

To Hell and Back



**By
Evdokia Foteva – Vera**

**Translated from Macedonian to English and edited
By Risto Stefov**

To Hell and Back

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Evdokia Foteva – Vera, “To Hell and Back”, AZ-Buki 2004, Skopje

Love is a sacred thing. Everything is done from love and for love. Nobler than love is without exception one's own homeland. Without a homeland free love can not reach its true potential. My life companion and I were in love with our homeland since childhood because we both came from Macedonian revolutionary families. We both took up arms in the midst of our youth for the freedom of our homeland. As fighters, in the most beautiful years of our youth, we decided that after we freed ourselves we would get married. But from the time we decided to the time we actually got married, a decade of struggling and suffering had passed. That was because of our outstanding dedication to the struggle, fighting so that nothing could harm our homeland. That is why we had the longest wedding: from the day that we decided to the day that we actually had it. My “wedding trip” was a fight for freedom and democracy in the Greek Civil War and in the detention camps and prisons in Albania and Russia. This was done to me because of Tito's squabbles with Stalin and because Informburo countries became hostile towards Yugoslavia. Our “wedding” was a tragic “wedding” not only for us but for our homeland and for our people. It was a wedding full of consequences, which left lasting open wounds.

On Vicho

No bird
flew alive
and here –
at Gramos,
in the wild battle
we dropped
from our shoulder
the last flag.

(From the poem “At Gramos”
by Atso Shopov, Skopje, 1950)

Introduction

The author Evdokia Foteva-Vera, in her book “To Hell and Back” tells us how some in the top CPG (Communist Party of Greece) leadership led DAG to defeat and then went on to put the blame on the innocent Macedonian people. What she tells us is an original and first hand account because she was there, a participant of these events. Her presentation of the NOBG (Peoples Liberation Struggle in Greece) and GVG (Greek Civil War) ideals for which Macedonians and Greeks fought shoulder to shoulder and many died together are genuine. As World War II had only fascists and anti-fascists, so did the Greek Civil War have Monarcho-Fascists and anti-Monarcho-Fascists. In reality the Second World War never ended in Greece until DAG was defeated in 1949, ironically “thanks” to anti-fascist Western Power intervention. This book is a story about the Macedonian leadership being wrongly labeled “the perpetrators” that led to DAG’s defeat and as they found out their dreams of “heaven” were not at all like they had imagined them. Their experience recaptured the creepiness of the words that the enslaved German woman told the notorious Beria, which the reader will discover by following Evdokia Foteva-Vera’s experience in her USSR dream.

In tough times humanity and inhumanity come to the fore. Vera mentions many examples of that. Thinking that the prisoners would go to another world, the deserters distorted the truth, and made slanderous statements against their closest comrades, and when the prisoners came back, they pretended that nothing had happened. And as earth has sworn to heaven, the truth will some day come out and there will be no more secrets. Thanks to Evdokia Foteva-Vera, who, on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of DAG’s defeat has given us that truth, told in her own authentic testimony.

Dr. Stojan Risteski

Instead of a preface

Since the Balkan Wars, since that damned 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, the Macedonian people in Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia have fought for their social and national rights. In the meantime the new invaders and our brothers in faith have done everything they can to rob us of our heritage and erase our Macedonian identity. To free themselves of the “Macedonian menace” the new masters expelled, killed and imprisoned many to the Aegean islands. However, “weeds” cannot be easily exterminated. Each new generation is more resistant and more decisive. The dictator Metaxas changed many things including banning the Macedonian language, the native language spoken at home by the Macedonian people, but that too proved to be futile because Macedonians still speak their mother tongue. Changing all the personal names and toponyms from Macedonian to Greek did not help much either, because the Macedonian people still remember and love the old Macedonian names.

The Macedonian people from Greek occupied Macedonia participated in Greece’s liberation struggle against the German and Italian occupiers and in the Greek Civil War. They made countless sacrifices including abandoning their homes and in the end they were not allowed to return to their birthplace and to reclaim what was theirs because they were supposedly not Greeks by birth. The Macedonian contribution to the struggle against fascism, it seems, does not count at all and is deemed irrelevant even by the biggest anti-fascist forces. So, instead of helping the Macedonians, the great anti-fascist forces, with all their means, chose to help the Monarcho-Fascists who were bent on destroying the Macedonian nation. Realistically this means that it was they who indirectly committed all these crimes including the expulsion of Macedonians from their native homes.

The Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia fought for freedom and democracy alongside the Greek anti-fascist progressive forces, but instead of getting freedom and democracy they received prison sentences and many were murdered. Those who fled the country to save their miserable lives were not allowed to return, not even to light a candle at the eternal resting place of their deceased loved ones. All this torment of the Macedonian people was openly done in front of the entire “civilized and progressive world” yet no one, it seems, is able to see anything wrong with it; no one seems to see it for what it is and to this day, no one has raised their voice against it. So I ask you this: “Should we continue to believe that there is still hope in the ‘Great Democrats’?!” To this day no one has raised a voice.

We should be grateful to the Republic of Macedonia for its part in accepting the refugees returning from the Eastern European countries, but in its search for legitimacy, it too wrote off the Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia. It was done under pressure as the young Republic fought for its survival. What does one do when one's brothers in the Republic of Macedonia write them off? We are a modest people, but bold and proud. We remember kindness and never forget evil. We keep silent but when we raise our voices we are loud. We still feel the lasting and open wounds we received from the Greek Civil War. We are everywhere on this planet, separated from our own kind. Many of us have already quietly left this world disappointed with unfulfilled dreams of ever seeing our birthplace for one last time, so that we can pay our respects to our loved ones who have died there. My husband Mincho died, bitter, on March 28, 1987 with his wish to return to his birthplace unfulfilled. So did Pascal Mitrevski, President of NOF who died on February 10th, 1987 and so many others.

The honest, worthy leaders and sons of Aegean Macedonia suffered the worst. Those who encouraged our people to fight deserted and abandoned them. They were also the ones spreading the lies in the Republic of Macedonia. They were the ones who slandered those who sacrificed themselves for Macedonia. They were the ones who portrayed the struggle and all that happened in a light that would personally benefit them the most. They thought that "it was all over" and those who knew the truth would never return. They convinced many politicians and historians to rely on their lies in order to get to the bottom of things.

After DAG was defeated, members of the NOF, AFZH and NOMS (Youth Organization) leadership from Greek occupied Macedonia were charged with being "agents" of Yugoslavia, Tito and Lazo Kolarovski. We were arrested and placed in a detention centre in Burreli, Albania and from there we were sent to the prison camps in the USSR. Instead of protecting us and advocating for our liberation from the allegations, the deserters and closest comrades with whom we shared both good and evil in the struggle, did everything in their power to turn us into scapegoats in order to save their own skins, thinking that we were doomed anyway and would be dead in no time. However, that did not happen, we all endured torture but survived with our honesty intact. So, we who did nothing wrong to tarnish our image, the image of our homeland and that of our people were released from prison and allowed to go the Republic of Macedonia. But when we arrived there we discovered that the deserters had turned the truth around 180°. They were startled by our arrival, but did not lose their positions and

privileges in society because every government needs sycophants and informers.

I wrote my book in the name of truth, to set the record straight, to correct perpetrated injustices and irregularities and to inform the current and future reader who may be interested in learning about the ordeals that my generation experienced. My story is real and the events which I took part in were first hand experience. I personally participated in the People's Liberation Struggle in Greece and in the Greek Civil War and the story I am telling is the way it happened, the way I remember it. I fought for the freedom of my people and as a result I suffered immensely, especially in my trek from Burreli to the USSR and to Skopje.

What I am about to tell you will make many people uncomfortable and even angry. But the more people get uncomfortable, the closer I get to the truth. I too got angry at the many twists and turns of "the truth" especially when told by people who gave false statements against me, against my husband Mincho and against the other honest leaders of NOF. Fifty five years after DAG's defeat, my book speaks authentically and defends the truth especially against the biggest slanderer of them all, Nikos Zahariadis, Secretary General of the CPG. Those who speak differently from what I wrote in my book will soon fall by the wayside. The truth may be delayed but is slowly coming to light.

THE AUTHOR

DAG's defeat

From August 10th to the 15th, 1949 the Monarcho-Fascists carried out a violent, hellish attack against DAG with unprecedented air support supplied by the United States. The poet Atso Shopov was right when he wrote the poem “Gramos” telling us that “no bird can fly in Vicho from the hail of bombs and grenades”. This struggle has been objectively presented in two volumes by Greek historian Giorgos Margaritis, a professor at the University of Crete. Margaritis has relied on the memoirs of prominent anti-fascists for his source material. The information presented is the best example I have read that describes why DAG aborted Vicho and pulled out of Gramos, leaving the population unprotected and running for its life.

One hundred and thirty bombing runs were made on August 10th, 1949 by the American supplied air support using “Dakota” and “Spitfire” military aircraft to bomb units of DAG and columns of fleeing refugees. The next few days the military aircraft did the same, at the same pace, providing air support for the Monarcho-Fascist artillery and infantry. There was not a square foot of space that had not been bombed on Mount Vicho, on Lisets, on Mount Malimadi and in Prespa along the Albanian and Yugoslav border. The entire area had been bombed with aerial bombs, grenades, napalm bombs and rockets and was garnished with machine gun fire by the dive-bombing aircraft. This clearly indicates the conditions under which DAG was placed and the kind of pot its fighters were put in to boil. There was an insurmountable amount of pressure and worry placed on the fighters not only for saving their own lives but also for caring for the wounded and for saving the huge columns of fleeing refugees. DAG was again attacked in Gramos with the same vigour. It was under these circumstances, created mainly by foreign intervention, that the “freedom-loving democrats” of Gramos dropped the “last flag”.

DAG was defeated by the Monarcho-Fascists on Mount Gramos on August 30th, 1949 with Anglo-American support. After Vicho fell to enemy hands, Nikos Zahariadis, General Secretary of the CPG Central Committee, said: “Gramos will be the tomb of the Monarcho-Fascists”. But that did not turn out to be the case. DAG suffered numerous casualties but had it not backed down and fled to Albania, the opposite would have been true. Gramos would have been the tomb for DAG. For the longest part, after removing General Markos Vafiadis from his command and after abandoning the proven military strategies of the so-called “Supreme War Council Law”, Zahariadis worked personally with his Politburo installing new “military strategists” who had

absolutely no relevant experience. Units of DAG from Gramos and from other places withdrew to Albanian territory.

Looking at the Most Dedicated to Find the Guilty for DAG's Defeat

The main culprits for DAG's defeat naturally were Nikos Zahariadis, General Secretary of the CPG Central Committee and his Politburo. But that's not who they found guilty. Instead of laying blame where it squarely belonged, Zahariadis and his clique pointed their fingers at the Macedonians, specifically at the NOF and AFZH leadership and at the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece. In Bureli, a town in Albania, Zahariadis staged a fake political trial, similar to those staged by Informburo countries. He had the last word.

On October 2nd, 1949 we were camped in a meadow under some olive trees beside a creek outside Elbasan. There was a beautiful white building on top of the hill. It had been converted into a hospital for the sick and wounded DAG fighters, cared for by doctors and nurses who were also members of DAG. There were both Macedonian and Greek patients and caregivers in the hospital, they were people who had fought shoulder to shoulder in the struggle and who had suffered and celebrated together. All the anti-fascists were united as one people then and had the same goal.

From earlier on, October 2nd was designated International Day of Peace in honour of the International Congress which was held in Prague on April 20th, 1949 as well as in Paris and Tokyo. A delegation from Greece also attended the Congress including representatives from Macedonian organizations. We, the cadres of NOF, AFZH, DAG, Ministers of the Interim Government of Greece and members of the CPG Central Committee were planning and making preparations for that extra-special occasion to mark this day with an appropriate program followed by speeches from several leading cadres, including some from the Macedonian side.

Even before the celebrations began many fighters and civilians began to gather and fill the hospital courtyard. Around 8 o'clock a jeep arrived carrying an officer from DAG Headquarters, whom I did not recognize. As soon as he got off the jeep the officer came in the direction where we were standing: Mihail Maliov, Urania Iurukova, Tashko Hadzhiianov, Gora Petrichevski my (not yet married) spouse Mincho Fotev and I. The officer knew me. When he came close to me he said: "Comrade Vera, this letter (he handed me a blue envelope) is for you from Comrade Bardzhotas, he wants to meet with you at his place." Vasilis Bardzhotas was a political commissar of the DAG General Staff and a member of the CPG Politburo inner circle. I quickly opened the envelope. In it was a short letter with the following text: "Comrade Vera, You, Mincho, Urania and Hadzhiianov, the

moment you receive this letter, are to immediately get in the jeep and come to Bureli” signed “Vasilis Bardzhotas”. When I read the letter I was stunned, I froze like lightning had just struck me. I looked at my friends all around me. I had the feeling that something bad was going to happen and I could not get that feeling out of my head; an evil feeling that had been hovering in my head for a while now.

My friends looked at me strangely as I was eager to tell them what the letter said. Mincho became impatient and grabbed the letter out of my hand. I quietly squeezed my words out of my mouth and said: “Us four: Mincho, Urania, Hadzhiianov and I are being called to immediately take the jeep and go to Bureli, to DAG’s General Headquarters”. There was silence. The message was worrisome to everyone and we all kept silent. A group of civilian men and women traveling with DAG units from the free territory, with whom we had camped together in that place, surrounded us and wondered what was going on.

We told our friend Gogo Petrushevski, a seasoned NOF fighter, that “we were sure that they would arrest us. If you can, leave now because you will suffer the same fate.” I also told some of my fellow villagers, my aunts and a first cousin that I was sure they would arrest us. This kind of threat against the central NOF leadership had been “circulating” for a long time and now they were putting it into practice in order to hide the real culprits for DAG’s defeat. Despite the threats that we would be liquidated, taken by some provocateurs, we were and remained to the end faithful to the people whom we organized, fought with, died with and rejoiced with.

Worries about my broken watch

Before leaving I managed to give my broken watch to my cousin Olga Mangova. That watch, even broken, meant a lot to me because it tied me to two dear people: to my father and my uncle Krsto Mangov. I had loaned the watch to Krsto Mangov, President of the District Board of the National Liberation Council, Kostur District. He died on August 11, 1949 just before the village Breznitsa was shelled by artillery. While there he helped people escape and find a hiding place just before the Monarcho-Fascist air force began to bomb the village. In his endeavor Krsto Mangov, a Macedonian, along with DAG General Nikos Teoharopulos-Skotidas, a Greek, were struck and killed by the same bomb.

I quickly rushed to the place when I heard about Krsto and Nikos's death. General Skotidas's body had been sent to DAG General Headquarters. The only part left intact from Krsto Mango's body was his left hand. He had wounded his hand twice before and it did not function properly. He was wearing my watch on that hand. Since nothing remained of him we just buried his hand. But before burying him I took back my watch, it was broken, and then I took the documents briefcase from the People's Liberation District Board and told my cousin Olga: "Olga, here is my watch. If I die, please give it to his children and if I survive, give it back to me." Olga kept the watch as if it was sacred. When I returned from exile in Russia, I met her in December 1956 and she gave me back the watch, which to this day I have kept. It is still broken but it brings back many memories of a "broken time".

On the Road to Bureli

Like it was nothing, the four of us, Mincho, Urania, Hadzhiianov and I, named in the letter went to our tents at the lower end of the slope where we were staying, picked up some personal belongings and documents from the NOF and AFZH Central Board and went to the jeep. A crowd of people, co-fighters, gathered all around us to wish us farewell as if we were going on a life-long trip. We were silent, smiled a lot, looked confident and dignified as we waved “goodbye”. We got into the jeep fully aware of what was waiting for us and, as we did before every battle, here too we began the trip with a song. We sang and joked about our misfortune: “When we did not get killed in battle, so what if we now die at the hands of our co-fighters!” The time passed quickly and we arrived in Bureli at dusk.

Detained at DAG headquarters

When we arrived at DAG General Headquarters in Bureli we were met by General Vlandas. "It seems they were very concerned about us!" The moment we arrived they placed the four of us in separate rooms, practically in solitary confinement. When I found myself alone in a room on the top floor of a building overlooking the barracks and tents in which DAG fighters were housed, it became clear to me that we had been detained. "But why?" I wondered out loud. I did not know. I could not figure out or understand what this was all about and what was happening to us, members of NOF and AFZH and organizers of the struggle in Aegean Macedonia.

There was a bed, a desk and a chair in the room where I was detained. It was already dark when they brought me dinner: tea, bread and cheese. I ate. After a while I went to the window. There was not much activity in the yard but those who went by slowed down at the side of the building and looked up, but in the dark they could not see anything. Their movement was suspicious; of that I have no doubt. I went toward the door. I opened it. I stepped out into the hallway. A Partisan with a gun immediately rushed towards me. "Where do you want to go?" he asked. I came out to find out where my three "co-victims" were but I told the Partisan I was going to the toilet. When I returned to the room I went to the window again. I saw more fighters out there, both Greeks and Macedonians. They were talking and pointing towards the building. I was certain they were aware that we had been detained, but the guards would not let them enter the building. I lay down but I could not sleep. I kept wondering about what was going to happen to us. I said to myself: "Whatever it is, it is! Life or death for the truth! This is how we entered every battle, determined to fight and die, and this is how I will enter this battle. I will fight to the end!" This is what I kept telling myself, but this battle I did not lead against the enemy but against my Party and against the CPG. This kind of fight unfortunately is harder and more difficult to fight when you are accused and you are innocent of those accusations. I somehow fell asleep.

In the morning I went to the bathroom to wash and comb my hair. I looked down the hallway and saw two DAG guards from General Headquarters with machine guns in their hands ready to shoot. I said "Good morning" to them in Greek. They said "Good morning" right back. Such is life: sometimes they protect you out of respect and sometimes they shoot you like a dog. I went back to the room and while pacing back and forth, I could not help but laugh at the grim position I

found myself in: “How lucky can you be to be guarded by guards from General Headquarters?” I told myself.

They brought me breakfast: tea, jam and bread. After breakfast I paced around the room and stood by the window. I waved at the people I knew and they waved right back, reassuring me that everything was going to be all right: “Don’t worry, we are with you!”

General Vlandas wants my statement

The door opened. General Vlandas entered the room, wearing pajamas, with paper and a pencil in his hands. I was well acquainted with him. He put the paper and pencil on the table and sharply ordered me to: "Write, write down your filthy deeds." Without wanting to, I laughed; I am by nature a happy person. I have laughed more than I have cried even in the hardest of times. Laughing usually gave me courage, but this time I laughed out loud without saying a word. The general looked at me angrily and furiously strained through his teeth the words: "Write down about Tito and Kolishevski's gang!" I said nothing; I just stared straight into his eyes and continued to laugh.

I sat down. I briefly wrote my autobiography on one of the pages: when I had become a member of the OKNE, when I had been admitted as a member in the CPG, my duties during the Second World War, my disagreements with the CPG regarding the Macedonian National Question, going over to Yugoslavia with the First Macedonian Aegean Brigade and my activities during the Greek Civil War.

I wrote all this down on October 3rd, 1949. I am sure that my statement can be found in the CPG Central Committee archives.

The next day, October 4th, 1949, General Vlandas came back to my room, this time dressed in uniform. I gave him the paper on which I had written my statement in Greek. After reading it he bent his mouth and said: "That's not what I wanted". So I said: "I have nothing else to add. You, as the head of our entire leadership, know everything about my activities in both revolutions in Greece!" He strained again and let out the words: "Well, we will see!" "Yes, we will see!" I replied.

In Camp among the Fighters

On October 5th, 1949 at around ten o'clock, Pirakli Miroviglis came to see me. He was an Information officer from DAG General Headquarters. In Poland he later wrote a book entitled "Tito and his clique's betrayal in Greece". He greeted me kindly and asked: "Have you been for a walk in this camp?" "No!" I said and asked, "Don't you know why?" "Well you can and you can visit with your friends," he said. And what kind of situation was he trying to put me in? I thought to myself. This was something calculated I imagined but I went for a walk anyway. I met Tashko Hadzhiianov in the hallway. We hugged each other and I asked him if he knew where Mincho and Urania were. He said he did not know. I asked him how he was spending his days there and from what he said it was no different than how I was spending my days.

Outside I met many of my comrades. They all invited me to go to visit with them in their barracks or tents. Milka Shukareva, one of my friends from the village Breznitsa, Kostur Region, gave me a whole bunch of my photographs that she had found at the bridge between the two Prespa lakes in Perovo. I remembered when we were leaving Vicho, after a long wait, General Headquarters had promised to send a vehicle to pick up the archives and NOF's printing equipment (the printing house was located in the village Bukovo and NOF's Central Board was located in the village P'pli in a grove in Prespa). By then the Monarcho-Fascists had already occupied the village Orovo and we were in danger of having our escape route cut off. For that reason we decided to bury the printing press underground and take the archives and whatever else important was needed, load it on up on a horse and have it couriered over the place known as "Africa" (this is what they called a small place in Prespa on the other side of the lake near the Albanian border) by Mr. Kolio from the "Iafka" services.

With weapons in our hands we left and joined the last units of DAG and a group of people from the villages L'k and Trnovo fleeing towards the Albanian border. At the bridge in Perovo, the column of people with which Mr. Kolio was traveling and carrying our archives, was attacked, bombed and fired upon by machine gun fire from U.S. aircraft, belonging to the Monarcho-Fascists. The horse was hit by a bomb and there was nothing left of it. The courier narrowly escaped and managed to save a small part of the archives. The rest of the material was picked up by fleeing Partisans. One of those Partisans, who managed to survive the raid, was my friend Milka. She managed to pick up some of my photographs. But instead of taking them from her, I told her to hold on to them for me because I was in a bit of a

predicament. She kept the pictures and gave them back to me when we met again, many years later, in Tetovo after her arrival from Tashkent with her family.

From my friends I found out that Paskal Mitrevski, NOF's President, Lazar Poplazarov and Vangel Koichev, NOF's representative in DAG's Military Council, were also there. I looked for them and found them in a barracks. They too were detained and later released and so was Risto Kolenchov, District President of the People's Liberation Council of Lerin Region.

After they had brought us in they also brought Lambro Cholakov and Mihail Maliiov, NOF Secretary, from the Elbasan Camp. I could not believe or think that the CPG Central Committee could be so presumptuous and so insidious towards the NOF leadership.

DAG General Headquarters had passed a decree putting the blame for the Vicho defeat on Pando Vaina, DAG Commander of Division XI, and Georgi Vasilko, Political Commissar of Division XI, both Macedonians. The two men were to be sued by a military court but that decision soon changed...

In other words, in the words of Zahariadis and his clique, the main culprits for DAG's defeat were the Macedonian leaders and not the real traitors of the people.

Zahariadis accuses Macedonian Leadership of being traitors and agents of Tito

A meeting of all DAG fighters in the Bureli camp was convened on October 7th, 1949. The meeting took place in a large barn converted to a meeting hall with a stage and with several rows of chairs to sit about 3000 people. Present at the meeting were members of the CPG Politburo, members of DAG General Staff, CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Interim Government Petros Rusos, member of the Politburo and Political Commissar of DAG General Staff Vasilis Bardzhotas and Generals Mitsos Vlandas, Dimitris Gusias, Piraklis Miroviglis and others. There were also Petrov, a member of the USSR Communist Party acting as a representative of the Information Office, members of DAG General Staff and others.

Zahariadis opened the meeting and devoted its introductory part to the current situation in Greece, DAG's position and CPG's role. Zahariadis then specifically and extensively focused on the Cominform Resolution against Yugoslavia. In fact, his aim for convening this meeting was to show the "great impact" the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia) had on NOF and its leadership, which, he emphasized "played a treacherous role" and that was the main reason why DAG had failed. Among other things Zahariadis also said that "Paskal Mitrevski and his clique are agents of Tito and Kolishevski" while pointing at us with his hand. We were standing next to the members of the Politburo and the interim government. Without any proof Zahariadis went on to make all kinds of allegations, looking for ways to put the blame onto the shoulders of NOF and its leadership in order to cover up mistakes made by the CPG and by DAG's General Headquarters. This news, however, was not taken well by the fighters in the meeting room especially since most were Macedonians and NOF members themselves who personally knew the NOF and AFZH leadership. Nevertheless, Zahariadis continued on with his lies and fabrications and went as far as accusing Mincho Fotev of attempted murder. He alleged that Mincho had tried to kill the officer with whom we came in the jeep from Elbasan to Bureli, reportedly to escape to Yugoslavia. After that he said that Mincho and I were in a "political marriage" and carried on all sorts of things and other nonsense, but he did not say what kind of "marriage" he was involved in with Rula Kukulu.

After Zahariadis, the next to speak was Vangel Koichev, a NOF leader in the DAG Military Council. Koichev, supporting Zahariadis, began to attack NOF. Somewhat softer in tone was Mihail Maliov,

secretary of the NOF General Board, who attempted to distance himself from the others and not fall into disgrace, by saying that the filthy things Zahariadis said about NOF were done behind his back and that he knew nothing about them. He even showed amazement and wonderment as to how such things could happen without him knowing.

Pascal and I silently listened in disgust to the lies and slander leveled against us by the speakers. We wanted to deny the charges at any cost. We wanted to come out in front of the three thousand Macedonian and Greek fighters who knew the truth very well and say you all know the truth and what these people are saying are lies.

Paskal Mitrevski, President of NOF and Minister of the Provisional Government of Greece, climbed on stage. The entire hall thundered with applause and cheers. Paskal and NOF were greeted in a positive way. Fearing that Paskal may say something negative, Zahariadis intervened and immediately stopped him from speaking before he had a chance to say a single word (see “The time of Paskal Mitrevski 1912-1978”, by Tashko Mamurovski, Institute of National History - Skopje, 1992).

Watching this tragicomedy of Zahariadis attempting to vilify NOF and its honest leaders made me angry and wanting to take revenge because at that moment I felt like I was losing the most valuable time in my life, which I had dedicated to NOF, to AFZH and to the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia who were raised en masse to fight for their national and social freedom. Zahariadis knew very well why we were fighting and how many of us became victims, a subject which was well discussed in Solun in 1946.

In 1945-1946 members of NOF were persecuted in the same way by both the communists and the Monarcho-Fascists. I remember those years very well. I thought of the processes employed in Enidzhevardar, I thought of Mirka who, before her death, shouted out: “Long live NOF and the CPG!” Hundreds of NOF, NOMS and AFZH members before being executed shouted out “Long live NOF, NOMS, AFZH! Long live the CPG! Long live democracy! Down with the Monarcho-Fascists!”

Unexpectedly and energetically, inspired by the heroic deeds of my predecessors, I suddenly jumped to my feet and found myself on the stage. In a loud voice I screamed in Macedonian: “Comrades and friends, fighters of the Democratic Army long live NOF and AFZH!” The entire room yelled back “Long live!” There were only a few voices which I heard calling for “Death” but they were muted by the mass of three thousand who were yelling “Long Live!” I briefly explained the role of our organization, how it grew from small to large and from a child to a teenager. I also explained the role of our eighteen year old men and women who participated in the struggle, giving their best and

how the organization AFZH was present everywhere; old women transporting food, arms and ammunition to the DAG fighters in Kajmakchalan, Vicho, Gramos, etc. Old women also participating in DAG auxiliary services: working in the cooperatives, ovens, sewing workshops, forges, in the care of the wounded, night harvests etc. Many performed their duties in dangerous situations in villages that were under enemy occupation. I also explained the women's role in building bunkers and digging trenches in Bela Voda, Lundzer and other places. More than three thousand women were in the DAG services carrying wounded regardless of who they were: Macedonians or Greeks. In addition to being fighters, many AFZH members were also officers, sanitation workers etc. Women were equal to men and took their place in all the battles fought against the enemy. Many Macedonians gave their lives in the march of the unarmed who started out from Greece proper and marched to Mount Gramos. "Accordingly, how can such an organization be treacherous and its leaders, the leaders of NOF and AFZH, who you all know very well since the anti-fascist war as members of ELAS and EAM-CPG be traitors? And what about Yugoslavia? We were all there, including thousands of Greeks because Yugoslavia too at the time was fighting against the anti-fascist forces. We wanted Yugoslavia as Yugoslavia and Macedonia, of which one part is free and that part of Macedonia became a shelter for our families away from the Monarcho-Fascists. As for DAG's defeat; that responsibility lies exclusively with the CPG headed by its Politburo and by General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis himself. They are responsible. If I have sinned in anything then let the people be my judge." I also said that I condemned all deserters from our ranks where they may be found.

Zahariadis was furious, not only because of what I said but because of the approval I received from the fighters. He climbed on the stage and started yelling and without wanting to, he called me "Comrade Vera". I laughed at that. At that very moment I did not care even if he had me shot. I said: "Since I did not perish at the front, let me perish here, as my debt to my people has been fulfilled." Zahariadis became even angrier and yelled out: "Look, this is proof that they are agents, Vera and Mincho concluded a political marriage, Mincho, down the road from Elbasan to Bureli tried to escape to Yugoslavia after wanting to kill the officer and driver, but fortunately he was prevented," but he did not say how and by whom. It was sad to watch the "General Secretary" stoop so low and not know what he was talking about. He continued to shout: "Here are Tito's agents. They should admit that, but they are the kind of people who are not ashamed of what they have done and will not admit to it." He continued: "Even Vera wants us to

call her by the pseudonym ‘OZNA’!” I snapped back and said: “Comrade Zahariadis, you and everyone else here knows my pseudonym is ‘Vera’ and my real name is Evdokia. I don’t have another pseudonym besides ‘Vera’!” It appears that Zahariadis was ignorant of this, which brought some in the hall to laughter.

I don’t know what Zahariadis’s reasons were for letting me speak for so long and why he did not abruptly interrupt me like he did Paskal. Perhaps he did not understand what I was saying because I spoke in Macedonian. Only to him I replied in Greek.

I came down from the stage and I did not want to hear any more. I did not want to listen to the lies, slanderous remarks and fabricated charges against us. It was already clear to me that they wanted to blame us for DAG’s capitulation by labeling us as agents of Tito and Kolishevski. Obviously they did not want to take responsibility for their mistakes and made us, the Macedonian leaders, the “culprits” of DAG’s failures. It became very clear to me that they wanted to “rig” the process as was done in all former socialist republics, including the processes of: Laslo Rajk, Trajcho Kostov, Koche Dzhodzhe and others.

When I left the hall, I met with friends, villagers and relatives, among whom were Vasil and Timio Ralev, Yani Chochev, Yoto Liochkov and Nuli Dzhadzheva. They said that I spoke well. I just should not have attacked the Politburo and Zahariadis. I told them that there were many provocateurs in the Politburo. My friends and comrades remained devoted even after many years. When I returned and we met in Skopje they again told me the same thing; If I had not attacked and criticized Zahariadis so sharply he would not have had me arrested and persecuted. I, on the other hand, as I thought then, still think that honest communists would never put their own guilt on others as Zahariadis had done to us the Macedonians. Was that fair?

While I was talking to my friends, two Partisans with machine guns came behind us. They pointed the guns at me, tied my hands and took me back to the DAG General Headquarters building. They took me to a small room on the ground floor. There were others there from the NOF leadership who had been escorted earlier. Included among them were Paskal Mitrevski, Mihail Maliov, Vangel Koichev, Risto Kolenchev-Kokinos, Lazo Poplazarov, Lambro Cholakov and Tashko Hadzhiiianov (the last four were escorted to Bureli after us). After that they brought Urania Iurukova and Mincho Fotev, whom they considered the most dangerous of us all. Urania and Mincho did not attend the meeting, they had been held in the same building but in separate rooms.

The next day Pavle Rakovski was brought to the same small room. After that they brought a fighter from the village Nestram, Kostur Region, nicknamed Laokratis. Laokratis had spent the last few years in

Belgrade as the Greek representative of “Iafka”. Why he was arrested, to this day I do not know. He was not involved in our affairs. As I learned later, in 1954, he was released and lived in Tashkent. Where he is now, I do not know.

Earlier, before the developments, Pavle Rakovski had written a letter addressed to the CPG Central Committee and to Zahariadis, criticizing himself for not being honest with the CPG leadership. In Prespa he had supposedly proposed to some NOF leaders that they flee to Yugoslavia so that they would not be arrested, but Mincho Fotev opposed him. Thus, on the basis of this letter Zahariadis found grounds to lay charges in Bureli.

They took my most treasured possessions

All twelve of us were held in the small room for two days; until October 9th, 1949. During the night of October 8th, when the camp was sleeping, Piraklis Miroviglis, the officer responsible for the DAG General Headquarters Second Bureau called us into his office one by one. He took everything we had except for our clothes. They took the money belonging to NOF, important documents, personal possessions, everything. Pirakli personally took my gold watch, a gift my father had sent to me from Toronto, Canada in 1948. My father had engraved the back of the watch with the words: "To Vera from your father." They also took away my binoculars and my Kodak camera. They too were sent to me as a gift from a women's group in Toronto. They also took 17 gold coins belonging to AFZH, a small suitcase belonging to the Kostur District People's Liberation Council, which I had taken from my uncle Krsto Mangov after his murder in the village Breznitsa on August 11th, 1949. They took my gold earrings and ring with my initials; gifts from my mother. They left my pistol with me which I pondered if I should surrender or calmly use it on Piraklis first and then on myself. But then I thought of the consequences and with a heavy heart pulled it out of its holster and held it in my hand. It was a nice sidearm, a German "Walter" with a brown handle. It was a personal gift from Lazar Kolishevski.

When did I get the gun from Kolishevski? It was in the spring of 1948 when Paskal Mitrevski, Mihail Keramitchiev, Stavro Kochopulo and I were invited to go to Resen. We were informed by the CPG Central Committee that we should take a jeep and go to Albania, to the Greek "Iafka" in Korcha. From there we were transferred to Resen. We stayed in a house. I don't remember which house it was because it was dark when we got there and it was dark when we left. During the night Lazo Kolishevski along with Dimitar Aleksievski-Pekar, Arso Milatovich and some security types came to see us. After we had met, Comrade Kolishevski informed us that Pekat would be coming with us. Before leaving I asked Kolishevski if he could give me a sidearm. I could not use my "Berretta" because I had no bullets for it. That's when he personally gave me the gun I surrendered to Pirakli. Never had I, even for a minute, separated that sidearm from myself since I got it. Even when crossing the Albanian border I would not surrender my sidearm. I gave them my machine gun but not that gun. The gun was my beloved and most faithful friend, which on many occasions had saved me from the enemy.

I was filled with hatred while standing in front of that cursed DAG officer, who until yesterday had been my friend and was now searching

me and taking away my most precious memories of my parents, my organization (AFZH) and the gun given to me by Lazar Kolishevski. For me, at that moment, that officer became my biggest enemy. Thoughts streaked through my mind about shooting him. Vera, don't be so stupid I thought to myself. His time will come and he will kill himself for what he is doing to us. And while these thoughts were racing through my mind, I saw a big hand lunge towards me and grab the gun from my hand. "Why didn't you surrender the gun at the border?" he asked. "I didn't want to," I said, "besides nobody asked me if I had other weapons on me."

None of the Albanians prevented us from crossing the border when I, together with Marika Elkova, a member of the NOF and AFZH General Board Secretariat, were headed for Elbasan where we were located. There was only one thing that stayed with me which I can't forget and which torments me. That was the cowardly murder of Sofia Giakova Bozhinitisa, AFZH Secretary from the village German, Prespa Region who was arrested earlier in 1949 as an "agent of OZNA" just because her husband was in Bitola. When we passed by the village Trnava, Monarcho-Fascist airplanes flew low over our heads, so low that we could see the heads of the pilots. They fired their machine guns at our column. Two partisans were coming towards us from the opposite direction, escorting the brave secretary. Initially I did not recognize her because she was so exhausted. When I went closer she recognized me and thrust herself at me. She hugged me hard and said: "Vera, these two will kill me!" I went for my sidearm but Marika intervened and said: "Vera, don't. What do you think you are doing?" and grabbed my hand. They took her another hundred metres or so behind us and then we heard the shot; Sofia was killed for nothing. A memory that haunts me to this day! Her life and her merits in the struggle meant nothing to Zahariadis's executioners.

When they took away all my possessions I felt like my life had been taken away. I had carried that gun with me for nine years. I felt safe and secure wherever I went. For the first time in my life I felt a sense of disgust at those who stood before me and I instinctively left the small room and went into the hallway. At that moment two guards grabbed me and took me back to the same room where they searched my comrades one by one. Included among us were: Paskal Mitrevski, Interim Government Minister and NOF and KOEM General Board President; Mincho Fotev, NOMS President, DAG General Staff Assistant Commissioner liaising between the Macedonians and DAG member of the Presidency of the NOF General Board; Vangel Koichev, member of the Presidency of the NOF Main Board and member of the DAG Military Council Staff; Pavle Rakovski, member of the NOF

Board and chief editor of the newspaper “Nepokoren” (Rebellious); Lambro Cholakov, member of the NOF Board responsible for Finances; Risto Kolentsov-Kokinos, member of the NOF Board and President of the People’s Liberation Board Lerin District; Urania Iurukova, member of the NOF Board and KOEM; Lazo Poplazarov, member of the NOF Board and Political Commissar of the DAG Artillery battery; Tashko Hadzhiiianov, member of the NOF and NOMS Boards in the Voden District; and I, Evdokia Baleva Nikolovska-Vera, secretary of the AFZH General Board, PDEG Vice President, candidate member of the PDOG Secretariat, member of the International Democratic Women’s Federation and NOF Vice President. For unknown reasons (to us) they also took comrade Themistocles Leokrati who at one point was a courier and CPG representative of “Iafka” in Belgrade. We were 12 people in total.

In Prison in Bureli

I found out later that Zahariadis was planning to execute us all on October 9th, 1949. This is what Piraklis Miroviglis told historian Todor Simovski in the 1970's in Bucharest. The executions however were prevented by Petrov, the USSR's Communist Party representative, so instead of being put to death we were put in prison in Bureli. The same night, October 9th, 1949, I heard the engine of a motor vehicle running. About fifteen minutes later Piraklis Miroviglis came and took us. The eleven of us, not including Vangel Koichev, were escorted to an open truck surrounded by armed guards. It was not a joke, to them we were "the great Titoist enemy". It was embarrassing but funny! It was so funny that we started laughing out loud. We laughed at Zahariadis and his foolishness. Piraklis and his cohorts did not know how to react so Piraklis yelled out "Shut up!" in Albanian. At this point we figured that we were going to be handed over to the Albanian government and it would decide our fate. We got on the truck and sat on the floor. Behind each one of us stood an Albanian militiaman, pointing a machine gun at our head ready to shoot us.

We thought that they were taking us away to execute us and there was nothing we could do so we went to our execution the same way we went to battle; joking and with laughter, cheerful about the situation we were in. We had avoided death in battle fighting against the Monarcho-Fascists, we had dodged the bombs and bullets from the American airplanes and now we were going to be shot in free Albania, but for what?! While I was thinking about that the truck stopped in front of a huge, heavy iron gate door. The gate opened and the truck pulled into the yard. We were ordered to get off the truck one by one. We were then separated: five men in one group, another four in a second group and then me and Urania in a third group. We were taken to prison cells and locked up.

The floor in our cell was all wet. There was no place to sit, let alone lie down. The floor was concrete and laden with water. The walls were dark and damp. There was no light in the cell and no air circulation. This was the beginning of a staged and shameful attack against the NOF leadership; pre-war revolutionaries and longtime fighters against the German, Italian and Bulgarian fascists, against the Anglo-American imperialists and against the Monarcho-Fascists in Greece. During Mehmed Zog's pre-war Albania, these cells were occupied by "dangerous" communists. There was a well in the yard where many were thrown in alive. I could still see the graffiti etchings of communist slogans on the walls of our cell. Now it was our turn to occupy the cells

in Communist Albania. The communists of the communists are now occupying the cells. What kind of irony is this?

Fortunately, in this unfortunate situation, we only stayed there five days, from October 9th to the 14th; in those dark wet cells in Bureli. They unlocked the heavy, dark cell doors and took us outside. I couldn't help myself but think that our time was up and we were about to be executed. It was a dark October night. We greeted each other with our eyes and by moving our heads because we were strictly forbidden to speak. They opened the heavy prison iron doors and one by one loaded us onto a truck, but this time they covered the top of the truck with a tarpaulin. We could not exchange words, but we conversed by sign language with our eyes and ears so that we could determine where and in which direction they were taking us.

After a long ride, the truck stopped. We heard the clamour of keys and a heavy door opening. We were taken to another prison. One by one, we were offloaded the same way we were loaded, giving us no chance to speak with one another. I was taken away by two police officers and escorted inside, one in front and one behind me. After passing through the third door we went left in a hallway and I was pushed inside a cell. The door was quickly locked behind me. It was a tiny cell two metres long by one and a half metres wide. Inside there was neither a chair nor a table, just a straw mat laid on the floor. There was no light. The only light coming in was from the crack at the bottom of the door. I looked at every inch of the cell and wondered how a person could stay alive in a cell the size of a grave. I was found guilty without any guilt and thrown into this grave. There are no words which I can use to express my feelings. No one, except those who have been in my situation could possibly understand what I was feeling. There was nothing I could do so I started to laugh. Soon my laughter turned into rage and I started to pound on the door. A police officer in a dark blue, winter, wool Yugoslav uniform came and opened the door. "What do you want?" he asked angrily. "I want to go to the toilet," I replied. "Wait!" he said and closed the door. A few minutes later he came back and took me to the washroom at the end of the hall. On my way there and back I coughed a bit and listened to hear some kind of response from my friends, but the policeman kept pushing me so I wasn't able to hear anything. I noticed that all the cells looked the same.

