

To :Mr. Jesse Flis Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Department of Foreign Affairs Ottawa/ Ontario

From : Macedonian Patriotic Organization/ "Luben Dimitroff"

17 Regent St./ Toronto, Ontario

Re : The Situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr, Jesse Flis : Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.
Department of Foreign Affairs Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Mr. Flis,

It has been a long time since I have attempted to write a letter to a member of parliament, let alone to a person who has some influence over the foreign affairs of Canada.

We seem to meet from time to time at important social affairs over cocktails, where you asked me to write on the subject of the Macedonian question from a Bulgarian perspective. Current events in the F.R.Y. (Former Republic of Yugoslavia) make it even more imperative for me to explain the current situation.

So here it is, in a nutshell....

Sincerely,

/signature/

George Mladcnov B.S.Ph.,

President of the Macedonian Patriotic Organization, "Luben Dimitroff

/signature/

Atanas Delivanov B.A.Sc.

Secretary of the Macedonian Patriotic Organization, "Luben Dimitroff Date.June 10.1995 edited by G.G.M

Much of what we know geographically as Bulgaria, Macedonia, Thrace and Dobrudja was originally populated by a common people known as the Bulgars. They spoke a common language, Bulgarian and had a common Orthodox religion, despite being conquered by the Ottoman Empire. This occupation continued until early 1878 when a Bulgarian uprising trapped a large portion of the Turkish army between an advancing Russian army and a small force of Bulgarian patriots. This victory unified the Bulgars as never before and crystallized a new national consciousness. The treaty of San Stefano, signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, in March 1878, brought an end to the war and formally acknowledged the existence of the Bulgarian nation. This newly created Bulgarian state included most of the territories

inhabited by Bulgarians, in particular the region of present day Bulgaria, Vardar Macedonia (in F.Y.R.), Aegean Macedonia (in present day Greece) and Thrace (in both Greece and Turkey). The imperial powers of the time objected to such a big state which was friendly to Russia and could become a Russian spring board into the European and Mediterranean theaters. Almost immediately the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Prussian empire (Germany), the British and the French convened in Berlin to prevent Russian influence from spreading. This conference was known as the congress of Berlin of 1878. The great powers decided to impose a unilateral solution which partitioned Bulgaria proper into two regions :

Eastern Rumelia and the principality of Bulgaria. Eastern Rumelia, Macedonia and Thrace were to be governed, as before, by the Ottoman Empire whereas the principality of Bulgaria was to be given a limited autonomy. The Russians were powerless to prevent the partitioning of the newly liberated state.

However the Bulgarian people were determined to re-unify their partitioned state. The Bulgarian people fought a number of wars in order to unite its people. The first war in 1885 (the war of unification) liberated eastern Rumelia from the Ottoman Empire. In 1903 the Bulgarians in Macedonia and Thrace had an unsuccessfully tried to leave the Ottoman Empire. The remaining regions were finally liberated in 1912 by a coalition made up of Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. However in 1913, after the Ottoman Empire had been defeated, the coalition collapsed and began arguing about which liberated region was to be governed by which country. The main point of contention was the governance of Macedonia and Thrace, both primarily inhabited by Bulgarians. Neither the Greeks nor the Serbs wished to be bound by the original agreement made at the beginning of the war, which stipulated that those regions being populated mostly by Bulgarians were to be governed by Bulgaria. This led almost immediately to yet another war, called the Balkan war, which pitted the Serbs, Greeks and Romanians against a badly outnumbered Bulgaria. Bulgaria was quickly defeated and yet again partitioned, losing Macedonia to the Serbs and the

Greeks, Thrace to the Greeks and Drobruja to the Romanians¹.

The Bulgarians in Macedonia enjoyed a brief period of freedom during the First World War while they were liberated by the Bulgarian army. This moment was not to last, as the territory was re conquered by the Serbs and the Greeks who sided with the western powers during the war.

