

Untying the Macedonian knot

In October the European Commission recommended opening negotiations for EU membership with Macedonia; it now seems that the EU's leaders will not decide on opening talks until next year ("Greece blocks Macedonia talks", *EuropeanVoice.com*, 8 December).

As in 2008, when NATO leaders refused to invite Macedonia to join the alliance, Macedonia's integration into the EU is, *de facto*, being vetoed by Greece and its demand that Macedonia add a 'qualifier' to its constitutional name – the Republic of Macedonia – to differentiate the country from the northern

province of Greece that bears the same name.

The temporary (and legally dubious) solution that the UN coined when it admitted Macedonia "as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" is no longer adequate as a means for the international community to circumvent this bilateral dispute.

There is a compromise solution that the UN mediator has not put forward and that would respect the concerns of both sides.

First, though, what are those concerns? To most Greeks, use of the term 'Macedonia' – the name of an ancient kingdom ruled most

famously by Alexander the Great – violates Greece's national narrative and seems to imply an entitlement to the legacy (and even geography) of historical Macedonia.

For their part, Macedonians argue that the right to ethnicity, nationality and identity is a fundamental principle of international law.

The solution would be for the country to be known internationally as the Republic of Makedonija. This is a name of Slavic origin and how Macedonians refer to their country in their own language.

Greece would be left with the name 'Macedonia', which it could use for the northern-

most region of the country and, indirectly, to invoke ancient Macedon. A declaration in which the Republic of Makedonija would acknowledge that ancient Macedonia is part of Greece's historical legacy could reinforce the agreement.

Makedonijans could co-exist along Greek Macedonians. Both governments could claim victory, one having won international recognition under basically the same name as in the constitution, the other having protected the Macedonian-ness of Greece's history and present.

This is more than a matter

of gaining membership of the EU and NATO – Macedonia's very future depends on a resolution.

If the EU sides with Greece, it would in effect be declaring that the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership are not important in Macedonia's case and that the most important factor is an additional criterion unrelated to democracy or the rule of law. Public opinion would turn against the EU in Macedonia. As a result, no Macedonian government would have much incentive to continue with reforms demanded by the EU. The EU's leverage would decrease. More

importantly, the possibilities for further soft mediation by the EU in Macedonian-Albanian political disputes would diminish.

Macedonian nationalism might grow, while Macedonia's large ethnic-Albanian minority might become restive watching the state of Albania, already a member of NATO, move forward with EU integration. Ethnic-Albanian nationalism is already being encouraged by Kosovo's independence.

The EU does not need another crisis. The EU needs to apply more pressure to end this dangerous dispute. An option is available.

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Stopping Bosnia from progressing

How to improve the prospects of Bosnia and Herzegovina has bemused several of your commentators and letter-writers. What should be clear is that the objectives are stability, democracy and self-determination. Seen in that strategic perspective, whether Bosnia's two 'entities' – the Croat-Muslim Federation and the Republika Srpska – join the EU as one state or as two is no more important than Belgium not falling apart.

But to progress, Bosnia must be sovereign and democratic. It is the international community that is preventing that: the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), which oversees implementation of the Dayton Agreement; the Office of the High Representatives (OHR); and the OHR's controversial and extensive Bonn Powers.

