

ON THE SITUATION OF THE BULGARIANS IN GREEK MACEDONIA

A DISCLOSURE

On the situation of the Bulgarians in Greek Macedonia

CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE MACEDONIAN PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATIONS
of the U.S.A. and Canada 107 South Capitol Avenue -
Indianapolis 25, Indiana, USA

June, 1960

The five centuries of Turkish rule in Macedonia terminated as a result of the Balkan War. The Balkan Christians believed that the time was ripe for pushing Turkey completely out of Europe. Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro forgot their mutual hatreds for a moment, formed an alliance and declared war on their ancient enemy. Turkey was defeated.

The Balkan allies soon began to quarrel over the division of Macedonia. A second Balkan war broke out, with Bulgaria on one side, and Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, Rumania and Turkey on the other. Bulgaria stood no chance and speedily lost the war. By the Treaty of Bucharest (August, 1913), which terminated the second Balkan War, Macedonia was divided between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. Commenting on that treaty, the Report of the Carnegie International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars (Washington. D. C., 1914) states:

"Unhappily, a nearer examination leads rather to the conclusion that the treaty of Bucharest has created a condition of things that is far from being durable. If the Bulgarian 'conquest' is almost annulled by it, the Greek and Serbian 'conquests' are not well established (page 69)." Ever since, the subsequent Balkan events have substantiated the above Report's prediction.

The lion's share of Macedonia fell to Greece. According to the above mentioned Carnegie Report (page 195), the ethnic composition of the population of Macedonia under Greek rule was as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Bulgarians— | 329,371 |
| Turks— | 314,854 |
| Greeks — | 236,755 |
| Wallachians (Roumanians) | 44,414 |
| Albanians— | 15,108 |
| Gypsies — | 25,302 |
| Jews — | 68,206 |
| Miscellaneous — | 8,019 |

Total 1,042,029

At that time, in the territory of Macedonia, occupied and annexed by Greece, there were 378 Bulgarian churches with 300 priests and 340 Bulgarian schools with 750 teachers and 19,000 students.

Tragedy fell upon the inhabitants of Macedonia in 1913. As soon as the Greek army occupied southern Macedonia, the Athens government immediately launched a policy of denationalization of the non-Greek population. All Bulgarian schools and churches in Greek Macedonia were closed, the priests and teachers banished, Bulgarian books, news papers, and other publications exterminated.

"Announcements and appeals to the population", states the Carnegie International Commission's Report, page 197, "were published in Greek, Turkish and **Yidish**, exactly as though the Bulgarian language did not exist, and Bulgarian remonstrances remained unheeded. To make the reality harmonize with the theory, the occupation army had recourse to the acts of violence which we know. After a sufficient demonstration had been made by the population, of the fate awaiting those who persisted in calling themselves Bulgarians, formal retractions began to be demanded. These demonstrations, which the villagers were forced to sign, conformed in the **Castoria** region to two types. According to one of the two declarations, the people were made to say that they had been Greeks from the most ancient times, but had called themselves Bulgarians under the influence of Bulgarian propaganda. According to the other, they were made to say that up to 1903, the population had been Hellenic, but that between 1903 and 1906, they had been forced to call themselves Bulgarians by the threats of the Bulgarian bands and **comitadjis**. The two models ended with the same declaration namely, that immediately on the army's arrival the population felt its Hellenism and asked to be received into the **bosom-of** the 'Great Church of Jesus Christ'. The Bulgarians were not 'Christians' in 'our sense'.. . The **evzones** played the part of apostles in this conversion at the bayonet's point. As examples we may cite the villages of **Gabresh, Drenoveni, Tchernovitsa, Tourie, Zagorichani, Dambeni**, etc. In the villages of **Breznitsa, Gorno, and Doino Nestram**, all the inhabitants were

thrown into prison and driven thereby to call themselves Greeks . . ." (page 197)

"Despite all these persecutions," states the Carnegie Report, page 200, "it may be said that in Greek [Aegean] Macedonia the simple fact that the ethnic difference between conquerors and oppressed is greater than in Serbian [Vardar] Macedonia, did serve to protect the Bulgarian population against -assimilation. Although the victors were satisfied with having changed names and statistics and teaching the peasants to say 'Good morning' and 'Good evening' in Greek instead of in Bulgarian, there was no real change in national consciousness."