After the First World War the Greeks and the Serbs embarked on a path of ethnic cleansing and forced cultural assimilation. Bulgarian schools and churches were closed, and any use of the Bulgarian language written or spoken, was punished by harsh jail sentences and severe fines. Bulgarians who expressed their culture or nationality were rounded up and executed or sent to prison. The Greeks and the Serbs wanted a complete assimilation of the Bulgarian population in Macedonia and Thrace, leaving no remnant of Bulgarian culture. This harsh policy continued unabated until 1941 when both Yugoslavia and Greece fell to the Germans. Despite over 2 decades of oppression the population still remained predominantly Bulgarian and welcomed the brief re unification with their fellow Bulgarians with open arms. Because Bulgaria did not participate in the second world war they could not uphold their claim to Macedonia and Thrace against those of the Serbs and Greeks who had fought against the Germans.

An even more vicious period of ethnic cleansing against the Bulgarian populations occurred after those regions were reincorporated into Yugoslavia and Greece. The Serbs killed over 12,000 Bulgarians and immediately imprisoned 120,000 more, out of a Bulgarian population of 1.2 million. The lack of success in their previous policy of cultural assimilation led them to change a significant part of their oppressive policy. Whereas before they tried to impose the Serbian language and culture unilaterally on the Bulgarian people, a policy which met with much resistance, now they permitted Bulgarian to be spoken, albeit with several limiting restrictions.

Bulgarian was to be taught in schools in a bastardized form with Serbian characters and words infused into this new language, known commonly today as "Macedonian". The Serbs hoped to first quench the national aspirations of the Macedonian-Bulgarians, who wished to be reunited with their kin in Bulgaria. In order to do this they tried to convince the conquered Bulgarians that they were actually liberated "Macedonians" and formed part of a culture previously unknown for over 2,000 years. The Bulgarian youth were to be taught that they were Macedonians culturally and linguistically distinct from Bulgaria. The policy of cultural assimilation could then proceed, although at a slower pace than before. With the repressive and mutually hostile regimes on both sides of the Yugoslavian and Bulgarian border the Bulgarians in Yugoslavia were culturally and socially isolated for over 50 years. Despite this policy over 500,000 self-admitted Bulgarians still exist in Macedonia today.

Contemporary Situation

In September of 1991 the Macedonian provincial parliament held a referendum for independence from Yugoslavia which passed with overwhelming support from the people. Three major political parties were formed after independence: the Macedonian socialist party (made up of the former Serbo-communists), the Albanian democratic party and the Bulgarian re-unification party (IMRO: internal Macedonian revolutionary organization). The Bulgarian independence party won the majority of seats in the first parliamentary elections but were defeated by a coalition government formed by the former Serbo-communists (Macedonian communists) and the Albanian nationalists.³ The Albanian party joined the communist party primarily out of fear that they would lose their cultural identity in the event of a Bulgarian unification and in order to gain a disproportionate share of political concessions. Fears that the pro-Bulgarian party would form a majority government prompted the pro-Serbian government to carry out widespread intimidation, police brutality and questionable electoral practices before and during the second parliamentary elections (1994) to keep itself in power. These elections were marred by so much corruption that the pro-Bulgarian party, the then official opposition, refused to participate in the final stages of the election. The present government is still a coalition of Serbian ex-communists and Albanian nationalists.

Macedonia's present population is made up of predominantly Bulgarians, with about a quarter of the population being Albanian and the remaining 5% made up of Vlahs (Romanians), Turks, Romi (Gypsies) and Serbs. Cultural and religious differences between the Bulgarian and Albanian population make the stability of the region severely in question. The Albanians are predominantly Muslim and speak a separate (Albanian) language and neither Bulgarians nor Albanians see themselves as "Macedonian". This fact alone puts the long term stability of the region in doubt. Unlike other regions of the former Republic of Yugoslavia, which have their own

distinct cultures, the people of Macedonia still have close cultural and linguistic ties to their neighboring countries: Bulgaria and Albania. Mutual hatred of the Serbs, by both the Albanians and the Bulgarians in Macedonia virtually guarantee the disintegration of the fledgling republic as we know it. A forced or imposed solution on the majority of the population to keep the republic together does not seem likely of success, given the temperament of the people living in Macedonia.

Perhaps the most reasonable solution is to allow the Albanians to join with Albania and the Bulgarians to join with Bulgaria. Unfortunately this solution is not very popular in international circles. The Serbs are unwilling to lose their influence over the fledgling republic, as most certainly would occur in the above mentioned case. The Greeks oppose this plan for fear that it will incite nationalistic feelings amongst its own Bulgarian population in Aegean Macedonia. The European nations are fearful to take any bold steps in the regions for fear of starting a multi-national war.

