



PRESS RELEASE

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AMAC condemns construction of Alexander the Great statue in Skopje

The Australian Macedonian Advisory Council (AMAC) regrets the recent decision of the newly re-elected government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to raise a bronze statue of Alexander the Great, in the main square in Skopje on 14th June 2011. This action is yet another clear provocation from the Gruevski government that will further strain relations between the FYROM and Greece. It follows the renaming of Skopje airport as 'Alexander the Great Airport', the renaming of the FYROM's main highway 'Alexander of Macedon Highway' and the renaming main sporting area in Skopje as 'Phillip II Arena'.

Although the statue was officially named 'a warrior on a horse', it is clearly a depiction of Alexander the Great, the great Ancient Greek conqueror. Underlining their tie to Alexander, Greeks voting by Internet last month voted Alexander as the greatest Greek of all time in a year-long poll organized by TV station SKAI. AMAC concurs with the statement made by the Greek government: "This is usurpation of the Greek history...[this] is a provocation and it undermines our bilateral relations and the negotiation process under the United Nations." AMAC welcomes response of the EU which said in a statement that "if the FYROM continues to take actions perceived by Greece as 'provocations' and fails to make faster progress in its reforms, the country could lose its EU candidate status".

The statue was cast in the Fernando Marinelli foundry in Florence, Italy, and shipped to Skopje in parts, where it was finally assembled on June 14. The price of the statue is estimated to be 5.3 million euros (\$US 7.7 million). The statue is an eyesore reminiscent of the large bronze statues built by the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. It is a waste of resources, considering the shape of the FYROM economy and the fact unemployment rate of the FYROM is the highest in Europe, currently at 33%.

AMAC strongly believes that the government in the FYROM should start focusing on reforms required by the EU, such as those guaranteeing the freedom of press, instead of deflecting domestic attention away by making various nationalistic stunts which provoke Greece and other Balkan neighbours.

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