

REMEMBERING

about the problems of the political immigration and the Macedonian refugees from the Aegean part of Macedonia in the Republic of Macedonia

For better understanding of the problems pressing them, in short, here is the genesis of this category of citizens in the Republic of Macedonia.

The situation of the Macedonians in the Aegean part of Macedonia between the two world wars was the same as in the other parts of divided Macedonia after the Balkan Wars which was sanctioned in the Peace Agreements after the First World War: a situation of hard exploitation, national slavery, and many different measures of denationalization and assimilation, including all the elements of genocide.

It was those kinds of conditions the Macedonian people found themselves facing at the beginning of the Second World War which, in Greece, started with the attack of Fascist Italy in October 1940.

Macedonians paid a dear price as victims on the Albanian Front as well, not because they loved and respected the Greek State, even then ruled by the evil-reputed and cruel Metaxa fascist dictatorship, but because they wanted to realize their freedom-loving feelings and to protect their centuries old hearths.

Because of our belief in the anti - Fascistic forces, we joined in great numbers the Peoples' freedom Struggle against Fascism in Greece. The principals of the Atlantic Declaration gave us extra hopes that in that war we would realize our reams for a more just society, as well as national freedom. We were sorely disillusioned.

We were disillusioned by the Triple Alliance who put their strategic interests above all, dramatically changing the history for the Macedonians during the Second World War in December 1944. We were also disillusioned by the companions of the Greek Reactionary Movement, during the people's freedom

and anti-Fascistic war. Even during the struggle they took activities obstruct and diminish the anti-Fascistic struggle of the Macedonian people in the Aegean part Macedonia. They did not allow the initiation of the Macedonian People's Freedom Movement and even asked help from the equivalent Macedonian movement in the Vardar part of Macedonia to discipline us within the framework of the Greek movement as "the only correct path to realize our ideals".

The Greek movement, however, showed its real face with its stance in January 1944 regarding the needs of "Strategic Border Restructuring" - a thesis of the Greek immigrant government, a request which previewed the enlargement of Greece to the North and the taking of new Macedonian territories from the Vardar and Pirin parts of Macedonia.

The stance of the "Strategic Border Restructuring" would become official in the agreement of May 1944 between the immigrant government and the Resistance Movement in the country, and the government of the so-called "National Unity". We had no other way but to express our disagreement and with one Partisan battalion we quit ELAS and EAM (The army of the Greek Movement and the Greek political organizations), and we joined the Macedonian movement of the Vardar part of Macedonia. An agreement was made between the Greek Resistance Movement and the General staff of NOB (People's Freedom War) of Macedonia that the Partisan battalion must join ELAS again and, at the end of July, 1944 it did.

According to the agreement (which both sides understood differently) separate Macedonian Partisan units were to be formed in the ranks of ELAS. The Greeks, however, were hindering it. Actually, this was against the program of the Greek government of "National Unity" and "only to delude the Macedonians", two Macedonian companies were to be formed. As a result, one Lerin-Kostur and one Voden battalion were formed but were never allowed to enlarge their ranks. At the end of October 1944, the Greeks tried, with their tactics, to destroy the battalions with requests to move them to the South. So, the Greeks broke this agreement as well.

The two above mentioned battalions, to escape from greater troubles, retreated to the territory of the Vardar part of Macedonia where they formed the Aegean Brigade. These were the first political immigrants from the Aegean part of Macedonia to the Republic of Macedonia. Previously, in conditions of the Balkan and First World War, as well as between the two world wars, smaller groups of refugees from the Aegean part were only in the Strumica area.

As a result of the December clash in Athens in 1944 and the agreement of February 1945 in Varkiza, the power of the Athens Monarch-Fascistic regime grew, due to the waves of political refugees from the Aegean part of Macedonia to the Vardar part of Macedonia, and to Bulgaria from the eastern Aegean part of Macedonia. These refugees later transferred to liberated Macedonia.

As it is known, the Civil War in Greece burned on to the end of 1949 and during all that time there were refugees. The biggest wave of refugees came in the summer of 1948 when the children were evacuated and transferred all over the Eastern European countries.

The waves of political immigration and refugees flowed within the conditions of broken relations between Yugoslavia on one side, and the resolution of the Cominform on the other. Many families were hurled all over Eastern Europe for many years and were separated without any contact, especially with those relatives living in the Republic of Macedonia.

The gathering of the families started after the normalization of the relationship (1955-56) Some families reunited in the countries over-seas, some in Eastern Europe, but the largest number decided to return to the liberated part of their fatherland - the Republic of Macedonia. Here we find the largest number of political immigrants from the Aegean part of Macedonia during and after the Second World War.

As a result of the relationship of the ex-Yugoslavian Federation and the international relations with the bi-polarity, this category of citizens shared the destiny of the cold war, even though Yugoslavia did not belong to the Blocks. In this unsupportable situation of undefined status this category of citizens accepted Macedonian citizenship and, therefore, became equal citizens of this country and were able to organize their daily life. However, there is one specificity: according to the international law, they illegally became citizens of this country because they had not entered legally the territory of Macedonia. They had not been released from their Greek citizenship.

