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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/20/2017  
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, GR, MK  
SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: ND INSIDER SAYS KARAMANLIS  
SERIOUS ABOUT BLOCKING MACEDONIA'S NATO MEMBERSHIP

REF: ATHENS 1618

Classified By: CHARGE TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Former FM Petros Molyviatis -- who remains closer to PM Karamanlis than his successor, current FM Dora Bakoyiannis, told Charge August 16 that Karmanlis recognized the diplomatic cost of vetoing Macedonia's NATO membership without resolution of the name issue first. But, he added, that might be exactly what was needed to get Skopje to take a more realistic approach to the issue. Molyviatis admitted that the GOG had not identified a concrete strategy for arriving at a solution, but said that

it first needed to know whether Washington even wanted to try to resolve the issue now. If so, Molyviatis believed that the U.S. could work with both capitals and UN mediator Nimetz on a strategy to solve the issue by the end of the year. Charge urged the GOG to engage in bilateral dialogue prior to the next stage of the Nimetz talks, and stressed that we expected the GOG to stick to the 1995 Interim Agreement if no resolution to the name issue was found. Comment: Molyviatis' belief that a veto might be what it takes simply to bring Skopje to the table is another -- particularly disturbing -- indication that Karamanlis may well be contemplating this step. Unlike Bakoyiannis, Molyviatis is Karamanlis' confidante, not rival; we expect his views more closely reflect Karamanlis's own. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) On August 16, Charge met with former FM Petros Molyviatis (2004-2006), who remains an unofficial foreign policy adviser to PM Karamanlis. Charge laid out for Molyviatis U.S. concerns about the Greek approach to the name issue and linkage to Macedonia's potential accession to NATO. Charge emphasized that, while he understood the Greek view that the accession discussion represents an opportunity to resolve the name issue, Greek thinking had not progressed to a concrete strategy for arriving at a solution. There was little for the USG to respond to other than a vague Greek desire for Washington to "solve it." Charge repeated what he had told Greek officials: that a low-key, authoritative dialogue between the two capitals could create a broader context of cooperation in which a compromise on the name would become possible. Charge also emphasized that the Interim Agreement remained the reference point for managing the problem if it was not ripe for solution (a point Molyviatis had agreed with in earlier conversations).

3. (C) Molyviatis, who had been briefed on Karamanlis' August 9 message to the Embassy (reftel), affirmed that Athens did see an opportunity to resolve the name issue before the NATO accession decision. It was a window of opportunity that would not re-open for many years, as the dynamics of the long EU accession process were very different from the NATO invitation. Molyviatis acknowledged, however, that it was not clear either Skopje or Washington shared this sense of opportunity. Greece needs to know whether Washington wants to even try to resolve the issue now, before it formulates a precise strategy. It would be difficult -- but far from impossible -- for the U.S. to work with both capitals and UN mediator Nimetz on a strategy to solve the issue by the end of the year, Molyviatis argued. If the U.S. was not interested, then the issue would drag on for several more years.

4. (C) Molyviatis acknowledged that Greeks believe the U.S. holds the key to the issue. Certainly, Skopje had gained confidence from the recognition by more than 100 states under its constitutional name. But it was the U.S. decision to do so that had caused the GOM to become more intransigent; the GOM believed it had unquestioning support from the world's main power. If that perception did not change, Skopje would not have any incentive to compromise.

5. (C) Molyviatis shared Karamanlis' view that a direct dialogue between Athens and Skopje on side issues should follow -- not precede -- resolution of the name issue. All other issues could be resolved easily and naturally if there was agreement on the name. To begin such a dialogue now (or even immediately following Greek elections September 16) would give only three or four months for results before NATO must take a decision. That is simply not enough time to build real confidence between the two sides. Charge noted that more complex issues than this one have been resolved in less time when a strong leader was determined to reach a solution; we were confident that Greek diplomats were capable of simultaneously handling both the Nimetz negotiations and a broader dialogue.

6. (C) Charge asked what the GOG meant by its oft-repeated line that it had gone eighty percent of the way to a solution and Skopje must cover the last 20 percent. What solution did

the GOG foresee? Molyviatis said the formulation referred to the GOG's spring 2005 agreement to accept as the basis of discussion Nimetz's proposal for a name that included the word "Macedonia" (Skopje rejected that Nimetz proposal). This had previously been a red line for successive Greek governments, and as FM, he had needed to push Karamanlis hard to accept the possibility that FYROM's official name would include the term. This "major step forward" was undone in December of 2005 when Nimetz proposed a dual-name solution, which Greece was obliged to reject. Greece's "80 percent" was its acceptance that "Macedonia" could be part of the name. Skopje needed to go the last 20 percent by agreeing to a variation.

7. (C) Molyviatis told Charge that Karamanlis had no desire to make the name a campaign issue. But no one should expect that Greece would take a dramatically different view after the elections, no matter who won. If Karamanlis acquiesced in the invitation without any indication that the matter was closer to resolution, he would take a political hammering -- one that would likely prevent ratification of Macedonia's membership by the Greek parliament. If Skopje followed up

its entry into NATO with a bid to change the name it uses in the United Nations, Karamanlis could forget about either a third term or a positive historical legacy.

8. (C) Molyviatis added that there was a psychological perception underlying the political issue. It was not simply that some two million Greek citizens considered themselves "Macedonian." Greeks viewed themselves as the historical victims of Great Power politics -- but could not abide getting the same treatment from a "lesser state." "We are used to being (expletive deleted) by a big state like Turkey, but getting the same treatment from a small upstart like Skopje is unacceptable" to most Greeks, Molyviatis said bluntly. The Macedonians, intentionally or not, seem to make an extra effort to provoke that kind of visceral reaction from Greeks, much like the Georgian-Russian dynamic, he added.

9. (C) Charge asked if the GOG was thinking hard about the period between the NATO invitation and the ratification of Macedonia's membership by Greek and other NATO parliaments. That period could give Athens -- if it chose -- an opportunity to spread out the time for the Nimetz negotiations, while still holding one card in its hand. Molyviatis said he was certain the MFA was working on that scenario, but did not know what they were considering.

10. (C) Charge pressed again the idea of bilateral dialogue prior to the next stage of the Nimetz talks, telling Molyviatis that he could foresee a worst-case scenario for all concerned. If Greece simply blocked Macedonia's invitation without having made a serious bilateral effort to avoid that outcome, not only the U.S. but many other NATO members would judge Greece harshly for its failure to stick by the Interim Agreement. Molyviatis (who in our last discussion had emphasized the value of the Interim Agreement) said that the potential cost of a veto could be quite high for Greece in diplomatic terms. However, it could also be exactly what is necessary in order to get Skopje to take a more realistic approach to the issue. He concluded by noting that Karamanlis -- or any other Prime Minister -- would not give more weight to international criticism than to his own political survival.

COUNTRYMAN  
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