

UN welcomes progress in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia naming dispute

The Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for the naming dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Matthew Nimetz, has welcomed the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia parliament's decision to ratify an agreement on a new name for the latter country, following a dispute that has lasted some 28 years.

In a statement released on Friday, Mr. Nimetz congratulated the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia parliament and the country's citizens – who approved the name change in a referendum held in September 2018 – for the move, and the democratic manner in which the process was undertaken: “this historic Agreement between two neighbours opens the door to a new relationship between them and to a firmer basis for peace and security in the Balkans. I look forward to completion of the process as outlined in the Agreement,” said Mr. Nimetz, adding that the United Nations remains “committed to working with the two Parties in finally resolving the difference between them.”

However, in order for the country to be renamed the Republic of North Macedonia, the Greek parliament must also vote to ratify the deal. On Sunday, it was reported that the issue has led to a Greek government crisis, with the governing coalition split over the name change: Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is reportedly planning to call a confidence vote, which is expected to be held on Wednesday.

The dispute stretches back to 1991, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia, and announced its intention to be named “Macedonia.” Neighbouring Greece refused to recognise the name, insisting that only the northern Greek region of the same name should be called Macedonia, and arguing that the former Yugoslav Republic's use of the name was a challenge to Greek sovereignty.