Although the task of forcibly changing the national consciousness of an ethnic group is quite difficult, yet the Athens Greek authorities have resorted to all sorts of vicious and brutal methods in order to achieve their objective. For almost half a century—prior to and after the two World Wars—the Greek governments continuously and methodically have tried to eradicate all traces of Bulgarian history, language, traditions and culture in Macedonia. The names of places, villages, towns and cities have been changed with Greek appellations; family names and names of individuals have been forcibly changed with Greek endings. Thus, the Athens chauvinists are trying to establish the theory that there have never lived Bulgarians in Macedonia!

Contrary to what Greek politicians and clergymen have been or are now saying, the fact is that the Slav-speaking population of Macedonia is Bulgarian. Scholars and diplomats who have lived or visited Macedonia bear testimony to this truth. Numerous are the foreign impartial scholars whose works testify to the Bulgarian character of the Macedonian Slavs. Since 1903, scores of thousands of Macedono-Bulgarians immigrated into the United States and Canada.; Eighty-five per cent of these immigrants originated from what is now Greek Macedonia. All the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox churches in the United States and Canada are Macedono-Bulgarian; the priests and parishioners of these churches have originated mainly from Macedonia! This truth was so glaring that in various international conferences the Greek diplomats did not dare to contradict it. Greece had to admit the fact that within her expanded boundaries, along with the other non-Greek inhabitants, there live also Bulgarians. And she has signed international documents to protect the rights other minorities! Solemnly attesting her signature to them, Greece has never intended to keep faith with her international agreements.

Following are some of the international agreements whose spirit Greece has violated:

1. Greece has signed the Treaty of Neuilly (November 27, 1919) and article 46 of this Treaty provides for the protection of minorities rights;
2. The "Treaty for the Protection of Foreign Minorities in Greece" was signed by England, France, Italy and Japan and also by Greece on August 10, 1920, at Sevres France (Hence the Treaty of Sevres).
3. On July 27, 1924, the Greek military authorities, in order, to frighten the Bulgarian peasants, massacred seventeen persons from the Macedonian villages of Farlis and Lovcha. Immediately, the-Council of the League of Nations appointed a mixed Commission to investigate the tragic event. The Commission established beyond any doubt the guilt of the Greek authorities. It was: a clear; case of brutal extermination of the Bulgarian minority in Greek Macedonia. However, as a result of this international investigation, Greece was compelled to admit the existence of a Bulgarian minority. As a consequence, on September 29, 1924 Kalfov and Politis, in the name of Bulgaria and Greece, signed a Protocol for the protection of the Bulgarian minority in Greece. The Protocol was signed also by Sir Eric Drummond, the Secretary General of the League of Nations. The agreement reached was acclaimed by the League of Nations as a great success. In fulfilling the stipulations of the Protocol, Greece deposited with the League of Nations' Secretariat a manual for her Bulgarian minority called "Abecedar", in order "to calm the conscience" of the world's public opinion. But Greece again failed to honor her signature . The Greek Parliament rejected the Protocol. Then, on March 14, 1925, the League of Nations by a special motion, reprimanded the action of the Greek Legislators,
4. After World War II, Greece has signed other international agreements. She accepted the spirit of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Another similar document, "The European Convention on Human Rights, " promulgated on March 28. 1953, was also ratified by Greece. But Greece never did care about the "human rights" other minorities, whether they are Bulgarian, Rumanian, or Albanian.
5. On July 31, 1954, 400 delegates of the World Presbyterian Alliance, assembled in Princeton, N. J., representing 66 self-governing church bodies from 45 countries, unanimously approved a resolution which took sharply to task the Orthodox Church of Greece. If the Greek Orthodox Church has imposed restrictions on religious freedom for its own national citizens, one could readily imagine the extent of restrictions it has imposed on non-Greek inhabitants living within the political boundaries of the Greek state.

Athens has relentlessly tried, for the past forty-seven years to assimilate the Bulgarian speaking population of Macedonia. All efforts on the part of the ;Greek authorities to coerce the Bulgarian minority

to accept the Greek language are in vain. That is why last summer the Greek authorities resorted to an entirely new but cruel method of forcible assimilation.