That epilogue to the status of the political immigration from the Aegean part of Macedonia determined the stance and measures of the Greek government. The Greek regime, during he period of the Civil war and after its end, brought a number of laws and government decrees, and undertook activities for the purpose of making the life of the Macedonians unbearable. They had to find their solution for a better life in the neighboring countries and across the ocean.

With a number of laws and measures, their properties were confiscated or simply, the properties of the absent Macedonians were sequestered with the idea of leaving them without a material base for their existence in their heartland.

Furthermore, those who "legally" and "voluntarily" wanted to immigrate, were asked to sign a statement that they would never return to Greece. A number of immigrants were deprived of their Greek citizenship by a decree of the Greek government. But in the 80's, with the appointment of Andreas Papandreu as head of the government, the politics of "National Reconciliation" were inaugurated with a decree, when, by first and last name (as we were informed by persons reading the "Official Paper"), citizenship was returned to the Macedonians as well.

But, when the Law for regulation of the properties of the returned political immigrants and refugees from Eastern European countries -who, by the way, were there because of the Civil War and the defeat of DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) - was laid down, they did not lose the chance to find a way to exclude the Macedonians from that process. In the law they dared to write the racist article that this applies only to "Greeks by origin". This means that the Macedonians who wanted to return to Greece would have to declare themselves Greeks in the application forms. However, this was not a hundred percent guaranty for obtaining their visas. It is very clear, even to the politically uneducated, that Greece took unheard of measures to stop the returning of the Macedonians to their hearthland and to their properties. According to this, the strategic goals of Greece regarding the return of the Macedonian political immigrants and refugees are very clear. This appears to be a part of the general Greek strategy about the Macedonian question, which was especially expressed after the independence of the Republic of Macedonia - to stop its existence at any price. If they didn't have the means at hand (because of the international circumstances protecting the Republic of Macedonia for the purpose of escaping the conflict wider in Europe, which would also confront the members of NATO, Turkey and Greece), then they would provide obstruction by keeping the question open.

The obstructions of the Greeks have not stopped since 1944 when the historical decisions of ASNOM were proclaimed. On the contrary, they increased with the Greek propaganda activities from the 80's to today. The publications of that time address this, even the unscrupulous statements of A. Papandreu, as a President of the government, that there were no Macedonians in the Balkans, but only Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians. In one of his statements he mentioned the Albanians as well, but not the Macedonians.

SFRY and the Macedonian government, considering us as citizens, did not react adequately to the above mentioned law with racist articles nor to the many other negative Greek actions. The world must and should point to Greece for its unscrupulous statements and measures, as is the racist law itself, and besides everything else, for animating the democratic public about the Macedonian question in general and separately, about the question of the Macedonians in the Aegean part of Macedonia.

A confirmation of this are the obstructions of Greece which took a dangerous stroke after the independence of the Republic of Macedonia. Greece opposed the acceptance of the Republic of Macedonia in the Organization of the United Nations under its constitutional name and we were accepted under the temporary name -which, according to the then given public statements from our representatives, should have lasted 2-3 months. But this has still continued for years, influencing the international situation of the Republic of Macedonia and its internal economic development, which unfortunately, makes difficult social and political problems. As a result of these obstructions, accompanied by threats of war, provocations and embargoes, we were forced to change the state name.

All this brings up the question: Doesn't the Greek tactic for settling the always-open question put us in the Greece's continuous game? We now firmly remain in defense of our right about the name of our state because, agreeing with the change of the name means that we relinquish our national identity. That would be the beginning of a new drama which could end with a burning warfare of unseen consequences. After all, in our opinion, we were protected by the international society even practically with "the preventive diplomacy". There is a question, however, how much we have managed to gain for our benefit -to make a livable state and to strengthen the relations with our neighbors on an equal basis.

Now the relations with Greece are based upon the "Temporary Agreement", which is also temporarily framed within the parallel negotiations in New York. We think that it also should have adequately resolved the questions of the ex-inhabitants and citizens of Greece. Firstly, to equalize their rights with those of the rest of the immigration and to annul the racist articles by which the political immigration is divided into those who are of "Greek origin" and those who are not.

Our other neighbors make obstructions as well. They also wish the Republic of Macedonia did not exist if, according to their illusions, they could gain enough. However, none of the neighbors is sure whether they can win or lose, even though at the moment they are not in a situation to ignore the statement of the

International Community on the existence of the Republic of Macedonia. The only neighboring country which, for now, is against the International Community, is Greece as a member of NATO and of the European Community. That is why Greece appears as a "dance leader", while the statements and the "plans" of the others depend on the resolution of the relations with Greece.