With me I carried a small green army blanket, which was a miracle that they did not take it from me, and a rug that I took with me when my uncle Krsto Mangov died. I found the blanket and rug very useful. I laid both on top of the straw mat and covered myself with my overcoat. Thinking that my friends and my spouse-to-be were here with me I

managed to fall asleep. A person in certain situations thinks of everything to find a way to appease their troubled soul.

I did not know what time it was or if it was day or night. I heard a knock on the door and a piece of bread, jam and a little bit of water in a helmet was handed to me under the door. I figured it was morning. I immediately ate the bread and jam. I was very hungry. As I sat there quietly I heard simultaneous clinking of helmets under each door. Shortly after eating my “breakfast”, I started to knock on the door and called out to the guard to let me go to the bathroom. He came and took me. I rinsed my eyes with a bit of water. I again deliberately coughed while going there and back. I heard replies to my cough but I could not make out whose voices they were; Malio’s, Mincho’s, or who else’s because most of them were “coughing” at the same time. I began to speak Macedonian asking who is in which cell. A voice answered me in Albanian: “I do not understand what you are saying”. I spoke in Greek. One person answered and asked me who I was and where I was from. I said: “I am Macedonian, a communist Partisan.” He began to swear at me. After that I said nothing more. From that I gathered that none of my comrades were near my cell. I also gathered that the Greek man was a prisoner from the Monarcho-Fascist side. From the coughing I gathered that my comrades were located in the cells of the same corridor. Even though I could not determine who was in which cell, the knowledge that we were close together gave me courage. In dire times even that means a lot for a person, even more when that person is innocent.

Three days after our arrival I was taken out of my current cell and transferred to a larger building. They opened a large door on the ground floor which led to a wide corridor on the right side. They unlocked a heavy door and my escort gave me the signal to enter. The door led to a small hallway with two cell doors. They unlocked the first cell door and put me inside. This cell was larger than my previous one, almost square and in one corner there was a straw mat laid on the concrete floor. I laid my small green army blanket and rug on top of the mat and went to bed, but unfortunately I could not sleep. I got up and started to pace through the cell. Here at least I could get up and walk around in circles. In the previous cell I could either sit or stand in one place.

As I was wandering around the cell, I noticed that I shared a common ceiling and ceiling light with the neighboring cell. I said something out loud in Macedonian. No one responded. I said something in Greek but still no one responded except that I heard a cough. So, there was someone in the cell next to mine. I started singing Partisan songs but again nothing. Who could my non-responding

neighbour possibly be, I wondered? The thought kept me awake for most of the night.

The unlocking of the hall door woke me up. Then I heard the door next to my cell being unlocked. Someone in slippers slowly walked out. After the prisoner had returned the guard unlocked my cell door. I went to the common washroom that all prisoners go to. On the walls I noticed various names written, which gave me an idea. Perhaps I could write something myself; a message for my friends and perhaps tomorrow one of my friends could leave a message for me, I thought. But what could I write with? During my trip to the washroom I failed to notice if there was someone inside the cell two doors from mine; there was no movement or response to my coughing. I could hear quiet coughing from my neighbouring cell but when I coughed back I got no response.

After I returned to my cell, a policeman came and brought me a piece of bread with jam and a helmet with water. He threw the food at me like I was a dog but I quickly jumped up and prevented him from slamming the door shut and said: "I am a Partisan and a communist; I am not a dog you can just throw bread at! I want to talk to the person in charge!" When he saw that I was determined to leave the cell he put his forefinger of his right hand on his mouth signaling me to keep quiet. He then said: "I am Ibrahim." He was a cute young boy. I smiled at him. He raised his shoulders and started talking to me in Albanian. As far as I understood, he said he would inform the administration. From then on Ibrahim was always kind to me. He was my age, about twenty two, twenty three years old. Strangely, over time we became friends. He also brought me more food.

Ibrahim, I was sure wanted me to know who the person in my neighbouring cell was, so that I could be more at ease. One morning when he was taking the prisoner next to my cell to the bathroom he allowed me to peek through the peep hole which he had intentionally not closed properly. I saw that she was an old woman dressed in a long and wide black dress with slippers on her feet. After he brought the old woman back he opened my cell door, a routine he performed every day.

I constantly thought about how I could make contact with my friends and find out who was here with me. In the collar of my overcoat I had attached several pins. I took one out and the next time I went to the washroom I scratched "Vera" on the wall. Two days later the word "Sister" was written down under my name. Underneath that I wrote "Brother" from which I learned that Tashko Hadzhiianov was close, probably in one of the local cells. It was a great joy for me that one of my friends was there and a concern that none of the others made contact with me, perhaps they were not there.

Towards the second half of the second month, guards came to my cell around midnight, woke me up and took me to an office. There was a major there sitting on a chair. He started talking to me in Greek. He asked me what my name and my father's name were, when and where I was born etc. After I answered him, I asked: "Why am I in this prison?" He said he did not know. He was ordered to take this information. His attitude towards me was courteous.

Reactions in Skopje about our arrest

During the night of the same day we told Gogo Petrushevski what awaited us in Bureli and advised him to flee to avoid the same, he crossed the Albanian-Macedonian border and informed the authorities in Skopje about us; that we had been detained. That relevant source of information was cause for monitoring what would happen to us in Bureli.

On October 17, 1949 the newspaper “Nova Makedonija” quoted Gogo Petrushevski (Member of the Committee to Protect the peace in Greece) as saying that on October 4 and 5, 1949, on orders of the CPG leadership, “many Macedonians were arrested and held in the Greek refugee camps in Bureli and Elbasan in Albania.” He also told the newspaper our names and that “Zahariadis himself had announced the arrests during a party conference held on October 4... in the Bureli camp.”

On November 26, 1949 the newspaper “Nova Makedonija” published an article entitled “Bloody epilogue of Zahariadis’s betrayal” in which attributes of DAG’s defeat were blamed on Yugoslavia and the names of the NOF leaders were disclosed. (Paskal Mitrevski, Pavle Rakovski, Kicha Baleva-Vera, Mincho Fotevski, Urania Pirovska, Lambro Cholakov, Lazo Poplazarov, Tashko Hadzhiiianov, Mihail Maliov, Vido Kushevski and others.)

On November 27, 1949, as the newspaper “Nova Makedonija” reported on November 29, 1949, Macedonian refugees from Greek occupied Macedonia gathered together in Freedom Square in Skopje and protested against our arrests and rallied against “the wild terror of the Greek Monarcho-Fascists who were out to exterminate the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia.” They also protested against the terror and arrests ordered by the traitor Zahariadis, especially against the NOF leaders and against the DAG fighters. They protested against Zahariadis’s plot to hide his own mistakes and pin his Party’s responsibility on Yugoslavia and NOF. After the rally protest resolutions were made and sent to the CPY Central Committee and to Lazar Kolishevski.

We are forever grateful to the refugees from Greek occupied Macedonia who raised their voices on our behalf, but with what kind of face did Mihail Keramitchiev speak in that rally?! That clearly says that the man does not have even a grain of conscience.

In the prison hospital

In the early part of December 1949, I got a high fever, a severe nose bleed and I could not eat anything. When Ibrahim saw me bleeding he advised the administration. They took me from my cell directly to the prison hospital. I was placed in a small cell, but compared to where I had been this was a much more pleasant place. The walls were painted with green oil paint and communist slogans were written on them. There was also a red star, a hammer and sickle and a figure of Stalin. This was probably the cell of former Albanian communists. I was examined by a doctor. They gave me injections and some pills to lower my temperature. They also gave me hot soup for breakfast. Somehow I slowly recovered and began to get my strength back. Five days later some people came and took me to another prison hospital. That's when I began thinking about committing suicide, I wanted to die. I ran down the hall in hopes that one of the guards would shoot me. But as I found out no one shot me. To my surprise policemen ran from all corners of the building after me. They caught me, tied my hands and put me in a car. I had not seen so many policemen in one place. The new prison they took me to looked like a clinic because it was on the main floor and the floor was laid with boards. There were two Albanian women in the room with me. One was a girl. She had given birth to an illegitimate child and was confined in this prison because she refused to disclose the father's name. She was a village girl and very cheerful in nature. The other woman was a radio announcer working for Radio-Tirana during Mehmed Zog's time and during the Italian occupation. Her name was Delphi Ruzhe Banushi, a very intelligent woman. She had a breast cancer operation. She was aware that she was going to die soon and wanted to die even sooner. She spoke a little Greek. When I told her in which prison I was held and about the old woman next to my cell, she told me that the old woman was a princess who did not want to leave Albania to escape communist rule and was caught and sentenced to life imprisonment. She told me that she personally knew the old lady and that she spoke French well and that I should greet her in French when I returned to my cell. I told Ruzhe I did not speak French but somehow I would find a way to convey her greeting to her. I told Ruzhe that I had already tried communicating with the woman in both Macedonian and Greek but she did not respond. Ruzhe said that the woman might be afraid of provocations.

I stayed in the prison clinic for a week and found out that beneath the main floor there was a basement where many prisoners were kept. We overheard them speaking Serbian and Greek. I gathered the Greeks were Monarcho-Fascist officers who had been captured and the Serbs

were Titoists, so I wanted no part of them, especially their swearing and cursing.

After a week's stay at this hospital, being treated with injections and pills for my fever, my nose kept bleeding even when I was sleeping. But it seemed no one really cared for such "trifling" things in totalitarianism. One night they took me back to the same cell in the same prison. I met with Ibrahim in the morning and then I started to write on the walls of the washroom again to make contact with my friends. Unfortunately there was no response, not even from "Brother". I began to feel overwhelmed with depression and disappointment. I thought that, perhaps during my absence they had taken them somewhere else, but that feeling did not last long.

On the road to Dures

On December 14, 1949 at midnight I heard my cell door unlock and two people step inside. One was the guard and the other was an officer. The officer spoke and said: "Prepare yourself to leave and take everything with you!" I picked up my green military blanket and left my rug for Ibrahim to remember me by in this Tirana prison. As I write down these lines I do not know where Ibrahim might be. Would he still be in Albania? Would he still be a guard or promoted to a higher rank? Would he still be working in this prison or would he have been transferred to another prison? Perhaps he has retired from his job? I left him my rug, one of my most valuable possessions, to show him my appreciation. Surely Ibrahim would have kept the rug if he had known what it meant to me. My rug was hand woven by my grandmother Ristovitsa Mangova, Krsto Mango's mother, who left for Yugoslavia in June 1948 when the village D'mbeni was burned down to the ground by the Monarcho-Fascists. She left the rug for Krsto but when he was killed on August 11, 1949 I took the rug with me as a reminder of my grandmother.

While preparing to leave I placed my entire attention on listening to all kinds of sounds. Walking in the hallway I heard cell doors unlocking. In about an hour they had gathered all eleven of us in the prison yard. I first greeted my husband-to-be, Mincho, then Paskal and the others as they stood in a row. When the guards saw the way we greeted each other they prohibited us from speaking. We were then handcuffed in pairs and tied together with three loops of thick rope. The leftover rope at the end was curled around Tashko Hadzhiiianov's waist. We kept greeting each other with our eyes and by bowing our heads. None of us looked like our former selves. The men had grown long hair and long beards. We all thought that this would be the last time we would see each other. We thought that we were on our way to be executed. It gave us some comfort though, being connected by the rope to each other in this way, as we had fought together, and together we would be in the other world.

They loaded us into a truck. There was a policeman standing over each one of us with a machine gun pointed at our head. There was also an officer sitting beside the driver who spoke Greek well. When the truck left the city, we could hear the song "Chupe Mashala" being sung in the distance. A strong December wind was blowing. We were all wrapped in our long coats, had our collars raised and our hats placed over our heads. Only Paskal had a military coat. Mihail Malio spoke up and in Greek said: "They are going to execute us." Pascal then in a calm voice replied: "Perhaps they are taking us to the Yugoslav border

and will release us.” Mincho then jokingly said: “Do you not see the kind of predicament we are in? Now you are asking for too much!” Everyone laughed. A hungry chicken dreams of millet.

Our greatest concern at the moment was “what would become of us.” It is interesting to note that even in dire moments such as these we maintained our fighting spirit. We did not care if we were shot or not and joked among ourselves even though the policemen kept ordering us not to talk. At one point a strong gust of wind blew Lambro Cholakov’s hat off and he yelled out: “Stop the truck, I lost my hat!” We all cracked up laughing and Mincho, who was tied to Lambro, said: “Leave it, you will find a better one where we are going!” One of the guards in poor Greek said: “Asi to mikro, apo pu kseris pu tato pate?” (You, the little one, how do you know where you are going?). We all looked at each other and started laughing. After hearing the guard joke and given that we had traveled for this long, we gathered that we were not being taken to be shot. Realizing he had made a mistake, the Albanian guard became angry and began to swear at Mincho, who at the time was curled up in his overcoat and blowing on his hands to keep them warm. Mincho looked at the guard and said: “And might you be that courier who used to cross the border and go to Yugoslavia?” (Esi ise to kuriri pu to pigane stin Yugoslavia?).

It was dawn when we arrived in a small town. Mincho asked the officer where we were and he, without thinking, said: “In Dures”. The officer became startled after realizing he had made a mistake giving him information and began to swear and yell: “A esi to kuriri, to mikro...”

On board the “Michurin”

They unloaded us off the truck near the port and escorted us to a ship tied with ropes to shore. As we began to climb up the steep iron stairs I noticed the large letters “MICHURIN” on board the ship. That was the name of a Soviet cargo ship which carried ore from Albania to the USSR. Two of the Albanian officers who had brought us here boarded the ship with us. Tied together we descended down the stairs in darkness and landed in a dark room at the bottom of the ship. The Albanians untied us. A Soviet sailor dropped in a lamp; that’s when we began to hug each other. Because the Albanians had fulfilled their obligation they gathered their rope and took off our handcuffs. Mincho addressed the Albanians with the words: “Goodbye and take care of your handcuffs and rope.”

In the room inside the ship where they had placed us there was only one opening. It was located on top of the stairs down which we had descended. Soon after we got settled, a Soviet sailor-officer in civilian clothes came and closed the hatch on the opening. The only light we had after that was that of the lamp. We stayed here in the port of Dures for two days while the ship was loaded with ore and who knows what else. In the morning they opened the hatch, gave us porridge and boiled water and shut it again. The men had overgrown hair and beards and we were all dirty, unwashed. We pounded on the hatch for a while. The civilian came. Urania and I asked if we could come up, wash and go to the bathroom. The man said okay but nothing came of it. During the night they brought us two tin cans, one empty and the other full of water and told us to wash in one and go to the bathroom in the other. They put the tin cans in the corner of the room and hung something like a curtain around them. In the barn like room we were in, at the bottom of the ship, there were also closets with beds inside. They could be locked from the inside. Mincho and I took one and called it “the closet of happiness.” This was our cruise on the ship “Michurin,” it was also our “wedding trip and honeymoon.”

On December 16, 1949 “Michurin” left the port of Dures and (for us) sailed away heading for an unknown destination. We all began to sing the Greek song: “Ena karavi apo ton Pirea,” (A ship from Piraeus) modified to sound something like this:

A ship from Dures,
Sails to an unknown place,
With a group inside of it,
With their thoughts constantly on dry land,
This is what we the people of NOF are,

This how we the people of NOF fare.

It may have sounded a bit sarcastic, but in the situation we were put in by Nikos Zahariadis how else could it have sounded? Looking at it another way, this was our way of expressing our “gratitude” to him for what he had done to us after we had given him our all with our Macedonian movement fighting for freedom and democracy.

Inside the ship we could not tell if it was day or night because there was no natural light coming in. We knew it was another day when we received our food which consisted of porridge, boiled water, broth and sometimes fish soup. The lamp burned day and night as we kept putting notches on the wall to keep track of the number of days we were on the ship.

Around the fourth or fifth day after we had left Dures we felt the ship slowing down. We thought that we were approaching a harbour and indeed we were. After a while that same sailor, or officer in civilian clothes, opened the hatch and we were able to see a piece of blue sky and land, seashore and rocks, not very far away. From this we concluded that we had left the Dardanelles behind and that we were somewhere in the Marmora Sea about to enter the Black Sea.

Thinking they will take us to Romania

– My memories of Zahariadis's treachery and psychological trauma

For some reason we had the impression that they were taking us to Romania, to Konstantsa Harbour. Paskal and I had visited Romania before. I had been there twice and I had visited Konstantsa. My first visit was an official visit in December 1948. I went there with a delegation of Greek women. I visited several working collectives and greeted the workers on behalf of the women in Greece fighting for their freedom and against the Greek Monarcho-Fascists and Anglo-American imperialists. The second time I went to Romania was in June 1949. That's when I visited Konstantsa. I had just returned from the Second International Peace Congress. Paskal and Taki Papadimitriou, Minister of the Provisional Government of Greece, were returning from Georgi Dimitrov's funeral. They were part of President Partsalidis's delegation. We knew that the centre of ELAS-Press and the Informburo headquarters were located in Romania, in Bucharest. That was on April 20, 1949.

I want to briefly mention a few things here. For the II International Peace Congress, part of which was held in Prague, our delegation did not receive entry visas from the French government. The Congress was held in Paris and Prague at the same time. Our delegation consisted of Miltiadis Porfirogenis (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Government of Greece, leading the delegation), Petros Kokalis (Minister of Education) and Rula Kukulu (President of the Pan-Greek Democratic Union of Women). From the NOF side, included in the delegation were Pavle Rakovski, Done Sikavitsa (Member of the NOF General Board Secretariat) and myself (NOF Vice President and AFZH secretary). As head of NOF's educational activities and chief editor of the newspaper "Nepokoren", Pavle Rakovski greeted the Congress in Macedonian. Done Sikavitsa at that time was responsible for the placement of children in the People's Republics so he greeted the Congress on behalf of NOF in that capacity. I remember then having a conversation with Kokalis where he proposed not to separate the Macedonian children from the Greek just so that they could study the Macedonian language, but we were adamant and determined in our demands. He backed down and agreed with us. He was a good friend. By profession he was a physician specializing in phymatology and did not care much about "current events". He mostly did what he was told.

That's when I visited the village Liditse, which the German fascists had completely burned to the ground when, on May 31, 1942, Czechoslovak anti-fascists killed Reinhardt Haidrih the Gestapo leader.

We used this occasion to visit the homes where our Macedonian children had been placed. We also visited the factories in the city Olomuz. There they gave us a car full of candies and chocolates. After that we went to Ostrava where the people gave me 50 pairs of shoes for the Partisans in Greece, 6 transistor radios and many other gifts. We donated the various packages of candies and chocolates to the children's homes in Liberets and Prague. There I also discussed the deficiencies in the homes but from what I had seen I was convinced that the children were well housed and cared for. I took several photographs of the children to show to their mothers. In Liberets I took pictures of small children one of whom was Doncho, Urania's son. When I met Urania in Breznitsa, on August 6, I gave her a picture of her child but she was not able to recognize him.

In Prague we were accommodated in the hotel "Paris". The Greek representative of "Iafka" for Czechoslovakia, responsible for taking care of our accommodations, was Maximo. When I told him who I was and that I was Macedonian, he took a liking to me and told me a lot of things. One interesting point he made was about the Macedonian National Question. In the thirties in accordance with the Comintern position on this question, the Communist Party of Greece agreed to an "Autonomous Macedonia", for that he was imprisoned by the Greek reactionary regime. As I also learned from him, he was not liked by Zahariadis and was not allowed to participate in DAG activities. But because he spoke French he had been appointed to this job. After DAG's capitulation he went to Vienna and died there. How true that is I do not know.

I was well received in Prague by Comrade Sinkova, member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia's Central Committee. She attended the PDEG Pan-Greek Conference on March 1, 1949, held in Prespa, in the free territory in the locality known as "Africa" and was thrilled by my performance when I read a resolution, especially since I had a fever, my temperature being 40° (I was sick). During my stay in Prague, Sinkova invited me to her home and in a conversation said: "You're like a daughter to me." Rula and I were given custom made military overcoats and other matching items of clothing. I was also given many gifts and more clothing.

The Congress lasted six days during which I met Fadeev, twice a Hero of the Soviet Union, and writer Konstantin Simonov, both were with us throughout the Congress. I also met Nikos Zahariadis's first wife who attended the Congress as a member of the CPG Central Committee.

I sat next to Rula Kukul in the hall. A blonde woman with a young three or four year old girl came and sat beside me. I did not know the

woman. I picked the little girl up, put her on my lap and stroked her hair. I smiled at her and she smiled back. I later found out that the woman was Zahariadis's wife and that the little girl was his daughter. The woman's name was Maria Novakova but she had changed her last name in Moscow to Krauzova. The blonde woman smiled at me kindly and said something in Czech. After the Congress was finished we prepared to leave. Porfirogenis and Rula had to leave for Greece, Kokalis and D. Sikavitsa were to remain there and I and Pavle Rakovski were to go to Bulgaria and from there through Yugoslavia to the free territory of Greece. I had to leave to join the units in Belasitsa where DAG Division VI was located.

The morning before I left, the same blonde woman sitting next to me at the Congress came to my room but without the little girl. She handed me a letter and said: "I only trust you to personally deliver this letter directly to Kolichka (Nikos) Zahariadis." She also gave me some candy for the trip. She gave me a hug and wished me good luck as we said our goodbyes. I was puzzled and wondered why this woman would choose me to deliver her letter? Porfirogenis was next door to my room and when he came out I asked him if he knew who this woman was and why she had given me a letter for Zahariadis. He told me that she was Zahariadis's wife. Then it became clear to me why she had given me the letter and not Rula and why Rula had behaved so coldly towards her. I remembered reading an article in the newspaper "Makedonija" in 1945, when I worked for NOF in Sorovich-Kailersko Regions, saying that Mrs. Zahariadis had left Athens on a plane for Czechoslovakia.

I could not even then imagine why Zahariadis had ordered Maximo to have me examined by a doctor because he suspected that I had malaria and kept me in Prague for treatment. I went to a hospital together with Sinkova. They took blood for testing and gave us the results the same day. We were greeted by two doctors, one was a Serb. He approached me and in Serbian said: "Macedonians are healthy as can be but take these drugs anyway." He gave me a miracle drug against malaria but I never used it, I just threw it away.

Then I remembered the dialogue I had had with Zahariadis in the first days of April 1949 after the conclusion of the NOF Second Congress and the KOEM Conference on March 25th to 27th, 1949 when he had invited me to meet with him in the village Vineni in Prespa.

For several days in a row he sent a Central Committee courier on a motorcycle to personally pick me up from NOF headquarters in the village P'pli and take me to Vineni so that he could talk to me in person. First he asked me to give a talk about NOF and AFZH's successes and about the Congress on the "Free Greece" radio program. Then he asked me to write an article about "Peace and Democracy" for

the “Cominform Bureau” newspaper published in Bucharest. I then asked him why he had chosen me and not someone like Paskal or Kochopulos or someone else more qualified to write the article. He said he had chosen me because I was famous and internationally known. (I did not know then that they had made a movie of our delegation attending the 2nd International Women’s Congress held from December 1st to the 6th, 1948. I found that out later during the Moscow trials when the translator Aristotelis Papunidis informed me that the film was being previewed in Moscow cinemas. Our delegation, especially Rula Kukulcu and myself, was highlighted giving speeches at the Congress. To this day I have not seen the movie, I looked for it but it seems like it is hidden in some remote archive somewhere.)

The next day Zahariadis asked me if I had thought about the previous day’s proposition. I told him no because I was not the right person for the job and I wouldn’t be able to carry out such duties. That’s when he said: “You, Vera, should be looking at Moscow and not at Belgrade.” So I said: “I can only look to Skopje in Macedonia, that’s as far as I can see.”

From what he said I gathered that he probably wanted me to criticize Yugoslavia, especially through the Cominform Bureau. Because I refused he later put me under house arrest in Bucharest, Romania and kept me in isolation abroad, away from my organization and my people until August 1949, before DAG’s defeat.

During our meetings I took the opportunity to ask Zahariadis: “Are the statements circulating around our people that you have jailed activists from NOF and AFZH true?” He said: “It is not your concern!” So I asked: “How can it not be my concern when some of my people are missing? Where is Dana Popova the AFZH secretary from the village Smrdesh? Where is Sofia Giakova-Bozhinitza the secretary from the village German? They are among the most active of our secretaries. Where is Atanas Makrievski, NOF’s Main Board courier?” I also mentioned other names... He said: “That is a job for the Party.”

I stopped asking him about this. There were too many incidents. I only asked him to allow me a day’s visit in Bitola. A delegation of NOF had been invited by President Risto Kalaidziev to join the Macedonian Association visiting Sofia and attend the anniversary of Yane Sandanski’s death. I asked Zahariadis if on the way back I could go and visit my mother for a day in Bitola. To that he replied: “Why not? You can stay even longer.” So on April 9th, 1949 Mincho took me to the border by jeep and I stayed with my mother in Bitola for a whole day and night.

I want to mention here that Zahariadis was always approachable for discussion and I was always open, direct and frank with him during our meetings, especially about NOF activists. I also want to mention that at the same time many Macedonian fighters from political organizations and DAG were jailed in Albanian prisons and camps. Some remained there for 10 years but after the normalization of relations between the Parties they were given an opportunity to return to Macedonia, to their families, as was the case for Giorgi Turundzhiev, Miltiadi Popnikolovski-Tsvetko, Atanas Makrievski, Dana Popova and others, some returned through Bulgaria.

In May, I don't remember the exact date, Maximo purchased plane tickets to Sofia for me and for Rakovski. Rakovski left before me, and I followed him via Belgrade to Sofia. I sat in the plane with a Yugoslav person returning to Belgrade from Prague. He asked me: "Why don't you stay in Yugoslavia?" I said: "I have obligations in Bulgaria". When he got off the plane in Belgrade I gave him some "dinars" (Yugoslav money) to go buy me cigarettes, but by the time he got back the plane was ready to take off so we said our goodbyes through the window and I never did get my cigarettes.

When I arrived at the airport in Sofia I was met by the "Iafka" agent for Bulgaria. He informed me that all the others had already left. Pavle Rakovski had left for Yugoslavia via Petrich and from there he was to head to Aegean Macedonia. While in Skopje he met with Goche and Keramitchiev and was handed a letter for Zahariadis. Without giving it a second thought he took the letter and delivered it to Zahariadis. The contents of the letter gave Zahariadis reason to assemble all NOF cadres and enact the KOEM resolution, which Zahariadis himself wrote and which no one, except for Pavle Rakovski, signed.

As for deserters Keramitchiev, Goche, Vangel Aianovski and others, they could have freely expressed their views when they were in NOF. They did not have to cowardly abandon NOF and desert when they were needed the most, especially out there on the battlefields. Why did the deserters have to put a wedge in the organization and in its dependable leadership from afar? That was not praiseworthy; it was inhuman.

I asked the "Iafka" representative in Sofia if I could return to NOF in Greece through Yugoslavia. They sent a jeep that took me to the Yugoslav border via Petrich to Strumitsa. As usual, no one was waiting for me on the Yugoslavian side. The person responsible for receiving me never arrived. After several attempts at contacting them through the Petrich office, I was informed that no one was coming. I had to return to Petrich where I was placed with a Macedonian family, a young couple with a small child. The people were very nice to me. Yani, the

“Iafka” representative there was running out of options as to what to do for me so I proposed that I leave for Division VI in Belasitsa. The next day I left with some Bulgarian soldiers and arrived at Division VI Headquarters. While visiting with Division Commander Vazvazanis I met Petri Iorgas, CPG Central Committee representative, Eritriadis, CPG District Committee Secretary for Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, whom I knew very well from May 1947 when he was involved with NOF and attended an all NOF rally on May 20 in the Mishovata building in Kajmakchalan. I was well received by Iorgas and Vazvazanis who immediately took me to the building where the Division Headquarters was established. After a bit of rest Iorgas came back and told me that Hrisa Kalimanova was there. I immediately left and went to her barracks where we greeted each other with a long embrace because we had not seen each other since 1944.

The next day a meeting of all the Partisans was convened where I briefed the participants about the Peace Congress. I told them how we had been received and many details about what had been said and done at the Congress. After that I asked Iorgas and Vazvazanis to help me get to Vicho from Kajmakchalan as soon as possible. “Iafka” then informed me that they had spoken with Zahariadis about my transfer but it could not take place through the Solun plain because there were too many enemy soldiers there and all the roads were controlled by them. They said that I could go through Yugoslavia if I wanted; the border was only a few hundred metres away. I thought about it and figured that it was some sort of provocation so I refused. I couldn’t go through Strumitsa because “Iafka” did not show up to take me. I asked Iordas to contact General Headquarters again and make new arrangements for my transfer back.

Hrisa Kalimanova was in charge of the women in Division VI in relation to General Headquarters. When I received confirmation that I was to go to Bulgaria and Romania and wait there for further instructions, I said goodbye to everyone. When I said goodbye to Iordas he said: “What, you are going to marry Mincho?” When I said yes he said: “Where did you find him?! He has links with Tito!” I said: “Mincho is too young to have a relationship with Tito”, but it became clear to me in what kind of situation I found myself. So I said to myself: “Vera be careful!”

I returned to Petrich with a courier, who was connected to “Iafka” in Petrich and with Stati, a DAG officer who had been in Bulgaria all this time. When we arrived at the border, all three border watchtowers (in Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria) were empty, there were no border guards. We stopped in the centre of the triangle. I told Stati: “You see those three watchtowers that are empty? That’s how it should always

be!” “Why?” he asked. “So that all three parts of Macedonia can be together. It is a tragedy what happened to my people when the Great Powers and the reactionary regimes in the Balkans divided Macedonia into three different states,” I said.

I had a transistor radio with me, given to me as a gift by the Czechoslovakian workers in a factory. I was given six transistor radios but I gave the others away to Rula and Porfirogenis, to the NOF Main Board and to DAG. I gave one to Division VI Headquarters and I brought one with me. We listened to songs from Greece and Bulgaria. Stati was delighted. We arrived in Petrich at night. I went to the same house I had been at before. When the hostess saw me she was very happy. A jeep came and we left the same evening for Sofia. I was accommodated in the “Iafka” house.

Two days later they purchased train tickets for me for Bucharest. I packed my uniform and a uniform that I was bringing for Mincho, along with my materials and gifts from the Congress. I wore the civilian clothes I was given. At the train station I met a delegation of Macedonian women, mothers who had chosen to visit children in the homes in the People’s Republics. Among the mothers was Donka Kalkova, AFZH member from my village, Lazo Trpovski’s sister, who was appointed in charge of the delegation. After I greeted everyone with hugs and kisses, I told them that I would see them again back in the free territory at home. The women came from Romania to visit the children’s homes in Bulgaria, in which some of our children had been placed. I left for Romania.

I met Leteri Apostolu at the train station in Bucharest, at that time he was in charge of ELAS-Press in Romania. He took me to the house where Sofia was located. Sofia was a Partisan blinded during the fighting and was waiting to be sent to the Odessa Filatov Clinic for therapy. But as I understood later, due to the severe damage she had received there was no hope of her ever seeing again. She married in Tashkent and had children.

A day or so later Nikos Dafnis arrived and was also located there in a different room of the same house. He was responsible for the Greek branch of “Iafka” in Skopje, for receiving non-combatants and wounded from the fronts and for transportation material assistance to DAG in Greece from Yugoslavia and from other republics. He was also responsible for receiving political workers and for finding care, placement and deployment for wounded Partisans in other Republics. “Iafka” or “Giafka” as the Greeks called it, at the time was established in several places. In Macedonia it was established in Skopje, Bitola and Strumica. It was also established in Nish and Belgrade. There were “Iafka” offices opened in all the People’s Republics. Interestingly, not a

single Macedonian ever served in the “Iafka” establishments, all representatives were Greek. In Skopje “Iafka” was located on “Hristo Botev” street in the “Vinar” building (later destroyed by the earthquake) opposite the former Macedonian Ministry of the Interior. When the borders were closed in May 1949, all our friends from “Iafka” in Yugoslavia were recalled by the CPG. That’s how Nikos Dafnis found himself in Romania. At Zahariadis’s request he was welcomed by Lefteri Apostolu and placed under house arrest in the same house where I was. What happened to Dafnis after that, I don’t know? As for Lefteri Apostolu (military revolutionary brother to heroic Electra Apostolu), he too fell into disfavour with Zahariadis because of his dealings. He returned to Greece during the junta and wrote a book. He died in Athens.

Lefteri came to visit us when we were in house arrest in Bucharest. I begged him to make arrangements for me to return to Greece but he told me that I was not allowed to return. Twenty or so days after my arrest he sent me for a medical examination because according to Dr. Koligani’s diagnosis, a DAG General Headquarters doctor, I was suspected of suffering from tuberculosis. I wanted to go and visit the children in the dormitory and the wounded Partisans in the hospital. I don’t know why I wanted to do this. Was it because of an inner desire or something else? But by insisting I was able to ease my nerves in the detention house in the ELAS-Press building where I was under house arrest in Bucharest. With me in the same building were Apostolos Grozos, later CPG General Secretary, Vuross with one of the General Headquarters Chiefs, Miltiadis Porfirogenis’s wife and Panaiotis Dzhimas, who at that time was in charge of publishing. Vuross, during a conversation with Grozos said: “We did okay with him but the other guy is a tough nut to crack.” I then asked them who they were talking about. Grozos then said: “We are talking about Keramitchiev and Paskal.” I thought to myself that they were probably referring to the letter that Goche and Keramitchiev had addressed to Zahariadis and about the famous KOEM resolution” for which I had no comment and knew nothing about except from the news that I heard coming from the front.

After my visit to the doctor and after I was found as healthy as a horse, I was allowed to go to the dormitory in Tulgesh to see the children. I was not sick, my illness was an invention of Zahariadis to remove me from NOF and AFZH and keep me away from the people so that I would not influence them in favour of Yugoslavia and they would never know the truth. In Tulgesh I had several meetings with the teachers, caregivers, nurses and the children. I noticed that the climate was not right because of a couple of abusive characters named Tsvetko

and Karatemio who constantly mistreated the nurses and teachers and harassed the older children. I almost came to blows with them so I complained to the Romanian authorities and asked them to clear the unhealthy atmosphere because it was negatively affecting the children. As I learned later, some teachers with whom I had met at that time were later interned in the city Kluz; accused of being Tito's agents. During the interrogations, among other things, they were asked: "What did Vera tell you?" This was especially asked of the teacher Kula Karantsova from the village Smrdesh.

I also visited Sinaia dormitory in Romania in which younger children were placed. My elementary school teacher from my village D'mbeni, Ristana Ratkova-Rizova was responsible for this dormitory. Ristana was well respected by the Romanian authorities because she genuinely cared for the children. Her husband Yani was also a teacher but he was killed fighting with DAG. Ristana with her three children was sent to Romania by the village Organization. She was chosen to head Sinaia dormitory because of her excellent qualifications. The building in which the dormitory was located was in fact the Romanian king's palace, his winter residence, equipped with winter recreational activities and hunting. There was also a hospital in Sinaia to which many of our sick and wounded Partisans were sent to recover. I visited the hospital as well. I had my picture taken with Done Sikavitsa there. Done was a member of the NOF General Board Secretariat responsible for all our children in the People's Republics. I was with him as part of the delegation that attended the International Congress of Peace in Prague. When he saw me at the hospital he asked me what I was still doing there. So I said: "Please don't ask me, it is best that you don't know." There I also met with Atanas Malinov who was recovering from his wounds. Atanas also served as a teacher in the Sanaia dormitory. After DAG's capitulation he completed his medical studies and worked as a doctor at the railway hospital in Skopje. Now he is a pensioner. From time to time I look at the photograph and it reminds me of those times. In the photograph are Done Sikavitsa, his wife Mulka Dzhambazova, teacher Kula Kurantsova, Risto Poptraianov, Aleko Dukovski and others who were interned in the city Kluz as Tito's agents and removed from our children's educational activities. In 1965 all these people went to Skopje. The photograph reminded me of a difficult period in my life and in the lives of my comrades.

I spent twenty days visiting the dormitories. I was especially glad to have visited and spent time with the wounded partisans in the hospital. I shared stories with them of fighting in the fields and mountains of our homeland.

When I returned to Bucharest I asked Apostolu if there was something there for me. He said: "Comrade Vera, believe me it is hard for me, but it was not my decision to keep you here." He also told me that Mitrevski and Papadimitriou were there. They had apparently gone to Russia on July 2, 1949 after returning from Georgi Dimitrov's funeral. Now they were placed in one of our houses here. Apostolu offered to take me to see them. I accepted and we went the next day. When they saw me they too wondered what I was still doing here. Paskal told me that they had lost all traces of me; they did not know where I was. He said: "Mincho is going crazy looking for you. He is constantly asking Baradzhotia about you; where you are, but he always gets the same answer 'I don't know!' Mincho even asked Zahariadis and he too told him that he did not know anything about your whereabouts and that perhaps you might be in Yugoslavia." Ironically it was Zahariadis who did not want me back, making it look like I went missing so that he could add more charges to NOF and AFZH. Pascal and Papadimitriou promised me that they would take me with them when they left. Apostolu was okay with that.

A couple of days later all three of us left Bucharest with proper documentation prepared for us by Apostolu and we headed for Budapest by train. Waiting at the railway station was Hristoforos Gizidis who, like Apostolu in Bucharest, Maximo in Prague and Dafni in Skopje, was our representative in Budapest. After a day's stay in Budapest Paskal and Taki left by plane for Albania, Greece and from there back to the free territory. I was not authorized to travel.

At the same time preparations were being made to hold the International Festival of Youth. Hristoforos told me that they were waiting for the EPON and NOMS youth delegations to arrive. He said: "Why fret? Mincho too will be coming!" I asked for and was granted permission to visit the children's dormitories and our wounded in the hospital. In the ward for the severely wounded I found some of my closest friends with whom I had lost contact. Among them was Naum Pachkov from my village, Giorgi Papadimitriou-Kotrumba from the village Rupishta, Anna Mangova from the village Zhupanishta (she later married Giorgi), Paskal Hristovski from Breshteni hero of Vicho and Gramos and some commanders and commissars. They were all severely wounded. I spent several days with these brave men and every hour I asked Hristoforos if there was anything new for me. But it was not until August 5, 1949 that Zahariadis approved my departure. I got the news from Hristoforos at dinner time, in front of everyone. He said that there was a ticket for me and that I should leave the next morning. I was ready to go at four o'clock in the morning. I put my uniform in my backpack and traveled dressed in civilian clothes. They gave me all

the necessary documentation but would not allow me to take my personal belongings, except for my uniforms and my transistor radio. More suspicious obstacles I suppose.

No one would believe the anguish that I went through in those two and a half months. A great deal of psychological pressure was put on me but I remained as I always was, I was not willing to compromise and say black was white and white was black. But at the same time I did not know why this had been done to me and what I was required to do. Nobody openly told me anything. No one told me why I had been kept there. No one told me that they did not approve of my Organizations. All I received was treachery, unheard and unseen treachery, impropriety of the worst kind, the kind that they had reserved for common people, not for the communists and definitely not for the top leadership.

Anyway on August 6th, 1949 I departed and through Belgrade I flew to Tirana where I was received by Nikos Fereos, the person in charge of “Iafka” in Albania. I knew Nikos from previous visits. He arranged a jeep for me that took me to the village Breznitsa in Kostur Region and from there I took another jeep and went to the village P’pli, Prespa Region, to the NOF “Iafka”. When Paskal and Mihail Malio saw me they greeted me with enthusiasm and after a brief discussion about my ordeal I left for my station. I was stationed in the same cottage where the NOF Main Board Headquarters was located. None of the women, my co-workers, were there. I asked for my gun and my purse with relevant documents, pictures and other materials that I had left with the Main Board. Paskal told me that everything I had given to Mincho for safe keeping after my departure, he had hidden somewhere before he left for Gramos General Headquarters, which included my camera and some other things. Paskal did not agree that Mincho should take all of my things and hide them, but Mincho told him that it was not his business. Mincho did not want anyone to have any of my personal things after he sent me to the village Rabbi on April 9, 1949.

I had not told anyone about my connection to Mincho. Many however knew or assumed that there was something there between us. Even Zahariadis was interested in exactly what was our relationship. Zahariadis, in the presence of Mihail Malio, NOF Secretary, and Tane Naumov asked Mincho what our relationship was. Mincho told him that it was personal business. Only my friend Hrisanta Tsanzovska, who now lives in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, a member of the AFZH Board, knew about our relationship.

