

GREECE RATIFY MACEDONIA NAME CHANGE DEAL

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Alexis TsiprasAFPANGELOS TZORTZINIS

Greek lawmakers ratified an agreement on Friday to end a nearly three decade-long dispute over neighbouring Macedonia's name, a landmark vote intended to clear the small country that will be renamed North Macedonia on the path to NATO membership.

The deal passed with 153 votes in the 300-member Greek Parliament, two more than needed. It had faced fierce opposition and cost Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras his parliamentary majority after a right-wing partner in the governing coalition quit in protest.

Tsipras' left-wing Syriza party holds 145 seats in parliament; independent lawmakers provided the votes needed for ratification.

Under the deal, Macedonia changes its name to North Macedonia and Greece will drop its objections to the country joining NATO and eventually the European Union.

Friday's vote came after three days of acrimonious parliamentary debate and numerous street protests, some of which turned violent.

Greece has long argued use of the term Macedonia implied territorial claims on its own northern province of the same name. The issue has been a contentious one for decades, and has whipped up nationalist and patriotic sentiment in both countries.

Opposition was particularly fierce in the northern Greek region of Macedonia, which borders the former Yugoslav republic that claimed the same name after declaring independence in 1991. Critics claimed the deal signs away their identity and a cultural heritage dating back to Alexander the Great more than 2,300 years ago.

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