masse, thus multiplying the political impact.

Despite such cohesion, no single Greek-American organization stands out as representative of ethnic Greeks in the same way, for instance, AIPAC can claim to speak on behalf of American Jews. Among those active in Greek-American lobbying efforts are: the American Hellenic Educational Association (AHEPA), representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church (especially Archbishop Iakovos), and prominent Greek-American politicians and businessmen, such as New York University President Michael Brademas, a former congressman. Former Carter Administration Assistant Secretary of Commerce Andrew Manatos, once paid \$100,000 by the

Greek government for "advice on tourism," has assumed a prominent role as spokesman for ethnic Greek concerns in the Clinton Administration. Leading politicians on Greek-American issues are Rep. Michael Bilirakis (R-FI) and Senator Sarbanes (D-Md), the nation's highest ranking Greek-American elected official and a long-time member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. ⁶

THE ISSUES

Issues for the U.S. raised by Yugoslavia's dissolution in 1991 encompassed a wide range of political, security, and humanitarian concerns. Two overriding (and related) issues the U.S. faced were (1), whether to recognize as separate states the Yugoslav republics that had opted for independence and, (2), how to respond to violence instigated by Serbian authorities in Belgrade aimed at changing the borders of those republics. Although FYROM had managed to sever its ties to Belgrade without violence (the only newly independent Yugoslav republic to avoid warfare), both the Bush and Clinton Administrations worried that spillover of fighting into FYROM could trigger a broader Balkan war. Drawing a line at FYROM and ensuring its survival were seen as critical to containing the conflict within the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia.

Recognition Bush Administration First Deliberations: In spring 1992, as Bosnia was veering into war, the Bush Administration reviewed its policy on recognition in light of EC recognition of Croatia and Slovenia. The U.S. Ambassador to the former Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann, recommended that the U.S. recognize all four Yugoslav republics which had opted for independence, i.e., Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia as well as Croatia and Slovenia. At the behest of Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger, Zimmermann and the State Department spokesperson had made repeated statements of support for the territorial integrity of both Macedonia and Bosnia, believed threatened by Serbia. Zimmermann, however, thought more needed to be done. After a long debate within the Administration on the merits of recognizing Bosnia, Secretary of State Baker and NSC Advisor Scowcroft presented President Bush with a recommendation to recognize three republics -- Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia. Serious

consideration to including Macedonia was never given. Why not? As one State Department official involved in the issue recalled, "it was an election year."

The ethnic Greek lobby had made its presence felt. After the U.S. decision was announced, Representative Bilirakis wrote President Bush to urge that he maintain the "policy of withholding recognition."⁸ Unable to pursue bilateral diplomatic relations, the State Department worked multilaterally through the CSCE in 1992 to establish a "spillover mission" in Skopje staffed by CSCE diplomats and military officers. A senior U.S. diplomat of ambassadorial rank was sent to head the mission whose job was to observe, report and mediate conflict -- the first foray by CSCE into "preventive diplomacy."

Recognition Redux: Post-Election Reconsideration: Vigilance by representatives of the ethnic Greek lobby was well warranted, particularly after the November 1992 election left a caretaker Republican Administration. Moreover, Jim Baker's departure had left former foreign service officer Lawrence Eagleburger as Secretary of State. A former ambassador to Yugoslavia, Eagleburger had a special interest in FYROM. In an earlier tour as a junior officer, he had gained the moniker "Lawrence of Macedonia" for his efforts in distributing relief following a devastating earthquake in that Yugoslav republic.⁹