I went to the village P’pli to the seat of the National Liberation District Board for Lerin Region. There I met President Risto Kolentsev. After we greeted each other he smiled and said: “Where have you been

all this time? I want you to know that I missed you very much.” There I also met my friends from ONOO, also members of the AFZH General Board. Among them were Malina Markovska (mother of two sons and one daughter, all partisans, her daughter was killed in combat. She was a lieutenant in DAG), Foteitsa from Zhelevo, Aleksandra from Shtrkovo and many others. Some time later my friend Marika Elkova, member of the NOF General Board Secretariat, arrived. In my absence she had acted as my replacement. I went with her to another room of the building for a private conversation and there she informed me about the AFZH status in Lerin and Kostur Regions. She said: “We have remained the same as before, nothing has changed except that we lost some of our friends. They were killed in the battlefields.” Saddest for Marika was that she knew nothing about the fate of her fiancé Tanas Papatriandafilu. A month and a half later I found Tanas in Elbasan where we were stationed, he had fled there with the refugee people. We were so happy to see that he was still alive. When we asked him where he had been all this time, he discreetly looked around, making sure no one was listening, quietly told me that he had been imprisoned in Korcha and that there were many other Macedonians imprisoned with him. Among other things, in the prison in Korcha, Tanas was asked about me, if he knew me and what kind of links I had with Yugoslavia. Based on these questions Tanas figured that they were interested in me so he warned me that he would not be surprised if I was arrested. I thanked him for the warning and after many years when I met him in Skopje, I again expressed my gratitude.

Marika and I traveled to the village Bukovo. That’s where our Agitprop was located. From there we went to Orovo and then to Zhelevo where I met with Mahi Pilaeva, AFZH secretary for Lerin Region. Mahi informed me about the current situation of our Organization and about the high morale of the population. She even said: “The enemy will never take Vicho. Our fighters and our people are ready for the decisive battle.”

The mountains Bela Voda, Lunzer, Vicho, Malimadi etc. were all equipped with bunkers and trenches built by our AFZH women and fighters. Truly the enemy could not pass their ring, but we did not count of the Monarcho-Fascists being supplied with heavy weapons and aviation by Truman. They not only took Vicho but they also entered Prespa. We made many sacrifices but we were forced out. We had no choice, both military and civilians, but to withdraw across the border into Albania, to Elbasan, where Marika caught up with her fiancé Tanas Papatriandafilu.

From Zhelevo Marika and I went to the village Oshchima to meet with AFZH secretary Liuba Dzhigerova. The next day Marika and I

went our separate ways. She returned to Prespa, while I visited the villages Trnava, Rulia and Breznitsa. In Breznitsa I met with my friend Urania Jurukova-Pirovska, who was performing several tasks on behalf of KOEM. At the NOO District I met with NOO President Krsto Mangov, also my uncle, my mother's cousin, with whom I had grown up. My meeting with him was emotional. He also gave me a personal message from Mincho.

I found out from my uncle, for the first time, that there had been a meeting in some cave somewhere in the so-called "Africa" locality during which Pavle Rakovski had brought a letter from Yugoslavia and during which Zahariadis accused Mincho of being an agent of OZNA and what Mincho had to say about that. My uncle took Mincho to the side and told him to keep quiet and not to talk back so much. But in the situation in which we found ourselves, no one paid much attention to that meeting, it passed and it was not a decisive battle for life and death.

I met with Urania again on August 11, 1949. Both of us did our chores from the previous day and went out to the outskirts of the village Breznitsa to visit with Krsto Mangov. I got a strange feeling when my uncle took me aside, hugged and kissed me and said: "If you should die, I will never leave Vena," Vena was my mother, "but if I should die please look after my mother and my children." Baba Ristovitsa Mangova-Lina and my mother lived together in one room in Bitola in Zhivko Delkov's house located at number 6 "Mirche Atsev" Street. Krsto's wife and his youngest girl also lived there. The other two children were sent to Romania and were living in the Tulgesh dormitory. The grandmothers Yana Balova and Mara Karadzhovala also lived in Bitola.

I said goodbye to Krsto and Urania, took a jeep and went to NOF General Board Headquarters located on a hill above the village P'pli. When I entered the cabin, I heard NOF Secretary Mihail Maliov talking with someone on the telephone. He signaled with his hand that we should wait. From the expression on his face we concluded that there was some bad news. I immediately thought of Mincho; maybe he had been killed. I shivered when Mihail hung up the telephone but did not say anything. He kept looking at us with a serious look on his face. "Tell us what happened!" I asked. He said: "Krsto Mangov, along with General Skotida, is dead; killed by the same shell. I just got the bad news from Headquarters. They are leaving for Breznitsa right now." I dropped everything and immediately ran to the Motorized Unit led by Sterio Mavranza from Rupishta. We got a jeep and left for P'pli. I asked my friends to drop me off in Breznitsa. When I arrived on the scene, two DAG officers from General Headquarters took General

Skotida's (Nikos Teoharopoulos) body in a jeep and buried him somewhere, where I don't know. General Skotida was one of the most liked of all the DAG generals. During ELAS he served in the 28th ELAS Regiment. He loved the Macedonian fighters.

Krsto Mangov's body was blown to bits by the shell. Whatever remained of him we buried in the village Breznitsa beside the graves of Pere Temelkovski from Prilep and a sergeant from ELAS. Their graves are now unmarked. The words that Krsto spoke to me only days before came true; he died. I picked up his bag and his suitcase full of documents, the broken watch he was wearing on his left hand and the hand woven rug made for him by his mother, my grandmother Ristovitsa. Ristovitsa died in Bitola and was buried by my mother in the Bitola Cemetery beside my grandmother Iagna. It was hard for me not being able to fulfill my uncle's wish because when his mother died I myself did not know where I was. I only know that I was in prison somewhere in Moscow. Many times I told myself that Krsto was lucky to have died then because if he were alive he would have been in prison with us or in a prison in some other People's Republic. With Krsto's death, Vicho fell on August 15, 1949. His bag and suitcase, along with all my documents from NOO were taken from me by Piraklis Miroviglis. My uncle's rug I left in the prison in Tirana.

NOT TO ROMANIA; They are taking us to the USSR

The ship continued to sail, floating along for another one or two days. We realized that they were not taking us to Romania; that they were taking us to the USSR. And that's how it was. On December 23rd, 1949 we arrived in the port of Odessa. Mihail Maliov and Paskal Mitrevski suggested that, since they had not taken us to Romania, they would surely be taking us to the USSR. We guessed that they would be taking us to some kolkhoz to re-educate us. Maliov said: "They will take us to a kolkhoz and we will shower and shave, we will get a haircut and then we will be re-educated." Lazo Poplazarov and Lambro Cholakov seemed to concur. Mincho, who had overheard the conversation, kept smiling at the notion but then said: "A hungry chicken dreams of millet. You know the proverb? But in reality they will probably be taking us to one of Peter the Greats' prisons. There they will shower and shave us nicely and then they will re-educate us." Paskal laughed and said to Mincho: "Typical Mincho, what else can we expect from you? Why don't you say something nice for a change?" We hoped that it would not be like that. Paskal and the others were basing their feelings on an imagined impression of the USSR. At the time we had a different impression of the Soviet Union than we have today. At the time we thought that jails did not exist in the USSR, the people were good and they would employ humane ways to re-educate us. How were we expected to know what really awaited us and that Mincho's sarcastic words would come true? Sarcastic or not, Mincho's assessment was the most accurate.

To pass our time in the bowels of "Michurin", the ship we were on, we made playing cards of the packages of cigarettes we were given. The biggest smokers were Paskal, Kolentsev and Maliov. We played for cigarettes. Whoever won got a cigarette.

In the morning of December 25, 1949, down in the bowels of the ship, we were visited by two Russian officers belonging to NKVD. They summoned us by name. There were 11 of us but only 9 came out of the depths of the ship. The officers started yelling and calling out the names of the missing two. The officers were speaking Russian of course but none of us knew enough Russian to truly understand what they were saying. We knew very little Russian, only what we had learned from the ELAS and DAG Party line. The ones missing of course were Mincho and I. We were locked up and still sleeping in what we called "the closet of happiness." Paskal then came and knocked on our door and yelled out: "Come out, let's go!" The closet was high and when we opened the door we both went flying out and

fell to the floor. The officers cracked up laughing, but we told them that we were a married couple.

December 25 was Christmas in Greece. We thought that if we turned to religion maybe Christmas might help us. Yes, it helped us all right; we ended up in prison for the next seven years. During the night of December 25th, 1949 two prison cars arrived at the port of Odessa. We later found out that, according to prison jargon, they were called “voronki.” They shoved us into the cars and took us to a prison in Odessa. They grouped us in threes and fours and put each group in a separate cell. They put Urania and I together in one cell. We stayed five days in the Odessa prison.

From Odessa to Moscow

Ah, fate! We celebrated the New Year in jail! And where? In the USSR of all places! Early in the morning on January 1st, 1950 we were taken from the Odessa prison, again in the same “voronki”, and delivered to the railway station. During our trip in the prison cars I managed to look around and see traces of the war: ruins, scattered piles of iron, piles of stones etc. I got shivers all over my body looking at the destruction. I said to myself: “Who knows how many Soviet troops were killed here in this place, defending their homeland.”

They loaded us in a prison rail wagon and locked us in. There were iron bars on the windows and doors. They put Urania and me in the same compartment while the men were paired up and placed in other compartments. We were constantly watched by the NKVD agents who were also placed with us in the same wagon and who constantly warned us not to talk to each other. We spoke in Greek mainly about the “hospitality” we had received from our Soviet hosts and about them taking us to the “kolkhoz” to re-educate us. Clearly that could be read from the “perfect” attitude of our escorts. And this is how we officially “awaited” the New Year in 1950. Reception was on the evening of December 31st, 1949 in the Odessa jail and New Year’s Day was only a dream of taking a walk in Moscow. I say “dream” because everyone had a different idea about the USSR based on what information they were given. Let’s say that there was not a Communist in the world who did not dream of going to Moscow at least once. And even then we too were “filled with joy” to have traveled through it.

We arrived in Moscow on the evening of January 3rd, 1950. When we were getting off the train I read “Kiev Vokzal” (Kiev Railway Station). There are several railway stations in Moscow, accessed by the different routes trains take. We were given a “stately” welcome by a team of NKVD agents and one by one we were loaded onto the “voronki.” We were honoured by being placed in separate cars. There were no windows and the only light came from a small lamp. The seat was so small that there was hardly any space to move. It truly was a “stately column” of “voronki.” I barely managed to wave goodbye to Mincho and my other friends, not knowing that I would not see them again for five and a half years. As for Mihail Maliov and Leonida; I never saw them again.

“LJUBLJANKA” Prison

After a long ride the “voronka” stopped. I turned my attention to my ears and listened for sounds. A heavy door opened, the “voronka” moved forward and stopped. They unlocked the door. Someone got off. They unlocked my compartment and took me, “the great enemy of the USSR,” out. One agent stepped in front of me and another followed behind me. They took me into a room. An officer with some papers in his hands came in and asked me my name. I told him who I was. He left and locked the door behind him. That’s when I realized that I was in some kind of prison and it was not an ordinary prison.

About half an hour later a woman my age or maybe a year older came in. She was wearing a uniform and ordered me to undress. “Undress yourself like the day you were born and follow me,” she said in Russian. She took me to another room with a shower. I laughed when I thought about what Paskal and Mihail had said in the ship about taking us to a kolkhoz for a shower, haircut, shave and to re-educate us. I also especially remembered what Mincho had said about taking us to one of Peter the Greats’ prisons. But this was not one of Peter the Greats’ prison. I laughed out loud when I was showering. My guard looked inside through the spy hole and warned me twice not to laugh. I pointed with my hands to my tormented naked body and said: “I am laughing at this. Look at it!”

My condition was deplorable. The guard unfortunately misinterpreted my sarcastic laughter as an insult to Soviet power, so she became frustrated. But there was also some truth in that. I had imagined that the Soviet state was a lot different. After my third outburst of laughter the guard opened the shower door. She angrily ordered me to get out even before I had had a chance to rinse the soap out of my hair. She took me back to the same room where I had undressed. I dressed quickly. While I was combing my hair, trying to get the soapsuds out, she came back, unlocked the door and pointed to some items that I should take with me. Among the items that were given to me there was a green army blanket. She then took me to another cell. There I found Urania. “It’s good that we are together,” I said to her but our time together did not last long.

They unlocked my cell door and again took me somewhere along a narrow corridor with many doors and up and down some stairs. Finally, after a long walk, I was put in a box with hardly any space in it. They locked me in and told me to sit, then every minute or so they looked in through the spy hole to see what I was doing. I was puzzled! Was this a dream? Was this real? My brain was getting a workout from the many thoughts that were going through my mind. But no matter how hard I

thought and speculated about everything I still could not understand what wrong I had done and how I was at fault to deserve this.

A little later another woman, a NKVD agent, came and undressed me until I was completely naked, like the day I was born. She cut all the buttons from my officers' overcoat and blouse. I want to mention here that on April 20th, 1949 when I was a delegate at the Second International Congress for Peace in Prague, my friend Sinkova had those clothes tailor made for me. Sinkova was a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. She took Rula and me to a shop where a seamstress sewed these uniforms for us. They were made of pure wool and were gifts from the Czechoslovakian women. I took my old uniforms with me. The overcoat I acquired from a Monarcho-Fascist officer in November 1948 when I was with the units of DAG in the 18th Brigade, fighting at Siatista. Unfortunately it was riddled with several bullet holes.

The Soviet NKVD agent cut all the buttons and my DAG emblem out of my clothing and took away my army belt, my long socks, the shoelaces from my army boots, a red silk scarf that I always wore around my neck and my mirror. In the end she ferociously removed the various decorations from my blouse, given to me at the International Congress. At that very moment I felt like my soul was being torn out. I grabbed her hand and squeezed it. With her other hand she banged hard on the box door with her keys, signaling that she needed help. My act was an act of anguish, that's how bad I felt. I said to myself: "God, what have I done to these people to deserve this? Why are they so rude to me?" She lifted her leg up and hit me hard in the stomach. I was still naked. I felt dizzy but there was no space in the box for me to fall to the floor so I struck her back with my foot and leaned against the wall. She angrily yelled at me: "Zlochi eto ne dlia tebia." It was foolish of me to have done that. She later stuck her fingers in my female organ to check if I had something hidden there but I believe it was done to intimidate me. When she was done she took my things, slammed the door shut and locked it behind her. She treated me as if I was some kind of murderous beast. Perhaps at that time this was how I had been presented to the Soviet authorities.

Cell 105

I can't say exactly what time it was at night, it may have been around midnight when they unlocked the box door again and a NKVD agent yelled out: "Vihadite!" Again they took me along the long corridor, up and down stairs and out to the yard through some doors. Waiting outside was a "voronka." They unlocked the back door, locked me inside and took me away. I heard noises from other vehicles and going over railway tracks. Later I found out from my lawyer that they had taken me to the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs. In 1968, during an excursion, Mincho and I visited Moscow and went to "Dzherdzhinski" square where we saw Dzherdzhinski's monument, but we couldn't see anything behind the walls. Hidden there was the dreaded "Ljubljanka" prison where we had been locked up.

From the noises I could tell that the "voronka" was driving over a cobblestone road, over some tracks and back onto an asphalt road. My midnight ride may have lasted over half an hour. The "voronka" stopped. A heavy iron door opened. The vehicle entered the yard. They unlocked the "voronka" doors and gave me a sign to get out. I got out. They took me through a long corridor. Again they told me to undress like the day I was born. Again my clothes were searched. They examined my mouth, my hair, my female organs and gave me a sign to get dressed. Two young NKVD agents that just had arrived ordered me to lift up my arms and escorted me, one leading and the other following, up the stairs to the third floor, to one of the prison wings, to the right through a hallway. I looked down to my left; it was a long way down. I contemplated plunging down and killing myself but I couldn't do it. I noticed that there was a net over the lower windows. We continued to walk down the hallway. On the way we met one of the chiefs who stood in front of a cell. When we reached about the middle of the corridor he signaled us to stop. He unlocked the iron door of cell number 105 and gave me a sign to go inside. Just as I stepped in, the door was closed behind me and locked. I could not see anything around me except darkness.

As I stumbled around the cell I tripped on something and fell on the floor. I began to weep and cry out loud. I could not calm myself down. "God," I said to myself, "I am in a Moscow jail locked up like a traitor! Terrible! To think that when our Aegean Macedonian Brigade was formed, on November 18, 1944 and when they were looking for volunteers for the USSR, I was first to volunteer. In December 1944 when I was in Bitola twelve of us volunteered to go to officer school. I volunteered to go to the aviation school and was signed up by Giore Gioreski from Prilep, who at the time was an instructor at SKOJ in our

brigade, but when the time came to go they left me out. I complained about it to SKOJ Secretary Mincho Fotev who later became my husband. It was for that same Moscow that I grieved then so much because I could not go in 1944!" Well, this is how they are repaying me for it now. The fault for not going however lays with my uncle Krsto Mangov, my mother's cousin who at the time was Battalion Commissar, Filip Kalkov, brigade quartermaster and Mincho. They agreed not to let me go. Later one of them said: "Why would you have gone to Russia when the war was still going on. You are your mother's only child. What if you had been killed?"

Some of the volunteers heading for Russia were turned back when they reached Belgrade, but most left and ended up in the military schools in the USSR. Included among them were two of my classmates from my village, Panaiot Ralev (who completed artillery school and served as an officer in the Yugoslav National Army in Bitola, now retired), and Risto Tselev (who after finishing school married a Russian woman and remained there. He later came to Skopje to visit his relatives and also visited with me). My 1944 desires to go to Russia kept turning in my head and so did my current status in Moscow. I cried louder to ease my pain. At one time Moscow for me was a sublime, human, humane place but now look what it had turned out to be? "Mincho," I yelled out as I cried, "where are you Mincho! How did you know that they would lock us up in a Peter the Great prison? No, no, I am not a traitor; I do not deserve what is being done to me..." At that time I did not know that "Lefortovska tjurma" was one of Peter the Greats' prisons. Lefortov built this prison and that is why it bears his name.

In my anguish and crying in the dark, feeling as if my heart had been ripped wide open, I did not hear my cell door open. When I came to my senses I saw the same officer, who had opened the door earlier and shoved me into this hellhole, standing behind me. He yelled out angrily: "Vstavaj" and I stood up. With a sharp tone in his voice he said: "Nelzja plakat, nelzja krichat, denje nelzja lezhat, nelzja smejatsja!" I wiped my tears, looked him in the eyes and with a sharper tone in my voice yelled back at him: "Nelzja, nelzja, nelzja!" I don't know how horrible I must have looked when I did that but he turned away, slammed the iron door shut and locked it.

Standing up I looked around the cell. I saw an iron bed with its feet stuck in the concrete floor so that it could not be moved. Left of the bed was a small table, again with its feet stuck in concrete. On top of the table was a bowl turned upside down, on top of the bowl was a plate also turned upside down. On top of the plate were a cup turned upside down and a spoon sitting on top of it. On the right side in the corner,

beside the door there was a toilet bowl. On the opposite wall was an iron faucet (tap), a small sink and underneath it a bucket of water for flushing the toilet and washing. In the left corner there was a radiator giving off very little heat. In the middle of the ceiling there was a lamp wrapped with wire and a tiny window. The walls were black, the floor was made of concrete and it had turned black. The door was made of iron and it too was black. I washed my face after crying and felt a bit better. I combed my hair and then measured the cell with my feet. I counted 16 long and 8 wide. I sat on the bed. I felt as if someone had flipped the lid on the spy hole and was peeking at me. There was a small window in the middle of the large door. Someone opened it and said: "Lazhites!" I stretched out on the bed with my long coat on, gazing at the ceiling. My entire life was passing me by as if I was watching it on film. It seemed as if I was watching my mother. I felt as if a large force was building up inside of me and I began to yell loudly: "No, no, no... I must see my mother again because she has only me; she has no one else..." My thoughts were again interrupted when the door flung open and the same officer entered my cell and said: "Na sledsvie!" He gathered that I did not understand what he said so he signaled me with his hand to get out. I gathered my wits and with my head up high I came out. He ordered me: "Ruku nazad!" One guard in front, another behind me and I in the middle. The guards kept signaling with their fingers and knocking with their keys all along the corridors and stairs where we passed so that we would not meet other prisoners. They were taking me to the first "sledstvie" (investigation, hearing). That was on January 3rd, 1950 at three o'clock in the morning, in "Lefortovskaja tjurma", one of Peter the Great's prisons. Oh Mincho, how could you have known that they would take us to such a prison?

My first “SLEDSTVIE” (interrogation)

They took me to a huge room. In the middle of it was a large table with several chairs around it. As I walked in I instinctively sat on one of those chairs, but a NKVD agent came over and said: “Vstavat ne zdes kavana!” I stood up and then sat on the chair in the corner of the room to which he pointed. I made another mistake by crossing my legs, to which the agent pointed and said: “This in not a café where you can sit like that!” I put my leg down and placed my hands on my knees as ordered. I was dressed in my beautiful Haki-military uniform, custom made for when I was in Prague, a delegate at the Second International Peace Congress in April 1949. The only other person who had such a uniform was Rula Kukulu, PDEG President and Nikos Zahariadis’s concubine.

An officer came close to me and, in a highly offensive tone of voice, began to yell at me: “You are an agent, you are a spy and you are Tito’s agent.” I looked at him with surprise; I looked into his eyes with wonderment. Who is this man and how could he speak to me like that. I was furious, listening to a stranger repeating the same hurtful words and insults hurled at me by Zahariadis in Bureli in front of three thousand DAG fighters. My blood was boiling. I suddenly stood up, went close to his face and shouted at him even louder than he was yelling at me: “No! I am not anyone’s spy; I am a Communist Partisan!” I said it as best as I could, I did not speak the Russian language well enough to say anything more. He took a step back and asked me: “Do you know where you are?” I said: “Yes I do!” “Where?” he asked. “In Moscow,” I replied. “And you know what Moscow is?” he asked. “The capital of the Soviet Union,” I replied like a student getting a geography lesson. From the tone of his voice and from the questions he was asking I understood that he was attempting to influence me to cooperate with him. Strangely, I gained strength from his insults and a growing desire emerged in me to fight back, so I raised my voice and said: “I am a communist, I am a Partisan, I am a Macedonian!” After a brief pause he asked me in what language I wanted to give my testimony. “In Macedonian,” I said. “In Bulgarian?” he asked. “No, in Macedonian,” I said “I don’t speak Bulgarian!” “In what language do you want to have this discussion?” he asked. “In Greek,” I said. He then said: “My name is Evgeni Konstantinovich Nikitin.” He knocked with his fingers on the door and the door opened. The two previous NKVD agents took me again, one in front and the other behind me, and escorted me back to cell number 105, where I stayed for a year and a half, all of 1950 until July 1951.

I stretched out on the bed with my coat still on me and covered myself with my military blanket and on top of that I put on the prison blanket. I did not know how many degrees it was but it was very cold. January in Moscow was not a joke, especially in my tiny cell. I constantly kept thinking of things. How the ambience could change overnight. I met many strangers here and was wondering who was worse than whom. These were rude and bad people as if they were not born from mothers. As I tried to fall asleep the door opened again. The duty officer entered my cell and said: "Hands up! Your hands must be visible and uncovered when you sleep!" "God, what else will these inhumane people think of?" I asked myself. I was too tired from my day's ordeal to think about it so I went to sleep, I think with my eyes open staring at the ceiling. Again, still during the night, my door, the small window inside the large door, was opened and a voice said: "Vstavaj!"

The duty officer had informed me that six o'clock in the morning was the time to get up and bedtime was ten o'clock at night and that lights out was after the third signal. It now was six o'clock in the morning. I got up and washed at the tap. A while later the small window in my cell door opened and I was handed a slice of ten grams of bread, a cube of five grams of sugar, a cup full of boiled water and a few grams of dried fruit. When the dried fruit was placed in the hot water it gave it some colour and flavour, a substitute for tea. The bread was to last for the whole day. Unfortunately the bread was so bad I could not eat it during my first days there, so I threw in the toilet bowl. One morning they caught me and told me not to do that. The guard told me: "You must eat it, nelzja." Everything there was "nelzja." Around noon I think, I don't know what time exactly, but from the small window in the ceiling I could see daylight, they again opened the small window in my cell door and asked me to hand them my plate. They handed me back fish soup and a spoonful of porridge. The soup was full of bones and during my first days I could not eat it. In the evening, I don't know at what time, the little window was opened again and they handed me a spoonful of mush, at that time I did not know what it was made of.

The routine in my cell, cell 105, was the same for three days. They did not call me for questioning, only the duty officers kept interrupting me and teaching me the rules and the signals of the prison; at what signal to turn off the light, at what signal to go to bed and what was expected of me at wake-up time at six o'clock in the morning etc. All the time I constantly thought about my miserable situation for which I could find no fault. From the bottom of my soul I hated the investigating officer's words when he called me "a spy and an agent..." The more I was reminded about those offensive words, the more I had a

strong desire to meet with that officer again. I was very familiar with the methods employed by our comrades in Greece organized by the fascist Metaxas government, even with those employed after the fascist Italians and Germans had left. These methods were at least fascist against communist and not communist against communist like in this communist prison, in this communist society and of all places in Moscow, in the Soviet Union; the country that we had all idolized during our struggle. I finally started to wake up from my delirium.

I said to myself: “You will all see that I am not guilty, not guilty. I am not guilty of being Tito’s agent and even Tito too is not guilty! The guilty ones and the ones to be blamed are the English, the Americans and Greek Monarcho-Fascists. Even Zahariadis believed in Tito and often said that Hari Polit from England and Tito from Yugoslavia were his best friends from the Comintern. He now only trusts Stalin and no one else, not even the truth.”

These thoughts that I had were the reason why I was so anxious and willing to meet with my interrogator and to set him straight; to say right to his face “Evgeni Konstantinovich Nikitin, you are wrong!”

Hearing on January 7, 1950

The light bulb went on and off three times on January 7, 1950. It was the signal to let us know that it was time to go to bed. I lay down with my coat on because it was very cold. I first covered myself with my tiny green military blanket which I had brought with me. I got that blanket in November 1948 when I was fighting in Siatista, when we took DAG General Aleko-Ruso Iptsiladis's fiancée with us. The General was among the first to return from Tashkent to Greece and joined the PASOK Party as an administrator in the Ministry of the Interior. I then covered myself with the prison blanket. I placed my hands over my head uncovered, in full view in accordance with prison rules. I could not sleep and I was still awake when the small window of my door was opened and I was told: "Padjom na sledstvie!" I got up, got ready and they opened the cell door. It was around 10:30 pm when they took me, one in front and another behind me. They escorted me along the hallway, down the stairs and finally to the ground floor in the same office where the interrogator was, but in another smaller room. Sitting beside the interrogator was a woman dressed in civilian clothes. I entered the room and greeted them politely. They did not reply. The interrogator pointed at a chair in the corner of the room. I sat on the chair and instinctively crossed my legs. The interrogator then yelled at me: "Sit properly, this is not a café!" Interrogator Colonel Evgeny Konstantinovich Nikitin, sitting on his chair behind the desk, started questioning me. He asked a lot of questions, what was my name, last name, first name, when I was born, where I was born, my nationality, where my parents were etc. Before that he introduced the woman in the room. He said: "This lady here is Tsakalopulu, she is a lieutenant in the Soviet Army and will translate from Greek to Russian and vice versa." Regarding his questions and my answers, he also said that he would follow protocol, draft a memo which, when completed, I would have to read and sign.

I was ready to truthfully answer all the questions and recount all events as they had happened. I was determined to get the truth out and only the truth and to make sure I did not make any mistakes, not about the CPG and not about the Soviet Union.

"My name is Evgenia Baleva," I said. "No," he said, "you go by a different first and last name." "Yes," I answered, "they call me Vera." "Yes Vera Nikolovskaja. That is your pseudonym," he said. "From now on," he said, "we will lead this investigation under both names and surnames: Vera Nikolovskaja aka Evdokia Baleva." "You can call me whatever you want, I am the same person," I said. Throughout the entire investigation, in the internment camps, in the prisons, in my

passport when I returned from the USSR to Yugoslavia on August 25th, 1956 and for my son, born in Belgrade, both those first and last names were used.

“What is your father’s name?” he asked. I said, “My father’s name is Nikola Balev.” “Where is he at the moment?” he asked. “In Canada,” I replied. “When did he go there?” he asked. “In 1928, as a migrant worker,” I replied. “We will see about that!” he said and asked, “What is your mother’s name?” “Nevena Baleva,” I replied. “Where is she located at the moment?” he asked. “In Yugoslavia, in Macedonia. The Monarcho-Fascists wanted to put her in jail so in 1946 she fled to Bitola,” I replied. Looking even more satisfied he said, “We will see about that too!” “Who else do you have in terms of relatives?” he asked. “I don’t have anyone else!” I replied. “And what is Mincho Fotev to you?” he asked. “He is my husband,” I replied. “Why aren’t you using his last name?” he asked. “We have not been registered, we have an agreement, our wedding was informal, a Partisan wedding,” I replied. “Good. Why did your mother go to Yugoslavia?” he asked again. “Because she was a member of NOF and the Monarcho-Fascists wanted to put her in jail, so in May 1946 she left for Bitola to escape,” I replied.

I paused for a moment and continued: “Thousands of people fled across the border from the terror of the Monarcho-Fascists. Besides, our house was burned to the ground. My grandmother Iagna was almost burned inside had it not been for our neighbour Pavle Karadzhov who ran inside to save her. At the time the Monarcho-Fascists were shooting all over the place and wounded Pavle Karadzhov. He too is now in Yugoslavia with all the older people from my village,” I concluded.

“Where is your mother now?” he asked again. “In Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Bitola,” I replied. “When did your father go to Canada?” he asked. “My father Nikola has been in Canada since 1928. He went to Canada to work as a migrant worker and now lives in Toronto. He has his own furrier workshop. I don’t know my father because I was barely two and a half years old when he left home for Canada,” I replied. “Do you correspond with your father?” he asked. “I did correspond with him up until 1940, but after the Greek-Italian war broke out on October 28th, 1940, during the German occupation, and during the Anglo-American intervention in Greece we did not correspond,” I replied. “When were you born?” he asked. “On August 2nd, 1926,” I replied. “Where?” he asked. “In the village D’mbeni, Kostur Region, Aegean Macedonia in Greece,” I replied. The translator kept translating my replies and the interrogator wrote them down.

“You are an agent!” he said. “I am a Communist!” I replied. “You are a spy!” he said. “I am a Partisan!” I replied. “You are an agent of

the Intelligence Service!” he said. “No! I am a communist, a Partisan and you will write down what I tell you and not what you want to write!” I said. He agreed. He gave me the paper and I read his questions and my answers. I was pleased with what had been written and as I read it over I thought of the ten continuous years that I had fought for freedom for the Macedonian people. I had fought against the Italian fascists, against the German Nazis, against the Anglo-American imperialists and against the Greek Monarcho-Fascists. I told the truth about the Macedonian nation in front of the CPG and now I was doing the same thing in front of the SKP(b) agent. If that is a crime then they can execute me. Satisfied with what was written, during the night of January 7th and 8th, 1950, in Lefortovskaja tjurma in Moscow, I signed the first protocol drawn up by the NKVD interrogator.

After signing the protocol the interrogator signaled the guards to take me back to my cell. I don't know what time it was, but just as I lay down, I don't know if I had fallen asleep or not, the tiny window in my cell door opened and someone said: “Padjom.” This meant that it was six o'clock in the morning and it was time for me to get up. From my cell window above I could see that it was still dark outside, then I heard the loud noise. It was like that every day, I don't know what was making the noise, perhaps there was a factory or something like that nearby.

They brought me my breakfast. It consisted of 200 grams of bread, 5 grams of sugar and kasha. I could not eat it. Lunch consisted of fish soup and a spoonful of porridge. I mashed the bread into the bowl of water and threw it in the toilet. I did that for a few days. One day they noticed that I was not eating the bread and told me to eat it and that I was not allowed to throw it out. After that I soaked the bread in water, cut it into small pieces and molded it into little people, little Partisans and put them on the radiator to dry. Again they warned me that I was not allowed to do that or distract myself with such trivial things. They asked me what my bread molds were. I said, “They were Marko's little Partisans.” They took them from me and destroyed them.

The days that I was not in interrogation I had to spend inside my cell either lying in bed or pacing back and forth from corner to corner. I constantly measured the cell with my feet: 16 long by 8 wide. I wanted to have contact with people and I didn't care if they swore at me or insulted me. I desperately wanted to talk to somebody. The days were long and seemed like years. A week or two later I started exercising in the morning. I learned that I needed to do that from our political prisoners in Greece. They told me that in order to be healthy and in good condition in prison you must exercise. Unfortunately my captors were not happy about that either and caused me problems. They told

me “nelzja” to exercising. I said that I was doing exercise so that I wouldn’t get sick. I also started eating the breakfast they gave me and in time even the kasha started to taste good. I ate all the bread in the morning like it was dessert and I wanted more. I was given the same Moscow prison food or “adinichka”, as they called it, for 28 months. Only during their national holidays, on May 1st and on November 7th was I given “manna kasha” or “ovcijanka,” of which I will talk later.

Second Protocol

A few days later, just as they signaled me to go to bed at 10:30 pm, I was still awake when they opened the small window of my cell door and called out: “Na sledstvie, vstavat!” This time they took me to a different interrogation room. My interrogator kept changing the rooms based on the type of interrogation he was going to do. I later found out that by changing the ambiance, the pleasantness, the space of the room, whether there was old or new furniture, the person being interrogated, it was believed, may have felt differently, resulting in revealing something different, but for me all those things had no effect. I always sat on the chair in the corner, but not until I was told to. I was disciplined in that respect.

The second protocol began with the question: “Do your mother and father correspond with each other?” I said: “How should I know?” “When did you see your mother last?” he asked. “On April 9 and 10, 1949, in Bitola, Macedonia, Yugoslavia,” I replied. “How did you get there?” he asked. “My friend Mincho took me there on April 9th. As a NOF delegate of the Main Board I, along with some of my comrades, was invited by the Macedonian Association in Bulgaria, Sofia, to attend the anniversary of the death of the revolutionary leader Yane Sandanski.” I had to explain to the interrogator who Yane Sandanski was and that the CPG sent us through its “Iafka” contacts in Yugoslavia. I also had to explain to him that my friends went there a few days before me and that I left alone because Zahariadis had given me permission to stay in Bitola to see my mother. “Zahariadis approved my stay,” I said. “Mincho dropped me off at the border during the night and an “Iafka” jeep took me from there to Bitola. Our contacts in “Iafka” were informed that I was going to the apartment where my mother lived at number 6 “Mirche Atsev” Street. I stayed there one day and one night and during the night I went to Skopje and reported to the Greek “Iafka” there,” I said.

“With whom else did you visit when you were there and who are they?” he asked. “During the night of April 11, 12 when I arrived at the Greek “Iafka” in Skopje, I was taken to a building in the centre of Skopje, located on the other side of the Macedonian Ministry of Internal Affairs. There I met Dimitar Trpovski, a friend from my village who then lived in Skopje. He took me to see some elderly people from my village. After that I visited with some of the heads of NOF who had deserted in 1948 and since then had remained in Yugoslavia, in Skopje,” I said and then named each one of them. “They were Mihailo Keramitchiev, Vangel Aianovski-Oche, Steriana Vangelova-Slavianka, Lena Stoikova-Mirka and others. In our

conversation they criticized me and told me that we had ‘given in’ to the Greeks. I got angry and told them that they were cowards and deserters for hiding in Skopje and for leaving the people alone in the middle of a war, the people whom they had organized. I scolded them for leaving and hiding to save their own skins and their families, while we, the faithful to the Party and to our people had to stay behind to finish the job and even die if we had to. I got so angry that I bolted out of there and slammed the door behind me and went back to “Iafka.” During the night I resumed my journey to Sofia via Petrich. At Petrich “Iafka” sent me to a Macedonian man named Iani who put me up for the night with a Macedonian family. The morning after I left Petrich with an “Iafka” messenger and a state security agent and went to Sofia, where I was placed with the Greek “Iafka.” There I met my friends from the delegation, Pavle Rakovski, Todor Kochev-Viktor, Tane Naumov and Vangel Nichev from the NOF Main Board who had been sent there to attend the celebration in Sofia. While the rest left to finish the job in Eastern Macedonia, Pavle Rakovski and I remained behind waiting to leave for Prague in order to attend the Second International Congress of Peace,” I concluded.

I read over and signed the second protocol. When I got back to my cell I couldn’t help but think, “Why was he asking me questions about my mother and father corresponding?” After thinking about it for a while I came to the conclusion that it had something to do with the Informburo criticizing Tito. After attempting to reconstruct past events I concluded that the Informburo attacked Tito because he was warming up to capitalism and they wanted to know how he was making connections with America and the western world. In other words, we the accused, as agents of the Intelligence Service, had made those connections for him with the West and my father and mother were in the middle of it. I was pleased and relieved to have come to that conclusion. I lay down and fell asleep. I don’t know what time it was and how long I had slept, but when they yelled out “Padjom”, I immediately got up feeling well-rested and in good spirits.

Translator Tsakalopulu removed because of me

I don't recollect the days and dates when I was questioned because my interrogator continued the interrogations during both day and night and during weekends and holidays. That's how it was for three months. One morning they brought me my usual breakfast but they brought me some good food for lunch. This lunch consisted of very nice borshch and kasha made of rice of course, on a small plate, but then that for me was very tasty. The next day they brought me manna kasha. I thought that the menu had suddenly changed and this food would be served from then on. The Interrogator had not called for me to go to see him so I thought that maybe now they would try me in court, but three days later we were back to the same routine.

The interrogator asked me when I was with my mother if I had met with any other people, except those in Skopje, and if I took anything from Yugoslavia. I said, "I did not meet anyone else and I did not take anything from anyone." He then asked me what education I had, to which I replied: "I went as far as grade three in high school in Kostur. There were no Macedonian schools in Greece so we studied in the Greek language. Then when the Greco-Italian war broke out in 1940-1941 the schools had to close because Kostur was close to Albania and my village was even closer and we were regularly bombed by the Italian air force. The entire city was almost all evacuated to nearby villages." He then asked me if I had attended any other schools. I said: "From May 1945 until the end of July of the same year I completed a three month course at the CPM Central Committee in Skopje, Macedonia." The interrogator smiled at my answer and went on to the next question.

"Since when and what organizations were you in and what functions did you have?" he asked. "When I enrolled in the Kostur High School in 1938, after the Metaxa dictatorship, all the students were enrolled in EON, a fascist organization," I said and explained what EON was. "They enrolled me without asking me, like they did my entire class. But I had no active involvement in that organization. Since 1932 a communist organization had existed in my village D'mbeni. All the teenage girls belonged to that organization and regularly participated in its activities. My mother had been a member of the CPG since 1932. From my mother's family, my grandmother and my uncle had participated in the 1903 Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman Empire. My entire village had a revolutionary tradition. In 1940 when I returned to my village, my neighbour Panaiot Karadzov enrolled me in OKNE (Communist Youth Organization of Greece). Panaiot died in Gramos in 1948. In 1943 I became a member of the CPG. When SNOF

(Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front) was formed I worked behind the scenes in the Kostur branch of the Organization,” I said. I then explained when SNOF was formed and by whom and continued. “In May 1944 we (SNOF) came into conflict with the CPG regarding the Macedonian National question and a group of ELAS and SNOF fighters, led by Naum Peiov and Atanas Koroveshovski, crossed over the border into liberated Yugoslavia and joined the NOF and Politburo units in Macedonia,” I concluded.

While the interrogator listened to me speaking, the interpreter translated what I said and he wrote down my answers. I read the protocol and after some minor points were fixed I again signed it. We did this with every interrogation. Time and time again he kept asking me how and why we had joined the Macedonian units in Yugoslavia. Why were we sentenced to death by the CPG Kostur District Committee and why was that judgment advertised through leaflets in the Kostur villages and in ELAS. He wanted to know why we had returned to the ranks of ELAS under the CPG and NOF agreement. More precisely, he wanted to know details about the agreement between the CPG, NOF Headquarters and POJ (Partisan Units of Yugoslavia) of Macedonia. He was interested in many details.

I told him for a second time that our Macedonian battalion had a disagreement with ELAS and that is why it had crossed over into Yugoslavia in October 1944. At the time Bitola was free and the First Macedonian Brigade consisting of Macedonian fighters from Greece was formed. I had given the interrogator all the details on several occasions. I told him that on November 7, on the occasion of the October Revolution our brigade took part in a march in Bitola and then attended a rally held in honour of November 7, in which Svetozar Vukmanovikj-Tempo gave a speech. This is when he went berserk. He got up from his chair and began to shout that, “That was not true; Yugoslavia does not celebrate the day of the October Revolution.” I said, “That’s not true! Even today there are busts of Marx, Engels and Lenin in Skopje square...” and before I had a chance to finish my sentence he got even more upset and interrupted me. He came closer, stood over my head and began to hysterically yell: “You’re a ‘zvoloch’, you’re an agent of the international bourgeoisie and you’re an agent of Tito and of Yugoslavia.”