The Greek newspaper "Eliniki Phoni" (Greek Voice) of Florina, published on August 8, 1959, the following announcement:

"Tomorrow the inhabitants of Atrapos (Atrapos is the new Greek name of an old Bulgarian village known to the people of the- Flonna district for centuries as Krapeshina) will swear before God and the people in an official ceremony that hence forward they will promise not to speak the Slav dialect, which in the hands of Slav propagandist, has become a weapon pointed at the national consciousness of the Macedonians. The proud people Atropos will take an oath to speak Greek only, so that in this way they may stress their Greek origin and their Greek consciousness"... (For a photostatic copy of this announcement see Appendix A).

The Greek newspaper "Eliniki Voras" in the issue of August 11, 1959, published the text of the above oath as follows:

"I swear before God, the people, and the authorities that from this day forward I shall cease to speak the Slav dialect which is the cause for misapprehension only to the enemy of our fatherland-the Bulgarians."

The Athens' newspaper "Sphera" (Sphere) in the issue of September 1, 1959, published a detailed article over the event which took place in the village of Atropos (Krapeshina) accompanied also by a photograph of the moment when the villagers-mostly women and children-took "the oath before God." The article states that representatives from 100 neighboring villages, together with many military and civil authorities, were present at the ceremony. The newspaper published also the oath as follows:

7 do promise before God, the people, and the official state authorities, that from this day on I shall cease to speak the Slav dialect which gives ground/or- misunderstandings to the enemies of our countr'-the Bulgarians-and that I will speak always and everywhere the official language of our fatherland, the Greek language, in which the Holy Gospel is written." (For a photostatic reproduction of this article together with the photograph, see Appendix B).

Another Greek newspaper, "Phoni tis Kastorias", in the issue of October 4, 1959, reprints an article from the Salonica newspaper "Makedonia" with the following introduction:

"During the last two months the inhabitants of some villages in Northern Greece (1 Aegean 1 Macedonia) in official mass ceremonies proclaimed that they will cease to use the Slav dialect and that in the future they will speak only Greek. The first ceremony took place in the village of Trebeno, district of Koiani, which has according to the census of 1952, 692 inhabitants. It was followed by other villages such as Breshcheni, Kostour district (41 inhabitants), Atropos (Krapeshina), Florina district, (466 inhabitants) and so forth" (See Appendix C).

The above quotations are sufficient to demonstrate the nature and method of pressure applied by the Greek authorities to hasten the assimilation of the Bulgarian speaking people in Macedonia. Must one conclude that Greece, the "cradle of democracy", has degenerated to such vicious intolerance, inhuman and undemocratic practices?

Greek chauvinistic propagandists maintain that there are no Bulgarians or Bulgarian speaking people in Macedonia. They are "all Greeks" they say, with a Greek national consciousness. If such assertions are really true, why is it that Greek military and civil authorities are forcing the inhabitants of the villages to swear an "oath before God" not to speak their "Slav dialect", which, of course, is the Bulgarian language? It would seem strange, if not ridiculous, to forcibly pressure "Greek people" to speak only the Greek language.

Reluctantly, some Greek propagandists admit the existence of an ethnic Bulgarian speaking people in Macedonia, but, they say, it is an insignificant minority. One may well ask then, why is it that Greece is so much disturbed of such a numerically small minority? Since such a minority exists, why not tolerate and respect it within the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Greece has solemnly accepted and signed?

If there is a sincere desire for peace, lasting tranquillity, and good neighbor relations among the Balkan peoples, all disturbing causes of friction and hatred should be intelligently eliminated. Greece's treatment of other Bulgarian minority certainly is not conducive to peace and respect for the dignity of man. This unhappy situation which now exists in Greek Macedonia is disturbing to scores of thousands of American and Canadian citizens who have originated from that area. Many of these unfortunate people have close relatives in the United States and Canada. Since they are gagged and cannot raise their voice in protest against Greece's new method of denationalization, we, as free citizens of the freedom loving countries, the United States and Canada, speak in their behalf.

