

**Statement by the Head of the delegation of the former Yugoslav
Republic of Macedonia**

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**REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
President**

**Speech by the
President of the Republic of Macedonia,
His Excellency, Dr. Gjorge Ivanov,
delivered at the 73rd Session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

New York, 27 September 2018

**Distinguished Madam President of the UN General Assembly,
Distinguished Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This year, we are celebrating 100 years since the end of the First World War. The League of Nations was supposed to safeguard peace. However, it failed. The United Nations rose from the ashes of the Second World War and were built over a world destroyed by fascism, Nazism, racism and colonialism. By adopting the United Nations Charter, a brave generation of leaders gave hope to the unprivileged, the oppressed, the denied, that they will be able to exercise their right to self-determination.

70 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights became another gleam of hope for humanity. This hope became more realistic through the work of the United Nations and its numerous programs. Through peacekeeping missions, arms control, non-proliferation treaties and the fight against terrorism and international organized crime we build a safer world. The Sustainable Development Goals help us focus our energy on reducing poverty, eradicating illnesses, spreading education, clean water and sanitation, and creating opportunities for the youth. With the Paris Agreement we fight climate change and try to build communities and nations resilient to disaster risks. As a result, millions of people today are living better lives than they did a decade ago. All these achievements would be unimaginable had we not united our efforts through the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the Republic of Macedonia, I can righteously say that the Macedonian people participated in the creation of the post-World War II order. We were at the right side of history, because even back in 1941, we started fighting the evil that was fascism and Nazism.

The Macedonian state participated in the creation of the United Nations. In 1945, the Federative Democratic Yugoslavia was one of the founders of the United Nations. As a constitutive Republic with a right to self-determination to secession, Macedonia was a co-founder of the United Nations.

As a state within that federation, we participated in the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; in the international pacts on civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights that guarantee human dignity, the right to self-determination and the right to sovereign equality of states.

On September 8, 1991, making use of our sovereign right to self-determination and secession, in a peaceful way, we left the collapsing federation and we proclaimed an independent and sovereign Republic of Macedonia.

This is what the great injustice is all about. We were not allowed to enjoy the privileges of the organization and the documents in whose creation we once participated. We were denied the sovereign right to call ourselves by our name, as if an ordinary administrative region in Greece (bearing the same name) has a bigger right in international relations than a sovereign state such as the Republic of Macedonia.

25 years ago, on April 8, 1993, the Republic of Macedonia became a member of the United Nations. And yet, in this community of equals before the law, the Republic of Macedonia was admitted as less equal, with a derogated legal personality and a violated right to self-determination.

Today, 25 years later, the talks within the United Nations should end by the adoption of the so-called Prespa Final Agreement that according to some, should put an end to the name dispute with Greece and open the way to membership of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union and NATO.

The Settlement begins with a grand preamble whose formulations would make even the authors of the Universal Declaration quite envious. Ironically, the Prespa Agreement violates the same universal principles and standards that it refers to in its preamble, including the right to human dignity. Out of all the rights that have been violated, I wish to draw your attention to one – namely, the right to self-determination.

The right of self-determination means that only the nation itself has the right to determine its destiny, that no one has the right forcibly to interfere in the life of the nation, to destroy its schools and other institutions, to violate its habits and customs, to repress its language, or curtail its rights. The right of self-determination means that a nation may arrange its life in the way it wishes. It has the right to arrange its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign, and all nations have equal rights.

The right to self-determination is the source of the right of people to choose their own name and the name of the state they created. The right to choose a name is an inalienable part of the right to self-determination. Only by respecting the right to self-determination will the United Nations be relevant for all peoples. As a people, we have been bearing the name Macedonians for centuries, and as a state for 74 years – even before the existence of the United Nations. Our attachment to this name was confirmed when, 27 years ago, we used our right to self-determination and proclaimed an independent and sovereign Republic of Macedonia.

Still, with the Prespa Agreement, Greece is imposing a new name and is asking for an *erga omnes* implementation – both for international and domestic use. It is foreseen that we change our Constitution, whereby Greece would become the ultimate authority that would approve constitutional amendments. Through this settlement, Greece would be given a permanent monitoring over how we name ourselves, but also over how you, Member States of the United Nations, will address us. Greece will be authorized to rename our institutions, to censor the contents of schoolbooks for our children, to

prevent citizens from expressing their Macedonian identity. This also regulates the appellation of our Macedonian language. A very important part of our way of life will depend on Greek will. It is a censorship of the world and an auto-censorship of the collective conscience of Macedonian people. It is violence against our historical memory. There are hundreds of thousands of pages of documents and testimonies in the UN archives, detailing what the Greek state used to do to Macedonians in Greece. Now, with the Prespa Agreement, the Greek state wants to do the same to the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia. The aim is to limit the use of the name Macedonians to the smallest possible space – and that is the space between our two ears, all while keeping our mouth closed. It is a flagrant violation of the right to self-determination.