The Americans, in particular, have recognized this potentially volatile situation and have posted 500 peace keepers in the region.

Solution

A slow reintegration of Macedonia into both Bulgaria and Albania seems to offer the best chance of success for averting a civil war. This policy would avoid much of the extreme violence which occurs during civil disorders and would guarantee the safety and rights of the existing minority groups. A division of the region into Albanian and Bulgarian provinces could be brought about in much the same way as Czechoslovakia divided itself into the Czech and Slovak Republics. This course of action would address the fears of both the Greeks and the Serbs while still meeting the national aspirations of the diverse Macedonian population. Reintegration of the provinces into their respective countries could eventually be brought about by long term trade agreements and cultural associations, both of which would provide a much needed economic and social stability to the region. Unfortunately leadership from the international community has been lacking and any solution to this dilemma will have to be developed locally by the Bulgarian and Albanian people regardless of any regional status quo.

" So in a nutshell, this is the situation and a possible solution".

Appendix to the material which was sent to the Canadian foreign office in June 1995

The spring of 2001 in the FYROM was a conflict mainly between the Albanians and the Serbo-Macedonians. The other major cultural groups which historically played a significant role in the turn of the last century, such as the Bulgarians, oppressed from before 1941 and after 1944, only took a minor role in these conflicts. Having been forcibly dispossessed of their Bulgarian culture and identity this people developed a severe aversion to becoming involved in cultural conflicts.

Yet as the conflict between the Albanians and Serbo-Macedonians intensified, more and “Macedonians” eager to escape the fallout of the hostilities “rediscovered” their Bulgarian roots by applying for Bulgarian citizenship. To date the Bulgarian government has yet to release any information regarding the number of passports issued to Macedono-Bulgarians. In addition more and more “Macedonians” are choosing to study in Bulgaria because of the employment opportunities in Europe which Bulgarian diploma offers.

None of this however addresses the two central issues of concern to leaders and diplomats of the region. What can be expected from the Bulgarian government in terms of national policy and what and when will be the eventual reaction of the Albanians in the region?

To date the Bulgarian government has disavowed any involvement in the region and any national claims to all lost territories. Similarly the Bulgarian people overwhelmed by cynicism, nihilism and poverty, have shown a similar disinterest in the region. This is in stark contrast to the past when the Bulgarian people were outraged by the treatment of their bothers and sisters in the dispossessed territories. The Bulgarian government has shown little leadership and understanding in this area. This is not entirely the parliaments fault, as the desires of each successive populist government have been unable to form a cohesive long term national policy. Indeed it seems as if the Bulgarian government is forever chasing the desires of shifting popular sentiment.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and American commitments in the Middle East the Americans have shown little interest in the region. The European Union seems happy to keep the former Warsaw Pact nations and newly Balkanized nations as dumping grounds for their high priced and luxury goods. Little interest has been shown in dealing seriously with future conflicts such as the developing hostilities in FYROM.

The conflict incited by Serbo-Macedonian chauvinism and Albanian national desires has created a Gordian knot which seems to have no peaceful solution other than the separation of the two cultural groups. While the Albanians have stated their goal to reunify the severed Albanian territories, the “Macedonians” have shown little desire to seek a peaceable partitioning of the unstable nation state. Yet eventual partition peaceful or otherwise is the only long term solution. Whether the partitioned Macedonian Territory can exist by itself or in a union with Bulgaria is a question of much concern. While Bulgaria would provide a much needed economic and industrial boost to the impoverished territory of “Vardar” Macedonia, 40 years of ethnic cleansing, Serbo-Macedonian propaganda and internment have made any union a difficult proposition. It is doubtful that an isolated impoverished “Vardar” Macedonia could exist as a Luxemburg of the Balkans.

G. Mladenov

15 sep 2003.

Thanking you for you attention,

I remain,

Yours Truly.

/signature/

G. Miadenov.

NOTES

1. The causes of the 1st Balkan war are well documented in the "Report of the International

Commission To Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan wars", the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace,1914 , Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd, Aylcsbury, Great Britain.

2 Based on contemporary US State Department Reports (1983).

3 Pettifer J. Macedonia: still the apple of discord. The World Today 1995; 51:55-8.

Final texts has been edited by Gosho Mladenov L.L.B.