

# UMD Voice



## Leadership Feature: George Atanasoski



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## Diaspora Leadership Feature: George Atanasoski

By Aleksandar Mitreski, UMD Vice President, Chairman of the Board

**AM: Mr. Atanasoski, thank you for agreeing to do an exclusive interview for UMD Voice. Can you tell us about your background, and why you decided to move to the United States?**

GA: I was born in 1952, in the center of Macedonia, in the village of Marul, near Prilep. In 1970, I left for America to pursue my career as an engineer working for New York University. After five years, together with my brother Josif, I founded the industrial complex Microflex Inc., located in Ormond Beach, Florida. But, I never left Macedonia completely. My heart is there and I spend a lot of time in Macedonia. My son also recently moved there so one might say that, thanks to modern transportation, I truly am a Macedonian and an American.

**AM: Microflex, Inc. has become a global provider of high quality flexible metal products, serving the automotive, petrochemical, and power generation industries. Where do you see the future of Microflex?**

GA: So far we have obtained all the highest certifications in the industry and have as clients major world corporations like: Ford, Chrysler, General Motors, General Electric, NASA, Siemens, ABB, Bechtel, Rolls Royce and many others. We expanded by building a special production facility for the automotive industry, and we strive to become a world leader in the field. We are constantly looking for new opportunities, including the European markets, which we can service through Macedonia.

**AM: Whenever someone mentions the importance of the Diaspora investing in Macedonia, your name comes up. You have been termed as the largest Diaspora-based investor in Macedonia. What types of business are you involved in Macedonia?**

GA: It is true that I'm the largest investor from the Diaspora. So far, I have opened several hotels, restaurants, a gas station, a large mill and bakery, a publishing house and a TV station. I constantly look for more opportunities although I have to say that the investment climate in Macedonia is not the best. There are a lot of problems facing potential investors, as many who



have tried could testify. My love for Macedonia, however, drives me to continue and I will never cease to try and help my country.

**AM: Macedonia's economy has had its ups and downs. What potential do you see there? What industries should they focus on developing? What advice would you offer, to strengthen the Macedonian economy?**

GA: Many successful countries in the world rely heavily on Diaspora foreign investments. It is my belief that this is exactly what Macedonia needs. Instead of looking for and wooing foreign investors, Macedonia should concentrate on attracting the Diaspora to invest in Macedonia. The Diaspora is emotionally involved with Macedonia, and they may see potential for investment where others can't. I am an example of this concept. Of course, the Macedonian state must create a healthy investment atmosphere by completing necessary reforms. So far, there are still too many horror stories of failed Diaspora investors, so we need to change that. Let's not forget that the Diaspora already contributes heavily to

the Macedonian economy, with close to \$2 billion annually in private money transfers. It is estimated that more than 160,000 Macedonian families live from these transfers. Macedonia needs to create the conditions for many in the Diaspora to return, as well. The Macedonian Alliance has specific plans for achieving this goal. Finally, the world needs healthy, good tasting foods and Macedonia has the best tasting tomatoes and peppers in the world. I believe that agriculture needs further improvement.

**AM: For close to 20 years, you have owned and operated the international magazine Makedonsko Sonce. And two years ago, you founded a TV station in Macedonia called TV Sonce. What is mission behind these media outlets?**

GA: Together with several other patriots, I founded Makedonsko Sonce to be a vehicle where the truth about Macedonia is written and spread. We gave space to countless Macedonian historians, writers and journalists to write about Macedonia, about our links with Ancient Macedonia, about the





activities of Macedonians around the world and especially those in our neighborhood. Gradually, Makedonsko Sonce became a center for debate on Macedonian matters. In time, I realized that television is a much more powerful medium that can reach a wider audience, so I decided to transform Makedonsko Sonce into TV Sonce. The goal remains the same: to spread the word about Macedonia to all corners of the world. At the same time, we are the leader in assisting Macedonian organizations in neighboring countries, and we invite others to do the same.

**AM: Your name has become synonymous with protecting Macedonia's rightful, ancestral and constitutional name, and protection of Macedonian human rights in Southeast Europe.**



**What would you recommend for the future of these causes?**

GA: Let me say immediately that I'm totally against changing our name. I'm also against negotiations about our name, because that sends a wrong message to the world. If you negotiate, then you must be ready to make a compromise. We simply cannot make a compromise about our name or our identity. We had them for thousands of years and our next generations surely need them to remain untarnished as well. The Macedonian Alliance has actively been involved in lobbying around the world to that effect.

**AM: Many people know you as a presidential candidate in the Republic of Macedonia. Why have you become involved in Macedonian politics?**

GA: I believe that it is time for a change in Macedonian politics. So far we have seen politicians coming to power in order to get rich. I don't need to do that since I'm already rich. As a sincere Macedonian patriot with vast business experience, I'm confident I can lead Macedonia toward prosperity and fulfillment of our national goals.

**AM: In May 2005, you were honored with the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in New York. What does this mean for you?**

GA: It was a great honor for me, of course, but also for all Macedonians. The medal's significance is great as it symbolizes the opportunities our people have had in this great country of America, and the great success we have achieved. All Macedonians greatly appreciate American support, but we also have to double and triple our efforts to lobby the government to continue this policy. ✨