That is why we are asking: Was and is it possible to change the game which Greece has created because of our diplomatic and political offensive, which has put Greece in a defensive position and has allowed us to be permanently on the attack? The question which could and can put us in an offense diplomatic situation is the question which is, undoubtedly, linked not only to the situation of the Macedonians in the Greek state but to the status and the rights of more than 100,000 inhabitants of the Republic of Macedonia who belong to the political immigration and are refugees from Greece. Especially because this question is in the realm of human rights. In the universal declaration of the United Nations for human rights which 50th anniversary will be marked next year, it is precisely stated that no one's property can be involuntarily taken from them. We, the Macedonian political immigrants and refugees from Greece, are deprived of our properties by the willful Greek State, only because we are not "Greeks by origin". To make the paradox and irony more absurd, the Greek citizens are allowed to have properties in our state the Republic of Macedonia, but we do not have the right to our own centuries-old properties. Another tragic circumstance placed Greece in a situation of having the same view on a similar question, according to which, Greece is attempting to return the Greek refugees from Cyprus to their properties in the Turkish part of Cypress, but takes away the right of the Macedonians to return to their centuries-old properties in Greece.

Concerning the question of citizenship, the declaration of the United Nations states that no one has the right to prevent the return of anyone to his homeland. According to this statement, there are no international, nor legal boundaries for anyone who wishes to return to his homeland. The practice of Greece, however, not only prevents but forbids any visit to the heartland. But we insist precisely on these two rights. The question about our returning has lost a lot of its meaning, bearing in mind that the political immigration and refugees in the Republic of Macedonia, for almost half a century, have organized their lives and have no conditions to benefit from these rights. The right of possession of property though, is an inalienable right for their successors as well. That is why true justice is the return of our properties without any restrictions and conditions.

A practical use of this right would be the recognition of the political immigrants and refugees and their right to a Greek citizenship, but without any conditions for declaring "Greek by origin". These are the European solutions of the problem, and Greece, as a member of the European Community must promote civilized relations with its ex-inhabitants who found themselves in a situation of political immigration and refugee in the whirlpool of the war. Only these human and democratic solutions can inaugurate a higher state of neighborly relations as they must be built in the Balkans.

These are the essential problems which are very smoothly inserted in the game - like the question of "the difference about the name" as a misdirection to a blind path, not to solve the actual questions which really could clear up and forward the international and good neighbor relations. In our opinion, the Republic of Macedonia has made many retreats already and every additional one could only start producing undesired processes-encouraging the aggressive appetite, uncontrolled vigor of the nationalism and chauvinism which, unfortunately, would not promise anything good for all Balkan nations. We also think that the governments of our neighbors will legitimize themselves and, by practice, will affirm themselves as democratic for the rebuilding of new relations in the Balkans as well as with the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonian people.

If we observe the Balkans as an organism, then the Republic of Macedonia is its heart. Our neighbors must understand that the life-pulse of his organism can be assured only in its freedom and the freedom of the Macedonians in it. Else, their own freedom could be destroyed in the mutual struggle for power over Macedonia, Actually, this is the reason that Macedonia has got the epithet "The Apple of Discord" or "The Chain of Unity."

In this Remembering, as you can see, there are elements of moral, international-legal and realistic situations and relations. This seems to be inevitable because a society without moral norms is surely judged to fall. We are witnesses of the downfall of very powerful empires and states with a frightful power. We believe that the builders of the international-legal structure should bear this in mind when building a society in which even the weaker can feel secure. The real situation in the Balkans and especially in our surroundings should change exactly according to the existing international legal laws. The Republic of Macedonia should loudly demand these norms to be respected both for herself and for the Macedonians. In this respect, the Republic of Macedonia follows that policy and there are many accolades from many international guests and organizations who were invited to evaluate the respecting of the international laws and norms for both human and minority rights. This is not

enough, however, especially if the proposal of the President of the Republic of Macedonia for comparative analysis and for respecting of human and minority rights in our neighboring countries is muted by their different excuses.

It should not be allowed that Greece, with European identity in its pocket, is able to transform the Macedonian - Greek border into one of the most closed borders because in its state Greece freely uses a policy of discrimination against one part of its citizens for not being "Greeks by origin", that Bulgaria can create the language dispute, that Serbia would not allow marking of the borders, nor that Albania would not undertake measures in its own state, but in ours. Macedonia should demand, with a complete moral right, an apology of their neighbors for the wrongs that are still being propagated on the Macedonian people.

As a part of the category of citizens - political immigrants and refugees from the Aegean part of Macedonia we are the most interested in the development of the good neighbor relations with Greece. This is dictated by our interest in our property rights. Some of us speak the Greek language and that can be a very important advantage, but not at any cost. Not for the price of trampling our human and national dignity.

And finally, we think that from this aspect, the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia should seriously engage in the solving of our rights and strategically become a cohesive factor for the Macedonians everywhere - as a minority in the neighboring countries or flung to the far corners of the world, in order not to have a new, catastrophic separation in our many centuries long-suffering and bloody history.

A group of political immigrants from the Aegean part of Macedonia:

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