“I am none of those things,” I said “I am nobody’s agent. I am a Communist and a Partisan. I am Macedonian by nationality and I am telling you the truth the way it is. Ask your diplomats in Belgrade, let them check for you and then tell me if I am lying or telling you the truth!” I kept giving him the same answers no matter which way he asked the questions. No sooner had I finished talking than the

interrogator looked at the clock and left. I was left there with Tsakalopulu, the translator. The woman then told me that she was Greek from the Caucasus, that she was an officer in the Soviet army and that she had a daughter who looked a lot like me. She then started crying and said: "Don't make yourself so angry." She got up from her chair came closer towards me and handed me a handkerchief. My nose constantly dripped and I kept wiping it with my hand. She said: "Let the interrogator ask you difficult questions, you just answer him the best you know how, don't be afraid." "I am not afraid," I said "but I did not expect to find myself in this situation in the Soviet Union. I had a different opinion of the first country of socialism."

The interrogator came back and started asking me what I had done in DAG. Just as I started talking about my involvement in DAG and the kind of organization NOF was, he again began to insult me calling me a "zvoloch", an agent and a traitor..." He looked at the clock again and came towards me with a piece of paper in his hand. He asked me to read it over. Everything was correctly written but he was not satisfied. "No," he said when I tried to sign it. "Yes!" I said. "We will see later when you admit to it!" he said. "Admit to what?" I asked. "I will only admit to what I am and to what I have done and nothing else!" I replied. He then signaled the guards to take me away. There were two NKVD agents, one in front and the other behind me. I was in the middle with my hands tied behind my back. They took me along the hallways and on the stairs. They kept tapping the walls with their keys to make sure that we did not meet up with another prisoner. They locked me in my cell.

The protocols from interrogations kept piling up for a year and a half. I spent eighteen months in Lefortovskiot prison in cell number 105 on the third floor. They moved me to a smaller but more "comfortable" cell on the same floor but only for a short time. Then I was back in cell number 105.

When the investigator called me in for the third time, Tsakalopulu, my translator was not there. An elderly man had taken her place. He introduced himself as Ioannis Ioanidis. He spoke Greek very well, he was a professor and he had been to Greece. Unlike Tsakalopulu he was very arrogant. He wanted to show his bosses, at any price, how loyal he was. He even asked me some questions of his own to which I protested because they were insulting. After some time they brought a third translator. His name was Aristotelis Papunidis, he was a Lieutenant in the Soviet Army. They used Ioanidis on very rare occasions, probably when Papunidis was absent. Tsakalopulu my first translator was removed because she was unable to put up with what was going on and possibly because of the sentimentality she expressed towards me.

Life in the prison cell – Not worth living and not worth dying

I was constantly watched through the spy hole in my cell and the duty officers reported everything that I did to the interrogator. I was not allowed to do anything that they did not first approve. The conditions under which I was put through were cruel and life was simply not worth living. At the same time they would not allow me to die, so life was not worth living and not worth dying.

I washed without soap. I was allowed to have a shower only once in 15 days. Women took me to the shower room on the ground floor of the prison. They gave me a small piece of soap and before I had a chance to wash my hair they shouted: “Kanchaj” (finish). While I was washing they watched me through the peephole, both men and women, but they did not see me as a human being; they saw me as a beast. Then they gave me men’s long underwear and a long shirt to wear. I used my own underwear as a wash cloth to scrub myself with. I would grab it from the search station, quickly soak it in water and rub it with soap then use it on me. That way I would get my underwear washed. They searched me when they took me from my cell to the shower and again when they took me from the shower back to my cell. This was another form of psychological torture that I had to endure. But I endured it all and was determined to stick to the truth and not stray, no matter what they did to me. Since I did not die like a hero at the front they could kill me here as they wished.

Occasionally I thought of Mincho, Paskal and the others and wondered how they were doing and whether they were well. Were they in the same prison in nearby cells? Perhaps! But thinking about them gave me courage to endure all kinds of torture, even to face a firing squad, but first I wanted them to publicly judge if I was truly guilty of something. As far as I was concerned, my only crime was that I was an honest Macedonian.

I endured thirty-two months of interrogations, three months in Albania and twenty-nine months in Russia. Many volumes of protocols were written during that time. Surely they are kept somewhere in Moscow and can be made available to researchers and historians if they want to find out what we went through, how much we had to suffer for our nation and how much torture we, the Macedonians from Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia, endured after DAG’s capitulation. These documents, as I have been told by some Macedonian historians, have already been brought to the Macedonian Archives in Skopje.

I fell unconscious during questioning

Unbearable interrogations, the same boring questions asked over and over again and the same answers given again and again. This was not done by accident; it was done on purpose in hopes that I might slip up and give them something different to blame me with. Sitting on the stool in the corner of the room I had to answer all questions. Time and time again I had to tell them by whom and how our units were transferred to Yugoslavia, about the Aegean Brigade, about NOF and so on.

I always answered each question truthfully exactly the way it was. I told the interrogator that some of those people I spoke about were here in Moscow but I didn't know where; perhaps they were in this prison in some cells near my cell. Among the people I told him about were Paskal, Mincho, Poplazarov, Cholakov, Hadzhiianov, Pirovska, Rakovski, Kolentsov, but not Maliov because he wasn't there, and some who were in Yugoslavia. About the others, I did not know where they were, some had been killed while fighting and others were in Greek prisons. I raised my voice for a moment and said: "It is a shame that you are holding my husband in prison, while his mother Alexandra with three young children has been imprisoned by the Monarcho-Fascists who first took her to Kostur and prosecuted her and then sent her to "Averof" prison in Athens but not before setting her house on fire because Mincho was a Partisan and now you have him laying in a communist prisons in Communist Moscow. What irony of fate is this for all of us? His juvenile brother Foti died in 1944 in the struggle against the German occupation."

"And where is his father?" the interrogator asked. "He is in Yugoslavia," I replied. "He fled there to avoid being arrested and shot by the Monarcho-Fascists like so many thousands of other people from Aegean Macedonia!" "Where is Paskal Mitrevski's family?" he asked. "Mitrevski's family is also in Yugoslavia," I said. "It fled with thousands of Macedonian and Greek families to avoid falling into the hands of the Monarcho-Fascists."

The interrogator kept asking all kinds of questions, wanting to know details about the others from my group; their names, surnames, the whereabouts of their families etc. I kept telling him what I knew including my mother's address in Bitola. I said: "My mother Nevena lives at number 6 Mirche Atsev Street." He asked me: "Who is Mirche Atsev?" I told him that he was a Macedonian hero. I kept telling him things and he kept writing them down but he kept asking questions that only interested him. He asked me why Mihail Maliov was jailed since he was never in Yugoslavia? I said: "You would have to ask Zahariadis

about that. He is the only one who can tell you for sure. I don't know! Maybe because he was an honest and decent man and as NOF Secretary he was good at his job? Maybe because he refused to allow outsiders to influence NOF? I don't know what to tell you!" In spite of my answers, the interrogator wanted to know details about Mihail's background. It's what interested him the most. I told him everything I knew.

Every day they took me to "sledstvie" at 11 pm and brought me back at 5 am the next morning. I was exhausted. The abuse was intolerable and I was without any sleep. It seemed to me as if every night was "Saturday night." One time, as I sat on the chair in the corner of the office, I became dizzy and blacked out. I was unconscious for a while. I do not know what happened after that. I do not know who, how and when they brought me back to my cell. I don't know how long I lay in my cell before I was awakened by a woman in a white coat and by the duty officer who yelled out: "Stavaj!" Both were standing above my head when I opened my eyes and was startled by their presence. I managed to get up somehow. They sat me down on my bed. The woman in the white coat, who I assumed was a doctor, injected me with something in my neck and put me back down to rest. I don't know how much time passed (days and nights) before I again heard the annoying "Padjom." I got up, washed and sat on the bed. I felt lost. I tried to gather my wits and to remember what had happened to me. After a while I felt better. Once I became focused I started to talk to myself. I said: "So here you are again. They will not let you live and they will not let you die. They want you to live, they will let you cling to life but will treat you like a beast. Vera, you must not allow them to take you down! You must hold on! You must stay strong! Muster all your strength and play your role. Do not let them turn you into something you are not!" After that I began to shout: "No! Never, never, no, no..." The little window in my cell door opened and the guard yelled out: "Malchi!" (Shut up!)

A strange force overcame me and I quietly said: "I will not allow you to break me! I will not allow you to break me!" This way I gave myself courage to endure everything they threw at me. It is strange how these feelings work. Feelings like that can be understood only by those who have experienced such a thing, only they who had been through what I have been through, will know and believe me.

"Vera," I continued talking to myself, "you have done nothing against them. They can't blame you for being born a Macedonian or because you went to Yugoslavia. They too have been to Yugoslavia and both Stalin and Tito honoured them for bringing victory over fascism."

After passing out, there was greater “concern” for me

Like every other morning, the little window in my cell door opened and they handed me 200 grams of bread, 5 or 10 grams of sugar, a pot full of hot water and some dried fruits to use with the hot water to make a tea-like drink. This was the usual daily breakfast. For dinner they brought me fish soup with the bones still in it, more hot water and a tablespoonful of kasha or borsch. That evening however, they asked me for my spoon which they filled with fish oil. I received fish oil for an entire month; it was like getting medicine for my ills. Taking the fish oil helped me recover and I got my health back. Eventually your body becomes accustomed to starvation; I experienced that with my friends when I was a Partisan, when there was nothing to eat for days. I was reminded of May 1, 1946 when we fought three battles in the same day against the Monarcho-Fascists in Radush. After the battles we fled to Mount Vicho where we spent fifteen days with nothing to eat except beechwood leaves, sorrel leaves and other grasses and drank mountain water. But we were strong. We had no food because all the people from the surrounding villages had been rounded up by the Monarcho-Fascist army and taken to secure areas. The Monarcho-Fascists were looking for us but at that time were afraid to enter the forest. We survived then and I will survive now.

They did not call me to “sledstvie” for several days. I couldn’t figure out what the date was because I did not know how many days I had been unconscious. I lost the sequence of days. Also it was very cold in cell number 105 in Lefortovska tjurma in Moscow those days.

On the third day after I had regained consciousness, as usual I was awakened at six o’clock in the morning and given my breakfast a little later. I listened for the little windows, one after another to open in adjacent calls before mine was opened. The officer on duty called me over and said: “Davaj skorej krushki” (quickly give me your cup). I stretched out my arm and gave him my cup. He then filled it to the top with sugar and said: “Tsukjur, Tsukjur” (sugar). The Ukrainians call sugar “tsukjor”. Perhaps the officer was Ukrainian. It was the same at lunch and dinner. He always gave me the leftover kasha after he had served all the other prisoners. They did not call me to “sledstvie” and my meals were getting better so I thought that maybe something had changed, but what I did not know. The next day they gave me my “paak”, that’s what they called breakfast, but only what was allotted, without the extra sugar and no extra kasha. Then I thought that they had given me the extra food because I had passed out and because I was not well.

On the third day, when the officer who gave me the extra food was on duty, he again gave me extra food. He would say: “davaj krushki, tsukjer, davaj tarelki kasha”. This went on every third day for about 15 months in cell number 105 when that officer was on duty. He helped me become well. I divided up my sugar so that I could have some every day. Of all the officers in my wing he was the kindest to me, why I don’t know. Perhaps because I was the only woman in that wing of the prison or perhaps because I was a foreigner? I can’t explain it. Or maybe because he was Ukrainian, or maybe he was guilty of something he had done? There were hundreds of thousands of men and women in the Siberian camps condemned to spend their lives in Banderovtsi and Vlasovtsi. Perhaps he felt sorry for me because of the enslaved under aged girls used by the Germans to serve in their homes... It could have been anything and, in such circumstances, as the people say, you will find someone born of a mother.

A week or two later they called me in for a day “sledstvie” in a pleasant and larger room. As usual I was escorted there by two guards, one in front and the other behind me and me in the middle with my hands tied behind my back. When I entered the room, as always I greeted the people but the interrogator never answered back. I waited for him to ask me to sit down before I took my seat in the corner of the room. Accompanying the interrogator this time was the translator Aristotelis Papunidis.

The interrogator asked me how I was feeling. When I told him that I was well he started to scold me for not following the rules. “What rules do I not follow,” I asked, “when I am locked up in a cell with nothing to do.” He then made a sign reminding me that I had been exercising. That naturally made me angry and at the top of my voice I said: “I don’t want to get sick, I want to live and if you don’t want me to live and I am guilty of something, then execute me! Why are you torturing me like this?” This was the first time I had told him to “execute me”. The translator did not know the Greek language that well to translate properly so I struggled in Russian to say something that meant “shoot me, kill me, murder me, or execute me.”

Time and time again he posed the same questions. Again he asked me: “Tell me more about your nationalistic activities?” I said, “If you think that our disagreement with the CPG regarding the Macedonian National Question is nationalism, then I don’t know what patriotism is.” I again told him the same details as to why we had come to disagreements with the CPG, about our departure to Yugoslavia, about the First Aegean Brigade, about the various people in the Brigade and about our October Revolution day celebration in Bitola. I told him that he could verify every bit of information I had given him through his

diplomatic services in Yugoslavia and if any of it was not true then he could sue me in a court of law.

He again asked me provocative questions about my so-called “spy activities” in DAG. Like myself, the other Macedonian prisoners too, he alleged were involved in “podrevnuju rabotu” (spy work) in the ranks of DAG. I categorically rejected that idea. I said: “That’s absolutely not true! It is downright slanderous because we Macedonians, together with our fellow Greeks, created DAG. Something that you alone create you cannot knock down. The Macedonian organization NOF organized the Macedonians who participated in DAG en masse, Macedonians between the ages 14 and 80, both men and women, took part in the struggle. We suffered a huge number of casualties in the battles against the Monarcho-Fascists and against their supporters the Anglo-Americans. We are not the reason why DAG was defeated. The reason for DAG’s defeat lies in the hands of the CPG’s Central Committee, headed by General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis.” But no sooner had I finished talking than the investigator blew up at me, cursing and shouting ugly words like “bljat, zvolch, agent, vrjosh” and whatever else came to his mind.

I endured his insults, slander and lies but for the protocol I told him to write only what I had said and not how he had responded, otherwise I would not sign.

The interrogations continued day and night for days, weeks and months, constantly looking to find something different from what I had said before. But the truth is the truth and there was nothing there to change. Only a person who lies can make a mistake.

After seeing the Journal of the Second Congress in Budapest, I became “Verochka”

Besides my usual interrogator, I was sometimes questioned by Colonel Viktor Petrovich Firsof. He too asked me insulting and provocative questions but I later found out why. He interrogated Paskal Mitrevski and was comparing his answers with mine.

I am pretty sure it was March 10th, 1950 when my interrogator Evgeny Konstantinovich seemed a little kinder towards me. I couldn't get my head around it, as to why. He took me into a more comfortable room and, while shaking his head, came closer to me. He had never done this before. Then in a tender tone of voice he said: “Oh Nikolovskaja, Nikolovskaja, you now find yourself locked up in a Moscow jail.” “I can see that!” I replied. “You do not need to be here!” he said. “I know that!” I said. “But you brought me here. I know I don't deserve to be here. I know I was made out to be the world's greatest offender, but I am not!” “If you were not then you would not be sitting here; things would be different for you!” he said. I did not know what it was but I was sure that something had changed during this interrogation; perhaps they had found something new or this was a new tactic.

When the interrogator left the room and went out to breakfast or dinner, my translator Aristotelis Papunidis came closer and said: “Oh Verochka, Verochka! It was March 8th, two days ago and you know we buy our women gifts on that day. I bought my wife the most expensive gift and during the evening of March 8th I took her to the movies. At the movie theater they were giving out journals from the Women's Second International Congress in Budapest and when I saw your picture in it, a Partisan, smiling and wearing the same uniform you are wearing now, I shivered. My wife noticed and asked me what was wrong? I said it was nothing; I had just looked at some photographs of the Greek delegation. Some of the people fighting there took the time to come to the congress to tell the world that after fighting against the Germans they were now fighting against the Americans and they had not yet been freed. Oh, Verochka, Verochka, there is talk of making a film about you and you are here. What a great irony it would be if the movie audience knew that this woman was now in prison in Moscow!” “Such is our fate. When a people lose a revolution, the best fighters will pay for it,” I said.

The interrogator returned and the first thing he asked was: “Kurite?” (Do you smoke?). Until that moment I had never put a cigarette in my mouth but I had always collected cigarettes and tobacco when I went to the villages and gave them to my fellow fighters. I also

kept cigarette paper, newspaper clippings and tobacco in my backpack. When my comrades ran out of cigarettes I gave them some of mine. They were always grateful. And now, even before the interrogator had finished asking, without thinking I replied: “Da, kuriu!” (Yes I smoke!)

The interrogator left the office and when he returned he brought me some “papiroski” and said: “Vazmi, dlja zhenshtini.” I already knew about the women’s holiday from Aristotelis, who had handed me a few cigarettes earlier and said: “Hide them in your pocket and don’t tell anyone that I gave them to you.” The interrogator also gave me a few matches. March 10, 1950 was the first time I had ever lit a cigarette in my entire life. It was the brand “Boks”, one of the lowest quality cigarettes in the USSR. The ones Aristotelis gave me were “Kazbek” brand. From then to this day I have been a smoker. After this unexpected, pleasant ceremony they began the interrogation. He asked me how, with whom and for how long had I been at the Women’s Second International Congress in Budapest. I told them everything from A to Z. Here is what I said:

The active body of military and political cadres of NOF was called to assemble on October 3, 1948 in the village Rudari, Prespa in Lerin Region. The assembly was personally attended by CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis. The assembly, among other things, discussed the NOF situation and put a motion in place to remove Paskal Mitrevski as Secretary and Mihailo Keramitchiev as President (in accordance with the organizational structure, the Secretary was a political figure in NOF) from the Organization and to suspend them from the NOF Main Board. After the assembly was over, in the same village, Zahariadis, who then personally led NOF, in the presence of Interim President Vangel Koichev, Secretary Stavro Koichev and myself Vice President of NOF and Secretary of AFZH, called first on Paskal Mitrevski to ask him to accept his suspension from the NOF Main Board and his removal as Secretary from the Organization. After hearing what Zahariadis had to say, Paskal responded by saying: “I am a fighter and I will go wherever the Party sends me.” Zahariadis then said: “You are to report to DAG as an ordinary soldier.” Paskal replied: “I will; thank you for the offer!” and left.

After Paskal left, again in the presence of everyone mentioned above, Zahariadis called Mihailo Keramitchiev and said to him the same things that he had said to Mitrevski. Keramitchiev declined the offer to go to DAG as an ordinary fighter because of health reasons; he said that he was suffering from epilepsy and flying aircraft had an adverse effect on him. In fact, prior to this meeting Keramitchiev had had two epileptic episodes as witnessed by Pavle Rakovski, one in the village Bukovo and the other in Breznitsa where he was ridiculed by

the people. "Okay then," said Zahariadis, "where do you want to go?" "Well, you can send me to the 'free territory' where I can remain or you can send me for treatment," said Keramitchiev. "Where do you want to go for treatment, to Albania or to Yugoslavia?" asked Zahariadis. "I want to go to Yugoslavia," said Keramitchiev. Zahariadis said: "Good."

After his meeting with Zahariadis, Paskal Mitrevski joined the DAG's 107th brigade as an ordinary fighter. Mihailo Keramitchiev went to Yugoslavia to seek 'treatment.' He took with him 813 gold coins belonging to NOF. He took the money without informing the new NOF leadership, which now was responsible for the money.

At that same meeting Zahariadis told me that I too should be going to DAG. I agreed. "You will go," he said, "to DAG's 18th Brigade as an assistant to the Political Commissar." The Political Commissar of the all Macedonian 18th Brigade at the time was Tashko Gushevski-Maki and the Commander was Pando Vainata. "But," Zahariadis said, "you will also work for both NOF and AFZH; you are not dismissed from your current duties."

After I tidied up things in the Organization, I held a meeting in the village P'pli during which I appointed Comrade Marika Elkova to act on my behalf while I was away. She was to monitor and manage the AFZH regional organizations. I left for the DAG, 18th Brigade at the end of October 1948. In November 1948 the 18th Brigade received a special assignment from DAG General Headquarters to "break the enemy's back." I left with the brigade and we went to Mount Siniachno where we led most of the fighting. I took part in the battle when we stormed the town Eratira-Seltsa. It was a successful battle for us and afterwards we conducted some mobilization. We had similar success in the town Siatista. Unfortunately we did not have the same success in Kailari and in the Kailari Region villages, the village paramilitary bands there were well-armed and we could not break them. We also failed to take the Neapoli Bridge because we were betrayed.

Towards the end of November 1948, DAG 18th Brigade Headquarters received a telegram with orders for me to leave. The telegram read: "Comrade Vera and Alexi Parni are to leave for General Headquarters immediately!" Alexi and I traveled for two days and one night on horseback before we arrived in Prespa. Alexi Parni then was a reporter at General Headquarters. He later studied in the USSR to become a writer. He had a villa near Moscow close to Konstantin Sinoni's villa. He praised Stalin well in his poetry. He now lives in Athens. Right away after our arrival in Prespa, I was received by Zahariadis who ordered me to immediately leave for Budapest. The other members of the delegation had already left a day or two earlier

and if I hurried I should be able to catch up to them in Sofia. Unfortunately I was delayed for a couple of days at the NOF Main Board because my co-workers were experiencing some problems that had arisen in the local organizations after the departure of my colleagues. The membership wondered why we were leaving and there were all sorts of speculations arising from that. My job was to persuade people that everything was okay and that our main emphasis at the moment was to help the front by all possible means. Comrade Marika Elkova informed me that all was well with AFZH and the women running it. AFZH elected board members Mahi Pilaeva and Malina Markovska had already left for the Congress.

I just want to mention here that Mahi Pilaeva was AFZH Secretary, Lerin Region and member of the Board. Malina Markovska was member of the Board and member of NOO, Lerin Region. Most of Malina's family was involved in the struggle. Her son Pando was a fighter and Giorgi was then living in Canada. Her daughter Arhonda was a DAG lieutenant in the officer's school when she was killed. Her two sons are currently living in Skopje. Malina died in Skopje a few years ago.

During the International Congress in Budapest Malina represented the Macedonian woman. She was dressed in a Macedonian folk costume. Representing DAG were DAG officers Afrodita and Mahi. Afrodita was from the village Gorentsi, Kostur Region. She died in Tashkent. Mahi Pilaeva was from the village Ekshisu, Lerin Region. She was in Czechoslovakia, in Brio as an immigrant and from there she moved to Athens because her husband was Greek. She came to Skopje twice to visit me. She died in Skopje.

After my meeting with my colleagues in the village Zhelevo, I said goodbye to my friends and comrades Koichev and Kochev, as well as to my friend Mincho whom I had not seen for a long time. I also informed him, in some detail, about the NOF situation after his departure. He was surprised by what had happened and was upset with me for allowing it to happen and for not intervening. I told him that he knew very well what kind of influences there were in NOF and assured him that things would be better this way. Before I left he warned me: "Watch where you're going and with whom you are going." He was right because he was more experienced than me. Mincho also gave me some documents to leave with my mother in Bitola for safe keeping.

A delegation of PDEG from the All-Greek Women's Democratic Union and from AFZH were also selected at the founding meeting on October 23, 1948 in the village Rudari Prespa, to represent the women of Greece at the International Congress in Budapest at the same time as the leadership was elected. Located in the village Rudari at that time

was the so-called “embeda” where all important newcomers from other republics were settled and mobilized for handling weapons and from there they were dispatched to the DAG units.

With help from “Iafka” I arrived in Bitola at night and met with my mother. From Bitola I then traveled to Skopje. While Ipsilandis remained in Skopje waiting to go to a different destination, the next night I left for Sofia via Strumitsa and Petrich where I was to meet up with our delegation. While traveling through Yugoslavia we were escorted by Macedonian Security Service personnel and while traveling through Bulgaria we were handled by the Bulgarian Security Service. When I arrived at the “Iafka” office in Petrich I was received by a young Macedonian man named Iani. All the “Iafka’s”, or “Giafka’s” as they were called by the Greeks, belonged to the CPG. In Petrich I was placed in a house that belonged to a Macedonian family. The next night I left for Sofia. In Sofia too I was received by our “Iafka” when I met up with members of our delegation. In Sofia we were joined by my friend Keti from Solun, who came through Belasitsa. The person responsible for “Iafka” there was Shapera.

In Sofia we were placed with families of the Central Committee members of the Communist Party of Bulgaria. Rita and I were placed in Neda Todorova’s flat; she was Minister of Health in the People's Republic of Bulgaria. There we could wear civilian clothes. We were given Bulgarian passports and other necessary documents for travel by train to Bucharest. The name in my passport was Stoina Stoianova. After a few days rest in the enjoyable first class train, we arrived in Bucharest on November 28, 1948.

Our delegation was made up of eleven AFZH members. From the Macedonian side we were (1) Vera Nikolovska, AFZH Secretary for Aegean Macedonia and member of the leadership of the newly formed PDEG Delegation. (2) Antula Liaku, DAG Lieutenant (later captain), a native of the village Gorentsi, Kostur Region. She died in Tashkent. (3) Mahi Pilaeva, AFZH Secretary for Lerin Region, a native of the village Ekshisu, Sorovich Region. (4) Malina Markova from the village Zhelevo, Lerin Region, member of the NOO, Lerin District. From the Greek side there were: (5) Rula Kukulu, PDEG President and consort to Zahariadis, (6) Domna Ioanidu, member of the PDEG leadership and wife of Iani Ioanidu, (7) Rita, member of the leadership, (8) Keti, member of the leadership, an illegal worker, (9) another Keti, DAG Captain (later Major), doctor by profession and wife to Hristoforo Gizidi responsible for “Iafka” in Budapest and who received us at the train station and (10) Marika, DAG Partisan from the un-armed brigade of fighters who came from Thessaly. In Bucharest we were joined by (11) Hrisa Hadzhivasiliu, well known CPG political worker, member of

the Politburo and wife to Petro Ruse, Minister of External Affairs in the Provisional Government. Hrisa was also a member of the Secretariat of the International Democratic Federation of Women. Hrisa and I were very close. I liked her very much, because for me she was a model revolutionary woman, courageous and very capable in her role in the communist movement in Greece. She knew that I was Macedonian and had no problem with that, but for some unknown reason, at least to me, Zahariadis did not like her. As I found out later she became ill and died in Romania.

When we arrived in Budapest we were taken to the “Geller” hotel on the left bank of the Danube River, one of the most luxurious hotels in Budapest. Here we were received and accompanied for the entire Congress by the leaders of the Hungarian Women’s Organization. After we settled in we dressed in our military uniforms. The Second International Congress of PDOG (International Federation of Democratic Women) began on December 1st and lasted until December 6th, 1948. It was held in the grandiose Hungarian Parliament Building.

President of the Women’s Federation was Madam Cotton from France. Honorary President was Dolores Ibaruri la Pasionaria. Unfortunately she did not attend the congress, I don’t know why. Secretary of the Women’s Federation was Marie Vaian Kuturie also from France. Vice President was Nina Popova from the Soviet Union. Our delegation was given instructions by Zahariadis to maintain the same good relations with all the delegations because we were at war. Our participation in the Congress was to affirm our struggle against the Anglo-Americans imperialists and expose their involvement in aiding the Monarcho-Fascist regime in Athens. That is why when the Congress welcomed Mitra Mitrovich, President of the Yugoslav delegation, our delegation applauded her with hand clapping. Immediately after the break, the Soviet delegation sent us a note to which we responded that we were in a state of war and that Yugoslavia was a supporter of our struggle and therefore we could not act any differently.

Mitra Mitrovich in the meantime asked the PDOG Secretariat to hold a leadership meeting. From our side the meeting was attended by Rula Kuku, Domna Ioanidi who spoke French well and by me. Mitra Mitrovich, heading the Yugoslav delegation, submitted a protest to the Congress because the building in which the Congress was held did not fly the Yugoslav flag. This was done, Mitrovich exclaimed, knowing full well that Yugoslav women participated en masse in the struggle against fascism and hundreds of thousands of them had become its victims. I happened to sit next to Mitrovich, who smoked a lot and was very nervous about this injustice, while Nina Popova sat opposite her.

There was a sharp dialogue between Mitrovich and Popova but, like the other delegations, we supported Mitrovich. The next day the Yugoslav flag was erected on the building and was flying among the other flags. We were again scolded by our Soviet friends for supporting the Yugoslav delegation on the flag matter but our position remained unchanged.

To decide who was doing what during the Congress, our delegation held a meeting in one of the “Geller” hotel rooms and it was decided that as PDEG President, Rula Kukulu would speak during the opening ceremonies on behalf of the women of Greece. It was also decided that I would speak in Parliament Square at the rally that was to be held in honour of the Congress. Rita and I were delegated to writing the speeches. I asked Rula if I could speak in Macedonian but she said no. Rita on the other hand made corrections to my speech which, on the advice of Antula Liaku, I had to accept. Antula warned me in Sofia to be careful around Rita. She said: “Vera, Rita was sent to follow you around, watch your movements, how you behave and to listen to what you say to other people.” I am very grateful to Antula for her advice and honesty. She was a brave young woman.

Rula did her part in greeting the delegation and welcoming the Congress on behalf of the women of Greece. There were cheers, applause and much support for our delegation and for our struggle. Rula in her speech explained the situation of the women in Greece and how they were affected by the terror carried out in the occupied territories. She explained why the children had to be evacuated to Eastern European countries and how the Anglo-Americans were helping the Monarcho-Fascists in Athens. During the break a man and a woman approached me and asked me if I recognized them. When I said no, they told me that they knew me from a meeting I had had with them on the Greek side of Mount Kaimakchalan. I did remember having the meeting with them in the village Gorno Rodovo.

At this point the interrogator stopped me from talking. He made a motion with his hand and two NKVD agents appeared and led me to my cell. After that I did not go to interrogation for several days. I wondered why he was not asking for me. My confession about the Budapest Congress was my spiritual outpouring even though I was constantly humiliated and insulted by him. And why would he want to see me again when I had given him every detail of what had happened? I wanted to be interrogated because it gave me a chance to talk; I hated the silence in my cell. Smoking the cigarettes I was given in honour of Women’s International Day did give me some relief even though they were of the lowest quality.

What was my connection to the Central Intelligence Service?

“Today Vera Nikolovskaja will tell us about her connection to the Central Intelligence Service,” the interrogator said after I was called in from a long period of being absent. In the beginning I did not understand the question. It was a strange question so I did not answer. The interrogator became very angry and with a raised tone of voice began to yell at me calling me “zvoloch, agent, traitor etc.” “I have no connection to the Central Intelligence Service,” I said. “So don’t waste your insults on me!” “Then explain to me how you know those English people that you told us about the other time? By what other means did you know them?” he asked and then said: “We know how you people ‘podrevnuju rabotu’ (worked) against the CPG and DAG together with Tito to betray the struggle.”

At that moment it became clear to me what the problem was. I started to quickly gather my thoughts and remember under what circumstances I had met Peter Farst and his wife. The interrogator signaled with his hand and a woman of uncertain age entered the office looking very comfortable. She sat on a chair in the middle of the table. One of the NKVD agents brought her a typewriter. After he left another NKVD agent, an officer, came in and introduced himself as Major Pantaleev. He explained to me that the protocol would now be typed and I would have to sign both the questions and my answers. By now I was very familiar with the beginning of their protocols. First it would be general questions like when my father went to Canada. No matter how many times I gave them my answers, the same questions persisted as if they had already forgotten my answers.

“My father, together with Lazo Trpovski, went to Canada in 1928 to seek work and to avoid persecution from the Greek government. Lazo Trpovski, a well-known revolutionary and Communist from my village, at one time lived in the Soviet Union. He along with six other people was killed on April 9, 1943 in a place called Imeri in Kozheni Region in present day Greece,” I answered. “Why did your father not return with Lazo Trpovski?” he asked. “I don’t know!” I answered. “I did not know my father, I was less than three years old when he left for Canada.” “Did you have any contact with your father during the war?” he asked.

“I corresponded with him up until 1940,” I said. “After 1940 I did not correspond with him because of the war, but in 1947 when my mother moved to Bitola she started writing him letters. Through my mother he sent me a pair of binoculars, a ‘Kodak’ camera and a gold watch. The bottom of the watch was engraved with the words: ‘To Vera from your father.’” He had also sent me some minor things. When

I was arrested in Albania all those things were taken away from me by Pirakli Mirovigli. Similarly he took my gold ring with my initials which my mother had given me, 17 gold coins that belonged to AFZH, a little briefcase full of documents belonging to the Kostur NOO District Board and my 'Walter' side arm." So I repeat who knows which way things would go from what I had already told him but here I specifically pointed him to the next case.

"I made contact with my father by letter in the summer of 1946 through some Vlachs who were staying with their flocks at Vicho," I said and continued. "Their leader was called Triiandafilis, he was from Karditsa, Thessaly. I sent my father a letter via Lerin asking him to send us money for our needs, at the Vlach's address. My father must have got the letter because he sent \$700 to the address I specified. With the money we bought shoes. Actually the Vlach bought them for us Partisan women because at the time we worked behind the scenes under very difficult conditions. Our work was considered illegal since we had no free territories and NOF consisted only of small groups of activists." "How were you acquainted with the Vlach to have such confidence in him?" the interrogator asked. "In April 1946 I had a terrible backache, I was unable to move and felt like I was paralyzed. Panaiot Karadzov from my village, who at the time was head of NOMS in Kostur Region, carried me on his shoulder. My friends wanted to take me to Yugoslavia for treatment, but how could I go when I was immobile? Lazar Poplazarov, Secretary of the Lerin District Board of NOF and my friends then decided to take me to the Vlachs and left me there until my situation improved."

"There were many families of Vlachs. They lived in huts. But in order to accept me they wanted us to give them guns and ammunition to defend themselves from wolves and bears. Otherwise they would have to ask the Monarcho-Fascists for those weapons. They said they needed the weapons because Vicho was infested with wolves and bears and they were afraid that they would harm their flocks. Lazo agreed to give them arms and said: "Make sure nothing happens to her and good luck to you." My friends then left me with the Vlachs and took the road to Bigla towards the village Trsie. At the time the villages around Vicho were still occupied by the Monarcho-Fascists. The family I was left with had a girl about my age. Her name was Anastasia. During the time of ELAS she had served in the ranks as a nurse. When she saw me in my condition she immediately placed a couple of cut "veduzi" (I had to explain what they were) on my back which pulled all my clotted blood away. After that I felt relieved and was able to stand up. I stayed with the Vlachs for fifteen days. I waited for my friends to return but they didn't. One day a unit of about thirty Monarcho-Fascists showed

up at the dairy asking the Vlachs if they had seen any Partisans passing by. The man in charge told them that he had not seen any. With the Monarcho-Fascists was a young Macedonian man from the village Bapchor whom I recognized. His name was Giorgi. He had been with our Brigade in Bitola but he deserted.”

“When the Vlachs saw the Monarcho-Fascists coming from the distance they dressed me in Vlach clothes, put a thick Vlach scarf on my head and covered me up with a goatskin quilt (lozhnik). Giorgi the deserter asked: “Who is that lying there?” And was about to uncover me. The Vlach leader told him that I was one of his girls and warned him not to uncover me because I was sick with a fever and that I was covered up to break into a sweat so that I could recover from my cold. It was my lucky day. Giorgi took his advice and decided not to uncover me, otherwise I would have been killed on the spot because he knew who I was. During my stay with these good people they fed me the best food that they had which consisted of butter, young cheese and fresh milk with salt. In place of water I drank skim milk and whey. Up until then I had drunk my milk with sugar, so initially I found it difficult to drink it with salt, but I gradually became used to it and it was delicious. Salt tends to dilute the thick sheep’s milk and makes it more palatable and flavourful. After I recovered, fifteen days later, the Vlach leader would not allow me to leave for the village Trsie alone, so he asked one of his shepherds to take me. During the night I met up with my friends in Trsie. We gave the Vlach shepherd two guns and ammunition to take back and he left. To this day I cannot forget those good people, especially Anastasia and her brother Tanasaki, whose father wanted me to be his wife. Actually, the entire family and community were good to me and I will never forget their kindness. I tried many times to remember their address in Thessaly but to this day I could not. They were so kind that in the fall when they were leaving for Thessaly, they sent me knitted sweaters and socks and containers full of cheese and butter for Vangel Koichev, who at the time was suffering from a stomach ulcer. With the \$700 I received from my father we bought shoes and everything else that we needed for the Partisans and the remaining amount we distributed among our friends to buy whatever they needed. Since then I had no other correspondence with my father, in other words, there is no link that may be of interest to you,” I concluded.

“What other relatives do you have in Canada and in America?” the interrogator asked. “I have an uncle, my father’s brother in Detroit. His name is Naum Balev and another uncle named Naum Mangov-Dimitrov. He is my mother’s brother and lives in Gary Indiana,” I replied. “Aha!” said both the interrogator and interpreter. I, on the other

hand, enjoyed telling them what they wanted to know because their questions made me remember good things about my family. I know what they wanted to hear and I could see where they were going with their questions but they were not going to get lies from me for their purposes because the people in my family were not that kind of people, especially my Uncle Naum Mangov or Numo as we called him. Now I too began to play their game. I started telling them great details about the names I mentioned, but frankly, I told them the truth the way it really was. My aim was to bog them down with details, to extend the interrogation, to make it more pleasant just the way it was today here in this “warm” prison atmosphere.

“What does your Uncle Naum Balev do for a living?” the interrogator asked. “He is a plumber,” I replied. “Where does he live?” he asked. “In Detroit,” I replied. “What family does he have?” he asked. “He has a wife and three children,” I replied. “What are the names of his wife and children?” he asked. “His wife’s name is Sofia. She is from our village D’mbeni. His children’s names are Marianti, Andon and Panaiot,” I replied. “Do you have contact with your Uncle Naum Mangov and his family?” he asked. “No I don’t, but my mother does,” I said. “What does your uncle do?” he asked. “He used to work somewhere for Interpol. I met him for the first time in 1935 when he was sent to Europe from his job. He used the opportunity to come to the village D’mbeni and visit his family. After that he went to Bulgaria. His wife now lives in Varna and his son Lambro left to study medicine in France and Belgium. He could have studied medicine in Sofia. As far as I know my uncle is now Captain in the Chicago or Gary Indiana police force. You can verify this information with your Embassy in the United States,” I concluded.

“Oh, is that so?” said the interrogator. “Yes that is how it is, just the way I said it,” I replied. He again asked what my connection with my uncle was. “I have no connection and I had no connection with him. I don’t even know if my mother still corresponds with him,” I replied. I then explained to him in detail of our Macedonian situation after the arrival of the Greek government in Macedonia after 1912-1913 and why so many Macedonians had to go to work in America and Australia while their families, wives, children and parents had to stay in the village and work on their own properties. For the Christmas and Easter holidays, I explained, the men would send their families a cheque for one hundred dollars. They would also send fifty dollars over the summer to purchase necessities for living. After some years of earning, the men would return to their village and re-join their families. This is how it was with my father and my two uncles and with all the Macedonian men that went to pechalba. But when the situation

worsened in Greece some began to take their families with them. That was the case with my two uncles.

They provocatively questioned me regarding what I had previously said; i.e. if I knew any other Americans or Englishmen. I replied that in 1944 I saw a man named Evans, an English officer, a Captain, who was at the 28th Regiment of ELAS. I also saw him on April 12, 1944 in my village D'mbeni when he attended the SNOF Second Conference. He attended the Conference as an ally with other English Party delegates but I never had any meeting or conversation with him.

Suddenly the interrogator asked me if I wanted to smoke a cigarette. When I said yes, he gave me a whole pack of "Prima" cigarettes. The box was red. Until then he had only given me "Boks" and "Roketa" papiroshki, the lowest quality cigarettes. I lit a cigarette or two in my cell just to pass my time and I made little chicks from the butts. One time when I lined up all my little chicks on the table the duty officer came in and asked: "What are those?" I said: "They are Marko's Partisans." Then with one sweep of his hand he gathered them all and threw them in the toilet bowl. He then said: "Eto nelzja delat". I was relieved after I got my "Prima" cigarettes and said to myself, I can now go to my cell and think about my relationships with the Central Intelligence Service, for which I am sure they will want to interrogate me again. When they brought me to my cell I was very pleased because during the interrogation I could express myself loudly towards my loved ones. I felt empowered by it. I wanted to play their game so that I could play them for a change, not just them playing me, because now it became even clearer to me what their game was. They wanted me to criticize Yugoslavia and Tito for turning towards the capitalist camp but they were not going to succeed!

Interview given at Kaimakchalan

The next day they again took me for interrogation. The interrogation was typed. The first question asked was: "What is your connection to the Central Intelligence Service?" Without feeling any pressure, I began to tell them how I had come into contact with the English journalist Peter Farst and his wife and a Yugoslav journalist during the winter, in late January or early February 1947, at Mount Kaimakchalan in the village Gorno Rodovo. I said: "We the workers, working behind the scenes, were up in the mountains with the NOF "Iafka." A courier came from the village and said that three strangers had come to the village and wanted to talk to the Partisans. Four of us decided to go and investigate. The four were Vangel Shamardanov-Iindenski (Organizational Secretary of Voden Region, afterwards Organizational Secretary of the NOF District Board, later killed), Lena Stoikova-Mirka (AFZH Secretary for Voden Region), Giorgi Janchev-Slobodan and myself."