However, this Prespa Agreement is just a bitter fruit of a tree that has been poisoned a long time ago. It is a detrimental compromise based on the 1995 Interim Accord. At a time when we were internationally isolated, the Interim Accord achieved under the auspices of the United Nations was supposed to be a guarantee that Greece would not block our integration in international organizations. However, there is a serious problem in this sense as well. No one can transfer to another more rights than they have themselves. And yet, with Article 5 of the 1995 Interim Accord and under the UN-led process, Greece was allowed to negotiate with the Republic of Macedonia about its name. It is a violation of the right to self-determination.

The Interim Accord itself is not without its own roots. It stems from Resolutions 817 and 845 of the United Nations Security Council in 1993. Although it notes that the Republic of Macedonia fulfills the criteria for UN membership contained in article 4 of the Charter, the Security Council concludes nevertheless that there is a difference regarding the name of the state, conditioning the membership of the Republic of Macedonia with the acceptance of a provisional reference and an obligation to discuss about the name issue. That formulation is nothing else but a euphemism for violating the right to self – determination.

And thus we arrive at the root of the problem.

The right to self-determination was violated when the Republic of Macedonia was admitted to the United Nations. The Interim Accord and the Prespa Agreement have been adopted in order to justify that violation. You should know that the text of that so-called Prespa Agreement was prepared without my knowledge and without my consent as President of the Republic of Macedonia. Moreover, the Agreement violates a clause of our domestic law which is of fundamental importance.

Otherwise said, the knot that started entangling with Resolutions 817 and 845 and the Interim Accord, has now, with the Prespa Agreement, taken the shape of a hangman's noose. The Republic of Macedonia is now asked to commit a legal and historical suicide, so that the legal abolishment of Macedonian people could then be interpreted as its own will. I wonder what this says about global leadership and shared responsibility of the United Nations?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece insists on an *erga omnes* implementation of the imposed name, thus making the violation of the right to self-determination *erga omnes* as well. However, the International Court of Justice has stated in its judgment of June 30, 1995 that the right to self-determination has indeed an *erga omnes* effect. This very important decision was neglected in the preparation of the Interim Accord, three months later.

It is said that the Macedonian case is a unique one in the United Nations. However, the UN archives have registered an almost identical case in which a member state denies the right of membership to an applicant country because of its name. I say almost, because the request of that member state to block the entry of the other country was ignored by the United Nations. All of this happened after our precedent.

I am asking: Why is this not valid in the case of the Republic of Macedonia? Are all states not equally sovereign? Are the United Nations more relevant for some, and less relevant for other peoples?

Again, we see an unprincipled Athens victorious over a peace-loving Melos, showing that the stronger do what they can, and the weaker do what they must. The Prespa Agreement places us in a *fait accompli* situation, in which we are told – you are smaller, you are weaker, and therefore you must accept Athens' ultimatum. Instead of being rewarded, we have been punished for our peace-loving nature. It seems to be forgotten that the United Nations were created by visionaries who wanted an order in which even the smallest and the weakest of peoples would be protected. This because the respect of the rights of small peoples and states is a barometer for the observance of the international charter on human rights.

Aristotle claimed that whoever is not part of the polis is either a beast or a god. What the individual used to be to the ancient polis, is in a way, what the state is to the modern cosmopolis today. Greece is acting as if it is not bound by the rules of international order. With this attitude, I wonder in which category would Aristotle classify the cradle of democracy today.

If the United Nations are incapable of giving force to a righteous law, then they will only legitimate unrighteous force. And international order cannot be preserved by violating international law.

For a long time, we were persuaded that there is no other way. But through the fruits, we recognized the tree. Through this Prespa Agreement, we saw that we have been misled to search for a solution that would mean erosion of the right to self-determination.

How should we undo this complicated knot, this noose placed around our neck? The unraveling should begin where everything else began – with the violation of the right to self-determination.

The Vienna Convention on Treaties states very clearly that every agreement contrary to the *ius cogens* standards is null and void. According to Article 1, Item 2 and Article 55 of the UN Charter, one of those *ius cogens* standards is the right to self-determination. Article 5 of the 1995 Interim Accord specifies negotiations on the right to self-determination, which makes it contrary to this *ius cogens* standard. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, means that the entire 1995 Interim Accord is null and void, and with it, the Prespa Agreement that stems from it.

No one has the right to bring into question the decision of the people to choose their name and the name of the country they created. It is a decision deriving from the right to self-determination established as an absolute right of all peoples.

Only the right to self-determination, and not its violation, can have an *erga omnes* effect.

Distinguished participants,

As I am speaking here, in my country, the Republic of Macedonia, they are counting the last hours before the referendum on which my fellow citizens have been asked to express themselves on the Prespa Agreement.

