

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

I don't remember the first time I met Ivan Mihailov. 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 Mihailov'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 Mihailov 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 Mihailov did. Unfortunately, unless those people can make the deeds of Ivan Mihailov 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 Mihailov was a legend. But pretty sure - 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 Mihailov 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

Mr.Ivan Mihailov with the author in the rail road station of FIUGGI Italy Aug. 1967

