

## EUROPEAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS SECTOR OF SYRIZA

### **Informal Briefing Note: Nationalist rally in Thessaloniki against the negotiations on the resolution of the name dispute with FYROM**

**22 January 2018**

- According to official estimates, around 90.000 people participated in the rally, which was held on Sunday, 21/1, in Thessaloniki. Attendants reject a final resolution on FYROM name dispute, ruling out any agreed name that can include the term “Macedonia” as component.
- During the on-going negotiations between Greece and FYROM under the auspices of the UN, Matthew Nimetz, (the UN mediator) has proposed five composite names: Northern Macedonia, New Macedonia, Upper Macedonia, Vardar Macedonia, Republic of Macedonia (Skopje). The two governments continue the negotiations. It is a historical window of opportunity for a peaceful resolution of a dispute that came up 25 years ago (after the dissolution of Yugoslavia) and since then remains unresolved. The position of the Greek government is a commonly accepted, composite name *erga omnes* (for all official uses).
- The rally was not officially organized or endorsed by any political party (except for the neonazi Golden Dawn). Numerous MPs and other main political figures from the neoliberal, conservative front-opposition New Democracy party (ND), far-right Golden Dawn MPs and the leader of the Union of Centrists were present. 2 MPs of the Independent Greeks also joined.
- Former Chief of the Greek Army, Fragoulis Fragkos, was the leading speaker of the rally. He resorted to hate speech and extreme-right rhetoric, recalling slogans of the Greek military dictatorship (1967-1974).



*Golden Dawn neonazi group marching, led by MPs Kasidiaris, Pappas and Barbarousis*

- PASOK (S&D) MEP, Eva Kaili, also attended the rally.



*Eva Kaili (PASOK MEP) marching with the crowd*

- After the rally, the ND leader, Mr Mitsotakis, declared that he shares the “sensitivity” expressed by the protesting crowd, asking for the Greek government to take into account the voice of the people, while the ultra-right populist ND Vice-President, Adonis Georgiadis, expressed his “enthusiasm”.
- On the FYROM name issue, ND has no official stance. Although he has hinted of contemplating a supporting vote on a composite name, Mr Mitsotakis is behaving irresponsibly, investing in opportunism, striving to balance between opposing trends (nationalist and centrist) inside his party. A deadlock in negotiations would be the best possible result for him.
- The Greek Orthodox Church did not officially endorse the rally. Archbishop Ieronymos held a meeting with PM Tsipras a couple of days before the rally. He clearly stated that, although the position of the Church is against the use of the term “Macedonia” by FYROM, such rallies are not helpful and the only responsible for resolving such issues is the Greek government. Only 9 out of 82 members of the Holy Synod attended the rally.
- Golden Dawn openly endorsed the rally, resorting to vandalism in many areas of the city, including the burning down of a neoclassical landmark building of Thessaloniki, because it had been squatted by anarchist groups (Libertatia squat). Fascist groups also vandalized the Holocaust Monument of Thessaloniki and physically attacked the former Deputy Minister of Education, Mr Zouraris.



*Libertatia Squat after the attack by Golden Dawn groups*

- Overall assessment: The rally brought together diverse groups – Golden Dawn groups and supporters, nationalists of any kind, military enthusiasts, religious fanatics and hard-line clerics, ND party MPs or leading figures, and Eva Kaili, MEP for S&D. After the end of the rally, Zoe Konstantopoulou, leader of the minor party “Plefsi Eleftherias” (Course to Freedom) enthusiastically endorsed it.
- Mixed messages from Greek S&D member parties: The parties that compose the newly-born “Kinima Allagis” (Movement of Change), mainly PASOK and POTAMI, have been sending mixed messages. While the leadership of POTAMI has been speaking in favor of a resolution of the dispute, the leadership of PASOK preferred to ‘wait-and-watch’, depending on the number of participants and the final outcome of the rally. When a representative of the DIMAR (Democratic Left) party -allied to PASOK- expressed its fury of Eva Kaili’s presence at the rally, she claimed that the Democratic Coalition (the Parliamentary Group of PASOK and DIMAR in the Greek Parliament) has not taken any official stance on the issue. PASOK has repeatedly accused the Greek government for not taking a clear stance, although, since the beginning of the negotiation talks, SYRIZA and PM Tsipras was adamant on what Greece wants: **a composite name, with either a geographical or a chronological qualifier, *erga omnes*, to make absolutely clear that nobody claims other people’s land or history.**