In these past few weeks, many high profile foreign representatives visited the Republic of Macedonia. I know that many of them sincerely wish to help the Republic of Macedonia become part of the European Union and NATO. And I thank them for their good intentions from the bottom of my heart. But I am afraid that they too have been misled. Their message is that if the referendum fails and the Prespa Agreement is not accepted, then we should not hope for membership in NATO and the European Union. And I ask them – if you take away our hope, what will we be left with? Help us by unblocking the process of EU and NATO membership of the Republic of Macedonia without violating the right to self-determination in the process.

Many of them have been persuading Macedonian citizens to accept the Greek proposal. I ask them, would they accept a derogation of the right to self-determination of their own peoples and countries? Would they accept interference in their internal affairs, a breach of sovereignty and political independence? Why are then we asked to accept something that no one else in the world would accept?

Do not try to persuade us to eat from this poisoned fruit. It is high time for this poisonous tree and its poisonous fruit to be rooted out.

Therefore, in these last hours before the referendum silence, I wish to convey a message to my fellow citizens in the Republic of Macedonia.

Voting on a referendum is your right, and not an obligation. In accordance with Article 7, Item 3 of the Referendum Law, 'no one shall be held responsible for voting or not voting in a referendum'. Every citizen has the right to decide how to act as regards this referendum – to go out and vote, or stay home and boycott.

Just as the referendum on September 8, 1991 led to sovereignty and independence, this referendum on September 30 may lead to a state of subordination and dependence towards another country.

If this referendum succeeds in accordance with law, then not only will the name of the existing country be changed, but a new, semi-sovereign country will be created, with a new name and a new internal and international legal identity. We will be a state only by name, but not in substance, because others will regulate our way of life.

However, if the referendum fails, a new possibility will arise. A possibility to discuss and explore new options for resolving the issue in accordance with international law, and by respecting our fundamental right to self-determination. To renew the national consensus that we achieved at the beginning of our independence.

It does not take courage to capitulate. It takes courage to persist in the realization of the right to self-determination and preserve the sovereignty and independence of a country. It takes courage to tell the truth.

This September 30th will be decisive for our future. But at the same time, for centuries in our tradition, September 30th has been the day when we celebrate Faith, Hope and Love which arise from Wisdom.

Do not lose the faith in yourselves, because the future of the Republic of Macedonia depends on you. Do not lose the hope and patriotic love for the Republic of Macedonia, because only as a sovereign and independent country it can be a guardian of your freedom and human dignity. As a citizen, I have made my decision. On September 30th, I will not go out to vote. I believe that you, my fellow citizens, will make a wise decision.

I also wish to address you, representatives of United Nations Member states. This irrational dispute has had detrimental consequences for the Republic of Macedonia and its citizens. Due to Greek blockades, we were denied the right to prosperity. Unfortunately, all of this has reflected on the sustainability of the Macedonian multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual society. A society which has actively contributed to peace, stability and security in the region and in Europe for the past 27 years.

The position of official Athens is not only contrary to international law and the decision of Macedonian citizens, it also goes against the will of almost 140 member states of the United Nations which have recognized the fundamental right to self-determination of the Republic of Macedonia and use its constitutional name.

As President of the Republic of Macedonia, I urge all states that already recognized the Republic of Macedonia and established diplomatic relations under its constitutional name, not to change their decisions. Demonstrate your sovereignty by remaining faithful to your principled decisions, made without any kind of pressure. Help us by being the guardians of our right to self-determination, thus safeguarding your right to self-determination.

Modern history has shown that the Balkans are the birthplace of precedents. If we are turned into detrimental precedents that limit our sovereignty and political independence, then it is only a question of time when those will be applied in some of your states. What does this say about the relevance of United Nations for all peoples, about leadership and shared responsibility?

I have always been an advocate and an active contributor to the building of a true and lasting partnership between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece, as well as friendship and trust between Macedonian and Greek societies. However, if the only way to accommodate the irrational demands of the Greek side is through imposed measures on the Macedonian side, what we get are relations without trust. This agreement does not bring Macedonian and Greek people together – it sets them apart.

Greek and Macedonian society should learn how to live together in spite of their deepest differences. In order to reach a real, sustainable and lasting agreement, we need dialogue instead of monologue, arguments instead of imposing by force, mutual respect instead of denial.

Only by supporting such a fair approach, the United Nations will be relevant in our case, and will demonstrate leadership and shared responsibility. The United Nations will only be relevant if they respect their own principles.

Dear friends,

Perhaps, even as I speak, there are statements being written condemning this speech. Most often, the first reaction to truth is hatred. Truth uncovers lies, it uncovers unfulfilled promises and guilty consciousness. And there is a lot of guilty consciousness involved in the Macedonian case. However, truth also liberates and allows for the acceptance of guilt, for correction of mistakes and healing of the wounds from the violation of our fundamental right to self-determination and human dignity. And the simple truth is that we are Macedonians and our country is the Republic of Macedonia. By respecting this simple truth for our identity, you respect our human dignity which is built in the foundations of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Thank you.

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