"By the time we got there the strangers had been accommodated by NOF personnel in a house in the middle of the village that belonged to Maria, an AFZH Secretary. We came down to the village armed with machine guns. When we entered the house the strangers stood up and raised their hands in the air. We motioned them with our hands to sit down. The man and woman introduced themselves and told us that they were journalists. The other one said that he was a Yugoslav journalist. I don't know his name because he did not tell us who he was. The first man said that he was an English journalist and the woman he was with was his wife. Giorgi Janchev spoke a bit of English and so did the Yugoslav journalist. The two of them translated for us."

"We asked them what they wanted from us. First they said that they wanted to make contact with the Partisans but the Greek Monarcho-Fascist authorities would not allow it so they left their car in Sobotsko and secretly headed towards Mount Kaimakchalan in hopes of meeting some Partisans in one of the villages. They told us that they wanted an interview. We told them that we would give them an interview under one condition; they needed to promise that they would publish exactly what we told them. Otherwise they could go back where they had come from. They promised that they would publish everything word for word. Peter Farst convinced us that he was a member of the Communist Party of England. His wife however was not because she wanted to know more about the communist cause and witness our struggle with her own eyes before she made her commitment. She wanted to know who we were fighting against and why, and what kind of weapons we were using and the kind of freedom we were seeking."

“We answered the English journalists’ questions in detail, especially those about us, the Macedonians. We told them who we were and what we wanted to achieve with our struggle and our NOF Organization. We told them that we were fighting against the December 1944 English intervention in Athens, against the Monarcho-Fascist terror and against the Monarcho-Fascists who until yesterday were slaves to the fascists. We also told them that we had been forced to take up arms because our allies lied to us and deceived us. When they asked what kinds of weapons we carried, we showed them what we had with us and told them how we had seized these weapons from our adversaries. We said that these weapons here are yours (meaning English), we took them from you, we took them from the imperialists; we don’t use Soviet weapons. We told them: “Go to the prisons and prison camps and interview the people there and you will find out that they are all ELAS Partisans, fighters who were fooled into surrendering their arms and after that they all ended up in jail. These people were the fighters who fought against fascism and liberated us all from the fascist occupiers; they are Communists, members of EPON and EAM, Macedonians and Greeks. We were also fighters of ELAS but we managed to slip out from the Monarcho-Fascists hands, grab whatever weapons we could get and head for the mountains. You the English and the Americans have pushed us into this fight.”

“Peter’s wife asked me who I was, if I came from a poor family, if I was of immoral character and unwanted. She asked that because she had heard stories that only the poorest and immoral women, who were shunned by their families, joined the partisans. When I heard that I laughed because I too had heard those stories. I said that I was not those things, only those who spread such rumours were of immoral character. It was the Monarcho-Fascists who robbed people and raped women and girls all throughout Greece. I said: “Morality among our partisans here is of the highest level. There is no place for immorality in our ranks. We are children of the people and do not tolerate immorality. Those who are immoral are condemned to death. It is not true that only the poorest people join the Partisans. We here were also ELAS Partisans and most of us come from wealthy families. We become Partisans not because we are poor but to fight against injustice, against the humiliation of women. We fight for equal rights. We the Macedonians are fighting for our National rights because we are not recognized as a people, as a nation. Ever since Greece acquired our Macedonian territory during the Balkan Wars no Greek government has recognized us as a distinct Macedonian people. In fact some regimes, like the Metaxa regime, were downright cruel to us and punished us for speaking our native Macedonian language. Some Macedonians had

their tongues cut off for speaking their mother tongue...” At this point the woman began to cry. She took her shoes and coat off and handed them to me. I declined by saying: “The people supply us with what we need; they give us what they have and what they can afford because they believe our struggle is just.” Peter then took his watch off and offered it to Vangel. Vangel too refused it. We refused to take any of the items that they offered us and told them that the greatest gift for us would be to report on our cause exactly the way it is. We then asked our hosts to serve our guests a meal and drinks. In parting they asked if they could take a photograph of us. We agreed. They took a group shot and then they took a picture of me and Lena.”

“Several days after the reporters had left, our interview along with the photographs were published in several newspapers worldwide and in Greece. The people kept their word and published exactly what we told them. The same interview and pictures were also published in the Yugoslavian paper “Borba” (when I returned from the USSR, during a visit to Lena’s home I saw the photograph enlarged, framed and hanging in her living room).”

I continued with my statements, exploring my memory from a few years back. I enjoyed telling details of my life because I was as pure as a tear drop and innocent of any wrong doing. Except for those meetings I had had with the few English people, I had absolutely no connections to the Central Intelligence Service or to any other western foreign services.

They did not interrupt me and left me to speak as much as I wanted, so I continued: “In December 1948 in Budapest at the Second International Congress of Women I again met with Peter Farst and his wife. I did not recognize them. They of course recognized me and when we sat in the Congress Hall, they came over to me, hugged and kissed me. Peter’s wife said: “You know Vera I became a Communist because of you. I will write an article with the title ‘Again with Vera, two years later.’ And she really did write such an article. You can ask your own Nina Popova about that. Nina was there and was Vice-President of the International Organization of Women. She spoke to our delegation several times and even scolded us.”

“After that I never saw Peter or his wife again. That was all the contacts I had with the English people. I have no more to tell you. You have embassies in England and Hungary and you can verify what I have already told you.”

All three, Evgeny Konstantinovich Nikitin, Pandelev and Aristotelis Papunidis simultaneously said: “We don’t need to know that, we need to know about your connections to the Central Intelligence Service.” “I have no such connection!” I replied. “Why

then did you drag us through all that, all these days? We need data!" demanded the interrogator. "You asked me what my connection was with the English people and I gave you all the details about my links with them," I replied. "Well then, who was that Serb with the Englishman?" he asked. I said: "I don't know who the Serb was. He never spoke or asked any questions, he just listened. I don't know his name; all I know is that the interview was published in 'Borba.' I personally have not read the interview, I was told about it at the Greek 'Iafka' in Skopje."

They again said the same thing: "We are looking for something different. You need to help the Soviet Party clarify its relations with Tito. All you are telling us is lies!" I said: "I am telling you the truth and only the truth. I think that the Soviet Party should not be lied to. I cannot tell you things which I don't know anything about." The interrogator then said: "Take these cigarettes, go away and reconsider what you are going to say the next time."

They took me back to cell 105. I felt good about myself. So now, I thought, they are asking me to lie and make up stories about imaginary connections to foreign intelligence services in England and America. They want me to discredit Tito and Yugoslavia for the path they chose to take towards capitalism. Zahariadis said that "Tito was a traitor" and they are now looking for fabricated statements from me to back him up. God, why did I believe so much that the Soviet Union was a perfect society? Why did I believe that the people here would be perfect and honest and that they would help everyone out of the goodness of their hearts? God, how could I have possibly believed that Stalin could do no wrong? How many of our fighters died praising his name with their last dying breath? And now I, Vera, one who represents the faithful young girls who fought for the freedom of our people, am required to tell lies to help the Soviet Party fight against Tito, Kolishevski and Yugoslavia? God, my God what is the world coming to! This just blows my mind! I am glad and proud that I was not intimidated and that I stood, all this time, on the side of truth. But at the same time I am so disappointed with these Soviet officers of whom, until now, I had such high opinions. "What a damn shame!" I said to myself as I spit on the floor. After getting the signal to go to bed, for the first time in a long time I fell into a deep sleep to be awakened by the usual "Padjom" at six o'clock in the morning the next day.

I found out Mincho was here too

Before they took me out of the interrogation room, when I was signing the protocol I noticed the typist's surname was Milosheva. She said to me: "Kakaa vi maladava, krasiva, machemu tak, kak I vash soprug haroshii i ochen krasivii." I looked at her and said nothing. When she said "your husband" my body began to tremble and my heart began to race. This could have only meant that Mincho was here somewhere in these cells. The typist's words were like a direct greeting from Mincho himself. I suspected they were all here. It almost seemed like the typist was bringing me a message from my Mincho telling me: "Vera hang on! Tell them only the truth and don't be afraid! Be strong like when you were a fighter. We will break them, they will never break us!" That's what Mincho used to say to me at Mount Paiak in December 1946, at Mount Kaimakchalan in 1947, at Mount Vicho in 1948 and at Mount Gramos in 1949 when we saw each other after long periods of being apart. That is why he dedicated a poem to me that he wrote from his heart in Vorkuta in 1954. He showed the poem to a Ukrainian poet; it was about our destiny. Mincho gave me the poem when we met at Potma after being apart for five and a half years. I would like to take this opportunity to share the poem with you.

МАЕЈ ЛЪУБОИМОИ

Тои каторои љубил и љубљу,
прости за все што ја приноси,
не по својј вине,
за бол разлук, за гореч слез,
за писма краткие с пути,
за зо што не хватило сил,
мне ударжат тенја,
кагда вдали с фронтами,
калесил недели, месеци, года.

Умна чесна Ти всјо паимјош,
што глоубока љубов била,
што не измена и не лоќ,
Нас бурја века пронесла.

Ја серцем и душој вса тот,
Апјат ја спешке ден денскои,
Лиш серце радосно замрјот,
чут мимо женщина проилјот.

Напомнил что то образ твои,
И хот нелзја соединит,
Минувших и градјадушних дни,
Ја всјо старијус лушче бит,
Во имја памјати твои.

Воркута, 1. I 1954 година

Honorary citizen of Balaton

The interrogations continued in the same manner as before. They were still looking for a connection between myself and the Central Intelligence Service, the British Intelligence Service, the Military Police (OZNA) and the international bourgeoisie. All through my interrogations in all the Moscow prisons including Ljubljanka, Lefortovskaja and Butirka, which lasted 29 months, I was objective, regardless of all the pressures they put on me, and I always told only the truth. If they could prove that I was hiding something, that I wasn't truthful about something, or if in any way I had wronged my people then let them try me before the people. I hid nothing from them, even if I had not wanted to tell them something about myself they would have found it because they had access to everything and everyone from the most honest people to the informers. It was no secret that I had been in Yugoslavia and that under the leadership of Tito and Kolishevski the Macedonian people won their national freedom, and now they have their own country; the People's Republic of Macedonia.

When I was a delegate of the Women's Second International Congress I often joined the Yugoslav delegation on its visits to various factories and children's facilities in and around Budapest. Rita was always with me. I tried to have a conversation with the Yugoslav delegates but they avoided me, they too were cautious. During a visit to the town of Balaton, as I remember, I was declared an honorary citizen of that municipality. At the request of the Netherlands, Norway, England, Sweden, East Germany and some others delegations, I visited some homes in Hungary that housed our (Macedonian) children, evacuated to be saved from the Monarcho-Fascist terror. While visiting these homes I met with the teachers, nurses and "mothers" as well as with the children who ran to greet, hug and kiss me. It was a moving encounter. Just then an airplane flew over and all the children, "mothers", teachers and nurses ran inside to hide, thinking for a moment that they were still in Greece. Even after so many months away from their troubled homeland they were still not freed from the fear of being bombed and machine gunned by the Anglo-American aircraft. I used the opportunity to explain to the other delegates why these children had been evacuated. Some of the more sensitive women delegates even cried because they could see for themselves how the children reacted to the airplane. Some even realized that what Queen Friderika was doing was not right or not exactly as she advertised. As a result of this encounter the delegations of the Netherlands, Sweden and East Germany requested from their leaders to open such homes for our children in their own countries. If I can recall correctly, we sent about a

thousand children to East Germany, mostly Greek. The Minister of Education of the Interim Government of Greece, Petros Kokalis, a trained doctor, went with them and later died there.

On our return from the Congress our delegation visited Romania and Bulgaria, where, as I mentioned before, I visited the children's homes in Tulgash and Sinaia and our wounded comrades in Bucharest. I also visited Brashov and Kostantsa. As I did in Romania in Bulgaria too I received beautiful gifts. After our return to Greece, Rula openly announced to everyone that I was given "the best gifts" about which she said: "They knew that she was Macedonian so they gave her more attention."

In Ljubljanka

Several days passed without interrogations. They started giving me five minute breaks for some air in an enclosed indoor environment. They allowed me to “walk” alone. During these walks I used the opportunity to listen for sounds in hopes of hearing a familiar voice. While I heard many voices, I did not recognize any of them.

One night before they gave the signal to go to bed they called me for “sledstvie.” They took me out of my cell in the usual way but we went in a different direction through different corridors, different stairs and ended up again on the ground floor in a large room. I recognized the room. This was the same room they had brought me in when I first arrived at this prison. They searched me and then escorted me to a “voronok.” The heavy doors opened, we stepped in and they closed behind us. As they drove off I could hear traffic, trams, cars etc. It was a long trip. I thought: “Are they taking me outside of the city to execute me?” I felt some comfort in that because, although this might be my last hour of life, at least I might get a chance to see my friends one last time. I was sorry that I did not take my overcoat with me. The prison car suddenly stopped and the heavy doors opened. They took me out of the car and escorted me into a hallway and into a box. I recognized the box; it was where they had taken us when we arrived from Odessa. I was back in the notorious Ljubljanka prison.

An NKVD woman came and searched me. The box I was in was the size of a small closet with hardly any space to sit. After she searched me they took me along a hallway into a well-lit room where my interrogator and one other person, who I had never seen before, were waiting for me. The interrogator made a sign for me to sit on the chair in the corner as I did in Lefortov prison. The interrogator then introduced the other man as Major Afanasiev and said that Afanasiev was going to interrogate me. The translator was Professor Ianis Ioanidis. Suddenly Afanasiev started shouting at me: “Tito’s agent, zvoloch, how long are you going to lie to us, vriosh?” He did this in such a hysterical tone of voice, sounding as if he was the only one that could break me so that I would tell him what he wanted to hear. I answered him calmly and told him that I was not any of those things he accused me of being. I told him that I was a freedom fighter who fought for my people’s freedom against the German, Italian and Bulgarian fascists, against the fascist counter-bands, against the Greek Monarcho-Fascists and against the Anglo-American imperialists. “Vriosh, you secretly worked against the Democratic Army of Greece!” he said.

At those words I got angry, stood up and started yelling back at him at the top of my voice. I said: "That's a lie, we created that army, it was our army and how could we have possibly worked against our own army, how could we have possibly worked against ourselves? The instrument that mobilized our people, the Macedonian people from Aegean Macedonia en masse was our Organization NOF! I am that person who was convicted four times in absentia and sentenced to death by the Monarcho-Fascists. Now you tell me, how can an officer of the Soviet Army tell me who I am and accuse me of things I have not done and treat me this way?" He kept yelling at me and I kept yelling back at him until he walked out of the room. At that point my interrogator said: "He will ask you questions, you answer the best way you know how." I then asked for permission to go to the washroom. The interrogator called in one of the police women and she took me there. It was the first time since I had arrived at these prisons that I had seen a mirror. This washroom was not for the prisoners, it was used by the staff. Perhaps they deliberately took me there.

When I looked at myself in the mirror I could not recognize myself. My face looked yellowish-greenish and had darkened. I scared myself. "Wow, what have they done to me?" I asked myself and almost fell to the floor from the disappointment I felt. I stopped myself from falling and bit on my teeth so hard that I broke the gold crown on one of my teeth. I had three gold teeth. One had a golden jacket, a "crown" on the outside and the inside was sealed with a piece of white dental material.

Back in 1939 when I returned home from the gymnasium in Kostur for the Easter holidays, I got a toothache. After a few visits to dentist Nikos Ikonomidis in Kostur he tied the root of my bad tooth with the two adjacent teeth. He coated the healthy teeth with gold caps, filled the missing part of my bad tooth with this white material and capped it with a gold crown. My peers in D'mbeni made fun of me and called me a "show off" because I had gold teeth. On top of that, at the recommendation of my eye doctor, I had to wear glasses because I had difficulty reading and I got headaches, so I had really become the butt of all jokes. I wore the same glasses when I was a Partisan until 1943, when I broke them during a skirmish.

When I saw myself in the mirror I became frightened from my own image and broke my gold tooth and the white material underneath it. At the same time I began seeing double, my headache came back and I began vomiting. The guard kept yelling for me to come out from the bathroom but I was out of it, I was stunned. Finally I came out and she returned me to the interrogation room. My interrogator Evgeny Konstantinovich Nikitin was somewhat understanding of my troubles in the bathroom and said: "Chevo vam ploho chustvuvaets?" I shook

my head confirming yes. He then left the room and for the first time ever brought me a glass filled with a not so sweet and not so sour liquid. I drank it and felt slightly better. I looked so bad that even my interrogator was worried that I was going to die.

After some time Afanasiev returned with a typed up paper and said: "This is the protocol from the interview I did with you. I need you to sign it." There was not much written on the paper except that I had worked against DAG in favour of the Monarcho-Fascists and that I had aided the Anglo-American imperialists by being an agent of Tito's. He accused me of all those things and now he wanted me to sign as if they were my own confessions. If I had been suffering from anxiety before, it was nothing in comparison to the anxiety that I felt after that piece of paper was shoved in front of my nose for me to sign. It made me truly angry! I would have rather died than sign this document. I somewhat calmed myself down and said: "This is not what I said. What you have written in the protocol is not what I said. I can't sign something like this!" I told Afanasiev. He got very angry and began to yell at me calling me "zvoloch" and "inaetchija." He said I was as stubborn as "my" Tito and that I should sign it. I then angrily said: "Sign it yourself, you invented it. These are your words not mine!"

Major Afanasiev then took the paper and threw it in front of my interrogator and went outside. Evgeny Konstantinovich went after him and they left me alone with the interpreter Ianis Ioanidis. He immediately began to advise me, telling me not to be like that, because I was young and I should be helping the Soviet Party. I said to him: "The Party taught us not to lie, if we now start supporting the Party by lying, then where is the legitimacy of the Party?" Two NKVD agents then walked into the room and one said: "Vstavaj!" I stood up and was taken to another room. Evgeni, my interrogator was standing behind the table. He ordered me to sit on that damn chair in the corner. The interpreter was not there. He then said: "Smatri Vera," and took the typed paper, lit a small butane torch that was sitting on the table and burned it. Afanasiev's protocol was burned to ashes. He then said: "If you don't agree you don't have to sign, we don't force people to recognize what they have done." Yeah right I thought to myself, you are so very kind. After that they took me to the box, had me searched again, put me back in the prison car and drove me back to Lefortov prison where they searched me again. The officer on duty this time found the several pins I had stuck in the collar of my military blouse. I had always carried pins in my military blouse since I was a Partisan. I also carried a needle and thread, a knife and scissors and pinned several pins in my collar in case I needed them. They had confiscated everything else but until now they had not found my pins. The NKVD

woman was pleased with her find. She first instinctively smiled but then became angry and started asking where I had gotten the pins. I said: "I found them at the place where I was."

When they were transferring us from prison to prison, they always did a full body search. They put me back in the same cell, cell 105, third floor, third wing. Ah I said to myself, I am "home" again. There I found my small military blanket and my overcoat exactly where I had left them.

My interrogator started calling me “Verochka”

The interrogations, no matter how difficult, insulting and slanderous they were, were still better than being all alone in my cell. At least I got to talk and interact with people. All I did in my cell was sit and think and go over past proceedings and wonder what would happen next. If they called me to interrogation, no matter how difficult, no matter what they thought of me, I knew it meant that they needed something important from me and they were looking for it. It also meant that as long as they needed something from me I was important to them. How one acted in this situation depended on what kind of individual they were. No one and nothing could break those with a solid character.

Again I was not called for “sledstvie” for several days. All that time I thought about my comrades. What were they doing? How they were doing and where they were? Were they doing to them what they were doing to me? Were they finding the interrogations difficult? Etc. When I was least expecting it I was “invited” to “sledstvie” again. As usual I went escorted, one in front and another behind me and me in the middle with my hands tied behind my back. Aristotelis, the interpreter, was always polite to me but this time even my interrogator seemed a little different, somewhat kinder. I thought to myself, was Evgeni attempting to use a different tactic? He even asked how I was. I told him I was fine, I experienced a bit of dizziness, I had a headache, some problems with my eyes but other than that, I was fine. “Do you want to read some books?” he asked. “Yes, I would be happy to do some reading!” I promptly replied in case he changed his mind and retracted the offer. “But they will be in Russian!” he explained. “I can read Russian,” I said, “only a few of the letters are different but most of the letters in our alphabets are identical but I can learn the different letters, no problem.” “We will give you some works of fiction,” he assured me.

“I have read the Russian novels ‘Maladoja Gvardija’ and ‘Kak zakaljalas Stal’ and have watched a Russian film in Skopje about Zoja Kosmodojmianskaja,” I said, but from the look on his face he did not believe me. He did not think these things, especially the film, were available to the general public in Yugoslavia. I said that he could check with his embassy and find out. I also told him that Gustav Vlahov taught at the Party school in Skopje about the structure of the Soviet Union. We also read “Volokolamskoe Soshe” and other books. For the first time I saw a change in my interrogators face and he called me “Verochka.” He said: “Verochka ti v rjosh.” After that he always called me Verochka and I signed the protocols with both Evgenia Baleva and Vera Nikolovskaja.

That day the interrogator did not ask me about “intelligence activities.” Pretending that he had forgotten to ask, he asked me where I had gotten the pins they found in my blouse collar. I said: “I had them stuck in the collar of my blouse since my early days as a Partisan, way before I was brought here. I was searched three times before but they were never found until recently.” After that he left me alone with Aristotelis Papunidis, the translator, for some time, so that Papunidis could advise me on matters of importance. Papunidis said: “Now is a good time to tell them what they want to hear because Tito will soon be overthrown. There are groups of Partisans who have begun to rebel against Tito and the Tito regime will soon be overthrown.” “Tell them what?” I said. “I can’t lie to them, this is how it is and there is no other truth.” When the interrogator returned he gave me two packs of low quality “Boks” brand cigarettes. The interrogation was finished earlier than usual, before five o’clock in the morning, exactly what time I don’t know. I was asleep when “Padjom” was called at six in the morning.

Interest in ties with OZNA and more slander

There was no daylight in the cell all winter long. In fact the light above was constantly on, day and night. In the summer I could see a bit of the sky through the window above. Some days the good duty officer gave me more sugar cubes than usual. They still had not given me any books to read. I smoked the cigarettes which were like poison but I smoked them anyway because I enjoyed smoking. From the cigarette butts and paper I continued to make little chicks, birds, little boats, crosses etc. and continued to line them up in rows on my table. When I had made about twenty, the little window in my cell door opened and the duty officer asked me what they were. They are nothing I said and he slammed the door shut. When the good duty officer came every third day and gave me extra food, I knew he would not react like the others, so when he asked me what they were I said they were General Markos's little army of Partisans. He then asked me if I was Greek. He said: "Vi Grkinja?" "Njet!" I said, "Ja Makedonka". So now "my" officer knew what I was, maybe they had told him already. Who knows what he thought of me. Maybe he simply felt sorry for me for being a young woman. Anyway, whatever his reasons, he always gave me the leftover food when he was on duty. For lunch that day I had rice and "shchi" and kasha for dinner. Without knowing what day it was, for me that day was a holiday. But as it turned out it really was a holiday, it was November 7th. I found that out the next day when they gave me the same food as before. Twice a year they gave us "special food," on November 7th and on May 1st. That was why my interrogator also gave me two packs of "Boks" brand cigarettes. He too celebrated those days with his family.

I was in solitary confinement in the Lefortovskaja tjurma prison for 18 months. They moved me out of cell 105 for only a few days. Those days I spent in a small square box in the middle of the hallway on the same floor. I suspect they moved me there because they were perhaps searching for something.

One evening, in the dark of night, they told me to gather my things, searched me, put me in a prison car and took me for a "ride." I thought they were taking me to trial. But again I found myself in the box of the famous Ljubljanka prison where I was again searched and thrown back into a cell. There was no table or chair in this cell. I had to curl up like a dog in the corner to get some sleep. Then I heard the annoying "Padjom." I picked up my things but they told me to leave them there because I wouldn't need them in "sledstvie." In the room, standing at the end of the table were Pandeleev and Moionidis, the translator. I was used to my own interrogator but with Pandeleev I felt somewhat

nervous. Pandelev was a Major by rank but always dressed in civilian clothes.

“What was your relationship with OZNA?” Pandelev asked. “I had none!” I said. “When you were in Bulgaria who did you meet with?” he asked. “I went to Bulgaria on behalf of NOF and DAG at CPG General Secretary Zahariadis’s request. In the delegation with me were Pavle Rakovski (with whom I went to the International Congress in Prague), Vangel Nichev, Viktor Kochev and Tane Naumov. Viktor and Vangel were supposed to leave after that for Eastern Macedonia. We went there at the invitation of the Bulgarian delegation that attended our NOF Second Congress on March 25th, 1949, which consisted of Risto Stoichev Kliashev, member of the BRP(k) Central Committee, Risto Kalaidziev, President of the Macedonian Association in Sofia, Bulgaria, and a woman. Our delegation stayed with the Macedonian Association in Sofia. Risto Kalaidziev gave a speech about Iane Sandanski’s leadership activities which he had undertaken during the Macedonian Ilinden Uprising. In his speech he criticized Yugoslavia, especially the Macedonian Party leadership and the Macedonian state. Among other things, he said that the Macedonian language was Serbian. We from our side, especially Viktor and I, immediately reacted to these allegations and stated that: ‘The spoken Macedonian language and the letters used in the People’s Republic of Macedonia are NOT Serbian because we the people of the Aegean par of Macedonia speak the same language and use the same alphabet, which you can verify, but the slogans that you have written here are written in the Bulgarian language.’”

“The participants from the Macedonian Association in Sofia began to look at us strangely. If I can remember correctly, Maria, Gotse Delchev’s sister, sat in the first row of seats. No one reacted to our objections. Pavle Rakovski and I stayed with the Macedonian Association in Sofia for several days as guests of the Association. Unfortunately we were not lucky enough to attend the memorial service at Iane Sandanski’s grave at the Rozhen Monastery on Pirin Mountain. Pavle and I received orders from the Greek “Iafka” in Sofia to immediately depart for Prague. So on April 19, after being supplied with the necessary travel documents and airline tickets, we left for Prague. Comrade Maksimo was waiting for us at the airport with a car. From there he took us to the “Paris” hotel where we met up with the other members of our delegation. The delegation was led by Miltiadis Porfirogenis, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Government of Greece. Among the others attending were Rula Kukulu, President of PDEG, Done Sikavitsa, member of the NOF Central

Committee responsible for the Macedonian children sent to the Eastern European countries, Pavle Rakovski and myself,” I concluded.

“Nikolovskaja, we don’t need to hear all that, what we need to know is what your relationship was with OZNA!” said the interrogator. “I had nothing to do with OZNA!” I replied. “With whom else did you meet in Sofia?” he asked. “One of my cousins worked at the “Slavianska Beseda” hotel where we were accommodated. His name was Vancho Shimbov. He was from Aegean Macedonia, from the village Kosinets. He served in our brigade but because his mother, sister and two of his brothers lived in liberated Bulgaria, he left and went there in 1945 when Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations were good. When Vancho found out that I was with the delegation, he immediately came to my room to visit with me. After that he invited me to his home to visit with his mother. I told my friends that I was going to visit one of my aunts. The visit only took a couple of hours then I was back in the hotel with my friends. I also informed Risto Stoikov, originally from Macedonia, from the village Smrdesh, Kostur Region, representing the CPB (Communist Party of Bulgaria). Risto was responsible for our delegation. In the evening we were supplied with tickets to visit the opera and see the play “Evgenij Onegin”. Escorted by Risto Stoikov, our entire delegation attended,” I said.

“Nikolovskaja, you are not being honest. I have asked you about your “podrevnaja” work in Bulgaria!” Pandelev reminded me. I said, “Wait, give me a chance to tell you all the details. The next day a car arrived during the day and my cousin said that some friends wanted to see me. When I came down to the front door of the hotel, the driver called me and asked me to get into the car. I saw that the car had diplomatic license plates. They took me to the house where Naum Peiov and his family lived. At the time Naum was an officer of the Yugoslav Embassy, a military attaché in Sofia. When we arrived I met his wife and grandmother and we had lunch together. Naum then asked me to visit Vasil Ivanovski at his home and ask him what he thought of the Macedonian situation in Yugoslavia.”

“After that they drove me back to the hotel. We were free in the afternoon so I decided to visit Vasil Ivanovski-Bistrishko at his home. I found his wife alone in the apartment. I told her who I was and where I was from and asked if I could see Vasil. She told me that Vasil was not on good terms with the Bulgarian Party and was currently unemployed. She asked me to wait because he was going to be home soon. A little later he arrived. I greeted him on behalf of Paskal and Mincho. Vasil and Mincho were relatives both from the village Luvradi, Kostur Region. Vasil’s family moved to Bulgaria during the population exchanges between Greece and Bulgaria that took place between the

two World Wars. From a young age Vasil joined the ranks of the CPB, contributing to it in some capacity and was even sent to the USSR. In 1942 he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. In the middle of 1943, together with a group of political prisoners, he was transferred from the Plovdiv prison to the Udrizovo prison in Skopje where he wrote a book entitled “The Macedonian Question Past and Present.”

After escaping with the other political prisoners, in 1944, he joined NOBM. He was elected delegate at the First ASNOM Session. He was a member of the Agitprop Agency for Information at the ASNOM presidium and became the first chief editor of the newspaper “Nova Makedonija.” After the liberation, in addition to leading “Nova Makedonija”, he was appointed Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Social Welfare but because of a conflict with official policy he resigned and in November 1945 returned to Bulgaria. I asked Vasil about the Macedonian situation in Bulgaria and what the thinking was after the Cominform resolution was adopted (labeling Tito a traitor). Vasil told me what had happened was not good. He said it was pure hatred and things could only get worse. Vasil said that he did not agree with the CPB Central Committee position regarding Yugoslavia. I told him about our reception by the Macedonian Society in Sofia and about Risto Kalaidziev’s comments. He asked me about our situation in Aegean Macedonia. After that I left Vasil’s house and returned to the hotel. (In 1949 Vasil Ivanovski was arrested and convicted in connection with Traiko Kostov’s trial.) The next day Risto Stoikov-Kliashev and I went to a department store and I bought myself everything that I needed, including civilian clothes, for the trip to the Congress. I was also given all necessary documents for travel, tickets and anything else I needed. I again went to Naum Peiov’s house and briefed him about the conversation that I had had with Vasil Ivanovski. I also gave his wife two pairs of “kaproi” stockings. She had asked me to get some for her during my previous visit with her at her house.

The next morning Pavle Rakovski and I were driven to Sofia Airport and left for Prague via Belgrade Airport. This is all that I can tell you about my stay in Sofia. I had absolutely no contact with any intelligence services. You can interpret what I have told you as you wish, it is your prerogative,” I concluded.

Pandeleev informed me that he had a written statement that contradicted what I had told him about my stay in Sofia. And indeed he had one. Some time later during a confrontation I had with Pavle Rakovski, Pavle said something that was not true. During the same confrontation I told him to his face that what he was saying was not true; it came from his own imagination. Many years after my return to

Yugoslavia, Vangel Aianovski-Oche, in his book “Egeiski Buri” (1945) on p. 342, wrote about our stay in Sofia, but not the way it really was. Risto Kiriazovski also wrote something about this in the “Vecher” newspaper in July 1989. That clearly showed that even then false statements had been made against me. It became clear to me that the CPG DAG Security Services, from earlier on, had followed my work, my movement in NOF in AFZH and in DAG. That is why my friend Afrodita had warned me when we were at the Women’s Second International Congress in Budapest and in Bulgaria to be careful, but they had no concrete evidence of me doing anything wrong, except that I had visited Yugoslavia. But I made no secret of it. Unfortunately it was sad and low that my friends allowed themselves to make defamatory statements against me. That is why I was kept under house arrest in Romania.

Pandeleev became frustrated with me and in a loud voice said: “Nikolovskaja, tell us what kind of connection you had with OZNA?” I said: “None! I used to go to Yugoslavia to meet with my friends who were interested in what was happening in Greece, with the Monarcho-Fascists and with the Anglo-American imperialists. They wanted to know more about the reactionary regime in Greece.” Suddenly at the top of his voice he yelled: “Enough! Even here you are trying to defend your Tito. Your husband said the same thing. He too is stubborn with his attempts to exonerate Tito and his leadership.” I said: “Do you think we are that mighty and powerful and that close to Tito that we are able to impose his views on you? Or do you think we are telling you about our situation the way it really was? You know very well where we stand. If you are looking for connections to Tito why don’t you ask Zahariadis and Ioanidid, they can tell you about their personal connections to him.”

I signed one more of the toughest protocols, a result of yet another interrogation full of insults, humiliation and even hatred. What I endured would make one’s hair stand up especially since I was innocent of all the fabricated accusations leveled against me by this interrogator.

Lefortov Prison cell 86

During the night they loaded me onto a “voronok” and brought me back to Lefortovskata tjurma. I was a little braver tonight because Pandeleev had mentioned Mincho. It appears that Pandeleev is Mincho’s interrogator. I could see that Pandeleev respected Mincho from the comments he made when he said: “It is a shame that he is so misled, he is such a smart man.” I could not describe my joy to know that Mincho was here and to find out that he too was “playing the game” with the interrogators.

Upon my return to Lefortovskata tjurma Prison they put me in a different cell, in cell 86 on the ground floor of the left wing. They didn’t call me to “sledstvie” for two months, July and August 1951. Lieutenant Pogrebnyak called me only one time to ask how I was doing and gave me two packs of cigarettes. One night while I was sleeping I got a bad nose bleed. I did not feel it at all but the duty officer who regularly checked on me through the spy hole must have noticed that I was bleeding and called for help. When I suddenly woke up two women in white coats were hovering over me demanding to know why I wanted to commit suicide. I was surprised by their comments and said: “That’s not true, I don’t want to die; I want to live!” Then one of them asked: “Why are you bleeding then?” Up until then I was not aware that I had been bleeding. Then I looked at my pillow and noticed the blood. At the same time the blood in my nose had clotted and my nose was dry. When I realized that I was bleeding from my nose, I explained to them that it was only a nose bleed and this was not unusual for me. My interrogator knew about it, I explained and it had happened to me several times before. “You can ask him if you don’t believe me,” I said. The reason that I mentioned my interrogator was because I wanted to know where he was. They gave me some powder and other drugs for several days. Both the interrogator and the interpreter, I found out, were not there, they had gone to Tashkent to gather more libelous statements, no doubt, against us from the people who knew us.

Poem - Allegory of my life

Every bit of loneliness I filled with recollection. I constantly thought about why I had fought in NOBG and in the Greek Civil War and why this was happening to me here in Moscow. I thought about how low I had fallen and how Moscow was not at all what I had imagined. What I imagined would be paradise had turned out to be hell. From my thoughts, spontaneously, verse by verse, I composed a poem, an allegory of my life. I began writing in cell 105 and finished in cell 86 in May 1951, at the Lefortov Moscow prison. Of course I had to compose the poem orally, as I felt it in my heart, because I had no pencil or paper to write it on. I was not allowed to have writing material. So I carried the poem in my memory and repeated it in all of my cells all the way to Alma Ata where I wrote it on paper.

At the end of the poem I wrote: time (1. V. 1951) and place (“MoLeTjur”). The place is short for: “Moscovskaja Lefortovskaja tjurma” or “Moscow Lefortov Prison.” I allowed myself to quote the poem here because it was torn from my soul and composed under extremely unbearable circumstances.

ЦВЕЌЕ (FLOWER)

Планинско, пролетно цвеќе, (Mountain, spring flower,)
со горски солзи и топла крв вадено, (soaked with mountain tears and
warm blood,)
растеше силно, немаше уште расцутено. (growing fast, but not
blossomed.)

Го играше ветрот во ноките, (Played the wind at night,)
топло го бацуваше сонцето, (warmly kissed the sun,)
весело се смееше цвеќето, (happily laughed the flower,)
гледајќи високо во небото, (looking high in the sky,)
играјќи весело лисјата, (playing happily in the leaves,)
ги поздравуваше цвеќата, (greeting the flowers,)
што растеа долу во полето, (growing down the valley,)
така весело леташе времето. (so happily the time flew.)

Но едно мајско, росно утро, (But one May, dewy morning,)
поган црвец, барајќи си храна, (a twisted worm, looking for food,)
без жалост, со апетит и радост, (without sorrow, but with appetite
and delight,)
го зграпчи право во срцето, (gripped it in the heart,)
се потресе цвеќето. (frightening the flower.)

Не обрна внимание тогаш, (Did not pay attention then,)
затоа не осети болка, (that's why it felt no pain,)
и пак весело ги играше лисјата, (and again cheerfully played the
leaves,)
шепотејќи со ветрот во ноќите. (whispering to the wind in the
nights.)

Но малата срцева рана, (But the small heart wound,)
со времето голема стана, (with time became great,)
црвецот ја испогана, таа оживеа, (the worm befouled it, it cut its life,)
убавото горско цвеќе пожелте и свена, (the beautiful mountain
flower yellowed and faded,)
ја наведна настрана главата, (it turned its head to the side,)
и ја навали – на копривата. (and leaned against - the stinging nettle.)

Ох, смртно ја избодеше раната, (Oh, mortally the wound was stabbed,)
крвави солзи ја натопија земјата, (bloody tears soaked the earth,)
не сакајќи цвеќето, (unwillingly the flower,)
ја повади копривата. (nourished the stinging nettle.)

И други таму растеа коприви, (Other stinging nettles there grew,)
темни, погани, горделиви. (dark, twisted, proud.)

Убавото планинско цвеќе, (Beautiful mountain flower,)
без пријатен планински ветар, (without the pleasant mountain wind,)
без слатка утринска роса, (without the sweet morning dew,)
без светлина и топло сонце, (without light and the warm sun,)
стана жртва на темнина, (became a victim of darkness,)
немоќно своите убијци да ги храни. (unable to heal its wounds.)

Така, убавата, бујна младост, (As such, the beautiful, exuberant
youth,)
предвремено згасна, (was prematurely extinguished,)
од думанската подлост. (by the dust of decay.)

МоЛеТјур (MoLeTjur)
1. V. 1951 (1. V. 1951)

Facing Poplazarov and Hadzhiianov

Two months later I was called in for “sledstvie” by my interrogator, in the presence of translator Aristotelis Papunidis. He asked me how I was doing and what the deal was with the blood. “It was the same as before, I bled from my nose on my pillow. The guard saw the blood and called for help. A couple of doctors came and gave me medical aid. But before doing that they asked me why I wanted commit suicide. I explained that I often got nose bleeds, about which you already knew. I told them to verify this with you. Perhaps (I instinctively smiled and said) in my early days here I was contemplating committing suicide, but now I am comfortable here in this luxurious place and suicide is the furthest thing from my mind.” The interrogator stared at me for a long time without asking anything except if I had cigarettes and if I was getting books to read. I told him that I had been out of my cell only one time when Pogrebniak wanted to know how I was doing and gave me a couple of packs of “Rocket” brand cigarettes. The interrogator then gave me a pack “Kazbek” brand cigarettes, this was a larger pack. This was also the first time that I had seen this kind of cigarette. Interrogator Nikitin had nothing more to ask and let me return to my cell early with the following parting words for me to think about: “Again, think about your offensive activities.” I was then taken back to cell 86. Unfortunately Nikitin’s last words put me in a bit of doubt.

A few days later I was again called to “sledstvie”. This time the interrogator asked me how I knew Poplazarov and Hadzhiianov. I told him everything.

“I have known Poplazarov since 1943; he was a teacher, a pre-war revolutionary and a communist. He led a Partisan group that fought against the Fascist counter-bands and after SNOF was formed in Kostur Region, he became a member of the SNOF Secretariat responsible for publishing the SNOF ‘Slavjanomakedonski Glas’ newspaper. He fell in disrepute with the CPG in May 1944 and after the liberation in August 1944 he joined the Macedonian “Goche” Battalion and transferred with it to Yugoslavia. We finished Party school in Skopje together along with Urania and others. In December 1946 he was appointed NOF District Board Secretary of Lerin Region. At that time I was secretary of the NOF Sorovich-Kailar Regions. I knew him well until we were put in jail,” I concluded.

Nikitin listened to me carefully, as always, when I spoke and after I was done he said: “We don’t need his biography, just tell me what connections he had with OZNA.”

I did not answer right away. I thought about it for a while and came to the conclusion that surely they must have collected information on

him by now so I said: "I suspect he had. During the NOF and DAG period all of us who stayed in Yugoslavia had to report to Internal Affairs, as I told you earlier. The Ministry of the Interior of Macedonia-Yugoslavia was responsible for us and the Greek "Iafka" in Skopje, Strumitsa, Nish and Belgrade cooperated with OZNA and the assistance they received came through OZNA. Hence, the entire CPG leadership was connected with OZNA."

"Does that mean Poplazarov had contacts with OZNA?" He asked again and then said: "If we take you to face him would you still say this? He would not admit to it himself. Why does he not want to admit to it?" he said. "These were normal official contacts, why would he not want to admit to them?" I replied. This is where we finished the interrogation.

