

The Bulgarian Dilemma: The reunification of a people

Over the last one hundred years there haven't been many examples of nation states with similar cultures unifying themselves into a single nation state. China and Germany both come to mind. Neither example is entirely helpful or promising to the Bulgarian situation. Bulgaria is unlikely to regain territories lost to the Romanians or Greeks almost a hundred years ago. The European Union is unlikely to allow its member states to enter into territorial conflicts of any sort.

However the case of Macedonia offers a unique opportunity for Bulgaria to reunify with one of its neighbors, Macedonia. Once both regions, Bulgaria and Macedonia, had similar language and cultural identities, since then, they have been separated by over ninety years of propaganda and cultural indoctrination. Despite this cultural chasm which the Serbian authorities had attempted to cultivate, the language and culture of the Macedono-Bulgarians and Bulgarians are still remarkably similar.

The Bulgarians are currently in a unique situation to unify the Macedono-Bulgarian part of Macedonia with Bulgaria. Currently over a 100,000 Macedonians are awaiting Bulgarian passports in order to obtain the benefits of a European Union passport. However, Bulgarian embassy staff in Macedonia is limited to 14 individuals to process the applications. It is unclear whether this staffing situation is to prevent Macedono-Bulgarians from destabilizing the Bulgarian economy and swamping the social support systems in Bulgaria or because the European Union has pressured Bulgaria so as to prevent a wave of migration by Macedono-Bulgarians to central Europe. What is clear is the current economic situation in Macedonia is in a meltdown mode.

While Macedono-Bulgarians currently hold the a slim majority in the Macedonian parliament over the Albanians in Macedonia, what is unclear is what will happen should the balance of power tip in favour of the Albanians. Already one civil war has erupted in the region over control of the country between these two ethnic groups, and it is quite possible that the "Macedonians" will take up arms if they lose control of the parliament.

Regardless of any nationalistic ambitions, Bulgaria currently needs to have a comprehensive plan to deal with a possible second civil war in Macedonia. The possibility of mass refugees and widespread civilian casualties makes the act of sending arms to the Macedonians, as they did in the first civil war, a weak and ineffectual response. This escalation is dangerous, particularly if Albanians from Albania and Kosovo respond in kind. Political negotiations between Bulgaria and the Albanians in Macedonia and Macedono-Bulgarians must be put into place to prevent a second civil war.

The idea of a separation of Bulgarian and Albanian Macedonia goes hand in hand with a Bulgarian reunification. Yet to do this Bulgaria needs to create a comprehensive policy to reverse 90 years of "Macedonization" in the Bulgarian part of Macedonia. The first step for any Bulgarian reunification is to promote a national pride within Bulgaria itself so that despite the propaganda of the

communist party over the past decades, Bulgarians can again begin to see their brothers and sisters in Macedonia as Macedono-Bulgarians separated only by circumstances and distance. This difficult process must be followed by the political will to open up Bulgaria's society and institutions to Macedono-Bulgarians. 14 Employees to process 100,000 application is just not enough. Open borders between the two countries is necessity. Proactive support to Macedonia in the form of Bulgarian medical clinics, schools and churchs are a necessary start to reverse the "Macedonization" of the Macedono-Bulgarians in the region.

These efforts must be put into place before Macedonia goes into economic or civil war meltdown. Most importantly however, is for the average Bulgarian to see his neighbor in Macedonia as a fellow countryman separated only by circumstance.

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