



BULLETIN

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New Greek Government and Prospects for Macedonia and Cyprus Settlements

by Rafał Kownacki

A parliamentary election in Greece, held on 4 October, ended with a decisive victory for the socialists. With the posts of prime minister and foreign minister combined by socialist leader Georgios Papandreu, and given a new approach to international policy strategy, chances have appeared for a settlement of two major issues nagging the Greek foreign policy: relations with Macedonia and Cyprus unification. Poland, interested in having Macedonia within the EU and NATO, should watch the new Greek government's initiatives and give them its backing.

Election Results and the New Cabinet. Held in mid-term at the behest of the then prime minister, Kostas Karamanlis, the election brought back to power, after five years in opposition, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), whose leader Georgios Papandreu took over as prime minister and foreign minister. The socialists scored the best result since 1993 (when they were led by the father of the present prime minister), capturing 43.9% of the popular vote and a 160-strong majority in the country's 300-seat unicameral parliament. The right-wing New Democracy party, on the other hand, scored worst in its 35-year history, with 33.5% of the vote and 91 seats. The remaining seats went to smaller parties, with the left getting almost two-thirds of all seats.

One area where the Karamanlis government provoked public criticism was its poor performance in conducting an active foreign policy, especially in the key region of the Balkans. Capitalizing on its public mandate, the new government may now improve relations with Greece's neighbors. One indication of this is Mr. Papandreu's performance as foreign minister in 1999–2004, when he showed readiness to negotiate and settle international disputes by compromise. That period saw successful initiatives to improve relations with Turkey and Albania, and an attempt to end the division of Cyprus.

Macedonia. Priority treatment should be given to relations with Macedonia, with which Greece is locked in a dispute over the official name of that state. The Greek government does not consent to recognizing the constitutional name of Macedonia as a republic with its capital in Skopje, treating the name as reserved for a historic region that was once part of the Greek state. Talks on the subject, held for a dozen years under UN auspices, have yet to produce a settlement. Reaching a compromise in the dispute is central to the Republic of Macedonia's aspirations for memberships of NATO and the EU. But Greece has made its consent contingent on a change in the state's name. Proposals presented by UN envoy Mathew Nimetz were rejected by the Karamanlis cabinet, but the new Greek government seems to be more inclined to make concessions. The current prime minister, Mr. Papandreu, in his capacity as foreign minister back in January 2002, was close to reaching an agreement with the Skopje government on accepting a compromise name of "Upper Macedonia," but other power centers within Greece objected. The Macedonian authorities, too, are keen to reach agreement as soon as possible, after the country was refused a NATO invitation at the Bucharest summit in April 2008, precisely because of the naming disagreement. It seems that a settlement of the dispute will not even be obstructed by Macedonia's having brought Greece to the International Court of Justice back in October 2008 over the Greek government's failure to observe a 1995 deal on the Republic of Macedonia's temporary name, under which Athens pledged not to block the country's

membership of international organizations under the name of the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM). The two countries then committed themselves to cooperate in working out a permanent-name agreement as soon as possible. The referral to the ICJ was prodded by lack of progress in the negotiations, coupled with the blocking of Macedonia's NATO membership and EU accession talks.

A condition that no Greek government will abandon is that the name used in international relations must not contain the unqualified noun "Macedonia." And that condition has so far been rejected by the government in Skopje, in a situation where a majority of the international community (more than 120 states, including Poland) do recognize the constitutional name of the "Republic of Macedonia." A most likely future compromise will be close to a recent proposal by Ambassador Nimetz, providing for a uniform name of the "Republic of Northern Macedonia" to be used in international contacts, while keeping the constitutional name of the "Republic of Macedonia" for domestic use. The Greek ambassador to the U.S. has admitted that such an arrangement might be accepted by Athens, and the Macedonian government will probably put it to a national referendum.

Cyprus. For more than 35 years the island has been divided into the Republic of Cyprus in the south and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the latter recognized by Ankara only. Although the Nicosia government holds a *de jure* sovereign authority throughout the state, 37% of its territory is *de facto* controlled by the administration governing the northern part of the island. Since the Annan Plan for Cyprus unification was rejected in 2004 by the population of the country's southern part, the northern part is excluded from the operation of Community law—and this despite the fact that formally membership of the European Union extends to the whole island (since 1 May 2004). With EU accession actually confined to the southern part of Cyprus, the division only adds to disparities in economic development. The stable economy, low unemployment and satisfactory macroeconomic indicators of the Republic of Cyprus, which joined the eurozone in 2008, have increasingly contrasted with the plight of the northern part, its budget hinging on transfers from Turkey. The steps taken since 2008 by the new, leftist president of the Republic of Cyprus, Dimitris Christofias, have made the prospect of island reunification a much more realistic proposition. He started negotiations with the leader of Turkish Cypriots, Mehmet Ali Talat, on single citizenship and single sovereignty, and—in a move of major symbolic significance—he ordered the demolition of a wall dividing Nicosia's Ledra street. Prime Minister Papandreou, in his address to the Cypriot Parliament on 20 October, vowed that assistance in uniting the island is a priority of the new Greek government. And although the Greek-Turkish negotiations on Turkey's military pullout from the north are still underway, a compromise is likely to be achieved on creating a demilitarized zone around Nicosia. The acceptance of this proposal of President Christofias, as part of a broader plan aimed at a complete demilitarization of the island in the longer run, provides grounds for a curtailment of the Turkish contingent. Improvement in relations with Turkey is a major item on the Papandreou cabinet's agenda, one of the motives being the intention to help resolve the Cyprus issue. The prime minister made his first foreign visit—just three days after being sworn in—to Istanbul, and he laid a wreath at the tomb of the former Turkish foreign minister, Ismail Cem.

Conclusion. The new Greek government understands the need to resolve the major foreign policy problems that have weakened the country's international position. In these initiatives, the Papandreou cabinet would rely on the understanding of regional partners and the support of the European Union and the United States. This reflects the intention to overcome a sense of impotence and passivity characteristic for the foreign policy of the previous New Democracy government. Poland, especially in view of its EU Council presidency scheduled for 2011, should back the Papandreou government in this drive, which widens the area of security and stability at the EU borders. The Polish government's support should be extended in particular to those initiatives that bring closer the prospect of Macedonia's EU and NATO membership, and also of the unification of Cyprus (which will be with Poland in the presidency trio).