At the next day's interrogation Nikitin asked me how I knew Tashko Hadzhiianov so I told him everything I knew about him as well.

I said: "I met Tashko for the first time in December 1944 when he came to Bitola to the First Macedonian Shock Brigade consisting of all Macedonian fighters from Greece. Tashko came from a revolutionary family. He was a leader in the NOMS youth Organization. His fiancée was killed in Gramos during the Monarcho-Fascist great offensive supported by U.S. aircraft. She was killed by a napalm bomb. Tashko's father was shot in Athens by the Germans. Tashko and I were arrested by the CPG in Albania and brought here." The interrogator asked me if Tashko had ties to OZNA so I told him the same thing that I had told him about Poplazarov. And then I said that I was curious as to why Poplazarov would not admit to something that really happened?

"Verochka, will you ask him this yourself during the confrontation?" he asked. "Why not, I will ask him!" I replied. "I will be pleased to be given the opportunity to see both Poplazarov and Hadzhiianov as they are in the same situation as I am, but I still find it strange why they did not want to admit to their ties to OZNA. OZNA, after all, was concerned about our movement and about the Monarcho-Fascists and the Anglo-Americans and gave us assistance to fight back against them," I concluded.

A few days later I came face to face with Poplazarov and Hadzhiianov. I told them what I had told the interrogator and then signed the protocols. The confrontation was a miserable experience. Why hide the truth? There was no problem with us in NOF having links with OZNA because OZNA was helping us. The entire CPG leadership was well aware of that and of the contacts we maintained at an even higher level. The CPG leadership had constant contact with the CPY leadership. In any case I was glad to have seen both Poplazarov and Hadzhiianov and to know that they were both alive, although

looking very exhausted. I did not know what else they had said, but not admitting to any links to OZNA was plain stupid.

Cell 46 in Butirka

For a while I was not taken to “sledstvie.” Then one night the door of my cell opened and the guard said: “Vazmi” and take everything with you. I collected my overcoat and my green army blanket and left the books I was given to read on the table. I had finished my cigarettes so there was nothing else for me to take. So I left the ground floor cell 86 in the left wing of Lefortovskaja tjurma. Here, in this cell, I had no “extra food” as I had every third day in cell 105.

From my cell they loaded me onto a “voronok” and after a long night’s “ride” through the Moscow streets, by Red Square... Heavy doors were opened. The NKVD agents searched me and then shoved me in cell number 46 in the left wing of a wide tiled hallway. My new cell seemed more “comfortable”. It was small, square, had no window, but was brighter; it did not have the black walls and dark floor like my former cells, but the “furniture” was similar. The food consisted of “kipjatok,” fish soup, borshch, shchi, kasha, but a different kind of kasha “grechiha,” a little bit but tasty. Your body gets used to it, even if it’s in small amounts. This is how it was during the first days of November 1951. I came to this realization when several days later they brought me a plate of borshch and rice kasha, even better food. This meant that this was the day of the “October Revolution.” The next day it was back to kasha “grechiha,” which was nutritious and delicious (many people in the USSR ate this food and it is popular to this day). This food is now even sold in the stores in Macedonia.

A couple of days after my arrival, the person responsible for that part of the prison cells opened the door to my cell and, while holding a clipboard in his hand, handed me a pencil and asked me to sign on the dotted line. He explained that I was going to receive 13 rubles but not in real money; for that amount I could buy anything I wanted from the canteen, through him of course. Without thinking I immediately uttered the words “soap” and “comb.” He said you can order as many things as you want that have a total value of 13 rubles, so I ordered sugar, toothpaste and a toothbrush. The next day I received my order and I had 3.5 rubles left. With those I ordered some candy. I received my candy the next day. What is this?! I thought. This was indeed a surprise! Are they going to give me money like this every month, I wondered as I rejoiced at the idea like a child?

I had been in Butirskaja tjurma for about eight months. Here I did not have the privilege of walking for five minutes during interrogation as I had in the other prison. I was taken to the shower room once every fifteen days. Here however I purchased good soap and was able to wash my long hair properly. My hair had grown very long in prison and I had

to braid it to keep it under control. The comb, which I purchased from the canteen, was small but had big teeth, it was easier to use than the small toothed comb that I owned. I economized on my soap and candy so that they would last me longer. My thinking that they would give us money like this every month was wrong. At one point I had forgotten where I was. But I always looked forward to having a bit of candy to keep me sane. I was also happy that things were much cleaner in this prison. Here I was rarely visited by doctors, only when they came to inspect us for lice.

After the customary greeting when I was called in for interrogation and after taking my place in the corner of the room, the interrogator asked me about my health and how I was feeling. He then complimented me on how “good” I looked. I thought this was unusual but I thanked him for asking and for the compliment anyway. He then asked: “Verochka, where did you get the mirror to have combed your hair so well?” I told him in the same tone of voice: “Didn’t you know that I was receiving double the “pajok?” He was not amused with my “smart” comment, so he asked me again: “I am asking you a serious question, tell me where did you get the mirror?” I again jokingly said: “I brought it with me but your people, after so many searches, were unable to find it.” I then paused for a second and said: “It is one of yours.” Looking somewhat puzzled Nikitin then asked: “How is it one of ours?” Nikitin was really interested in finding out where I had gotten the mirror, because mirrors were not allowed in the prison and would have been confiscated during the searches. They did full body searches so there was no way of hiding a mirror. Both he and Aristotelis, the translator, were intrigued. Aristotelis insisted in Greek that I tell him how I had gotten the mirror, and in Greek I told him that they gave it to me here. At the end I said: “I don’t need a mirror to see myself, I use my pot and even my teaspoon to fix my hair. I don’t have a mirror!” I concluded. About that Nikitin himself wanted to be reassured so he went and got a teapot and saw for himself that indeed “they had given me the mirror.” The interrogator then gave me a pack of “Prima” brand cigarettes. This was the first time that he had given me “Prima” and said that we were now in another prison and that I still needed to think about my “acts of treachery” and that the next day I would be again called for interrogation.

Defamatory statements made against me by my comrades

The interrogations in Butirka were conducted mostly during the day and not during the night like in Lefortovska tjurma. It seems that every prison had its own rules. Besides that I sensed a change in the interrogator's attitude towards me. It may have been due to my transfer to this prison or due to other factors unknown to me. But my thinking was that they had moved me to this prison to extend my stay. This soon became clear to me. A few days later I was again summoned to interrogation to some underground rooms, or perhaps it seemed to me that way because most of the stairs we took to get there went down and all the hallways we passed through were illuminated by lights. When I arrived in the room the three of us, the interrogator, translator and I, took our familiar places. Nikitin pulled out a small photograph from his briefcase and came over to me to ask me if I knew the person in the picture. The photograph was a small picture like the ones made for passports. It was E.K.K. I felt shivers all over my body when I saw her and became very worried as to what might have happened to her. Regarding the question of how I knew her, I told interrogator Nikitin everything.

"This is E.K.K.," I said. "She is from my native village D'mbeni. We were neighbours and members of the same Youth and Party cell. She was a Partisan (I mentioned the functions she had performed). She and I were close friends." "Good," he said. "Now we will start writing the protocol." After that he gave me a written statement to read written by E.K.K. in Tashkent. I read it but I could not believe that E.K.K., my best friend from childhood, could give such statements full of lies and slander about me. She wrote about how I had worked to break up DAG, that I was an agitator among the fighters to lead them to desert and leave for Yugoslavia and so may other lies.

Of course, I categorically rejected her testimony. All her statements were false I told the interrogator. "On Zahariadis's personal approval I transferred her mother to Yugoslavia, to Bitola, because our village was burned down to the ground by the Monarcho-Fascists and all the elderly and disabled people, about 90 of them, men and women, left for the Yugoslav border through Prespa. Now her mother lives with my mother in the same room on 6 'Mirche Atsev' Street, in the house belonging to our countryman Zhivko Delev," I explained. Nikitin then said: "For her false statements, by our laws, she will get two years jail time." Then he showed me her signed statement which at the bottom right, beside her signature, gave a warning that false statements were punishable by two years imprisonment. I told the interrogator: "Bring

her here to meet with me and say all those things to my face.” He said: “That I can’t do!” Her address was: “12 Zhil-gorodok, Tashkent.”

When I looked at the address, I forgot about my closest friend’s damning remarks and all I could think about was that the DAG units might be here in the USSR, close to us. Knowing this gave me a morale boost. So, we might not be alone in the Soviet Union. That for me was a great discovery which my interrogator made possible by letting me take a peek at E.K.K.’s damning testimony. I signed the protocol armed with high spirits and encouragement. No matter how much the lies and slanders weighed on me, knowing that the fighters were alive gave me some relief in my hopeless situation. But at the same time I could find no words to describe how it felt to be betrayed by my closest friends. I want to mention here that E.K.K.’s brother at that time worked at DAG General Headquarters. He had asked me to go with him to visit Zahariadis regarding moving his mother to Bitola. After Zahariadis had approved, I did that for him. At that time DAG General Headquarters and the Central Committee were located in the village Vineni, near Lake Prespa. And after all I had done for them; E.K.K. gave me many days of grief with the interrogator. E.K.K.’s slanders, as I said, did have some benefit. I found out that the DAG units might be here and that we the arrested were not alone.

The week after the interrogation, the interrogator showed me another picture and said: "Verochka, you should know this person, and well." I looked at the photo; it was Dimitar Shalapunov-Micho from the village Zhupanishta, Kostur Region. I knew him from ELAS. He was much older than me but we had worked together behind the scenes in Kostur Region. I said to the interrogator: "I know him very well." He then asked me to give him some details about him. He said: "Read the statement that he made about you first," and then he gave me a piece of paper. I read through it and what can I tell you! Without a grain of conscience this man, Dimitar Shalapunov Micho, had dragged me through the mud. He had accused me of killing communists during ELAS and DAG, of organizing defections and of committing all kinds of treachery. The statement was full of lies. He made slanderous accusations against me beyond an honest man’s capacity. He accused me of killing the Communists, Stamko and his daughter in the village Gabresh in Kostur Region. The accusations were so revolting I jumped out of my chair, leaped forward towards the interrogator and in a loud voice said: "Bring that man here so that I can tell him to his face that these are treacherous lies and fabrications of his own imagination. First, I did not know Stamko and his daughter. As far as I knew they were not communists or I would have known about them. Dimitar Shalapunov himself, for no reason at all, took those people from their home and

threw them into a hole located on the mountain above the village Gabresh. After that he robbed their house. Bring him here and I will tell him all of this to his face!”

God, a person can be capable of inventing anything; it is so inhuman and criminal! I was so upset, both the interrogator and interpreter came over to calm me down. The interrogator then said: “Don’t worry about the accusations that they made against you, you just tell your side of the story.” And I said: “Unfortunately you do not believe me, you believe them! That is why I want a ‘confrontation’ with him.” He then said: “Well, that’s not possible!” “Then how will you get to the truth,” I asked, “if the Soviet Party believes these lies?” I then said to myself: ‘What kind of Party is this anyway?’ At the time I did not know that thousands of Soviet people had been killed and imprisoned in the Gulag based on such lies. Dimitar Shalapunov-Micho’s filthy statement caused me a lot of grief for the next few days until I signed the protocol after which the interrogator gave me a pack of “Kazbek” cigarettes to ease my torment.

For the next two or three months, I don’t remember exactly how long, at every interrogation the interrogator showed me a new photograph of my former comrades in arms and party affiliates, who invented the worst slanders against all of us to prove their loyalty to the CPG and to the SKP(b). They gave damning testimony against all the imprisoned NOF and DAG leaders thinking that we would never survive to see or read their filthy signed statements. The procedure followed by the interrogator was always the same. He showed me a picture and asked me whether and how I knew the person in the picture and then gave me their statement to read. Then it was up to me to prove my innocence.

Included in the group of people who gave invented libelous statements against me were Risto Evangelu, Zizo Delevski, Giorgi Paikov and many others who I will reveal later. Risto Evangelu was from the village Aposkep, Kostur Region. In his statement he had written that I gave the communist flag, made of red silk, to the AFZH ladies to make underwear for themselves. What I gave the women was not a flag but a few meters of red silk material which was donated to us by the delegation of the Macedonian Association of Sofia during the NOF Second Congress held on March 25th, 1949 in the village Nivitsi, Prespa Region. The delegation was headed by President Risto Kalaidziev. We could not use the silk then but after DAG’s capitulation, in Elbasan Camp, Albania, I decided to give each AFZH woman a small piece to use as a scarf around her neck. We made six scarves in total. And that is all that I told the interrogator. “One of those scarves was mine, which your people confiscated from me when I first

arrived in Ljubljanka prison. Your people took it from me along with all my other possessions during a search in the prison box,” I said. Then I signed the protocol with the interrogator’s questions and my answers.

During the coming weeks in the fall of 1951, I was interrogated in a similar manner as before responding to testimonies made by my “comrades” who, without conscience, had made false and defamatory accusations against me.

A similar statement with similar content was also made by Zizo Delevski from the village Dobrolishta, Kostur Region. Zizo had also worked behind the scenes for the CPG and NOF and was a loyal pawn of the CPG since his Akronavplion prison days. Otherwise he was a simple man. He did not have the capacity to be promoted up the hierarchical ladder past district official. And whatever he achieved was mainly due to his sycophant ways. By making defamatory statements against those of us who were imprisoned, he was given another opportunity to prove his loyalty to the CPG and to the SKP(b). Because of such “merits” he received a pension from the USSR and when he went back to Skopje he continued his old practice, supported by those like him who deserted our Movement in Aegean Macedonia.

Giorgi Peikov, a resident of the village Nestram, Kostur Region, was a pre-war Communist and supporter of the CPG. To prove himself loyal to the CPG and to the Party he gave false, defamatory statements without a grain of conscience and human dignity.

All of those that I mentioned who gave abominable statements against me, asked me to testify for them when I arrived in Skopje in 1956, to establish their status as fighters. They did this without knowing that I already knew about their false statements and defamatory remarks. When they came to me asking for my help I told them to their faces: “You gave the NKDV false and defamatory statements against me in hopes that they would execute me. But now here I am alive. Now you’re asking me for help to solve your problems? You are incapable of working yet you want to receive a pension?” When I said this to their faces and quoted parts of what they had said in their damning statements, they tilted their heads down and claimed that they were forced to testify against me. By nature my late husband Mincho and I were not the kind of people to hold grudges. Even after the miserable way that they had treated us, wishing us death, I gave them a second chance to live and testified on their behalf regarding their involvement in the Second World War and in the Greek Civil War.

As an old friend, Dimitar Shalputov-Micho, who lived in Plodvid, Bulgaria, came to see us and be our guest. He had given damning testimony against my husband Mincho with many details involving me.

When we confronted him as to why he had done this against us, he said that if he hadn't he would have suffered a lot. At the time he figured that we were already dead anyway. "If we were already dead, what need would they have for your testimony? Another thing, if you hadn't given such damning testimony you would have suffered, but did you ever think how we would have fared and how we did fair with the testimony you gave? Didn't you care?" I asked him before leaving. He left perturbed.

A joint statement was given by Nikola Boikov, a doctor from the village Zhupanishta, Kostur Region, Atso Ivanovski from the town Rupishta, Kostur Region and Atanas Angelovski-Garefi from the village Lobanitsa. They told the truth that I had helped one of them join the Organization in 1943. The interrogator only showed me their photographs, he did not show me the statement, so I don't know what they had said.

A defamatory statement against me was also given by Kosta Hrisafov, from the village Banitsa, Lerin Region, who at the time was living in Bulgaria. When he came to Skopje he asked me to verify his participation in DAG. It was interesting to note that all of the people who came to me or to my husband for help, who had testified against us, did not know that we already knew what they had done. They acted as if there was nothing wrong. When I asked Hrisafov why he had testified against me, he was ashamed and claimed that he had been under pressure from the Party.

Pando Vaina from the village Srebreno, Sorovich Region, about whom I gave some details earlier, was DAG commander of the 18th Brigade when I was assistant to Kaki, the political commissar. Here I want to mention that Pando Vaina had written a recommendation for me to be decorated for demonstrating courage and to be promoted to the rank of Captain in DAG for my successes demonstrated in the battle for Lerin. Then he went and gave a damning statement against me. When the interrogator showed me his picture and when I read his statement I said: "I never believed that a Communist could be such a liar."

When the Organization "Ilinden" was disbanded, Pando Vaina did not have the courage to come to Skopje, Macedonia so he went to Bulgaria where he finished military school and was promoted to General in the Bulgarian Army. While visiting Bulgaria with my husband Mincho I made many attempts to meet with him, but because he knew that we knew what he had done, he avoided us. But we did meet with Stavro Kochev who had moved from Poland to Sofia, where he later died. Stavro was a member of the NOF Secretariat and the transformed "Ilinden" Organization. We greeted him like a friend and

talked about the mistakes made and about the manipulations of our “comrades” and “friends”. While Pando Vaina refused to come to Skopje, his father-in-law came and paid us a visit. He wanted to know what our opinion of Pando Vaina was and if we were okay with the filthy testimonies he had made against us. So it would appear that even those closest to him were judging him. We sent our greetings to Pando via his father-in-law. We also sent him a message that we had personally read his damning testimony and lies while we were in Butirka prison in Moscow. He should be ashamed of his rank as General because he had received that rank at our expense and at the expense of the fighters and people that he had sent to jail with his false testimony. We on the other hand, remained honest and loyal to our cause, throughout the war, in prison and now that we were free.

I did not see a statement against me from Kaki, the Commissar of the 18th Brigade, under whom I served as an assistant. For years he used to visit Romania. One time he came to Skopje to visit his cousins and asked to see me, but for some reason they did not bring him to us. He wanted to move to Skopje permanently but internal affairs did not approve his request. He later went to Solun but was not on good terms with the CPG.

Another person who gave damning testimony against me was Lefteris Katsakos, a Greek from the town Karditsa. Before the war he had been a policeman and later joined the CPG as an active participant. When I met him in 1945-1946 he was CPG Secretary of Lerin Region. He used to put a lot of obstacles in front of NOF in the Lerin Region local village organizations. We spent a lot of time and meetings with him before the CPG recognized NOF. During the 1970's he sent me a letter from Tashkent asking me to arrange a guaranteed visit for him to Skopje, Macedonia. He must have found out that Mincho and I had made such arrangements for all kinds of people, including those who had made defamatory statements against us during the interrogations in Moscow. He used his mother to get to me because I was friends with her. But Lefteris Katsakos knew me “very well” from the arguing we had done over NOF, but did not think that I knew about the damning statement that he had given against me or perhaps he was hoping that I had never read his statements. As a communist in a high position he sure stuck a knife deep into my back. But Mincho and I decided to send him a letter of guarantee anyway. He came with his wife Roxana, a physician, a surgeon and both were guests in my home. His wife Roxana was from the town Negush. She joined the Partisans when her home town was invaded. She advanced her education in Tashkent and upgraded her specialization. We showed them a lot of respect, but during one of our conversations I asked Lefteris: “Why did you make

such damning statements against me?” Like the others, he said he was “forced to do it”. But at the same time he did not believe that the NKVD would actually use his real name in the interrogations or that the NKVD would allow me to read his statement. He stayed in Skopje for a while and visited with many people that he knew. He only said positive things about us after our visit and criticized the CPG for its role in what had happened in Tashkent. After a year or so Lefteris, with his wife, daughter and son, returned to Greece. He now lives in Athens but since then has not made contact with us.

A statement, without a photograph, from an older man named Koraveshov from the village Smrdesh, Kostur Region was read to me. In his statement he had the most praise for me. He testified that he did not know me as an agent or the way others referred to me, he simply knew me as a person who often visited his village, spoke at meetings, urged people to organize and got Partisans to enlist and fight like Macedonians against the fascists. He said it was not true that I conducted “disruptive” activities in the CPG, NOF, AFZH and DAG Organizations.

The interrogator told me that there were other such testimonies but he did not read any more to me. After reading each statement I asked the interrogator, if those people were in the USSR, in Tashkent, “Why don’t you take me there and if I am guilty then sue me in their presence.” And as usual he would say: “That’s not possible!” “How then will you get the truth about who I am and what I am?” I would ask. Each interrogation, conducted during the day or at night, lasted about 5 to 6 hours, depending on the questions asked and my answers given. After the protocol was read back to me if I agreed with everything I would sign it.

As time passed, it felt like both the interrogator and the translator were more “polite” to me. Nikitin no longer yelled at me like he had in 1950 and he did not insult me by calling me “zvoloch”, “agent”, etc., especially after he returned from Tashkent and after I was moved to Butirka Prison. One time he asked me if I wanted to be in a cell with others. I thought he might want to pair me up with a provocateur so I said: “I am used to being alone and reading the books you give me in Russian and by foreign authors translated into Russian. They help me refine my language. But... I wouldn’t mind being placed in the same cell as my husband,” I added. He laughed. I laughed too. He then said: “That’s not possible!”

In one of the confrontations in the prison, they had brought Pavle Rakovski, Urania Pirovska Iurukova and Paskal Mitrevski. I categorically denied everything they said and labeled their stories as lies and inventions aimed at ruining my character. I said to their faces

that what they were saying was coming from their own imagination. When I came face to face with Urania and when I said to her that what she was saying was a fabrication and her aim was to save her own skin, she began to cry. They immediately took her away and said to me: “Why are you upsetting them like this?” I said: “Because they deserve it!” I don’t know by whom or why they were forced to testify against me.

After a month or two they moved me from cell 46 to cell 446, left wing. At least that’s how it seemed to me because I went on stairs. The new cell was smaller but “equipped” the same. Yet here it seemed a bit better. It was like a “hotel room”.

I cannot count how many false statements were made against me by my closest comrades at the most critical time of the war. How could people change so quickly! I was raised to be honest, to trust people, to help people, but now I too began to change. I concluded that no one could be trusted because there was anger and fear in people and some people were simply sycophants and informers.

Condemned to eight years for unproven crimes

I was locked up like a beast in solitary confinement for nearly three years without proof of being guilty of anything. I measured and re-measured the cells I was in by moving back and forth from one corner to another so that I wouldn't forget how to walk. I am grateful to the "authorities" for allowing me to read. They brought me fiction books in Russian, written by Russian and foreign authors and translated into Russian. That was good because reading allowed me to pass my time and gave me moments of freedom; to forget my troubles. I also acquired some knowledge and a better understanding of the Russian language. In particular I admired Tolstoy. While reading his book I sometimes missed the signal for bed time getting the guards upset with me.

One afternoon the duty officer told me to get ready for my shower. It was usually every 15 days. On March 8 they again showed the journal from the Second International Congress of Democratic Women that took place in Budapest from December 1 to 6, 1948. On the way to the shower room, when we were going down the stairs, one of my escorts said: "Vi Grkinja" because she had seen me in the journal with the Greek delegation. I said to her I am not Greek, I am Macedonian. Then she said: "Ja vam smatrala v kartine."

After several days had passed I was called in for interrogation. Besides Nikitin and Papunidis there was another person, in civilian clothes. He brought his chair close to mine. He looked to me like he was a high ranking official in the NKVD, KGB and MTV hierarchy. Around this time the ministry was changing. In a gentle voice the stranger asked: "Kazbeg?" "Da," I said and he handed me a packet of "Kazbeg" brand cigarettes. I pulled a cigarette out and he lit it for me. Three hundred thoughts were spinning through my head as I wondered what this was all about! "Verochka, what pushed you to take this road?" the stranger politely asked. "This road? What other choice was there for me during the Fascist occupation except to fight against Fascism. As Macedonians under the Greek thumb we were constantly harassed by the Greek reactionary regimes, including being prohibited from speaking our native language. Then came the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupiers followed by the Anglo-American intervention. We took the road to fight against the occupiers and their servants in order to liberate ourselves," I said.

Then he asked me for a second time: "Are you Macedonian?" When I said "yes" I also told him how we as Macedonians had lived in Greece. I also answered his question: "Why did you join with Tito?" God knows how many times I had spoken about this with Nikitin. The

stranger then said: “Verochka, don’t get upset I am only asking.” In my opinion, this man was one of Abakumov’s aides. Abakumov at the time was Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR. I think his name was Anasimov, a decent gentleman.

The days kept passing. They exchanged my books once every 15 days. Besides my shower there was nothing else for me to do. In this cell my window was bright like it was spring outside. One morning I heard a song from afar. That day they brought me a portion of rice. I figured that it was May 1st, 1952. Red Square was close to Butirka prison. Two days in a row I heard songs. I too sang in my cell. I sang Russian revolutionary songs that I had learned. I was not called to interrogation for a long time. One morning I was called but not to go to interrogation. They put me in the box. I figured that they were going to send me to another prison but why without my belongings!?! The box door opened and a security officer, with papers in his hands, read me something. It was my sentence: “Prisoner Vera Nikolovskaja, aka Evdokia Baleva, you are charged with breaking the RSFSR “saveshtanie” criminal law, Article 58, paragraph 4, 6 and 11 and on this day, April 19, 1952 you are sentenced to 8 years imprisonment in the labour camps in Siberia.” I understood nothing of what he had read to me. And as I learned later in the Siberian camps from the Russian prisoners and from those from abroad, “saveshtanie” was a criminal offense for having committed unproven crimes. This way they could keep you in jail for life. That judgment followed me everywhere I went.

At the end of May 1952 Evgeni Konstantinovich Nikitin came to visit me in my cell and politely asked how I was doing. I said that I was doing fine and asked him to explain to me what they had said in the box? He said that soon I would have to go to the labour camps in Siberia. He said that there were many prisoners there, some good people, and I would not be alone any more. He also told me not to be afraid. I had been through everything, what else could there be that would make me be afraid? They were people there too... The one thing that I kept thinking about though was “what kind of verdict was this without a court trial?” Nikitin gave me a pack of cigarettes and we said our goodbyes. We finally shook hands like true comrades after two and a half years of “antagonizing each other.”

I was told that Kaplanova, the woman who shot and wounded Lenin, was in Butirka Prison sentenced to life but she worked in the prison library. Lenin himself requested that she not be put in solitary confinement. From what I heard from the inmates she gave birth to a son in the prison.

On the road to Siberia

One morning at the end of June 1952, the prison “Narjadchik” came into my cell, cell number 446, and gave me orders to: “Gather all my things!” I picked up all my tattered things and as usual, one guard in front and the other behind escorted me down the stairs and out the exit where they surrendered me to another group of guards. In front of the entrance was the “voronok.” Where would they take me now? I wondered. Would they take me to Siberia, like Nikitin told me? The “voronok” door opened. I sat on the empty seat and they closed the door. I listened as we drove off. The prison car kept moving through the streets of Moscow. The car stopped and the doors opened. I came out last. Several men stood by a fence with their backs turned to me. I saw Urania standing in front of me facing the fence wearing her DAG uniform which hung like a rag on her thin, weakened body. We looked at each other and without saying a single word, broke into hysterical laughter; a sign of our miserable situation. They took Urania first and escorted her onto the nearby train. They took me much later and put me in a compartment all alone. Of course it was a prison train secured with iron bars. I yelled out loud: “Urania, where are you?” She replied: “I am here beside you, but I am with many other women.”

We traveled on the prison train for two or three days before arriving at Cheljabinsk. They unloaded the men first and then the women and took us to the “peresilka” in Cheljabinsk. They put Urania with a number of other women in a large room. They put me in a small room all by myself. They addressed me by both my names Vera Nikolovskaja and Evdokia Baleva. When the person took me to my room, all by myself, after all the other women had been taken to a different room, I asked: “Why are you separating me from the other woman, from my friend?” He said: “Because you are from the same place, so that you don’t attack each other, those were my orders.” I said: “Why would we attack each other? Put me with the other women and with Urania.” He thought for a moment and then said: “How long you stay with them depends on you. Take your things and go with them!” So after two and a half years in solitary confinement I too joined the many women. Urania said to me: “For the last several months, I had been in a cell with other women.” “And you?” she asked. I said: “No, I have been all alone all the time, I talked to myself and I sang songs in my cell so that I wouldn’t become mute.” From Cheljabinsk they again loaded us onto a train to continue our journey into the unknown but this time I was not alone. We arrived in the city Novosibirsk in the central “peresilka.” It was a big camp. We were allowed to walk through the camp and visit other prisoners from all

over the USSR, Europe and Asia. Here we were divided into groups based on who was sent where in the camps.

We stayed for several days in Novosibirsk. One day they took Urania and me and assigned us to clean up duty, cleaning the men's barracks. We got a surprise. What a small world this was! In one of the cabins we ran into Kosta Tsilkov from the village Breznitsa, Kostur Region. When we saw each other there was no end to our joy. He said: "We knew about you in Tashkent. The entire leadership and army of fighters are there. They were constantly asking about you." I said: "Here too they were asking me about you and how I had come to know you." He said that he knew about that because they told him, he also told us that our people in Tashkent were divided. Some supported Zahariadis and others supported Markos.

The allegations I had made to the interrogator about Kosta were confirmed by Kosta himself, yet he too was put in prison and did not know where they were sending him. We didn't know where they were sending us either. Kosta was interested to know where our comrades were who were imprisoned with us. I told him: "I don't know where they are. We have been separated since 1950 when we were taken to the USSR, who knows where and in what prison they are. I met Urania only two months ago." That was the last time I saw Kosta Tsilkov until we met again in Macedonia. He lived in Gostivar, where he died. We were pleased to get that information from Kosta about our people in Tashkent.

From Novosibirsk we were transferred to Camp Taishet. This camp, from what we learned from the prisoners, was the central peresilka. All other camps were directed from here. Men and women were sent from here to all the other camps. There were about one hundred camps in total from what we learned from the prisoners. The camps held men, women, children and "bitoviki" who were not political prisoners. They worked in farms, food production facilities, etc. We stayed here several days. A number of women were then loaded on a train and taken to a women's camp called "Column 21."

We were issued camp clothes consisting of a black body warmer, "bruki" and a black linen gown to go with the "bruki", looking something like a skirt and sewn on the lower right hand side was the number AO 446. The same number was imprinted on the back of the "telogrejka." There the cold started in September. They gave me nothing for my head so I wore my own "pilotka", but I was very cold. One of the women prisoners responsible for the camp, a Lithuanian by nationality who went by the name Laskovskaja, took pity on me and gave me a hat with ear covers; a "ushanka." It saved me from the cold. Since that day I have worn a hat every winter. At the camp I cut my

long braided hair that had grown long for three years. I cut my braids because I could not maintain them.

At Camp 21

When we arrived at Camp 21 the old prisoners gathered around us and watched us as we were paraded through the office to report and register. From our military uniforms the prisoners thought we were English aviation personnel. I told the more curious ones: "I am Macedonian and suffered immensely from the British aviators while fighting in Greece." They were fascinated with us. Some guessed that I was Georgian and others assumed that I was Armenian. Some gathered that I was Greek from the symbols on my uniform so I had to repeatedly tell them that I was Macedonian. The camp in Taishet housed thousands of prisoners, both men and women. The authorities here decided who was going where depending on their sentence. My group was sent to Camp 21. Among us were women prisoners from Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Macedonia and the Baltic States.

After they had registered us at the office, they assigned us to a barracks which they locked up during the night. I was separated from Urania because she presented herself as an artist and was put in a barracks together with other artists. In my barracks most of the women inmates were from Russia, the Ukraine and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). I was located in the second row "nari". Next to me was a Ukrainian woman named Elizabeta. She was a beautiful woman. I made friends with her. She said her husband was a journalist imprisoned in Vienna. She was imprisoned soon after him. When we were separated Elizabeta gave me a photograph of her two children, Misha and Vova who at the time were living in Kiev with her mother. I still have the photograph. I tried to contact them after I was released but I got no response. I don't know where they are now. The address where her mother lived, that Elizabeta had given me, was "USSR 2 Kiev ul. Klincheskaja 23 VNIS, Raznotovskoj Barbare Vinijaminovski." I still have the piece of paper it was written on.

To my left, beside me was a teacher from Leningrad. Her name was Raisa Shahnovskaja. I still have the photograph that she gave me. She had a son but did not know where he was. Raisa was photographed on May 8, 1944 and gave me the photograph on July 1, 1954. A professor and her sister from Lithuania also gave me their photographs which I have kept and cherish to keep my memories of them alive, to remember those uncertain times at Camp 21 in Siberia. We were good friends; our common fate brought us together. Their address was "Litovskaja SSR Klamendeskaja sm G Salantam Ul. Plunches N° 13 B uda Vitas." The sisters Natasha (Natute) and Bronja from Riga also gave me photographs on July 6, 1954. I have an address but no photograph from Karsovoj Ekaterina Aleksandrovne. Her address was "P/a Gorkino

Ivanovskaja oblast Rodmirovskij reon.” Her husband Karo, a scientist, gave this address to Mincho at the camp where they were serving together. Mincho has one more address from another inmate from Vorkuta, from Kiev. He got his address on October 9, 1954.

A German woman, a friend from camp 21, wrote her address for me on canvas. She told me that when she was imprisoned her parents and children were in Poland in the city Zgorzelets. Her husband was an SS officer. Because of her knowledge of the Polish language she was able to speak Russian well. She told me that she was transferred by plane to Moscow and was personally investigated by Beria to whom she said: “Our fascism is better than your communism.” She said to me: “Verochka, we failed because we were fanaticized.” With Adenauer’s visit to the USSR and the signing of prisoner agreements, Elizabeta Shvinkovskaja was released. I met Elizabeta again at the international camp for prisoners in Potma. I introduced her to Mincho and Paskal. She, with a number of German prisoners, left for Germany before us. We on the other hand, along with many other Partisans, were sent to the internment camps in Kazakhstan. What fate! We, who had fought on the Soviet side, who had helped them liberate themselves, were treated worse than the German fascists who had fought against them. They sent them back to their country but kept us for another year and a half before they released us to see our families. I looked for Elizabeta at the address she had given me but the people there told me she had left. She had told me that if she was not there the people would know where she was. She was a smart woman.

Why did so many women inmates give me their pictures and their addresses? Because they thought I would be one of the first ones to be freed and wanted me to get in touch with their families by letter and let them know that they were alive and well and where they were located. What happened to them later I don’t know. I don’t even know if any of them were lucky enough to see their loved ones again. Perhaps if this book is publicized enough it will fall into their hands and they can contact me. (Translator’s note: I am sorry to say that Vera passed away but if anyone wants to contact her family you can write me at: rstefov@hotmail.com) I also met many Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian women at Camp 21 with whom I shared fate.

There were also students from Moscow University in the jails, serving 25 year sentences for attempting to assassinate Lazar Kaganovich, member of the USSR Politburo. The group of young men and women consisted of 25 students so they were convicted to 25 years each. The sentences were 25 years in prison plus 5 years deprivation of political rights after being released. That is why they would say “25 and

5.” Of all of them my dearest was Ilona Lenskaja, an artist. She gave me a postcard from Red Square with her address written on the back. On the back of the same postcard she also wrote the address of her son and Raisa Alexandrova’s parents. Serving there was also a lovely young woman from Moscow by the name of Lydia Savinskaja, she was a clerk at the Indian Embassy in Moscow. She was sentenced to 10 years in prison because she had fallen in love with an Indian officer at the embassy. Her father was a colonel in the Soviet Army. One time he came to visit her at the camp. There I also met Tania Perepelitsina, an artist and a number of older women who worked in the library. They were personally acquainted with Lenin. They told me their stories many times as well as specific details about their meetings with him. One of them had already served her 25 year sentence but when the time came for her to leave, she refused. She told the warden that she did not want to leave the safety of the camp because she was afraid of getting into trouble in the outside world and preferred to stay and work there. There were many good people among the prisoners, exemplary Soviet citizens who were sent there because of vicious slanders. All of the women working in the library were teachers, educated women. After I left Camp 21 and was taken to Camp 9, I lost contact and don’t know what happened to them. I tried to contact some of them later, during my visit to Moscow as a tourist but I couldn’t find any of them.

At Camp 21 they divided us into brigades in order to deploy us in the mica processing factory. We were assigned a special knife to separate the mica from the stone. It was very hard work. Mica is thin, barely visible and the norm was 600 grams extracted in a ten hour shift. No one could fulfill the norm. We barely extracted 300-350 and up to 400 grams. Mica is a compound that contains 32 kinds of minerals. It is used in electrical applications and in aviation. At least that’s what they told us during the lectures. They had a similar factory in Irkutsk. I hid a number of mica pieces and secretly brought them home. I also bought a book on how to process mica. I still have it. In Camp 21 I met a Bulgarian woman who was in Prilep during the occupation. She was head of one such factory. They processed mica and shipped it to Bulgaria. When I was freed, I realized why the Bulgarian woman was in Prilep during the occupation; because there was mica in Prilep.

On my way to becoming a blacksmith

It was difficult working with mica and even harder breathing the fine dust. I kept thinking of a way to get out of it. Every morning before going to work, the camp director took attendance to make sure that we were all there. During war time he had married a Polish woman. He was interned with us because he had married a Pole. As we were lining up he asked if anyone among us had any blacksmith experience. I stepped up and said that I had. He then asked me from where. I said: "One of my uncles had a blacksmith shop in my native village D'mbeni. I frequently went there and helped him with his work. I used to operate the bellows and hammer out the hot iron to stretch it." As I spoke I got a mental picture of my village D'mbeni and watched the brothers Krsto and Kosta Ratkov working in their blacksmith shop. Everyone in the line turned and looked at me. Urania was stunned and wondered what I was doing; but I was determined to do anything to get out of the mica processing plant. The warden then said: "Tomorrow I want to see you at the blacksmith shop."

Finally I was rescued from the mica plant. I was allowed to stroll around the camp. And because the work was physically more demanding I was given double the portion of food. I was with a Lithuanian woman named Natute or Natasha. She trained me. I worked the bellows to fuel the fire. We both, but mostly her, stretched the iron wire from which they made bars for windows and nails. I was with Natute for about two months during which time I felt free.

Working outside the camp

A captain, an interned Jew, from the camp came to the blacksmith shop perimeter to check it out. When he saw me in the shop he said: "Nikolovskaja, what are you doing here? Go back to the mica plant!" I said: "I was sent here by order from the warden!" But he insisted: "No, you must go back!" I then stubbornly said: "I am here, I was sent here by orders and I am not going back." He then said: "I am sending you to work outside the camp with another brigade!" I agreed. I was deployed with a brigade of workers responsible for supplying the camps with wood and when it was snowing we were responsible for cleaning the snow off the railway tracks. The summers in Siberia were very short, a month and a half to two months long at most. During that time the climate was perfect for the infestation of small insects called "moshki." The "moshki" flew in swarms and if you were out in the open unprotected they would eat you alive and there was no escape from them. Some of the older prisoners told us stories about how prisoners were punished by being left out unprotected and that they had died as a result of blood loss due to it being sucked out by the "moshki." This tells me that the Jewish captain wanted to punish me for my disobedience, for not wanting to return to the mica plant. We also ate outdoors.

For the Siberian winter they gave us "valenki", "fotirani bluzi", "fotirani bushlati" and "ushanki kapi." When we returned at night we left our gear at a designated area to dry and be ready for the next day. Our clothes were numbered and everyone used their own gear. One day when the temperature was 40 degrees below zero they took us to load timber. The timber belonged to another camp where men were interned. We were so bundled up that only our eyes and noses were exposed. Even still there was danger that our noses might freeze so they constantly warned us to: "Rub our noses and cheeks with snow to prevent them from freezing." The snow was frozen and could support us with the "valenki" (especially made from twisted wool to make them waterproof). You couldn't wear shoes because they would stick to the flesh of your feet.

Twice a year they allowed the prisoners from the USSR to write letters to their relatives living inside the USSR. I had no such right and neither did any of the prisoners from other countries. I counted on my Ukrainian and Russian friends who always asked their relatives to send them "slanina" (pork fat) and garlic. And when they got some they were generous enough to share it with me. They used the "slanina" to reinforce the prison food. They crushed the garlic and spread it over the bread crust to avoid getting sick. They also rubbed their gums with

garlic to prevent gum disease and keep their teeth healthy. Also included in the winter food was cooked “hvoj,” instead of tea, made from pine needles. The needles had vitamin C and kept us from getting sick. This way they could keep us half living and half dead.

Various events at Camp 21

Camp 21 was a big religious world of all sorts of sects. And low and behold a lot of them were there because of their religious beliefs. Stalin was taught religion in a seminary, at least that's what he told these believers, especially about the Sabbath, children of Jove and others. When I started telling them that I too had studied religion in school and quoted some of the prayers and sermons I knew, some raised their hands in praise.

One morning when we were all lined up, the Camp Chief informed us that some prisoners from Vorkuta Camp had tried to escape along with a pilot, who made an attempt to hijack a small plane. Among the prisoners attempting to escape was Paskal Mitrevski. I shivered when I heard his name but at the same time I felt a strange joy knowing that my comrades were still alive and somewhere in the surrounding camps, be it in one of the worst prisons - Nizhnij. The people around me noticed that I was excited by the announcement, so one of them asked me if I knew any of the names mentioned. I said: "I know one of them personally. He was a Minister in the Provisional Government of Greece." They often told such stories in all the USSR camps to frighten the inmates.

