

SECRETARY RICE HOLDS A NEWS CONFERENCE

AUGUST 13, 2008

QUESTION: On the Balkans, Madame Secretary, anything to say on the name issue between Athens and Skopje? And on the irredentist issue raised the other day by the Skopjian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski to the Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, in a crucial period during which Skopje would like to become a NATO member?

RICE: Let's -- I'll have to reset here for a moment. About **Macedonia**, all right. Look, you know our position, which is that the Macedonians should be admitted into NATO. That was the position in Bucharest.

The hope is that the name issue can be resolved very quickly now. I've spoken both to my Greek colleagues. The Macedonians were here. This is something that should not get in the way of the admission of **Macedonia** to NATO, and that's what we're working on.

And I just would note, to make a link between the two discussions, one of the reasons for NATO membership action plan and ultimately for NATO membership is that it allows states to overcome longstanding difficulties, differences, and conflicts under the umbrella of a collective security organization, defense organization of democracies.

I have noted before that, had anyone said that you would be able to resolve, for instance, differences between Hungary and Romania, between Bulgaria and Turkey, in peaceful ways, no one would have believed it when the Soviet empire broke up. But, in fact, under the umbrella of NATO, that has been taking place.

And so if you now look across Central and Eastern Europe, one thing that is also very different from just a few decades ago is that the countries that were liberated after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Baltic states, and the aspirants, Albania, Croatia, **Macedonia**, and others, are now -- have made the transition and are making the transition into transatlantic institutions.

That allows them both to resolve their differences and to have a reason, a spur for internal reform and further democratization, the appropriate relationship between the civilian and military leaders, and so forth and so on.

That is why membership action plan has been so valuable. And it's why the United States continues to stand for membership action plan for Georgia and Ukraine.