

About the "Prespes Agreement" Tsipras-Zaef

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ABOUT THE "PRESPEES AGREEMENT" Tsipras-Zaef: PEOPLES OF GREECE AND THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA AGAINST THE BLACKMAIL OF NATO-USA-EU-CAPITAL

Although this agreement is greatly discussed, the public debate is only about... half of it. While the government, the right and the far right give prominence to the "name" issue, a whole segment of the agreement which defines the financial, political and military relationships of the two countries is left in obscurity. Why?

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE PRESPEES AGREEMENT?

In Article 1 the agreement defines the **name of the country** and in paragraph 1.8 it defines the terms of **the humiliating for any people erga omnes**, as it imposes the use of the name internally, the obligation to change the Constitution (article 4), while the processes of the validation of the agreement are also defined.

"PART 2" of the Agreement refers to the "strengthening and deepening of the co-operation between the two parties". In paragraph 1 it is defined that the parties agree that "their strategic co-operation will be extended in all sectors such as agriculture, civil defense, defense, economy, energy, environment, industry, infrastructure, investments, tourism, trade, trans-border collaboration". This vague and neutral phrasing of the need to improve the bilateral relationships is followed by some very particulate specifications which reflect highly specific interests concerning the multi-national giants that are involved in the area, as well as the Greek capital.

With Article 14 the Agreement moves forward to the financial "gist". In Paragraph 4 it is determined that "the parties will reinforce their co-operation regarding energy, mainly by constructing, maintaining and using inter-connected natural gas and oil pipelines (that already exist and are being manufactured or designed).

Article 16 defines that the two countries will "co-operate" in the field of "**civil defense**". We all know the role that "civil defense" plays regarding the relations between the suppression mechanisms as well as the delimitation of the "influence zones" (e.g. the Aegean)

Article 17 directly pertains to the "**military co-operation**" **between the two countries**. This article determines that the two parties will expand their collaboration to the field of defense through joint exercises and of staff training.

Therefore this agreement has **three aspects**: a) the participation of "Northern Macedonia" in the imperialist coalitions of NATO and EU, b) the resolution of the "historical disputes" between the two states (name, language, historical legacy etc) and c) the development of financial, political and military relationships between the two countries, which comprises the Second part of the Agreement (essentially half of the agreement).

Therefore if one wants to criticize the agreement and particularly from a left, **class perspective**, then one must deal with the **Agreement as a whole** and not as an isolated diplomatic text, but within the specified political and economic context in which it was signed, within the particular balance of power which reflects and forms, within, finally, the class interests that it represents.

THE FINANCIAL SIDE OF THE AGREEMENT, THE FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE ROLE AND PURSUITS OF THE MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND THE GREEK CAPITAL IN THE AREA

In 2017 Greece having a trade volume of 726 million € **was the third most important business partner** of the Republic of Macedonia after Germany (3.1 billion €), just 32 million less than the United Kingdom, which has a trade volume of 758 million €. This evidence alone would be enough to debunk the laughable rhetoric of the “national danger” and the “irredentism” that is still adopted by some left wing groups in Greece.

But all this is not enough because it would be more serious to examine a basic overview of the **structure of the Greek capital's presence in “Northern Macedonia”**. If we followed this elementary Marxist analysis, we would easily see that the **Greek capital plays a crucial role in the most important financial fields of the neighboring country, controlling them to a certain extent.**

335 businesses of Greek interests operate in the neighboring country. Ranked third among the most vigorous is “OKTA REFINERY”, a subsidiary of HELPE (Hellenic Petroleum) with a revenue that exceeds 311 million €. The domination of HELPE in the neighboring country's market was not easy, as in 2013 the Gruevski administration terminated the oil pipeline that connected the HELPE refinery of Thessaloniki to the respective refinery of OKTA which undermined the conditions for the HELPE's infiltration in the area. But within the context of the agreement the re-commission of the pipeline is hastened, which, after all, is **photographically defined** in the Agreement when it is mentioned among the “existing pipelines” of oil and natural gas. The pipeline's re-commission, according to the HELPE plans, will make the Republic of Macedonia an energy node for the further infiltration of HELPE to the Balkans and especially in Serbia (which today is supplied fuel from the Panchevo Refinery, which in turn is 50% Russian and 50% Serbian), in Bulgaria where the Russian Lukoil dominates and in Albania.