As the Bush Administration entered its final months, Eagleburger revisited the issue of Macedonian recognition. In December he held an unannounced meeting with the Macedonian Foreign Minister in Stockholm. Eagleburger also let it be known within the State Department that he was considering urging that President Bush recognize Macedonia before leaving office, so as to avoid passing that "tar baby issue" to the incoming Administration. What appeared to make sense on strictly foreign policy grounds, however, did not take into account the residual strength of the ethnic Greek lobby even after the election. President Bush's political career might be over, but

other members of his Administration, such as Vice President Quayle and Defense Secretary Cheney, could not have been interested in alienating such a substantial group of voters. The U.S. Ambassador to Greece, a political appointee and himself an ethnic Greek, learned of Eagleburger's plans and sent in a strong cable predicting disaster for U.S.-Greek relations if recognition occurred. Eagleburger's trial balloon died before it was officially launched.¹⁰

Clinton Administration: Promises, Promises. Candidate Clinton had promised to continue the Bush Administration policy of withholding recognition and the word was passed throughout the State Department by incoming Administration officials to expect that promise to be kept. Under Clinton, prominent Greek-Americans gained easy access to senior policy makers at State and the NSC. The Clinton Administration adopted an approach of vetting important actions on FYROM with Senator Sarbanes. Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff quickly gained a reputation as the in-house "gatekeeper" for ethnic Greek concerns.¹¹

Clinton Passes First Test: When Macedonian President Gligorov attempted to force the recognition issue by applying for UN membership, the Clinton Administration skillfully delayed Security Council consideration until a compromise between Athens and Skopje could be hammered out by UN Special Negotiator Cyrus Vance. In these deliberations, the U.S. tilted toward the Greek position, even as Greece's EC partners showed signs of being increasingly fed up with Greece's stand.¹² For the new U.S. Administration, however, the outcome was an unbridled success. First, it met the test of satisfying Clinton's campaign promise to Greek-Americans. Second, Macedonia's admission to the UN (under the FYROM name) enhanced stability by normalizing FYROM's international status and by providing a special mediator to attempt to find a solution to the dispute with Greece.

U.S. Troops to FYROM The next major policy decision affecting FYRCM occurred in a broader context of a U.S. policy review on Bosnia. Eager to demonstrate U.S. leadership on the Yugoslav

crisis but unwilling to match European deployments of peacekeeping troops to active conflict zones in Bosnia and Croatia (to which DOD and senior military officers were adamantly opposed), the Clinton Administration sent 300 troops to FYROM in July 1993. The U.S. move substantially augmented the small group of Scandinavian UN peacekeepers already in place, underscoring U.S. resolve to avoid spillover of the war. The local UN commander was surprised by the deployment, which he publicly noted was unnecessary to carry out the UN mandate of monitoring FYROM's borders. Representatives of the Greek-American lobby took no position on the deployment, although it made some uneasy, particularly those opposed to U.S. participation in UN operations.¹³ Just as the Bush Administration employed the CSCE spillover mission to get around the absence of diplomatic relations, the Clinton Administration used participation in the multilateral UN operation to enhance the U.S. presence and signal its support for FYROM's stability.

The Slide toward Recognition: While not affecting U.S. non-recognition policy, the new U.S. military presence in FYROM greatly enhanced contacts between the U.S. and FYROM governments. Following the deployment, a steady stream of senior U.S. military and Defense Department officials visited Skopje. Nearly two dozen Members of Congress traveled to FYROM during the summer 1993 recess alone to visit the U.S. troops. At State Department recommendation, DOD and Congressional representatives always met with senior Macedonian officials, usually President Gligorov himself. By contrast, the State Department kept a low profile, relying on a relatively low ranking political officer resident in Skopje to maintain communications, supplemented by visits by the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade and Washington contacts with a U.S. citizen unofficially representing the FYROM government.