At one time new inmates were brought to our camp. I wondered where they were from. We were told that they were bringing them from the Karaganda camps. They were imprisoned Red Army officers along with their supporters who had rebelled against Soviet authority. Three days after the rebellion, tanks and bulldozers rolled in and killed most of them. The ones left alive were rounded up and sent to the camps. There was also a camp for women convicted of theft and other non-political offenses. They called these women "bitoviki" but mostly "suki" (bitches). When they quarreled among themselves and fought they bit their noses.

Most of the women in our camp were Ukrainian, young girls, about whom I wrote earlier. A woman physician from Leningrad experienced a similar fate as them. She told me that during the war and in peace time physicians examined only sick patients, not just anybody. But during the siege of Leningrad she gave medical aid to all the wounded, including wounded Germans. For helping the Germans she received 25 years imprisonment and 5 years deprivation of political rights after being freed. At her trial they said that she was serving the occupier by treating the wounded Germans. The court gave her a severe sentence even though, as a doctor, she had sworn to treat everyone in need of help. The Ukrainian women, who as young girls were abducted and

forced to serve German families, were also charged with “assisting the occupier” and sent to prison.

On March 5th, 1953 we received news from our camp warden that Visarionovich Joseph Stalin was dead. We were not touched by his passing, on the contrary, a lot of prisoners yelled: “He should have died a long time ago the ‘zvoloch’.” I said to Urania maybe now they would release us. And she said: “And you believe that we will go back to Macedonia!?” I said: “Yes and you will be walking around the square in Skopje.” She did not believe that, she had different thoughts. After the “sad news” nothing changed in the camp. We went to the “sofhozi” who worked the farms and planted potatoes, beets, carrots, etc. and we picked crops. The prisoners practically secured their own food, in other words the prisoners looked after themselves. We picked the food and ate some raw. We were hungry and our stomachs needed filling especially with vitamin rich raw food. The Siberian soil was fertile, unfortunately the growing season was very short. But for a two month summer, the growth did very well. I saw tiny apples there. They said the apples trees were planted there by the scientist Michurin.

Besides working in the fields we also cut trees in the forest. There was nothing there to see or experience. The guards marked off the four sides of our limit of where to cut trees and we did the cutting. The limits were marked off by placing four stakes into the ground with cross planks nailed on them and with the words “Forbidden Zone” painted on the planks. One time we cut a pine tree whose top fell beyond the limits of the “Forbidden Zone” and a German woman went outside the zone to cut the branches. The guard yelled at her to “get back” but she did not understand what he said and continued cutting. The guard then immediately opened fire on her with his weapon and killed her. That day the entire brigade rebelled but before we had a chance to complain to anyone the guard threatened to kill us all saying that she was aiming to flee. In sympathy, as a sign of our condemnation, we all began to laugh! Where in God’s name would she have gone up in those mountains and how would she have survived in that cold jungle. It was funny but tragic. We were immediately ordered to load the cut timber onto the truck and go back to camp. They did not allow us to take the murdered woman with us or bury her there. Her body was left to freeze and decompose after it had thawed; like a dead animal.

Camp 9

In 1954 I was transferred from Camp 21, to a camp called “Shtrofnaja Kolona.” Urania remained in Camp 21. Some of my friends, of whom I wrote earlier, thought that I was going to be released, so they gave me their photographs and addresses in hopes of contacting their families and themselves when they were released. The camp to which I moved was smaller, with fewer prisoners. Most were Romanian, Czechoslovakian, German and Russian women. Most of the Russian women had previously lived in China. The German women were Russian citizens who had lived in Russia for a long time. Some were Ukrainian. In other words they were mostly foreigners.

There I met a Ukrainian woman who told me a horror story that a person simply could not believe. After the October Revolution, before the Second World War, when their village was turned into a “kolhoz” (collective, SR3), that is, when their land underwent collectivization, many people became very poor and turned to cannibalism. There was nothing to eat so people started eating people. She was so frightened that she ran away from her village on foot. When they found her they put her on a train to Moscow where she was taken to a home. During the war, along with many Ukrainian families who had fled from the Ukraine, she was taken to Siberia to work in a factory that built pipelines. She told the story of what had happened and why she had fled but no one believed her. For fleeing she was sentenced to ten years in prison to be served in the prison camps in Siberia. She was a beautiful girl. When the Ukrainian women got together they sang “chastushki”, they had wonderful voices. It reminded me of my village D’mbeni of when the girls used to get together and sing as a group. We were called the “Kosturianski.”

Conditions in Camp 9 were appalling. Soon the snow began to melt. We were cutting trees up in the mountains where they said they were preparing the land to build a town. They pushed us hard to clear the ground and prepare it for building houses. In July two groups of prisoners were dispatched there to a large meadow. They gave us scythes to cut the grass that had grown quite high. The place was called “Mishova Koliba.”

There we were greeted by a Siberian man who lived somewhere nearby. We cut the grass according to his instructions. A few days later, after the grass had dried we picked it up and stored it in a silo as cattle feed for the winter, but we did not see any cattle anywhere. They probably had farms somewhere nearby. The place got its name from Misho, the hermit. Here I got a “promotion.” They put me in charge of one of the brigades responsible for cutting the grass because the

Siberian man thought that I was an excellent grass mower. In the fall they took us back to where we were cutting trees. By then the place had been cleared, probably by a brigade of men from the camps. In the "Taeisheski" terrain, "Irkudska" Region, as we were told by the old camp inmates, there were about one hundred male and female camps of political prisoners and of "bitoviki." The houses in the area were built with pine and cedar tree trunks by the male prisoners. Our brigade's job was to plaster and paint the insides during the month of November. It was not an easy job because the mortar would not stick to the wood and kept falling off. It was torture.

The houses were short. One day a Romanian woman, named Ira, and I climbed on the roof of one of these houses to build a chimney. I put mortar on the brick and the mortar would immediately freeze. We were unable to build the chimney no matter how hard we tried.

I heard the best news – of freedom

While Ira and I were torturing ourselves trying to build the damn chimney we heard the woman responsible for the “bitoviki” camp shout: “Nikolovskaja, na svoboda!” “Nikolovskaja na svoboda!” I tossed my trowel and told Ira to build the damn chimney by herself. I then jumped off the roof and, together with the woman in charge of the camp, went to the governor’s office. He took both of my names and surnames and said that, as per the USSR Supreme Prosecutor, I was exempt from the penalty and prosecution and I was free to go but I would have to wait until others were available to travel. Ever since Stalin’s death I had expected that something would happen to us because we were innocent of the charges leveled against us.

Many of us who were freed from our charges gathered together. Most were German women who were covered by the agreement between Chancellor Adenauer and the Soviet authorities. The Germans, until Stalin’s death, were living in miserable poverty. With bags in their hands they gathered crumbs and other refuse from the tables to survive. After the agreement was signed they began to receive letters and packages of food. They suddenly raised their heads and became superior to us. What misery! They quickly forgot that until then we had shared everything and fought together to survive.

At the end of January 1955 they loaded us onto a train and as we passed from station to station where they loaded all the prisoners that were freed from the other camps. When we came to the main railway station in Taishet they loaded the men; Germans, Russians and other nationalities in separate cars. The prisoners told us that in 1954 they also released Ruslanova, a popular singer who opposed Stalin on behalf of her husband. Stalin had her jailed just for that, so after his death she was freed. She traveled with us. On the platform in Taishet she asked for permission to sing to the prisoners. After she was released she sang for a long time. We heard her voice on the radio when we were interned in Kazakhstan. She was one of the most popular singers in the USSR.

I met up with Mincho after five and a half years of separation

Our travel by train, with the stops we made at all the stations and by changing direction to accommodate all those being freed from all other camps, lasted nearly two months. We arrived at Camp Potma, at the camp station for all foreign nationals, in early March 1955. When the camp gates opened I saw Risto Kolentsev wearing an “ushalka” hat without ties and “botinki” without laces. He recognized me from my uniform and said: “Vera, Mincho is here and so is everyone else!” They didn’t come with me here because they had to return to the barracks. Our group was asked to go to the camp admission office to fill out some paperwork.

A while later Mincho arrived with Paskal. I had a hard time recognizing Mincho. Physically he had changed a lot. After they took my information at the office I got to visit with them. Risto had told them that I had arrived here and they rushed over to find me. Mincho said: “We have been waiting here for more than a month and I have been asking everyone if you were alive and why you hadn’t arrived? Because we were interned for the same offense, you too should have been released the same time I was.” From there we went to the barracks to visit with Lambro Cholakov and Tashko Hadzhianov, who had arrived from the Vorkuta Camp, and Lazar Poplazarov from Siberia. There were many Yugoslavs in the barracks, mostly Serbs and a Macedonian from Skopje, a lieutenant. Most had been with Mincho in Vorkuta. We were still missing Rakovski and Urania. We hugged and kissed each other, being grateful that we were still alive and for a moment forgot our troubles and our long suffering in silence.

Potma was a huge camp, a collection of all foreign nationals. We were sure that from here we would be going to Macedonia. All other prisoners, every day, were being sent to their home countries; especially the Germans who were asking to go to West Germany.

Mincho at the time met up with Milan, a Serb with whom he had worked in a coal mine in Varkuta. Milan had given Mincho a cigarette box which he had made from lignite coal and engraved with dates. Mincho had told him about me. They came together. As I got to know Milan I found him to be a wonderful person. He told Mincho: “Let’s go to Aleksandar’s.” Aleksandar was also a Serb appointed “narjadchik” of the entire Potma camp. Aleksandar asked us to go with him. There was a separate small room in one of the barracks which belonged to a Hungarian woman. We all went together. Aleksandar asked the woman to vacate the room. He said: “Please go somewhere else. This room now belongs to the most beautiful couple in the camp who for years has been separated and did not know about each other or if they were alive

or dead!” The Hungarian woman left without saying a word and immediately moved into the general barracks for women.

Aleksandar told everyone that “Verochka and Mincho, the most beautiful couple in the camp, were separated in Vorkuta and Siberia for 5 years and now finally they are together.” Being located together in that room gave our friends a chance to find us and visit with us. Everyone had a story of suffering to tell us. Paskal named us “the happiest couple in the camp”

In the camp I also met up with my friend Elizabeta Shvinkovskaja, with whom I had spent time in Camp 21 and who had written her address on a canvas for me to contact her family before I was moved to Camp 9. But instead of releasing me earlier they released us both at the same time. Elizabeta was happy to see me again. I introduced her to Mincho and Paskal. We were there together for ten days. She was familiar with Mincho’s and my situation. She left before we did. She said that in Germany she would preach socialism, we had had enough of wars and separation of families.

For the first time they gave us permission to send cards to our families through the International Red Cross. From all my friends I was the only one who remembered my mother’s address in Bitola (6 “Mirche Atsev”). I sent her a card to let her know that I was alive and well. I dated the card March 1, 1955 and I still have it. For days my mother slept with it. She got it two months after I sent it. She told all our relatives and friends, got them together and cooked roasted lamb for them to celebrate. My poor mother, she had only me. The card did not have my address because I did not know where we were.

Interned in Kazakhstan instead of going to Macedonia

We were expecting to be released so that we could go home to Macedonia but instead they told us: “You are not going to Yugoslavia; you are going to prison in Kazakhstan, in Alma Ata.” I was not given the “news” directly about this but when I found out that I would be separated from Mincho I reacted sharply. I wanted to know from those making these decisions: “Why are you separating us again?!” As much as the world is large it is small, as much as it is beautiful it is loud! The German fascists were rehabilitated and everything was forgiven. They were released and allowed to go home but not us; the people who had fought on their side against fascism. Some Justice this was!

Since I was not told in person that I was going to Alma Alta, Mincho and Paskal figured that maybe they would be sending me to Macedonia. Paskal said: “Maybe they will let you go to Macedonia and from there you can help us.” We were to be separated again and sent into the unknown. A few days later Pavle Rakovski arrived followed by Urania Pirovska. I introduced Urania to Milan. We were housed in the barracks for women. I thought that Urania would remain in Irkutsk and work in the mica plant because that’s what she had told me before I left for Camp 9. She told me this because she did not believe they would be letting us go and it would not be possible for us to go to Skopje in Macedonia. As it happened however, Urania was released and arrived in Potma and became friends with Milan. On March 25th the authorities summoned Pavle Rakovski and myself and informed us that we too would be leaving for Kazakhstan. They gave us civilian clothes and a sealed envelope with information on where to report in Alma Ata. We received rations of bread and canned food for five days. Urania remained in the camp with Milan. Rakovski and I arrived at the Alma Ata railway station on April 2, 1955.

The first thing for us to do was report to the police station in Alma Ata, but how were we to go there when we did not know where it was or how to get to it. Even if we had known where it was we had no money to pay the fare to get us there. I had a pair of shoes that the Red Cross had given me with my civilian clothing. I said: “Pavle why don’t we sell my shoes. I don’t need them, they are too big and they are men’s shoes.” We summoned a taxi and as it happened the driver was Russian. I said: “We have no money but we need to report to the main police station. We are not from here. Will you take these shoes as payment? How much will you give us for the shoes and also to take us there?” The man had had experience with people like us. He paid us 10 rubles for the shoes; he kept 8 for the ride and gave us 2. The taxi driver took us and left us in front of the police station. They were

expecting us. They had been warned of our pending arrival. We presented ourselves and our information to the police and asked them where we could find our comrades who had arrived there a short time before us. They told us they did not know exactly where they were located because they were supposed to go to a “sofhoz” out of town, but they did not want to go there and told the police that they would be on their own for a while. The police had no problem with that as long as they reported to the police station once every month. So where were we going to go now?! The police told us to report to the Red Cross and perhaps they could help us and maybe they could tell us the whereabouts of our comrades.

We took a streetcar and went to the Red Cross but it the town Red Cross. We needed to go to the National Red Cross. Again we got on the streetcar and went to the National Red Cross where they told us: “Two people were here inquiring about you because the police had told them that you would be arriving.” “So where do we look for them?” I asked. One of them said: “They were headed towards the green market” (Alma Ata had a green market). We again got on the streetcar and criss-crossed Alma Ata. Fortunately we managed to travel all over this unfamiliar city with only two rubles and with some “kopejki” to spare because a streetcar ticket cost only two “kopejki.” When we passed through the green market I spotted Mincho and Lambro Chokalov on the left side of the pavement, walking briskly through the market looking for us. They had been looking for us all day. When I saw them through the streetcar window I screamed as loud as I could: “Minchooo!” They heard me and turned towards the streetcar. “We kept going back and forth from the police station to the Red Cross looking for you,” Mincho explained. “Where are you located?” I asked. “When we were coming to Alma Ata we met a disabled Russian military man returning from Sochi, where he was on vacation, and he invited us to stay at his house. His house is located at the end of the last station at number 9, house number 92,” Mincho explained. With our last “kopejki” we took the streetcar back to the man’s house where all the others were also located.

Valendin Diukov’s house was a single storey building. It had three rooms and a yard. When we arrived we were greeted by Valendin and his wife, Aunt Shura. They were good Russian people with hospitable souls. They were happy to see me because Mincho had told them about me. Valendin said: “Ah, you must be Misha’s friend?” They called Mincho, Misha. They gave Mincho and me the smaller room and the others, Paskal Mitrevski, Lambro Cholakov, Lazar Poplazarov, Hristo Kolentsev, Tashko Hadzhiianov and Pavle Rakovski were placed in the large room. Most had to sleep on planks or on the floor. It was

important that we were all indoors and not under open skies. On the other side of Valendin's fence there was a house that belonged to his sister and niece Klavdija. The fence had a door through which you could go to their garden. A day or two later Lambro, Lazar and Tashko relocated there.

A few days later we all went to the National Red Cross to seek help. We were received by Ana Mitrofanova Chernish. She was Second Secretary and according to the Party line, she was responsible for providing assistance. She advised us to report to the "Profsojuzi" so that they could give us work. Lambro and Lazar left immediately to make contact with the "Tras Sibirska trasa" contractor. We had no means of getting food. During our first days there we ate all of Valendin's potatoes, which he used to feed his pig. He gave us those potatoes under the condition that we replenish them as soon as we got paying jobs. One day when we were returning to the city by streetcar, we went into a shop, not to buy anything but just to see what they were selling. We spoke Greek so that the shop clerk would not know that we had no money. But, as it turned out, that benefited us more than we could imagine. The clerk approached us and said: "Are you Greeks?" One of us spoke up and said that we were from Greece and explained our situation, that we had been in the prison camps, had been released and that we were now interned here in Alma Ata. The woman told us that there were many Greeks and their families from the Caucasus interned there who were relocated from the camps. Our mercy!

The clerk filled a bag with rice, sugar, bread and other products and gave it to us. It was encouraging to hear that there were Greeks employed in the hospitality industry and that they would help us find employment. The clerk's name was Maria, a young woman. We told her where we were located and that we would be seeing her again. We thanked her for everything she had done for us and told her that we were indebted to her. On the way home Mincho and I were joking around quoting folk sayings: "Oh mother give me birth with luck, toss me on the manure heap and I should be okay!" Some "okay." But the proverb was coming true for us.

One morning while going to the green market in that part of town, Mincho found ten rubles. This was another surprise. At the market we met another employee named Maria, an older woman, who had heard about us from the younger Maria from the store. She had heard what had happened to us. Both her son and husband were taken to the prison camps. She lived here with her mother-in-law. So it was true that "many Greeks lived in Alma Ata." She told us that Stalin had moved the entire Caucasus to the prisons here and that they were all getting by, working in the catering business. Maria also introduced us to Aunt

Evgenia. Her brother Savas Kostandinidis was director of the “Stolovi i Restorani” enterprise in town. She also introduced us to him. They had a sister who had moved to Solun but they did not know her address. We said that if we ever returned to Greece we would try to find her. Human destinies!

After a week or two, thanks to Maria and Evgenia who vouched for us at the “Profsojuzi”, we were hired in the hospitality industry. Mincho was employed at the enterprise “Stolovi i Restorani” where Savas Kostandinidis worked and I was employed at the XIII “Stolovaja” canteen. It was a canteen for the medical faculty. I was accepted very warmly by the staff. All these people were martyrs like us, Greeks, Russians, Chechens, Tatars, Jews, Gypsies and us, nine Macedonians. Risto Kolenchev was employed at another canteen in shipping and receiving where he received goods and then shipped them to other canteens and restaurants. Tashko Hadzhiianov worked with him. Paskal Mitrevski was employed as a controller in a bus station. Only Pavle Rakovski at the time was unemployed. He stayed with us in the small room.

At our jobs we were also given food and little by little we began to gain back our physical stature and began to look more like human beings again. Lambro, during his first days in shipping and receiving, broke his leg and had to take sick leave. In the meantime Urania arrived from Potma. She also came to live with us and was employed as a controller at the bus station. But soon all of the men found themselves girlfriends and one by one moved out. Urania went with Lambro. Pavle Rakovski met a teacher named Maria, a Ukrainian woman whom he introduced to us. She was a Partisan in Brezhnev’s Unit. Brezhnev then was appointed Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan by Khrushchev.

We were all employed; I worked at the canteen where Aunt Maria, a lovely Jewish woman who cared for me, was in charge. Maria did not know the whereabouts of her own family or if they were alive or dead. She put me in charge of cutting bread for the tables for the students. After they were finished eating whatever bread and other food was left over I collected in a bag and took it home for the others. I walked to and from work because my pay was only 16 rubles a month and I wanted to save my money. I knew a shortcut which took only 20 minutes. Aunt Maria was educated and was a very smart woman. One time she asked me: “Verochka, why do you collect the leftover food from the tables? We feed that to the animals.” I was embarrassed and began to cry. I told her about my situation and my concern for my friends. She then said: “Listen Verochka, from now on take a whole uncut loaf of bread, not the leftovers.” A couple of days later she said:

“Today you can take a loaf of the white bread from the bar.” A day or so later she said: “Verochka, we got a delivery of lemons at the bar, how many do you want?” I said: “A kilo or two please?” She began to laugh and said: “I will give you one or two lemons. Oh Verochka, Verochka, you still have no idea where you are!”

The female cooks who worked in the kitchen sometimes asked me to stay after work and count the meal coupons. For my help they gave me leftover food, including horse meat. At first I could not eat the horse meat because it tasted sour, but with time I became used to it and it was delicious. The Cossacks used to say: “Pigs are filthy, horses are clean and beautiful and their meat tastes better.” The cooks often said: “We will let you know when our husbands will come here to eat. We will tell you at which table they will sit and you can serve them their lunch, your friends are welcome to join them, it will be our treat.” I gained full trust among the employees in the canteen.

One day three Russian officers came to the canteen. Aunt Maria wanted me to serve them. I kindly approached their table and politely asked how I could help them. Initially they were amazed by my courtesy and my attitude towards them. They asked me where I was from because I did not look like a Russian woman. They figured me for a Greek or an Armenian. I told them that I was a Macedonian from Greece. “Ah, from Alexander the Macedonian’s country?” one of them yelled out with enthusiasm. I said: “YES!” from the bottom my heart. They asked me if they could take my picture to keep as a memento of a Macedonian. The next day they brought pictures of me and asked me to sign them for them. The Cossacks call Alexander of Macedonia “Iskender Makedonski”. Many of them called themselves “Iskender Makedonski.”

I became friends with many of the regular students who came to the canteen. Some gave me gifts and their business cards. I still have one. It was given to me by Tsakena who I am sure is now a doctor.

One day Aunt Maria suggested that I go and work as a waitress at the reputable “Alatau” restaurant because they were expecting distinguished guests and needed extra help. I went with my friend Valia, with whom I worked at the canteen. The guests were pleased with my service and I made 15 rubles in tips, a whole month’s wages. When I told Mincho he was dumbfounded. We needed that money to buy something for us to wear because we were still wearing the same clothes that they had given us at Camp Potma.

Only Pavle and Urania were living with us now. I wrote something about them earlier but not all the details. One day Mincho and I went to the market and we bought tomatoes for a salad. We had not eaten tomatoes for more than five years. Urania at the time was at home

doing nothing so we asked her to make the salad. But instead of putting oil in the salad she put “gaska” (kerosene?) because the bottles were identical and sitting side by side. When we sat down to eat Mincho, with a special appetite, was waiting to eat the salad. But instead of getting satisfaction he was disappointed. Seeing what Urania had done Mincho tossed the entire salad at her. Urania did not take that well and left. She went to stay with Lambro Cholakov.

We persevered to return to Macedonia

I established regular contact with my mother and with Mincho and Paskal's families. The letters took a long time to get there, about two months, but we were able to get news from our families. My mother also sent letters to Lambro Cholakov and Pavle Rakovski's relatives in Poland. After a while they too began to receive letters from their families. We got news that Lambro Cholakov's family had moved from Poland to Skopje; his wife, brother and his brother's children. Pavle Rakovski's wife and daughter however, after our return, moved to Alma Ata. My mother in Skopje also wrote letters to my father in Canada, my uncle in Detroit and my other uncle in Chicago, letting them know that I was alive and well. My father personally wrote to Zahariadis many times asking him where I was. One such letter exists in the Archives in Macedonia. Risto Kiriazovski promised me that he would give it to me but to this day he hasn't. My father, when he got my address in Alma Ata, sent me a letter with ten dollars inside. Mincho unfortunately had to destroy the ten dollars because it was dangerous to have Canadian money there. We had had enough bad experiences in our lives. I wrote my mother and asked her to let our relatives in America know not to send us money or letters to Alma Ata until relations between the USSR and the west had changed for the better.

We had to report to the police station every month and we were not allowed to leave the city. On orders from the police we had our pictures taken for temporary residence ID cards. I sent one of those pictures to my mother who had moved to Skopje and who at the time was living with my cousin Petre Angelkovski. After the two grandmothers (my grandmother Iagna and his grandmother Lina) died, my mother asked Petre to move to Skopje so that she would not be alone. So Petre, his daughter Valiska (born in Romania where her mother died), his second wife Olga Peiovska and her daughter Dochka moved to Skopje. My mother lived with them. When my mother received the little picture I had sent her she began to cry and insisted that the woman in the picture was not me. She continued to cry because she did not believe that I was alive. She was sure that the woman in the photograph was not me. After my cousin Petre informed me of that I borrowed some clothes from my friends, Maria the Georgian woman, Aunt Evgenia and Savas Kostandinidi's sister, had my hair done at the hairdresser and had my photograph taken again. I immediately sent it to my mother to let her know that I was indeed alive and to calm her down. I still have the two photographs.

Times were changing. We were working. We made friends with many Russians and Greeks. We were invited to be their guests, especially the two Marias, Aunt Evgenia and Savas Kostandinidis and his family, but we would not tell them who we really were except that we had come here from Greece. Only Ana Mitrofanova Chernish, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, knew about us. We wrote letters to the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow. The ambassador then was Vidich. He was then replaced by Michunovich. Relations with Yugoslavia were slowly improving, Tito and Iovanka visited the USSR and then Khrushchev went to Belgrade to apologize to Tito. We continued to write letters, we even wrote letters to the Kremlin leadership, to Malenkov and to others. But it seemed that our letters never reached their destination. Then we were called to the police station and warned not to send such letters. If we needed to inform outside agencies, they told us it would have to be done through them.

We wrote to our relatives in Skopje to do whatever they could, to go to the Macedonian government, even to Kolishevski if necessary, to expedite our return. In November 1955 Paskal Mitrevki and Risto Kolentsev received visas from the Yugoslav Embassy allowing them to return to Yugoslavia. Paskal's family, wife, children and parents were living in Skopje. They fled their hometown Rupishta to avoid being arrested by the Monarcho-Fascists. They left everything behind, their house and their store full of merchandise, about which I wrote earlier. Risto Kolentsev did not know where his family was. He was born in Lerin, to a large and wealthy family. He was a lawyer by profession. He knew that his parents, brothers and sisters had been arrested and convicted by the Monarcho-Fascists but he did not know the whereabouts of his wife or daughter. He then found out that both his wife and daughter were in Hungary, where many immigrants died from extreme torture. Upon his arrival in Skopje Risto married Elizabeta Mijovich, a Montenegrin woman from a respectable revolutionary family, and had two children.

After Paskal and Risto left, we began to persistently write letters to the Yugoslav Embassy and to the Soviet leadership, but our letters only got as far as the police station in Alma Ata.

Bid to stay in Alma Ata

One afternoon in February 1956 we were visited by two gentlemen at Valendin's house. They said that they were representatives of the National Red Cross. In the room where we were staying the roof leaked and we had a couple of cups set up to collect the rain drops. When these gentlemen saw the conditions under which we were living, they scolded us and asked: "Why do you want to go to Yugoslavia - Macedonia?" If we agreed to stay in Alma Ata, they said we would qualify for a house, a better job and the opportunity to study at a faculty if we wanted to further our education. But Mincho and I were determined to leave and did not want to stay. We wanted to go back to our families and asked the Red Cross workers to help us if they could.

The Red Cross workers asked us to think about it and if we changed our minds to contact them at the National Committee of the Red Cross through Ana Mitrofanovna Chernish. Upon parting they once again told us to think about their offer. From their approach, Mincho and I concluded that these people were from the Ministry of the Interior and not employees of the Red Cross. In accordance with the advice the two "Red Cross workers" had given us, two or three days later we contacted Ana Mitrofanovna Chernish. She received us kindly and promised that we would be granted the "kvartira" promptly and told us the same thing the other two gentlemen had told us if we decided to stay here. She also complained that she had not received a letter from Paskal and Kolentsev. Then she gave us 700 rubles for assistance. We figured it was probably a hook with which to catch us.

Mincho and I continued to correspond with our families in Skopje. My mother went in person to see Lazar Kolishevski. She also wrote to the President of Yugoslavia, to Tito's Cabinet in Belgrade. Finally my mother received a response in which, among other things, they said, "Your daughter is allowed to come to Yugoslavia." My mother sent me that letter. Since the letters took a long time to get there I received it in May 1956.

Mincho and I continued with our monthly visits to the Police station in Alma Ata. We again begged them to allow us to personally go to the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow. Their answer was the same as always: "You can't! Yugoslavia does not want you!" We explained that Mitrevski was allowed to return and I showed them the letter from the Office of the President of Yugoslavia, from Tito himself, which my mother had sent me, which said I was allowed to return. They didn't know what to say except to ask: "How did you get this letter?" I told them: "By mail as usual." Then they started yelling at each other and arguing about how the letter could have been missed by their censors.

The first of May is a holiday in the USSR, which is solemnly celebrated. We did not work that day so we all agreed to visit the museum of the 26 “Pamfilovci” who died heroically fighting against the Germans in order to prevent them from occupying Moscow. It was a beautiful gallery dedicated in their honour. I don’t know if it still exists. From there we went to the big green market where a fair called “tolkushka” was held displaying new and old clothes. At the green market near a basketball court we saw the famous Vaska Chechenetsot, well-known in Alma Ata for his height of 2.25 meters. Lambro Cholakov stood near him, he was tall also but next to Vaska he looked like a dwarf. We made a lot of jokes at his expense. Vaska Chechenetsot had sold his body to the state for 25,000 rubles to be taken after his death.

At the market Lazo Poplazarov cast his eyes on a white jacket. He bought it. He told us that when he was a Greek teacher in the village Zhupanishta he had envied the rich men from Kostur wearing white jackets like this. He could not afford one. After twenty years he finally got his wish but not for long. During our trip back it began to rain. To protect his new white jacket from the rain, Lazo folded it and put it under his arm under the black copula he was issued at the camp. Unfortunately black die from the copula leaked onto his white jacket, giving it black spots and stripes. Klavdija, the woman with whom Lazo lived, washed the coat and left it on a rope in the yard to dry. Someone stole it during the night. We consoled Lazo by telling him that he would buy a better one in Skopje. So many things happened to us in Alma Ata, some enjoyable and some regrettable, but we always laughed. Even in difficult times, despite our misery and humiliation, we remained cheerful and in good spirits.

Nikita Khrushchev comes to Alma Ata

At the end of May 1956 Ana Mitrofanovna invited us to the Red Cross to inform us that they were going to give us a newly built house in the neighbourhood north of Alma Ata. She promised us that they would later gradually give us everything that was needed to furnish it. Accommodated in the new house were going to be myself with Mincho and Urania with Lambro. Lazar, Tashko and Pavle were to stay with their girlfriends.

Before moving out, except for Tashko and Pavle, we all got together at Valendin Diukov's house to write a letter. We received news that the Peasant Economic Counsel in Alma Ata was going to be visited by the President of the USSR, Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev. We decided to write a letter and possibly give it to him in person because we knew that by any other means it would only end up in the hands of the police in Alma Ata and stay there. We wrote the letter requesting assistance to help us to get to Macedonia, Yugoslavia, via the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow, because our families had immigrated to Macedonia. We were all unanimous about the content of the letter but we were not sure who was going to deliver it? Lazar Poplazarov proposed that if anyone had a chance of personally delivering the letter to Khrushchev it would be me. He said: "Vera is pregnant. Under current Russian law pregnant women are protected. If the security people grab her they will have to release her because she is pregnant. Anybody else they will prosecute and throw in jail." Mincho and I agreed. We decided that we would all go to the meeting and I would deliver the letter. It was reported that Khrushchev was going to visit Kazakhstan and attend the session with the rural economy heads of counsel in June 1956.

Chairman of the Central Committee of Kazakhstan at that time was Leonid Brezhnev, a close friend of Khrushchev from the Second World War front in the Ukraine. Khrushchev's visit to Alma Ata was at the end of June. We were ready for the "decisive battle" and the message from my friends was loud and clear even during the drafting of the letter: "Listen, Vera, imagine you're on Vicho or Gramos in a major offensive and there is a bunker in front of you. Your comrades and your unit depend on you to destroy the enemy inside the bunker so they can succeed. It is now up to you to get the job done!"

The Conference was to take place at the Alma Ata Theater. That summer day none of us went to work, I took a sick day, while Pavle Rakovski did not join us at all. Mincho, Poplazarov, Cholakov and Tashko went to the park beside the theater. I secured the letter inside a newspaper and held on to it tight. Urania joined me and we headed

towards the main entrance of the theater where a large crowd was gathering. We anxiously waited for Khrushchev to arrive. When we reached the entrance of the theater, Mincho reminded me of our agreement to not pay attention to anyone. Think that you are on Vicho or Gramos, cheer and shout and when you see an opening take it and run for the goal!

As we waited about twenty cars arrived and waited for the black cars. But the black cars did not come through the main gate; they came through the rear entrance of the theater. The people applauded: “Khrushchev, Khrushchev” and ran to the back entrance. I also ran and was followed by Urania. There was a whole wall of people but I elbowed my way through the crowd like Mincho had advised me because this was a crucial moment in our destiny. With all my might I broke through the wall of people and moved forward. I could see Khrushchev in front of me only a few steps away. I ran for him but two police officers in civilian clothing caught me by my shoulders. They tripped me and tore my dress but I persisted pushing my way towards Khrushchev yelling loudly: “Tavarish Khrushchev!” Khrushchev turned towards me and said to the security people “Pushite zhenshtinu!” They released me with my dress torn. I quickly grabbed and hugged him, he hugged me back. I then said: “We are Macedonians who want to go to Yugoslavia to our families, here is a letter that explains out situation, please help us!” Khrushchev took the letter and kissed me. He then put it in the inner pocket of his jacket and said: “Harasho.” I said: “Prashu Vas, otvetite nami.” “Harasho!” he confirmed. Many people were thrusting themselves at Khrushchev, everyone wanted to greet him but there was a big crowd. Urania unfortunately never made it. Satisfied by my deed I ran through the crowds to the park where Mincho and my friends were waiting for me. My whole body was shaking with excitement. I said to Mincho: “I gave him the letter!” He then asked: “Are you sure he didn’t drop it?” “There is no place for it to fall in the inner pocket of his jacket,” I said as my friends kept asking me all sorts of questions. Urania then came and told everyone exactly what had happened. She said: “Vera personally gave Khrushchev the letter.”

We left the masses of people behind us as we all headed for Valentin’s house. Our satisfaction in handing Khrushchev our letter was great and we each took a long time to analyze that moment and give our personal impressions.

At this point I would like to explain a bit more about the letter. All seven of us should have signed it but I could not find Tashko Hadzhiianov so I signed it on his behalf. Pavle Rakovski on the other hand refused to sign it claiming that: “I will not sign it because I am not

going there. I am going where my people are!” This meant that he was not going to Macedonia, Yugoslavia and indeed he went to Tashkent where his wife and daughter from Poland had joined him. But soon afterwards he returned to Alma Ata and after two years there he went to Skopje. He quickly realized that “his own people” were not in Tashkent or in Alma Ata and when he went to his people in Skopje he spoke differently, making himself a great patriot and the patriots who actually signed and gave Khrushchev the letter he badmouthed. But he was not alone, after the war they all presented themselves as “generals.” I openly told Pavle to his face not to lie in his memoirs because nowhere did he say anything that he had lived with Maria, the Ukrainian woman who was close to Brezhnev, before his wife and daughter arrived. Was she the reason he had refused to sign the letter?

The letter I handed to Khrushchev certainly exists somewhere in the Russian archives. One can see who signed it and who didn't. I regret not making a copy, but then who would have thought that we would need it as evidence to come to the fore? All the signatories believed that only Khrushchev could be trusted to end our suffering. And we were right. Two days after delivering the letter, Valentin's house, which was well known to the police and to the Red Cross, was visited by a limousine. Two Soviet officers came out, entered the yard and asked Aunt Shura: “Do foreigners live here?” One of them mentioned me by name “Nikolovskaja Vera” because my name was first in the letter. Aunt Shura called out to me and said: “Verochka they are looking for you.” I went outside and introduced myself. One of them said: “You are coming with us!” I thought that they were going to take me to jail so I went inside and got dressed, took my overcoat in my hand in case I needed it in prison, even though it was hot in July in Alma Ata, and got into the limousine. They took me straight to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. I knew the building well because we had gone here many times looking for an audience with Brezhnev. They opened the door and helped me get out of the limousine and then we went into the yard. We walked up the stairs and then went into a large room with many tables and chairs, which reminded me of those in the prisons.

One of the officers said: “Sadis!: A moment later a gentleman came in and introduced himself as Panomjarov. I recognized that name because I had read it in newspapers. A few minutes later Leonid Brezhnev, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan arrived. I stood up to greet him but he motioned with his hand for me to sit down and said: “Sadis.” I sat down and waited to see what he was going to tell me. He said: “I have orders from the Kremlin to help you return to Yugoslavia.” Instinctively I jumped up with joy.

He said: “Sadites! Why didn’t you come to us earlier, why did you wait until now?” I said: “We have been here many times knocking at your door but we were not allowed to see you.” “Now you go back and tell your friends to be here tomorrow at 10 o’clock!” he said. One of the women served me lemonade but I was so happy that I could not drink it. I said goodbye to Brezhnev and flew with joy as I returned to give the others the good news. First I went to where Mincho worked but I was so excited I could not speak. “I came from Brezhnev,” I said. I then took a few deep breaths and told Mincho about our appointment with Brezhnev. After Mincho, I visited the others and gave them the good news. The next day we did not go to work. I took a sick day.

At 10 o’clock the next day we reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. A colonel from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan was waiting at the door. He spoke Greek and we went with him to the Ministry. Brezhnev did not receive us. We were told: “Come back tomorrow and we will come to an agreement as to when Brezhnev will see you.” A well-known stalling tactic. The next day I received a letter with a visa from the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow, but only for me, not for Mincho. What did this mean? Six of us signed the letter; myself, Mincho Fotev, Lazar Poplazarov, Lambro Cholakov, Urania Pirovska and Tashko Hadzhiianov. At exactly 10 o’clock the next day we were back at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan. The same colonel received us and took us into his office with another officer. He said: “We can’t send you all to Yugoslavia because you have no visas from the Yugoslav Embassy. Only Vera can go.” I protested and said that I was not leaving without my husband. I said: “You had us separated for all these years. I am not leaving without my husband!” I said I was not leaving and I was adamant about it. He then said: “But he doesn’t have a visa!” So I said: “Then send us to Moscow to the Yugoslav Embassy and we will get a visa.” But no matter how much I insisted they were not prepared to do anything for us. The only thing they said was to keep in touch with them.

A few days later Mincho and I went to the Red Cross to see Ana Mitrofanovna Chernish. She knew about my visa and said that she would help me get a ticket for my trip to Macedonia. I said the same thing to her that I had said to the colonel, that I was not leaving without Mincho. I also said to her that I would again complain to Brezhnev because he had told us that he would help us “all” return home and that he had received that order directly from the Kremlin. “Why do you insist so much on going?” she asked. “We built a house for you here, we offered you better jobs and scholarships to study in any faculty you want!...” But no matter what she offered us we still insisted we wanted to go. Then Ana said to Mincho: “You Misha, why are you so stubborn

like your Tito?" Then Mincho said: "Ana Mitrofanovna you must understand that our parents, our brothers and sisters and our friends are all there and for many years did not know about us and now that they know that we are alive, they are anxiously waiting to have us back!"

"Okay then. I will give you two tickets for a third class train ride. And instead of one first class ticket for Verochka I will give you the money and you can divide it up," she said. I agreed. "We will pay any extra surcharges for first class," I said. "Oh Verochka," she said, "I wanted very much to be your godmother, but you turned me down! How disappointing!" "Thank you Ana," I said, "and thank you for everything you have done for us. We will always remember you for your kindness. Our separation from you is also difficult, but like we said, we are also needed at home by our loved ones!" Both Mincho and I would like to express our sincere gratitude to this woman for all the help she gave us.

"Come back in a few days so that I can give you the keys to your new house and to arrange a date when you can occupy it!" Ana said. It was great to finally get our own new home and spend our last days in Alma Ata and the USSR in it. We were also relieved when Ana told us that all the authorities in all the republics now knew about us leaving the USSR.

Our departure from Alma Ata

It was August 10, 1956 when Mincho and I said goodbye to our friends who had helped us find employment and survive. We said goodbye to the staff at work who wished us farewell and a nice and safe trip back. The separation from our new friends was not as easy as we had thought it would be, especially with my friends at student's canteen XIII where I worked and with the students and staff. I especially found it difficult saying goodbye to dear Aunt Maria and to the director Firsova in charge of the canteen who wept with joy at the prospect of me returning to my mother. It would be a sin if I didn't mention that everyone was happy for me, in getting my wish to return home to my mother. Mincho had a similar experience. Savas Kostandinis cried when we said goodbye to him. He knew our situation very well; it was similar to his. To the employees of his company who were leaving, Savas gave each person 700 rubles severance plus their wages for the month. He told us: "Take the money. I know you will need it. But please if you ever get a chance look for my sister in Greece and let me know where she is. Please make sure that you look for her."

We took possession of the keys for our new house in Alma Ata. Before moving into it we arranged to have dinner with our friends. Pavle Rakovski was the only one who did not attend. He did not even come to say goodbye when we were leaving. Was it because of the letter to Khrushchev? Was it because we criticized Brezhnev? We don't know. We reported to the police station in Alma Ata. The police officers were very civil to us and wished us a happy return and begged us not to hold anything against them, they were simply doing their jobs, carrying out orders given to them by their superiors.

