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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000099

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TAGS: PREL, PGOV, NATO, MK, GR
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA'S PM GRUEVSKI ON THE MAY 29 AGREEMENT
AND NAME ISSUE

REF: A. SECSTATE 8781
B. SKOPJE 59
C. SKOPJE 95

Classified By: POLOFF NEISULER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a February 6 meeting with PM Gruevski, the Ambassador began by highlighting two issues the GOM should close to complete its NATO accession tasks: the social package for victims of the 2001 conflict and a draft language law. Pledging his commitment to address these issues, Gruevski pointed to the name issue with Greece as the real stumbling block on Macedonia's path to NATO. He acknowledged Macedonia's NATO and EU prospects would be limited if the issue was not resolved, and suggested that the best time for a solution was after Macedonia received an invitation to join NATO and before the Greek Parliament's ratification. He pledged to consider UN negotiator Nimetz's next proposal seriously. He made it clear, however, that any compromise on the name would have to be endorsed by a majority of the Macedonian citizens in a referendum. That Gruevski is considering any possibility of a compromise is encouraging. We believe we can make additional steps towards getting Macedonia into NATO if we press both Skopje and Athens to accept a compromise along the lines of the Nimetz framework. The Gruevski government will also be seeking assurances or guarantees that a compromise on the name would result in NATO membership. End summary.

SOCIAL PACKAGE -- WILL DO IT, BUT WILL DISAVOW IN PUBLIC...

2. (C) During a February 6 meeting with PM Gruevski, the Ambassador delivered ref A points on sustaining aspirant progress in the run-up to NATO's April summit. Assuring Gruevski that the USG wanted to see all three Adriatic Charter countries become NATO members, the Ambassador reminded him that the two outstanding issues from the governing VMRO-opposition DUI May 29 agreement (ref B) --a social package for the victims of the 2001 conflict and a draft language law-- required closure. The Ambassador encouraged the PM to start implementing the victims of conflict social package. Gruevski responded that his government was ready to offer "jobs and money" to the persons that DUI had already proposed. Warning against DUI "triumphalism" on the issue, especially in the context of counter-pressure from a newly-found organization of eMacedonian veterans from the 2001 conflict and from coalition partner DPA, he said that the GOM would publicly disavow any government role in such a settlement, if asked.

LANGUAGE LAW -- WILL GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS, BUT IT'S DIFFICULT...

3. (C) Gruevski was pessimistic about a language law and repeated he had not promised to complete a draft law as part

of the May 29 agreement. He expressed frustration at opposition SDSM's refusal to participate in the process, saying had SDSM agreed to participate there would already be an acceptable draft in Parliament. The Ambassador urged Gruevski to work off of a joint language law draft that the Parliament could then refine. Gruevski returned to old arguments but pledged to keep trying to find a solution.

THE NAME ISSUE -- THE GREEKS ARE STUCK, BUT WE HAVE OUR LIMITATIONS TOO...

4. (C) Emphasizing that the U.S. position on the name issue is unchanged, the Ambassador told Gruevski the danger of a Greek veto on Macedonia's NATO invitation is real (ref C). Gruevski acknowledged that Greek politicians had painted themselves into a corner that gave them no leverage for compromise on the name issue. "If I were Karamanlis and did not veto in Bucharest, I would hand in my resignation," Gruevski opined. He stressed that the Macedonians also faced limits on their flexibility and had to fight for the use of their constitutional name internationally. He thought that the only way out would be for a compromise after Macedonia's invitation to NATO and before the ratification by the Greek

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Parliament. The Ambassador agreed that the situation was not easy for the Macedonians or the Greeks, but it was imperative for the two sides to look to the future and to the regional implications of leaving their dispute unresolved.

WILL TRY TO ACCEPT THE NIMETZ PROPOSAL, BUT ONLY WITH THE CITIZENS' CONSENT...

5. (C) The Prime Minister made no comment on the formula contained in UN negotiator Nimetz's framework, but said an agreement would depend on the specific proposal. He said that FM Milososki recently had floated the names "Independent Republic of Macedonia" and "Sovereign Republic of Macedonia," with the argument that the qualifying adjectives "reflected reality" and did not change the overall name. Then why not call you "the wise Antonio Milososki," countered Gruevski.

6. (C) Gruevski said that, no matter how difficult and absurd the situation, he understood the positives and the negatives that came from resolving/not resolving the name issue. That is why he pledged to look at the Nimetz proposal with an open mind and, "if there is any way we could accept

it, and explain it to the public, we will try to resolve this."

7. (C) Any change to the name, though, even if only for international use, had to be endorsed by the citizens in a referendum. "This is not just my country. I cannot change the name on my own. That would be undemocratic," said Gruevski. He believed that he would have to remain neutral on such a referendum, but the Ambassador pushed back and pointed out that politicians of all stripes would need to work together to support a positive outcome. If the parties agreed to move away from the question "the name (and national identity) or NATO" to "FYROM or a differentiated name and/or NATO," the referendum could be framed in a positive light. Gruevski said he was not pessimistic about the outcome, because the citizens would understand that the future of the country was at stake and would vote accordingly. He said he remained committed to working on the issue, but added that the Greek side would need serious pressure, too, to come to a compromise solution.

COMMENT

8. (C) Gruevski is confident that his government has accomplished the majority of its NATO-related tasks. The social package issue is approaching quiet closure, while the language law working group will keep grappling with opposing viewpoints. We expect the two sides to start discussing a joint language law draft (a compilation of the VMRO and the DUI drafts) at the working group's next meeting on February 11.

9. (C) On the politically-charged name issue, Gruevski appeared rational and willing to keep an open mind about possible compromise. As noted in ref C, we are cautiously optimistic that the GOM can be induced to move beyond the traditional "dual name" formula and might be ready to make a bolder move toward compromise on a name for international usage. Gruevski's willingness to seriously consider Nimetz's proposal shows that he understands Macedonia's options and is moving toward a more sober problem-solving approach.

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