Macedonian unhappiness with the continued use of Belgrade-based diplomats and the need to service the increasing flow of visitors precipitated the decision to open a U.S. "liaison office" in Skopje in December 1993. In doing so, the U.S. was keeping pace with key European nations, as several EU states had opened consulates following FYROM's admission to the UN. (In an odd

anomaly, Greece itself maintained a consulate in Skopje accredited in Belgrade until February 1994) Before announcing the opening of the liaison office, the Clinton Administration consulted Senator Sarbanes, changing the text of the announcement at his behest. Plans to send a relatively senior State Department official to attend the official opening of the office were shelved; instead a deputy director represented Washington at the low key ceremony.¹⁴

U.S. Recognition and Flip-flop on Diplomatic Relations: Shortly after the U.S. liaison office opened, a major shift occurred in the international setting. Six EU states -- including Germany, France, the UK, and Italy -- announced their intention to establish diplomatic relations with FYROM. (The EU move was precipitated by a desire to break the diplomatic logjam before Greece assumed the EU presidency in January, after which such a step would be too provocative.) Secretary of State Christopher reopened the issue of recognition, and recommended to the White House that the U.S. follow on the European coattails and help to stabilize the region by recognizing FYROM.¹⁵ Although Congress was in recess, cognizant of the possibility of a shift in U.S. policy, Greek-American advocates registered strong opposition. Nonetheless, President Clinton opted to recognize FYROM. The Administration sought to contain domestic political fallout by having key Members of Congress briefed before recognition occurred. Secretary Christopher called Sarbanes personally. Despite negative reaction from Greek-American advocates, the new policy was implemented as the NSC dispatched the telegram officially notifying the FYROM and Greek governments of the presidential decision. The White House public announcement issued February 9 made clear that diplomatic relations were expected to be established shortly, once "certain assurances" were obtained¹⁶

Within twenty-four hours, however, the NSC had put any further action to establish diplomatic relations on ice, even though FYROM appeared to have satisfied the specific U.S. concerns initially raised¹⁷ On Capitol Hill, offices were pummeled by calls expressing grass

roots opposition from Greek-Americans, in what one staffer described as a "spontaneous outpouring of anger" In New Jersey, "Clinton's picture was booed by a crowd of 22,000 when it flashed on a video screen at a concert by the popular Greek singer Jorgas Delaras"¹⁸ While fully predictable, the political heat proved too much for the White House.

Working through the NSC, Greek-American lobbyist Andrew Manatos arranged a meeting for prominent Greek-Americans with President Clinton for a fence-mending operation. The meeting occurred a day after a New York Times editorial sympathetic to Macedonia condemned the Greek government's trade embargo against the FYROM.¹⁹ That did not prevent Manatos from putting out a press release that President Clinton had said that the U.S. would not establish diplomatic relations until progress was made on resolving its dispute with Greece. The State Department spokesman, noting no State Department official was present at the White House meeting, referred even congressional questions on U.S. policy to the White House.²⁰ There was no doubt, however, that a major policy reversal had occurred. But the outcome (and the process leading to it) left advocates on both sides of the issue dissatisfied. While pleased to have stopped diplomatic relations, one representative of the ethnic Greek lobby indicated that a Rubicon had been crossed: trust, once lost, could not be recovered, particularly from "an Administration in such complete disarray"²¹ State Department unhappiness was so severe to provoke unusual public (albeit anonymous) criticism of the White House.²²

Appointment of Special Envoy: Seeking to make a new start before Greek Premier Andreas Papandreou's scheduled visit to Washington in April, as well as to keep a closer reign on policy toward the FYRCM, the White House in March 1994 appointed veteran Carter Administration diplomat Matthew Nimetz as a special envoy to work closely with Cyrus Vance and help resolve

the Greece-FYROM dispute In the White House announcement of Nimetz's appointment, U.S. diplomatic relations with FYROM were described as "pending."²³

Papandreou Visit Confirms Return to Greek Tilt : By the time Papandreou arrived in Washington, the dispute with Greece over U.S. recognition of FYROM had been overcome and the Greek premier did his best to ensure that message reached Greek-Americans. Responding to questions from Greek reporters outside the White House, President Clinton asserted convincingly "I think it's obvious that we've shown a real concern for Greek concerns" and muted public criticism of the Greek trade embargo against FYROM. Papandreou responded in kind stressing that he considered Clinton "a friend of Greece and in whatever Greece signifies..."²⁴

LESSONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Were there any doubt, this brief anatomy of major U S foreign policy decisions on Macedonia should demonstrate that the ethnic Greek lobby remains a potent force. On its core issue of opposition to establishment of normal bilateral relations with FYROM prior to resolution of the dispute with Greece, the lobby has held the line through two successive Republican and Democratic Administrations, and forced the Clinton Administration to backtrack on undertakings given to a foreign head of state. The lobby, however, has not prevented the U.S. from formally recognizing FYROM, from supporting its membership in the UN, or from gradually building up the U S. presence in Macedonia -- steps which do not sit well with most Greek-Americans. Indeed, despite the furor over recognition, President Clinton was able to double the number of U.S. troops in FYRCM without any significant challenge from Congress

While State Department specialists have privately criticized the influence of the Greek lobby, it is worth recalling that despite some dire predictions of Macedonia's collapse in 1991 if it were not recognized by the U.S , the worst has not occurred. Indeed, U S policy toward FYROM to date has been a relative success, particularly in comparison to the record for other parts of

the former Yugoslavia²⁵

Moreover, the inability of the State Department to conduct business as usual in FYROM because of Greek-American opposition resulted in some unusually creative U.S. diplomacy: first, invention of the CSCE "spillover mission" and later, strong U.S. support for establishment of a UN peacekeeping presence in Macedonia, despite the absence of a hot conflict. Both are examples of preventive diplomacy which may well be emulated elsewhere.

In any event, the Greek-American lobby is certain to exercise strong influence on U.S. policy toward the FYROM for the foreseeable future. The results of the 1994 congressional elections seem to have strengthened lobby's position. Incoming Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich has been a strong supporter of Greek-American concerns.²⁶ Sarbanes will be joined in the Senate by another Greek-American, former Representative Olympia Snowe (R-Me).

Republican concerns about U.S. participation in UN peacekeeping operations could also dovetail with Greek-American interests to produce serious questioning of U.S. participation in UNPROFOR/FYROM. Rep. Bilirakis had sought congressional hearings on this subject in April 1994, but never received a response from then House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) Chairman Lee Hamilton, despite Hamilton's support for ethnic Greek concerns. Incoming HFAC chairman Benjamin Gilman -- also a long time supporter of ethnic Greek concerns -- may well view the issue differently. Given the lobby's strengthened hand, the Clinton Administration will be pressured to give even greater consideration to Greek-American concerns in determining U.S. policy toward FYROM in the future. Absent a compromise to the Greece-FYROM dispute, the current state of limbo in U.S.-FYROM relations seems destined to continue.

NOTES

¹ "FYROM" is the temporary name under which Macedonia was admitted to the UN, pending a settlement of its dispute with Greece. Greeks generally refer to FYROM as "Skopje," after its capital, while FYROM's inhabitants call their home "Republic of Macedonia." Greeks object vociferously to FYROM's use of Macedonia. Greece claims "Macedonia" as its own exclusive historical patrimony despite Yugoslav usage of the term since WWII to describe its southernmost republic. Athens argues that newly independent FYROM's insistence on being called "Republic of Macedonia" reflects territorial designs against Greece's northern Macedonian province. Greece also objects to FYROM's newly adopted flag (which displays a symbol associated with Philip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great's father) and to language in FYROM's 1991 constitution seen as implying territorial pretensions against Greece. It is not within the scope of this paper to evaluate the merits of these disputes. This paper attempts to avoid taking sides by using the temporary UN name, FYROM.