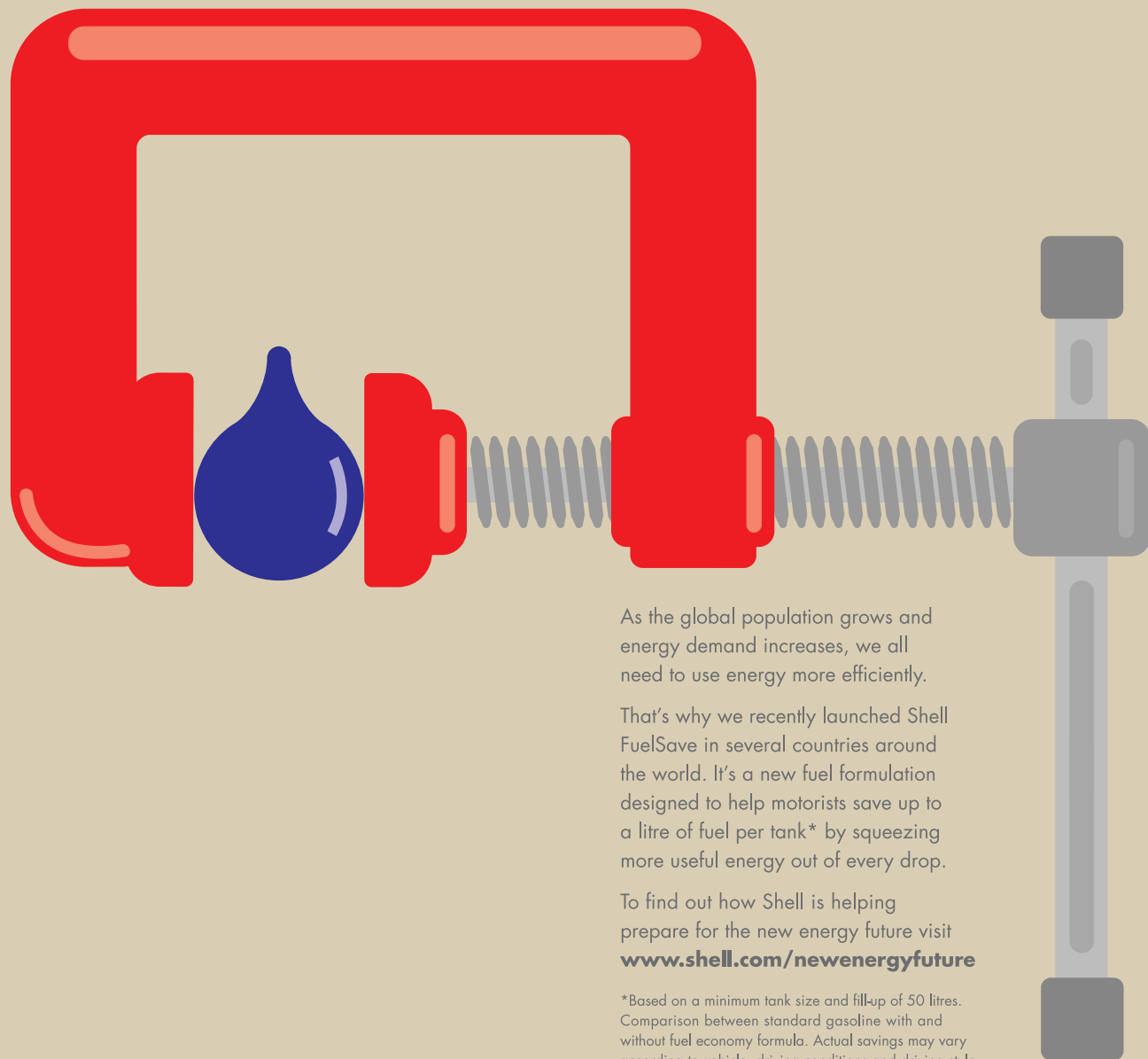
The PIC/OHR's tactics of political moralising, arm-twisting and dismissing elected representatives have only succeeded in weakening the international community's legitimacy and in souring notions of democracy. Ironically, the OHR supplies Republika Srpska with justification to edge towards *de facto* nationhood. Bullying will not help. Yet some call for more PIC/OHR 'toughness' ("It is time for a Plan B for Bosnia", 22-28 October). That is too much like Plan A.

The OHR must close, because, as the International Crisis Group said, "the OHR is now a non-democratic dispute-resolution mechanism".

Bosnia must be welcomed into the only 'entity' able to absorb its hopes, fears and internal differences: the EU. For that, the conditionality of the accession process is surely demanding enough. No OHR or PIC is needed. To provide security, the EU and NATO need to co-operate flexibly. As the EU's incoming enlargement commissioner, Štefan Füle, was an ambassador to NATO and as NATO's commander in Bosnia is a European, there are grounds for cautious optimism.

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