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Macedonia Plays Up Past Glory

By MATTHEW BRUNWASSER
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SKOPJE, [MACEDONIA](#) — In the view of many here, the neighbors have been bullying this little Balkan country for a long time.

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Georgi Licovski/European Pressphoto Agency
 A 30-ton statue of Alexander the Great in Skopje, Macedonia.

Bulgarians see its people as Bulgarians with accents. Serbia used to consider the land Southern Serbia and refuses to recognize its church. [Greece](#) accuses the country of nothing less than stealing its name, history and national symbols.

This week, Macedonia pushed back.

In a precisely calibrated display of political and civil engineering, workers lifted a 14.5-meter, or 47-foot, bronze statue of Alexander the Great, weighing 30 tons, and placed it on a 15-meter-high pedestal in the central square of Skopje, the capital.

“This is a way for Macedonia to affirm its national existence,” said Vasiliki Neofotistos, an anthropologist from the State University of New York at Buffalo studying identity politics in Macedonia. “Macedonia wants to advance the thesis that it is a cornerstone of Western civilization.”

This is no mere philosophical dilemma. Macedonia has been stuck in one of the most intractable disputes of the post-communist world: Greece has held international relations hostage for 20 years because it considers the name Macedonia an appropriation of its own Hellenic identity and its northern province of the same name.

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