² This assessment is based on personal interviews with State Department and National Security Council staff officials involved in formulating Balkan policy from 1991 to the present. The Clinton Administration has proven somewhat more receptive than its predecessor to Greek views. For published material suggesting lack of support for Greek's position see "Mischief in Macedonia," editorial, New York Times, 8 Mar 1994, sec. A: 20 and David Greenhouse, "State Dept Criticizes White House on Macedonia Ties," New York Times, 19 Apr 1994, A6. Privately, Greek Americans and even some Greek officials admit that Greek fears of tiny Macedonia are difficult to explain and that the Greek embargo on FYROM has hurt Greece's position.

³ Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," reprinted in Halperin & Kanter, Readings in American Foreign Policy, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 75.

⁴ Personal interviews with NSC staff and State Department officials during November and December 1994.

⁵ Charles McC. Mathias, Jr., "Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 59, No. 5 (summer 1981), p. 990.

⁶ Hanna Rosin, "Greek Pique," The New Republic, 13 June 1994, pp. 11-12. Personal interview 12/1/94 with Harry A. Sporadis, legislative aide to Representative Michael Bilirakis, provided more detail to Rosin's description of Greek-American lobbying groups.

⁷ Personal interview with former State Department official November 30, 1994. Zimmermann's account was first published in a 1993 interview with the Belgrade magazine Vreme.

⁸ April 27, 1992 letter to President Bush from Rep. Bilirakis. Provided by Bilirakis aide Harry Sporadis.

⁹ A plaque is still affixed to the elevator in the U.S. embassy in Belgrade commemorating "the Lawrence of Macedonia elevator shaft."

¹⁰ Personal interviews with former State Department officials and NSC staff during November and December 1994.

- ¹¹ Personal interviews with State Department officials and NSC staff familiar with Clinton Administration policy making on FYROM during November and December 1994.
- ¹² This is my interpretation based on public statements made at the time.
- ¹³ 12/1/94 interview with Bilirakis aide Harry A. Sporidis. Bilirakis sent a letter in spring 1994 to then House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton urging hearings be held on US participation in UNPROFOR/FYROM.
- ¹⁴ This account is based on personal interviews with State Department officials involved in Balkan policy-making at the time.
- ¹⁵ Hanna Rosin, op. cit., provides the best published account of the flip-flop. Additional details provided here are based on personal interviews with State Department officials.
- ¹⁶ "U.S. Recognition of the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia," U.S. Department of State Dispatch, 21 Feb 1994, p.98.
- ¹⁷ Personal interview with State Department official, 12/15/94.
- ¹⁸ Rosin, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ "Mischief in Macedonia," editorial, New York Times, 8 Mar 1994, sec A: 20.
- ²⁰ Personal interview with State Department official, 12/15/94.
- ²¹ Personal interview with Congressional legislative aide, 12/1/94.
- ²² David Greenhouse, "State Dept Criticizes White House on Macedonia Ties," New York Times, 19 Apr 1994, a6.
- ²³ White House Press Release, "Special Envoy on Macedonia," March 18, 1994.
- ²⁴ "Exchange with reporters prior to discussions with Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou of Greece," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 30:16 (Apr 25, 1994), p 883.
- ²⁵ Former BBC correspondent in Yugoslavia Misha Glenny, author of a book on Yugoslavia's break-up and frequent contributor of op-ed pieces on the Yugoslav crisis, shares this assessment. See, for example, Glenny's article on Macedonia in The New Republic, "Fear", 25 Apr 1994, pp. 12-14. Glenny now resides in Thessaloniki and is writing a book on Greece and the Balkan crisis.
- ²⁶ Interview with Bilirakis aide Harry Sporidis. Gingrich traveled to FYROM briefly in August 1993 after a more extensive visit to Greece. Gingrich's support may be largely politically motivated. According to a State Department official involved in the Gingrich visit to Skopje,

Gingrich urged FYROM President Gligorov to hire a U.S. lobbying firm to make FYROM's case in Washington. However, Gingrich has been a consistent supporter of the Greek-American position on FYROM and seems unlikely to change that stand lightly. Sporidis attributed Gingrich's support to his background as an historian.