In the meantime, recently, in April 15, the board of DEH (Public Power Corporation of Greece) approved the buyout of EDS, a supplier and trader of electric power, for the price of 4,8 million €. The EDS group is an up-and-coming corporation in the field of trading and supplying Electric Power. It was founded in 2012 and owns subsidiaries in Serbia, Slovakia and Kosovo. The contract was signed in **April 25** between the CEO of DEH Manolis Panagiotakis and the owner of EDS and **vice president of the neighboring country, Angusev Litch.**

Lastly, in a recent announcement the government of the Republic of Macedonia informs us that it is agreed between the Company of Energy Resources (MER) and the Greek DESFA (National Natural Gas System Operator) a timeline, as well as the details for the construction of the inter-connecting natural gas pipeline. With this project a network of natural gas pipelines will be constructed, with a length of approximately 120 km, while at the same time the conditions for the future connection with the international Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) are being created.

But it is not just the energy field where the Greek capital (in its current composition with the defining role of the multi-national corporations, particularly the American) has a dominant role. The leading place in the financial system is held by the Stopanska Bank, which is a subsidiary of the Greek National Bank. Major investments and powerful positions in the neighboring country belong, except

from the energy companies and banks, to the TITANA group with its subsidiary Usje Cementarnica, to the constructions corporation AKTOR which is a subsidiary of the Greek group AKTOR and to the SIDENOR subsidiary Dorjan Steel. A major player in retail is the Veropoulos group, while Elbisco, belonging to Kyriakos Filippou, is the biggest bread producing company in the neighboring country.

In a single visit from Thessaloniki to Skopje you locate everywhere the presence of the Greek capital. As soon as you cross the borders to Gevgelija you meet the “Las Vegas of Balkans”, casinos that are almost exclusively aimed towards the Greek market. Later you cross the new highway for whom it was greatly discussed that it would be renamed from “Alexander the Great” to “Friendship Highway”, while at the same time it is being constructed by AKTOR, owned by the Greek “national contractor” Bobolas, who finds a new field of profit in the neighboring country. And as soon as you reach Skopje, next to the Central Bus Station you see the Vero mall, the biggest mall in Macedonia, owned by the known to us Veropoulos, who, along with the Jumbo company have constructed major malls in other cities as well. Veropoulos, even though having declared bankruptcy in Greece, continues to profit by actually applying the same and even worse working conditions that we have also known in Greece.

The infiltration of the Greek capital and its definitive role in the area is undisputed. The signing of the Agreement and Macedonia’s road to accession to the EU will amplify this role.

Therefore **the imperialist countries and their international organizations for the most part rushed to applaud the agreement**, as it sets the path for the neighboring country’s accession to these organizations, **but the bourgeoisie of our country was thrilled as well**. A characteristic example of this is the support from the majority of the press in a variety of articles using arguments that focus on Greece’s possibility to “regain part of its leading role and influence in the Balkans while limiting, over time, Turkey’s influence and room for manoeuvre in the area”. The minister of Foreign Affairs himself did not hesitate to mention that the Prespes agreement sets the path for the Balkans to become once again a “Greek mainland”!

It also goes without saying that the military balance of power between the two countries is overwhelming. Greece has a personnel of 161.000 while Macedonia has 8.055, Macedonia’s air force is comprised of 6 attack and 6 transport helicopters (Greece has a fleet of 600 aircrafts), 31 armored vehicles (Greece has 1345) while it has no navy. Taking all this into consideration, it is truly bizarre that some forces say there is some kind of “danger” and that forces in the left do not raise a strong front against this nonsense.

WHAT SHOULD BE A POSITION OF PRINCIPLE IN THIS MATTER?

The core of the nationalist as well as the “anti-nationalist” currents is the controversy surrounding the name and nationality while they downgrade the role that the agreement plays as a herald of Macedonia’s accession to NATO and the EU as well as the pursuit of the upgrade of the geopolitical role of the Greek oligarchy.

The issue of the national identity is never the cause of competitions and wars. The reasons lie in the conflict of class interests. This should be on the forefront of the Left, instead of regurgitating the so called “irredentism” and “danger” rhetoric, which is a grist to the mill of the right’s opposition to the agreement. The Macedonian ethnogenesis was connected with the social issue already from the time of Iliden but as well as in the ‘20s, ‘30s, and ‘40s where it clashed with the fascist regimes in Serbia but in Greece and Bulgaria also. Currently there is an ongoing effort in the neighboring country to include all this in their national narrative without the social and class dimension in an overall effort to revise history that takes place not only in Greece but in a world scale as well, for example with the equation of fascism with communism.