Most unhappy about our leaving was Ana Mitrofanovna-Chernish from the Kazakhstan Red Cross, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. She sincerely regretted that we were leaving. She gave us the train tickets and some other things for the road. She hugged and kissed us like a true friend and wished us a happy return. She also asked us to stay in contact with her. We left Alma Ata on August 15, 1956. All of our friends came to the railway station to send us off and begged us not to forget them. Lambro Cholakov clung to the side of the train to the end of the station, crying and shouting not to forget him.

At the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow

We traveled on the train for five days from Alma Ata to Moscow. We arrived in Moscow on August 20, 1956. We then took a taxi from the railway station to the Yugoslav Embassy. We were received by Secretary Dizdarevich. At the time Michunovich was ambassador. (Ambassador Michunovich wrote a book entitled “My years in Moscow” in which he wrote nothing about the Macedonians, even though he knew that every day Macedonians, even Greeks, from Tashkent sent hundreds of requests to the Yugoslav Embassy asking him to help them relocate to Macedonia. I don’t know why he did not write anything about the Macedonians?) When Dizdarevich saw us at the Embassy he said: “Ah, you have arrived?” I told him that only I had a visa and that we had problems getting one for Mincho at Alma Ata. He then opened the drawer, pulled out Mincho’s visa and gave it to him. He said; “Let the others know to come here and get their visas.”

Dizdarevich told us that the Kremlin had contacted the Embassy and wanted to know why the Embassy was not looking for the people who wanted to return to Yugoslavia. In other words Khrushchev had kept his word. Dizdarevich also told us that several times the Embassy had sent notes to the Soviet government asking about us, but the reply was always the same: “There are no such people in USSR territory.” After that he directed us to a hotel for foreign students, where the rates were cheaper. At that point however, accommodation was the last thing on our minds. Our primary concern was to find a means to let our friends in Alma Ata know to come and get their visas! We immediately went to the post office and asked them to contact Lambro Cholakov or Lazar Poplazarov at Alma Ata. It was a long wait. They finally managed to find Lazar Poplazarov who then called us back. We told him that their visas were ready at the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow and to go there and get them. Three months after our arrival in late November 1956, Lambro Cholakov, Lazar Poplazarov, Urania and Tashko arrived in Skopje.

At the embassy they told us that they had had many requests from Macedonians (and from some Greeks) from Tashkent who wanted to move to Macedonia. Dizdarevich showed us a long list of claimants wanting to return to Macedonia. He showed us the list so that we could help him identify people who were in danger so that the Embassy could get visas to them sooner. On the list we found my uncle, Timio Ralev and his family. Timio was one of those people who did not agree with Zahariadis’s politics. Timio was a fighter in the anti-fascist war and a DAG officer in the Greek Civil War. We found a few more names; some of prominent Macedonian fighters who, we expected, would be

given their visas as soon as possible. Two of them, Ralev and Karaliev had come from Tashkent to Alma Ata to visit us. During their visit we advised them to immediately apply for their return home and obviously they did.

But as it turned out, those Macedonians returning to Macedonia from Eastern European countries had many inconveniences. The moment they arrived at a railway station or at an airport in Yugoslavia they were immediately picked up by the Ministry of the Interior and taken to Idrizovo Prison. After spending a few days there, being interrogated about this and that, they were released. Unfortunately this had a very negative impact on our people. They were full of joy and high expectations when they arrived in Macedonia only to have them dashed when they were put in jail. They never expected it! I will tell you a story about a couple of such cases.

They had Timio Ralev and Nikola Karaliev locked up in the Idrizovo prison for 15 days. Among other things, they interrogated them about why they wanted to relocate to Alma Ata. Ralev told them: "I went there to visit my niece and my friends with whom I had fought in the war for many years." Similarly, Timio's wife Ianula was also a fighter and a NOF and AFZH activist. Her father had come to Macedonia a long time ago. We learned of this from Ralev and Karaliev's wives. Mincho decided to pay the Minister of the Interior a visit. He made a big fuss about it and angrily told the minister: "How dare your agents harass people of patriotism, proven freedom fighters, fighters for democracy and accuse them of being agents of foreign countries! Is this our fate as Aegean Macedonians? Out there they accused us of being agents of Tito and Yugoslavia; in here you accuse us of being agents of this and that! This must end now!" But it took time and, like the others who came back from the Eastern European countries, Ralev and Karaliev were released and given apartments in which to live. Ralev also received a scholarship and completed a course in administrative law. He got a job as a secretary with the ambulance service, from which he retired, and was replaced by his son Naso Ralev, who still works there.

Suli Markovska-Duvaljevska also had a bad experience. She and her two infant children were kept in Idrizovo Prison for more than 20 days. She was interrogated for the simple reason that in Tashkent she was secretary of a women's organization and through her job had contacts with Zahariadis's CPG. She was one of the first people to apply to return to Skopje because her parents and sister were already living there. But despite her parents making constant requests in person to have her returned, she just barely won her approval. She was very active in AFZH and was a DAG fighter, a sergeant in the free archers

unit. Her younger brother Iani was a Partisan and was killed in combat; a fate shared by many young Macedonian men and women.

Problems getting airline tickets to Belgrade

We took Dizdarevich's advice and stayed in the hotel that he recommended and nearly every day we went back to the embassy asking for our airline tickets. We had some money so during our free time we did some sightseeing in Moscow. We were interested in finding out where the damned prisons were that we had spent time in: Ljubljanka, Butirka, Lefortovo... We were told that they were far outside of Moscow. One day the embassy advised us to contact the President of the International Red Cross and get our airline tickets through him. We took a taxi and went. The place was packed with people waiting to see the president. An older man approached us and told us that he was Spanish, a participant of the Spanish Civil War. "Are you Greeks?" he asked. "No," I said "we are fighters from the Greek Civil War, so we share a similar fate." "Were you in Tashkent?" he was interested to know. "No, we were in Kazakhstan, in Alma Ata!" I said. "We, the fighters from the Spanish Civil War, were located in a camp in the Ukraine but now we are returning to Spain or to France. These 18-20 year old young men that you see over there were born here but want to go to Spain even though they don't know anything about Spain; only what they heard from their relatives. They don't want to stay here. You can see how impatient they are waiting for the President to see them!" he said while pointing at the large number of people waiting.

"We want to return to Yugoslavia, to Macedonia. We are Macedonians!" I said. "You know," the Spaniard said, "when we came here we were divided into Spanish communists and Spanish fascists. Now we are all returning home as Spaniards." When they saw the situation I was in, pregnant and all, they let me skip to the front of the line to see the President. I walked in and introduced myself to the President. I told the man that I needed airline tickets to Belgrade, Yugoslavia for me and for my husband because there was no other way to get there. He said: "I can't get you tickets!" I got upset and started yelling. Mincho heard me and ran inside. I told the President that Mincho was my husband and I kept yelling at him. I said: "You take us back the way you brought us here, we need help to return. We did not come here willingly and at our own expense! You put us in this situation! I am not getting up from this chair until I get two tickets to Belgrade!" I was persistent and kept shouting. Mincho also stepped in and explained to the man that he needed to help us, pointing out that I was pregnant and late in my pregnancy.

The International Red Cross President in Moscow got on the telephone and spoke to someone. He then called in one of his clerks

and told him to provide us with two airline tickets to Belgrade. The clerk was back in minutes with two tickets. He told the President that he had bumped two Syrians off their flight and took their tickets. The Syrians were headed for Damascus via Belgrade before their tickets were taken from them. "We will give them new tickets soon," they assured us. We thanked the president and apologized for my outbursts and for our perseverance but it was necessary to get things moving; especially for me in my condition. We said farewell and he wished us a good trip. Back in the hallway we thanked the young Spaniards for letting us go to the front of the line. We said goodbye to them and the old Spaniard. They all wished us a safe trip home since we were all in the same predicament.

New problem: I almost gave birth in Moscow

We returned to the hotel happy. I was very tired. I lay down to rest a bit and suddenly my water broke. Mincho immediately called an ambulance, which arrived promptly. The paramedics examined me and said they needed to take me to a hospital because the child was about to be born and I was in a critical condition with the birth. Mincho contacted the embassy and they told him that we needed to leave immediately because if the child was born in Moscow it would be considered a Russian citizen and that would create serious problems for us. There were many such cases where the parents couldn't take their child with them.

On the way to the airport we passed by the embassy and said our goodbyes. I asked a Russian woman, a friend who worked there, to pick up my photographs that we had just dropped off to be developed and send them to us in Macedonia. She did. After that we left for the airport. Earlier I had told the paramedics that we had a plane to catch and that we were on our way to Vnukovo airport to fly to Belgrade. That was on August 24, 1956. We got to the airport by taxi and waited for our plane to Belgrade. I sat on a chair while Mincho paced back and forth nervously, anxiously waiting for the plane to arrive. At one point Mincho said: "Vera, stand up Lazo is here." I thought he was talking about Lazar Poplazarov from Alma Ata and others, so I stayed put sitting on the chair. Mincho then said that it was Lazar Kolishevski. I was barely able to stand up. Mincho went to greet Kolishevski and Kolishevski asked him: "Where is Vera?" I managed to take a few steps and I too went to greet him. In the meantime Liupco Arsov had just arrived with a delegation from Belgrade. Lazo told us that he was going back home and introduced us to a Russian who was part of his entourage. Lazo told the Russian: "These people here are also Macedonians going back to Yugoslavia." While greeting the Russian I recognized him and said: "We know each other from Albania don't we? You are Petrov." He was stunned. I said: "Thank you for keeping us alive. You saved us from being executed in Bureli in 1949." After that we boarded the same plane from which Liupco Arsov had arrived with the trade delegation and on which Kolishevski was returning to Yugoslavia on his way back from vacation in Sochi.

From the airplane to the maternity hospital in Savki Venats

In those days the flights from Moscow-Budapest-Belgrade took nine hours. I somehow got on the plane, barely being able to stand on my feet. The flight attendant helped me get to my seat. I found the take off and the vibrations on the plane difficult. The pilot warned us that there was going to be turbulence because it was very windy. Mincho kept encouraging me to hold on. But I must admit I was lucky, because of the bad weather the plane could not land in Budapest. I was unconscious when we arrived in Belgrade on August 25, 1956. Had we landed in Budapest I don't know what kind of trouble I would have been in but one good thing about Budapest at that time was that I could have attended the famous October events.

As soon as we landed an ambulance took me from the aircraft straight to the Savski Venats hospital in Belgrade. I was received by Ludich, the head of maternity and he personally helped me give birth because there was no time to look for other doctors. He lifted my child in his hands and said: "Russian or Greek, whatever you are, your child is healthy." I told him that I was neither Russian nor Greek; I was Macedonian and wanted to give birth to my baby in Skopje. I am sure Lukich had been informed of my arrival to the hospital by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is why he admitted me in person and performed the procedure himself. Lukich asked me what the name of the baby was so that he could register him. I said: "Baby." He then told me that my boy weighed only 3.5 kilograms and was 52 centimeters long, but his birth may have affected my health. I began to cry and the doctor said: "Hey Russian, don't worry he will grow up to be a big man and both of you will be under my care."

Mincho was waiting out in the lobby. They told him that he had a son, the baby was in good condition, but his birth may have affected the health of the mother. They moved me to the fourth floor. I was alone in the room. After a while they brought my child for me to see. I was having a difficult time all alone. I felt anxiety and flashbacks to my days in the prison cells. From time to time the cleaning lady came in and consoled me telling me: "Don't fret, everything will be fine. This Macedonian will become a great man." But I was so out of it that I was still not aware of exactly what was happening to me. Mincho sent a telegram to Skopje telling our relatives that I was in the hospital and had given birth to a baby boy. Two days later my mother, along with Olga Peiova Angelkova my cousin Petre's second wife and Mincho's younger brother Alki, arrived in Belgrade. I saw my mother from my window above. She could not believe that I was there and that we had arrived. To her this all seemed like a dream. Olga was a midwife. She

took a white coat from the nurses and came upstairs to my room to see me and my child in order to convince my mother that it was really me and that I was alive after all these years.

The next days all the visitors from Skopje left. Mincho booked himself into a hotel, thinking that the hospital would be discharging me in a couple of days and we could leave for Skopje together. But my health situation did not improve and the doctor did not want to discharge me. I told Mincho to leave and go to our people in Skopje. Fifteen days later my condition had still not improved. I was not aware that having a high temperature while giving birth was dangerous. My temperature had climbed to 40 degrees. The staff looked after my son while I lay in bed. My temperature persisted and would not go down despite the medications that they gave me. Twice a day they brought my baby so that I could see him.

Disappointed, one day I asked the cleaning lady to bring me some paper and a pencil. I wrote a telegram to my relatives in Skopje in which I said: "Come and take the child because I find myself in a critical situation." All the hospital workers consoled me saying: "Don't worry, it will pass. You're in good hands here and your child will become a strong man. Don't just look at your current condition." Twice a day I visited with my son. While they comforted me, I thought to myself: "Oh my brothers and sisters if you only knew the conditions and torture I have survived until I got here, of course I will be fine. There is nothing better for me than to make my mother happy by giving her a grandchild..."

My family in Skopje received my telegram exactly at the time that they were having their lunch. The same day Olympia (Mincho's oldest sister who was also Paskal Mitrevski's wife, with whom we were together, but she had returned earlier and knew our situation), left Skopje and arrived in Belgrade the following morning. Using a white coat she borrowed from the nurses she came to visit me in the hospital. She saw the situation I was in and examined the baby and said: "I know people here and I will stay for a couple of days. Don't tell the administrator that you have a high temperature. When they give you a thermometer to take your temperature, try and keep it away from your body and tell them you are feeling better and I will take you back to Skopje."

I did what Olympia told me. Two days later they discharged both of us, me and my baby. They gave me medications and some artificial milk for my baby and after we had said our goodbyes to Lukich and the hospital staff, we left. Olympia got us train tickets and we were on our way to Skopje. The train from Belgrade was crowded and more people climbed on board at each station. Many were moving to Turkey. We

had secured a cabin but when the conductor came and witnessed the misery that we were in he took us to his carriage where it was more comfortable. The conductor was a Macedonian from Gevgelija. We later became friends and had him to our place in Skopje as our guest many times. We always looked forward to our visits with him; we wanted to repay him for his kindness and the respect that he gave us during the trip from Belgrade.

We were finally in Skopje

We arrived in Skopje during the night. Waiting at the railway station were my mother, Mincho, my cousin Petre, Mincho's younger sister Marika and her husband Vasko Makrievski; our comrade from the anti-fascist war. They were so impatient they could not wait for us to get off the train so they took me and the child out through the train car window. Petre and Vasko were both tall men and grabbed me by the underarms and yanked me out of the window. Olimpia handed my baby to my mother. After greeting everyone, I braced myself against Mincho and we both followed Petre to his mother's place on "Ilinden" Street. Waiting there for us were Petre's wife and the two daughters Vasilka and Dochka. The apartments in that building no longer exist, for a while the building was used to house the CPM Central Committee. It now houses the Government of Macedonia. The apartment had only one bedroom. They put me, my mother and the baby in the bedroom while Mincho went to stay with his sister. By now my temperature had risen even higher. Olga took care of my child because she was a midwife and knew what to do; she worked at the City Hospital.

The next day more of our relatives and friends came to visit me, telling my mother: "Kolevitse, you sent away one but now three came back." My mother did not know what to do with me. Petre broke the thermometer, saying that "this is no good" we need to get a real thermometer. But in reality he broke it to elevate my mother's worrying. As luck would have it however, a few days later my countryman and co-fighter Antonie Shkoklev and his wife Dara came to visit us. Dara worked as an administrator at the gynecological hospital in Skopje where Olga worked. When Dara saw the condition I was in, she yelled at everyone there: "Can't you see the woman is sick! Get her ready I am taking her with me to the hospital. You will kill her here."

Dara put me in a separate room in the hospital and told the nurses: "You will continue to administer injections of penicillin and streptomycin and you will care for the child!" There were other people working there as nurses and midwives besides Olga whom I knew. I also knew Ristana Liochkova and Sultana. I remained in the hospital, under the care of gynecologist Dr. Dara Shkokleva, until early December. By then I had somewhat recovered but I continued to take the prescribed medications. In the meantime my mother, Olga, Vasilka and Dochka looked after my baby. At the time we called Vasilka and Dochka "the little mothers". They are now grandmothers with their own grandchildren. So even though I was now free, my life somehow

continued to be a torture. But at the same time I can't forget the good people who, at their own expense, helped me in a time of need. Among the many, I want to mention a few. Before going to the hospital my aunt, Lefteria Purovska who had a short time earlier given birth to her daughter Zoritsa, often came over to breastfeed my baby. Zoritsa is now a famous ballerina. Also many thanks to Dara Shkokleva for helping me recover. Dara later moved with her husband to Belgrade. Antonie worked at the VMA under the rank of General and was first in Yugoslavia to accept Chinese acupuncture as a treatment for various ailments.

Care and support from Lazar Kolishevski

Mincho and I knew President Lazar Kolishevski very well. We had known him even before the Greek Civil War had started. He was very familiar with NOF and AFZH and the suffering we had experienced. Mincho and I even had personal contact with him when Yugoslavia was helping our movement. Besides all that, I think our journey from Moscow to Belgrade left a distinct impression on him that he could not forget, especially my situation. In early December 1956, a person from Lazar Kolishevski's cabinet came to our home and invited us to go and see Kolishevski. Mincho and I accepted the invitation. Lazo received us as if we were old acquaintances and asked us how and where we were located. He was well acquainted with our situation. Among other things, during our discussions he said: "We were concerned about you. We couldn't find you anywhere. We asked many of your friends but they too did not know where you were all this time. About you Vera, they told us that you were in China."

I told him: "At one point I was going to go to China at the invitation of the Chinese delegation of women who attended the Second Congress of Peace, held in April 1949 in Prague (as well as in Paris and Tokyo). I couldn't go to Paris because the French authorities did not want to issue us visas. But while the Congress was taking place, Shanghai was liberated from Chiang kai-shek. The Chinese women were so happy that they invited me and Rula Kikulu (Zahariadis's consort) to attend their women's Congress in China. But after what had happened here, I was not at liberty to go anywhere, let alone to China. I don't know if Rula went or not, that is why some people got the impression that I was in China." Lazo then addressed Mincho and said: "There is a two year 'legal administrator's' course opening up that I think you should take. You will receive a scholarship if you take it." Then he turned to me and said: "You, Vera, when you feel able and can work, we will employ you as a clerk at the 'Ilinden pensions office', there is an opening at Vene Georgievski's. If you have questions both of you can contact Vasil Giorgov the Secretary of the Executive Council and get answers and financial assistance.

At that time Vasil Giorgov was President of the Commission for accepting Aegean Macedonians coming from Eastern European countries who wanted to settle in Yugoslavia and who were not allowed to return to Greece. Bulgaria, through its embassies, also offered the expelled Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia sanctuary in Bulgaria provided that they declare themselves Bulgarians. Some Macedonians who had relatives in Bulgaria went to live there. It is important at this point to mention that some people who worked against NOF and AFZH

also went to Bulgaria and were later spreading anti-Yugoslav Bulgarian propaganda among the Macedonians living there. In Skopje, a Special Service was established to take care of technical questions arising from the Aegean Macedonians. Responsible for the Special Service was Blagoi Daskalov, who took care of financial aid, housing and other needs that arose after their arrival.

“About your accommodation and your personal housing issues, you will be looked after by Comrade Ivan Krstevski, responsible for the technical services of the Executive Council. A new building is now being built which will solve the housing crisis in which you will get to pick your own apartment. I understand,” continued Comrade Lazar Kolishevski, “that you lost many years of your lives, but now we need you to focus on the political and civil life of our lives and look beyond our differences. As you know we have formed a committee to address the issues of the Aegean Macedonians. We have made large sums of money available to fund housing projects but the people are fractured into two factions. I reminded those responsible that if this continues I will have no choice but to expel them all,” concluded Lazar.

Lazar Kolishevski’s advice was very helpful in the furthering of our work. Indeed both factions approached us and attacked one another. Each told the truth differently but there was only one truth. Those who had deserted from DAG and NOF, who fled the war and left the people at the mercy of the enemy, in our absence, were promoting (oral and written) untruths about us which caused much trouble for us. Even when they were in Aegean Macedonia in the CPG, NOF, AFZH, and NOMS they always served with intrigue. And as such they twisted the truth about DAG and NOF 180 degrees, thinking that the true and reliable officers would never return alive. So we used every opportunity to correct those lies and the slanders propagated by these people. We even reacted in the media. That is why everything that was written after our arrival had to be verified by science before it was published. That is why that Board had to be dismantled. Anyone can say whatever they want about Lazar, but Lazar Kolishevski remained a true Macedonian to the end. I had the honour, in the last days of his life, to speak to him at his request after my withdrawal from a television discussion regarding the problems of the Aegean Macedonians and of Aegean Macedonia.

Mincho and I by nature are polite and honest people. This is how we were during the struggle, when we were detained, in the prisons and in the camps. We remained far from foreign influences. We always told the truth. We remained true to the Macedonian Organizations, to NOF and to the Aegean Macedonians. We opposed all those who rushed to justify their own sins against our struggle with various simulations,

intrigues and defections. We became thorns in the eyes of those who deserted in various ways and rushed here to care only for themselves and their own families, leaving our people stranded and at the mercy of the enemy. Mincho thoughtfully made those points clear to everyone.

Mincho took Kolishevski's advice and enrolled in the administrative law school. Having successfully completed the two year course he was employed as a senior officer in the Secretariat General Administration in the Executive Council, then as an advisor in the Ministry of Justice, from where he retired. We got our apartment during the first half of December 1956. It was located at 34 "Hristo Botev" Street near the old railway station. Now the street is called "Mito-Jasmine" and our apartment is br.6/III-2. Our child at the time was three months old. My mother Nevena came to live with us. She was very helpful at home and pleased to be with us. For the first month we slept on the floor with our child. We had to start from scratch but by working hard and savings we managed to scratch out a decent life.

In February 1957 I got a job at the Executive Council of Macedonia as an officer of the Ilinden pensions. At that time there were approximately 3,000 retirees in the Republic of Macedonia. The Ilinden pensions were about two to three thousand dinars. Each Ilinden pensioner was also entitled an additional 4,000 dinars per year as vacation pay. Among the Ilinden pensioners were Shakir Voivoda from Prilep and Rosa Plaveva, a socialist's wife from Veles. Their pensions were far from being any compensation for their Ilinden merits. They were more symbolic than anything else. Being recognized as participants of the 1903 Ilinden Uprising was worth more to them than the compensation that they received. I later switched jobs and went to work as a senior officer for the Bureau of complaints and grievances in the Executive Council, from which I retired.

A decade from making a promise to actually being married

When we came to Skopje we received citizenship identity cards. Now my first child was already three years old and a second one was on its way and still Mincho and I were not officially registered as married. We needed to become legally married so that our children would not be illegitimate. One Sunday in 1959 we found ourselves in the Skopje Civil Service office. The date of our marriage registration was witnessed by President Dushan Dimov and Secretary Velko Ilievski, secretary of the Kale municipality. Our marriage was witnessed by Tomo Changov, a friend of Mincho's from his native town Rupishta and his sister Marika's husband, Vasko Makrievski.

The home office of the municipality Kale submitted a request to the appropriate service in the Belgrade municipality Savski Venats, where our son was born on August 25, 1956, to record his name. We named him Lazar Fotev after Mincho's father, an Aegean custom. When our second son was born on May 1, 1959 we named him Nikola after my father. From a promise made during the struggle, with a promise kept during our time in custody, in the prisons and in the camps, a decade later we finally formalized our marriage. Our "wedding" was long, joyful and sad but we always lived for each other, one for the other and as such resisted much torture and isolation. With those promises we lived a modest but honest life.

Our home – An open door for everyone

Since the normalization of relations between Yugoslavia and the other Eastern European countries, Macedonians began to return to Macedonia en masse. Many came with unregistered marriages and young children, but after receiving their citizenship they were registered. During those years many families, Macedonian and Greek and mixed marriages, visited us and stayed at our house until they were placed in shelters or in apartments in Skopje and elsewhere.

General Markos came to see us and stayed with us in our apartment on two separate occasions. We were visited by General Georgios Kikitsas, Himaros and other senior officials from the anti-fascist struggle and from the Greek Civil War. We were visited by the colonels Ilias Papadimitriou-Liakos, Ahilaes Papaioanou, Gianis Patsuras, Alekos Papamadiotou, Thanasis Hadzis, Renos Mihaleas and others. Greeks from Eastern European countries came here to visit with their relatives from Greece. After that many moved to Greece. Among those who did was Deftheris Katsakos, a CPG official. This was in accordance with the 1982 law of repatriation enacted by Andreas Papandreou which called for the return of: “Greeks by birth!” Which meant that we Macedonians were excluded! There were no visas for us to enter Greece, not even to light a candle at the graves of our dead.

General Markos Vafiadis visited us at our home in 1978 and in 1981. He wrote some good things about my village D'mbeni and about some of our heroes. His handwritten statements in the Greek language were published in 1996 in the monograph “Kosturskoto Selo D'mbeni” by Lazar Popianev. Before moving to Greece, Ahileas Papaioanou gave us a handwritten manuscript of the history of his village Kalevishta (monograph written from 1963 to 1970). Alekos Papanaiotou, a historian at the Institute of National History of Macedonia, before moving to Solun with the family, gave us a manuscript entitled “Za udarot od grb” in which he wrote about Zahariadis's accusations of Yugoslavia and Tito. Many of our friends, including my husband, left this world in pain. They left this world without having had the opportunity to visit their birthplace. That injustice has lasted and still exists to this day even after Greece became a member of the EU.

For me it took 54 years before I was allowed to go back. On July 17, 2003 I, along with my two sons Lazar and Nikola, took a trip back to my birthplace and visited the remnants of my house in D'mbeni, burned to the ground in 1948. In fact the entire village D'mbeni was burned to the ground in 1948. We visited Rupishta, my dead husband's birthplace. The town is now settled by the newcomer settlers. We visited the places where Mincho and I had fought before we were

detained, as well as the place where the Second NOF Congress was held in March 1949. During our visit we filmed all these places including the bridge between the two Prespa Lakes.

On August 20th, 2003 the Greek state allowed us to go back with the refugee children, evacuated during the Greek Civil War in 1948, and visit several cities including Kostur, Lerin, Voden, Sorovich and the legendary Mount Vicho where we fought heavy battles against the Germans and against the Monarcho-Fascist hordes. We also visited many of the destroyed Macedonian villages left with almost no inhabitants. My visit to Lerin, Kostur and Voden seemed to me like it was part of my long wedding. I was reminded of many things and I remembered many things as if they had taken place yesterday; not more than half a century ago.

My husband Mincho and I became truly active in the overall life of the Republic of Macedonia as Lazar Kolishevski had advised us (which I will discuss in my autobiographical notes). The folk singing group, the “Kosturchanki”, sent me back to my youth in D’mbeni and Kostur. They truly portrayed our life in D’mbeni and our tragic “Aegean wedding” on stage. The monograph “Kosturchanki” was written by Dr. Stoian Risteski in 1988. In the picture “kosturchanki” (not included in the translated version of this book) are the singers: Kola, Vera, Lena, Vasilka, Hrisa, Boda, Mita, Tsana and Marika. They all contributed a great deal to safeguard our folklore. In October 2003 the Faculty of Music, led by composer Buzarovski, promoted the latest video tape made by the group “Kosturchanki.”

During the Metaxas dictatorship, Renos Mihaleas, a Greek native of Peloponnesus, was repeatedly imprisoned, but during the Fascist (German, Italian and Bulgarian) occupations he was released. Upon his release he immediately joined the antifascist struggle in Greece which lasted from 1941 to 1944. During that time he was political commissar of the 9th ELAS Division and in his capacity was present during the formation of the first Macedonian Battalion on August 2nd, 1944. He was in total agreement and advocated for the realization of the rights for the Macedonian people in Greece in accordance with the Tehran Charter and because of that he came into conflict with the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece.

In 1945, with the arrival of Zahariadis in Greece, Renos fell into disfavour. During the Greek Civil War he was declared insane because of his beliefs and was interned in the city Kluz in northern Romania. By Cominform resolution many Greeks and Macedonians who disagreed with Zahariadis’s views were interned in this city. Included among them were Done Sikavitsa (NOF representative in charge of the care of children in homes in Eastern European countries, who together

with Petros Kokalis Minister of Education of the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece were in charge of the children's homes), his wife Milka Dzhabazova (teacher and educator in the Macedonian language), Kula Karandzhova (teacher in the children's camp in Tulkez, Romania), Foti Ilkovski (head of the NOF cultural and educational group), Alekso Dukovski and Risto Poptraianov (in charge of children's literature and books in Bucharest) and many other Greek and Macedonian Party undesirables. These people were not allowed to leave Kluz.

During the same period similar camps for CPG undesirables, or for people who Zahariadis personally disliked, also existed in Poland. Among the people interned there were Urania Rakovska (Pavle Rakovski's wife who was later imprisoned in the USSR with her young daughter), Petre Asprovski, Tane Naumov, German Damovski Stariot, Kosta Kirkov and other NOF leaders. Such camps also existed in Czechoslovakia. At the end Zahariadis started a "pogrom" (an internal conflict between his supporters and those of Markos) in Tashkent, pitting Partisan against Partisan until eventually the Soviet authorities interned him. Zahariadis was interned in Borovitsa from 1956 to June 1962, after that in Surgut-Tjumen until August 1, 1973 when he could no longer stand the isolation and took his own life. In 1991 a booklet was published about Zahariadis in Athens entitled "Osnovach i Zhrtva" (Founder and sacrifice).

Renos Mihaleas returned to Athens where he published his own newspaper. He adopted the son of a friend who had died and took care of his upbringing. He was invited to a symposium at the Institute for National History of Macedonia in Skopje during which time he donated this photograph to be remembered (photo not shown). After that he returned to Skopje several times, traveling back to France where he owned a shop.

We were rehabilitated while Zahariadis punished himself

We were arrested, tortured and tormented in the jails, concentration camps and in exile. As leaders of NOF and of the Aegean Macedonian people we were loyal fighters and responsible for the massive participation of the Macedonian people in our struggle for freedom and democracy in Greece. Our only crime was that we had survived the conflict and remained alive; waving the battle flag to the end. This, our noble CPG membership and our esteemed leader Zahariadis, knew only too well. But the CPG and Zahariadis, it seems, served different masters without knowing that they too were expendable. Our truth was publicly acknowledged by the CPG in 1956. The CPG Central Committee rehabilitated us as Macedonian Democrats and as Anti-Fascists, who together with the Greek people fought for freedom and democratic rights in Greece and for National and Social freedom for the Macedonians in Greece.

Nikos Zahariadis survived to be excluded from the CPG and to be interned. When we were being rehabilitated, he, in 1956, as CPG General Secretary submitted an application to the CPG Central Committee to be re-admitted into the Party as an ordinary member. The answer that he received was that it was not possible to re-admit him, not even as an ordinary member because even as an ordinary member he would be harmful to the Party. Zahariadis was at Borovitsa until the end of 1956. In June 1962 he was sent to Surgut-Jumen in the USSR. Unable to withstand the treatment that he was getting from his party, on August 1, 1973 he hung himself by placing a rope around his neck. His end speaks best about the kind of inhuman person he was. More information about his suicide can be found in the book "Osnovach i Zhrtva" (Founder and sacrifice) published in Greece in 1991.

Well this is the truth, now out in the open, about us who were arrested and expelled from our birthplace. But unfortunately knowing the truth will not return us to our homes and reverse our dark fate as Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia, nor will it recover the best years of our lives that we lost! However moral satisfaction means a great deal to us, especially for our current and future generations.

Autobiographical notes

My name is Evdokia, but according to my hometown tradition, the people who know me affectionately call me Kicha. I was born on Ilinden, August 2nd, 1926 in the village D'mbeni, Kostur Region. My parents were Nikola Balev and Nevena Mangova. Both of my parent's families came from a revolutionary tradition. I don't remember my father well because he left for Canada, as a pechalbar (migrant worker), when I was barely three years old. My mother took care of me when I was young. I have no brothers or sisters, I am an only child.

I finished primary school in my native village D'mbeni. I had a wish to further my education, a desire which prompted my mother to suggest it to my father. To accomplish my goal I received help from my teacher Lazaros Hazizisis. I was an excellent student and he was a man of forward ideas. He was from the village Loshnitsa, Kostur Region. After passing the entrance exams, I was enrolled in the first year of high school in Kostur. But it did not take too long before I was made fun of by the teachers and especially by the students from the city. It was very rare for a female child from a village to attend secondary school, especially from a revolutionary village like D'mbeni. When they asked me what I was, I used to say that I was a "selanka" (a peasant girl). "If you are a 'selanka' then what are you doing here?" was the typical question I was asked. Then I would say: "I am here to learn!" When I began to surpass the rich girls from the city, academically, some befriended me but they never allowed me to forget that I was a "peasant girl." Like the bear who was never allowed to forget the pain from the burning coal.

I lived in Kostur with my relatives. My mother, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday came to market to sell firewood in order to support me. During her visits she always brought me and our relatives food from the village. This is how the children from the villages studying there were supported.

Experiencing insults in high school in Kostur became a regular daily affair for me so one day it occurred to me what the old D'mbeni Communists Staso Karadzha, Kolio Karadzha, Malbro Moskov and others had told us back in 1932-1935 when they, together with the women Communists Dana Karadzhova, Mara Karadzhova, Dana Stavkova and Baba Rina Kenkova, went from house to house and spoke about the injustices that existed from exploitation. Connected with this group also were women whose husbands worked in America, Canada and Australia, like my mother Nevena and others. They told us about the Revolution that had taken place in Russia and how the Russian people had achieved their freedom from exploitation. At the

time all of this seemed like a nice story to me. During the religious holidays I would go back to D'mbeni and notice the anti-regime mood of the people become stronger and stronger despite the Metaxas dictatorship crackdowns. D'mbeni, because of its past revolutionary activities, was carefully watched by the Greek government. It always had a police station supporting 10 to 15 policemen. In 1939, on Easter day, I was with my friends in the village square singing Macedonian songs. When the police heard us sing they began shooting above our heads to intimidate us. After that they gave us hefty fines.

After the Italian-Greek war broke out and after the Front was established in 1940-1941, education was interrupted. The Italians were bombing the entire territory and it was too dangerous to be outdoors. The first casualties in D'mbeni were Sulta Mutkova and Mara Liochkova, both killed, and Dana Karadzhova wounded. Many houses were destroyed. Besides the police, two army detachments were also stationed in D'mbeni.

As a sympathizer of the Progressive Movement in Greece, in the summer of 1940 I became a member of the Communist Youth of Greece (OKNE). Other members belonging to this Organization included Liubitsa Popianova, Donka Kenkova and Evdokia Karadzhova. My bid to join OKNE was supported by my neighbour Panaiot Karadzhov. I was deployed in the propaganda agitation sector. Secretary of the OKNE cell was Olimpia Popianova, who in 1939 completed a domestic course in Lerin.

Although I have written much about NOF in the main text and some in the autobiographical notes, there is still more to discuss. NOF in its development went through various periods and passed through three stages; the illegal stage, recognition by the CPG stage and the demobilization stage.

NOF was established on April 23rd, 1945 as an illegal and independent entity. At the time it managed to win over the masses but mostly in remote places. NOF's activities were carried out in the spirit of the progressive forces in Greece. For precisely that reason General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis recognized NOF at the CPG Plenum and at the Bureau for Macedonia and Thrace, held on December 26, 1945 in Solun, at which point the democratic and anti-fascist forces expressed readiness for cooperation with NOF.

NOF's recognition by the CPG and Nikos Zahariadis was repeated in a July 15, 1946 speech Zahariadis gave at a rally in Solun. NOF was viewed as a democratic and anti-fascist organization. When the CPG called for boycotting the March 31st, 1946 Parliamentary elections, NOF endorsed its position and in some places managed to boycott 100% of the voting. March 31st, 1946 was also the date when fighting

was renewed in Greece, which prompted the start of the Greek Civil War. On this day ELAS commander Aleksos Rusos-Ipdzilandis attacked and destroyed the gendarme station in the village Lithohori in Olympus. On October 28, 1946 DAG General Headquarters was established and came under General Markos's command. NOF unified all DAG staff from Gramos, Vicho, Kajmakchalan and Paiak Mountain.

NOF's influence and ability to get results began to be viewed as "interfering in the affairs of the CPG", in other words in Zahariadis's affairs, so he began a campaign to dismantle NOF from the inside. On May 20, 1947 Giorgos Eritrijadis-Petris, member of the Macedonian Bureau for Macedonia and Thrace, through Mihailo Keramitdzhev, member of the NOF Board, began to unravel NOF, exploiting Secretary Paskal Mitrevski's absence. Mitrevski at the time had been supposedly sent to Solun to negotiate with the CPG but instead he had been placed under house arrest. Dzhordzo Urdov at the time was the representative of NOF at DAG Main Headquarters.

A NOF meeting was held at the "Mishova Koliba" locality in Kajmakchalan where, through internal spies, despite our opposition, NOF was reorganized by the "coordination bureau." With that NOF lost its identity. NOMS too was dismantled and its members were sent to DAG. The only independent organization that remained the same was AFZH.

NOF gained its identity during its First Congress on January 13, 1948. The Congress passed resolutions giving NOF status and a program and chose its new leadership consisting of 35 member and 15 deputy member candidates. Shortly after NOF's Second Congress, which took place on March 25th, 1949 in the village Nivitsi near Lake Prespa, the great struggles for Vicho and Gramos began, resulting in DAG's capitulation and the exodus to Albania. It was definitively a calculated measure on the part of the CPG Central Committee and Zahariadis to blame NOF and its leadership for DAG's failure and to label the NOF leadership "agents" of Tito and Yugoslavia.

After our arrest NOF practically ceased to exist. The entire Organization was sent into exile but in 1951 it was renamed to "Ilinden." The following people were appointed leaders of Ilinden under Nikos Zahariadis's personal initiative; Pando Vaina, Stavro Kochev and others. These "internal enemies" went to Bulgaria and completely ended NOF's i.e. "Ilinden's" activities.

When I wrote these lines I had different thoughts. Why, despite our great ability, did we suffer in Macedonia? Because we allowed "strangers and foreigners" to manipulate us? It will always be like this

until we start learning from our mistakes. We will always be like this until we learn to put national issues ahead of personal feelings.

For my merits in the Anti-Fascist and the Greek Civil War I have been awarded the following decorations:

1. Medal for bravery
2. Medal for brotherhood and unity with a silver wreath
3. Medal for merit for people with silver rays
4. Plaque of the Alliance of fighters in Yugoslavia
5. Jubilee Medal from the Russian Federation, marking the 50th anniversary of Victory over Fascism, 1945-1995
6. Order, 50 years of DAG, 1946-1996
7. Medal, NOF, 1941-1949

I have also received numerous awards, praises, plaques, certificates and acknowledgments from the Martial Associations and other social, cultural and educational organizations and associations.

About the Author

Evdokia Foteva - Vera was born on August 2nd, 1926 (Ilinden) in the village Dmbeni, Kostur Region, to a family with a revolutionary tradition. Vera completed her primary education in her native village so that after that she could attend high school in Kostur. Unfortunately because of the break-out of the Greek-Italian war her education was interrupted and she became actively involved in the resistance movement. She participated in the Anti-Fascist war (WWII) and in the Greek Civil War, during which she occupied prominent leadership positions in the organizations OKNE (Communist Youth Organization in Greece), NOF (National Liberation Front), AFZH (Women's Anti-Fascist Front), etc. After DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) was defeated in 1949, she, along with a dozen in the top Macedonian leadership, was blamed for "losing" the war and since then began her agony and ordeal on which the main subject of this book is based. Her "episode" in the Soviet Union ended in the summer of 1956, after which she moved and since then has lived in Macedonia. For her merits in the Anti-Fascist and the Greek Civil War she was decorated with a number of awards, accolades and praises, plaques, certificates and acknowledgments from military associations and other social, cultural and educational organizations and associations.

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There are many other source materials that have information about Evdokia Baleva Nikolovska-Vera Foteva including books, magazines and daily newspapers. Vera has also been recorded in several documentary films and has been interviewed by both Macedonian and foreign broadcasters.

Acronyms used

ASNOM – Anti-Fascist Assembly of National Liberation of Macedonia
BRP(k) – Communist Party of Bulgaria
CPG - Communist Party of Greece
CPM - Communist Party of Macedonia
CPY - Communist Party of Yugoslavia
CVG - Greek Civil War
DAG – Democratic Army of Greece
EAM – National Liberation Front
ELAS – National Liberation Army of Greece
EON – National Youth Organization
EPON – All Greek National Youth Organization
KOEM – Communist Organization of Aegean Macedonia
NKVD – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NOBG - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Greece
NOBM - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Macedonia
NOF - Peoples’ Liberation Front
NOMS - Peoples’ Liberation Youth Organization
OKNE - Communist Youth Organization of Greece
ONOO – Local People’s Liberation Council
OZNA – People’s Defense Division –
PDEG – Pan-Greek Democratic Union of Women
PDOG – International Federation of Democratic Women
POJ - Partisan Units of Yugoslavia
SNOF - Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front
SKP(b) – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
USSR – United Soviet Socialist Republics
WFZH - Women’s Anti-Fascist Front