In the name of the sacred principles of Human Rights, decency, and respect for the dignity of man, may we, Sir, ask that you, within propriety, exert your utmost influence and entreat the Athens' government stop forcing the "oath before God" on the Bulgarians in Macedonia in order to renounce their century - old language and culture.

Sincerely,

Macedonians Patriotic **June, 1960**
Canada

f The Central Committee of the
Organizations of the United States and

(signed)
Methody D. Chaneff, President
Ohio

(signed) Peter
G. Atzeff, Vice-President Fort
Wayne, Ind.

(signed) Christ
Anastasoff, Vice-President St.
Louis, Mo.

(signed)
Tashe G. Popcheff, Treasurer
Indianapolis, Ind.

(signed) **Luben. Dimitroff**,
Secretary Indianapolis, Ind.

(signed) James
Bitove

[brother of John Bitove - Representative of Mr. Kiro Gligorov in Toronto today]
Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church "St. George", Toronto, Ont.,
Canada

(signed) Very Rev. **H.**
Elieff, Rector

Sts. Cyril and Methody Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern
Orthodox Cathedral, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

(signed)
Reverend Jordan **Dimoff**, Parish Priest **Sts. Cyril and**
Methody Macedono-Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox
Cathedral, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

N. Boyadjieff (signed)

N. Mihailoff (signed)

C. Stavro (signed)

Macedonian Patriotic Organization "Victory"
Toronto, Ont., Canada

(signed) Rev.
Vasil Mihailoff Toronto,
Ontario, Canada

(signed) Rev.
Kyrill Yoncheff Toledo,
Ohio

(signed)
Very Reverent George **Nicoloff**, Canton,
Counselor, Detroit, Mich.

(signed) **Blagoy**
Markoff, Counselor Toronto,
Ont., Canada

(signed) **Vasil**
Stoyanoff, Alternate
Toronto, Ont. Canada

(signed)
Austin **Mircheff**, Alternate
Clairton, Pa.

» * » *

Opinion: How do you know a legend when you meet one?

I don't remember the first time I met Ivan **Michailov**. In fact I don't remember any of the times I met him, except for the last one. I know though, that I must have met him at least half a dozen times. I was a child just learning to walk the first time. The last time I saw him was about 2 years before he died. I was in my early 20's. He was an old man. He kept asking me about the 'Macedonian Question'. I thought that was kind of weird because the way *7 grew up there really wasn't any question; regardless I really wasn't a student of history I knew that there was only one Bulgaria - Bulgaria of San Stefano.*

When it comes right down to it, what are the defining characteristics of a legend? I am not sure I know. I would guess that a legend is someone whose activities go beyond normal ones. Aren't they people who take great risks? But they also have to have an underlying philosophy for those risks; there has to be a reason for what they do. Their acts also have to have the ability to capture peoples' imaginations. The most important part is that other people have to recognise the actions of a legend in their context. without that context you just have another person whose actions seem inexplicable.

I'm sure most of you who read this are aware of Ivan **Michailov's** contribution to the Bulgarian cause and his views on the Macedonian Question. In fact, most of you probably know more than I do. From

what I know he did a lot of work. Probably most of it forwarded our cause. The thing is, there are a lot of people like me who grew up outside of Bulgaria . The language I speak most is not Bulgarian, although I speak that better than most of the first generation types that I've ever met. Bulgaria was always very far away, even though I have had the privilege to visit many times. So how do I know Ivan Michailov is a legend? The point is that I don't. I met a very old man, who was always referred to as 'Cheecho Radko' in my presence. I think it's great that there are people who can and do remember all the important things that Ivan Michailov did. Unfortunately, unless those people can make the deeds of Ivan Michailov real for me and the ones for whom Bulgaria is a foreign country, his importance will die soon after he did. And whether he is a legend or not won't matter.

You see, I'm pretty sure that Ivan Michailov was a legend. But you know - he couldn't help me understand the "Macedonian Question". He didn't know my life so he couldn't explain his life in a way that I could understand. In fact nobody ever has, not even my father who knew Ivan Michailov very well. What's important for me is to know what he was like, how he grew up, what was going on in his world. May be then I can understand why he was important. Until then he will be just that "diado" for me.

J. Miadenova 15.02.95