In Greece the “Macedonian Issue” reaches the core of the national narrative of the new Greek state. By concealing the multi-national composition of the area and the nationalist policies of repression that the Greek state over time systematically imposed on the Slavic elements within the Greek borders.

Historically the communist movement in Greece opposed this national, bourgeois policy.

The current view of KKE (Communist Party of Greece) and other left groups is a tragedy. In 1988 for the first time its leader at the time, Harilaos Florakis claimed that “for KKE, there is no Macedonian minority in Greece”. In consecutive interviews of its current General Secretary Dimitris Koutsoumpas the existence of a Macedonian ethnic minority and of a modern Macedonian nation and language is being disputed. Also, the recognition of the existence of any of the above matters is considered to prove the irredentist claims of the neighboring country and raise the issue of border change. This position is tragic if we consider the thousands of communists in Greece that were tortured, executed, or exiled in remote islands exactly because they refused the policy of the official Greek state in the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s.

KKE by constantly underlining the issue of national safety and the neighbors’ irredentism and by ignoring the unprecedented intervention for the modification of parts of the neighboring country’s Constitution in a time of peace, the only thing that it comments on is that these are not enough and that they constitute a dangerous retreat. **The dangerous/hegemonic intentions of the Greek state in the area are left uncriticized.** The other problem of this view is that, despite the wishful thinking being expressed, it undermines any possibility of communication with the neighboring people, in a time where a common front against the Greek corporations, the multi-national capital, the EU and Nato is required. How will this prospective move forward with a people whose national, linguistic and state self-determination they deny? Second but equally important. From the overall stance of KKE and other groups the duty of opposing the Greek nationalism is absent or downgraded. But how can the domestic chauvinism-nationalism be battled more effectively? When we adopt part of its argumentation? When we set the alarm for the territorial sovereignty from the neighbors’ irredentism or when we boldly debunk the national myths and the ideology of “encircled by enemies Greece?”

There must also, though, be a reference to **the opposite mistake. Part of the domestic left and the anti-authoritarian movement views the Tsipras-Zaev agreement favorably or at least leniently.** Behind this standpoint is the wrongful logic that the Agreement strikes a blow to nationalism and constitutes a (relatively) fair arrangement of the matter. In this case there is a clear **underestimation of the imperialist factor** and its obvious priorities that are being served in the area through this Agreement, while it overlooks the nationalist dynamic that the narrative of the “national betrayal” will create, which is already cultivated by the traditional Right and Far Right n both sides of the borders. Moreover, **the aggressive policy of the Greek state and capital in the area, as well as the fulfillment of this plan by the SYRIZA government is acquitted.** This stance, though, involuntarily communicates with the government propaganda in a wider progressive audience and does not contribute to the revelation of the bourgeois plans.

Against the two views which cannot as a whole contest the two main forms of the bourgeois policy - the bourgeois nationalism and the bourgeois cosmopolitanism/“anti-nationalism”, there attempts to emerge a view that shows its clear opposition to the agreement not only because the latter is a link in the euro-NATO integration of Balkans but because it serves the interests of the Greek oligarchy which seeks to upgrade its geo-political and economic role in the area, using blackmails and finally impositions against the neighboring people. It proposes the need for anti-imperialist, class and internationalist unity of the peoples.

The communist and working-class policy is necessary, and the only one that can respond to nationalism. The first is the unveiling of the NATO and EU plans for the complete hitch up of the West

Balkans to their imperialist chariot. The Tsipras-Zaev Agreement serves these priorities. At the same time, we are obliged to reveal the national, state plan of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois political staff for re-emerging to the Balkans and turning the Republic of Macedonia a field of extreme profits for the Greek capital.

The internationalist working-class intervention, especially that of the communists, is necessary for the co-operation of the working classes and the peoples against all of the bourgeois classes, imperialism and every nationalism from both sides of the borders. This is the only way to ensure the independence of the class forces from the bourgeois policy, to lay the foundations of forming **a new alternative for the Balkans and to accommodate a common anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist, anti-war struggle with the workers and the left forces** of the Republic of Macedonia, which are also fighting against nationalism and their bourgeoisie.

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