

*Analysis of historical  
events in Greek  
occupied Macedonia*



**An interview with Risto Stefov**

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INTERVIEWER – Risto, I found your name on the internet and want to ask you a few questions about Macedonia. In the past we have heard much about the Macedonians from various sources, the majority of which were non-Macedonian. You are among the first Macedonians on the internet to have contributed to the Macedonian point of view and to Macedonian history. What can you tell us about that?

RISTO – Macedonian history begins in prehistoric times but the Modern Macedonian nation's unique history begins after the invention, if I can call it that, of nationalism and accelerates during the breakup of the Ottoman Empire in the early 1800's.

The people that existed in the Balkan Region before the invention of nationalism cannot be called "nations", something that was not yet invented.

Before these modern nations were created, by the nation building process, and before borders were placed around them, all the people in the Balkans lived together within the confines of one large borderless region.

As history tells us, the people in this large Balkan region began to openly and freely live together after Philip II, a Macedonian king (338 BC), opened the frontiers and united them under his kingdom which at the time extended from the Adriatic Sea in the west to the Black Sea in the east.

This frontier remained open from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. In other words, all through the Macedonian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and the Ottoman Empire until the European Great Powers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century decided break up the Ottoman Empire and replace it with smaller nation states each with their own unique people and borders.

The concept of "nationalism" and "nations" at the time was not known, was alien, to the people of the Balkans inside the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

Nationalism was introduced to these people by the European Western Powers, brought to them from the outside.

In addition to having lived together without borders for over 2,300 years, the Christian people of the Balkans, for over 1,800 years, shared a common religion which served as a unifying force and kept them together.

The Ottoman Empire of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious pluralistic society, but outside of language and some folk traditions there was not much in the Balkans to distinguish one people from another.

Unfortunately the real aim of the European Great Powers was not to free the Christian people in the Balkans but to get rid of the ailing Ottoman Empire and replace it with smaller and more manageable “nation states”. In retrospect, freeing the Christians was a side effect of that aim.

To the Western European Great Powers it didn't matter what kind of “nation states” they were creating as long as they were “non-Slav speaking” homogeneous societies which would agree to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean waters.

And while the Western European Great Powers were trying to break up the Ottoman Empire into smaller and divergent states, Russia, another European Great Power, was attempting unite all the Slav speakers in the Balkans under a Russian leadership.

The national awakening of Serbia, due to neighbouring Austro-Hungarian influence, was an accident that couldn't be helped. But Greece, on the other hand, was purposely created by design. Greece was created to be the opposite of Serbia and a solution to keeping the balance of power in the Balkans. While Serbia was destined to become a Slav State, Greece would be destined to become the “opposite”.

The Western European Great Powers chose the name “Greece” and “Greeks” for the new state because it was a Latin name denoting a

“Latin” lineage which was to represent the Latin “Romaos” (Roman) character of the people.

[According to Strabo, the Phoenicians of Halkidiki were the first colonists of Eubeia who, in “Kampania” on the west coast of Italy, founded the cities “Kim”, in 757 BC and “Region”, about 730-720 BC. This was the oldest colony in that region. There, the Phoenicians made contact with the neighbouring Latin “Etrurci” and passed on to them their culture, their Phoenician alphabet and their myths. A few years later, around 600 BC, they founded the city Naples, and in Sicily they founded the cities “Mesena”, “Katana” (730 BC) and “Naks”. The Latins called the new colonists “Graios” in accordance with their origin, the land of the “Greia” (Graias), today’s “Orop”, a boundary located between Boeotia and Attica, at the mouth of the river Asop.] (Page 83, Antonije Shkokljev, “Prehistory - Central Balkans Cradle of Aegean culture”)

The name “Hellas” and “Hellenes” was later discovered by German historians. This was a more suitable, realistic and unique name for the new state and on top of that it had local origins.

[King Deukalion (Deykalion) was considered to be father of all Hellenes. He was married to Pira, daughter of Epimetei and Pandorar and lived in Thessalian Ftia together with the indigenous Pelasgians and later among the Achaean Mirmidonians in their existing cities. According to Homer (Homer, Iliad and Odyssey, II, 681, Novi Sad, 1985. (Prev. Gjurić MN)), “... Some were from Arg and lived in Pelasgian cities. Some were from Alopa, Al in Trehina, and from Ftia and Hellada. They had beautiful women. They were called Mirmidonians, Hellenes and some still called themselves Achaeans. They had fifty ships and their leader was Ahilei.”

From what we know from Homer, it would appear that the cities Arg, Alop, Al, Hellada and Trahin existed in Thessalian Ftia before Deukalean’s arrival. Each place name had special meaning. The word “Ftia” comes from the verb “fino” meaning land of the dead, disappearance, destruction. The word “Hellada” comes from the word “helos” meaning swamp, mud. The word “Trahin” comes from the word “trahus” meaning brittle, rocky. The word “Al” comes from “alos” and “als” meaning salt. The word “Alopa” means salty,

salty island. The word “Arg” means white. The river which created the plain where these cities were located was called “Sperhei” meaning fiercely attacking. A mountain to the south bears the name “Eta” meaning misery, suffering. It was on this mountain that Hercules lit himself on fire to escape his pain. This is also the location of the Thermopolis Gorge and where the city Lamia, capital of Ftia, is located. (The word “Lamia” is a Macedonian word meaning dragon).

If the toponyms are names associated with real objects and events, then the stories in mythology must also have realistic meaning. And as such the ethno genesis of the Hellenes can be derived from the myths about who Pindar (Pindar, Olympia, IX, 41), Apolodori (Apolodori, Bibliotheca (I-II) I, 7, 2) and others have informed us.] (Pages 185, 186, Antonije Shkokljević, “Prehistory - Central Balkans Cradle of Aegean culture”)

In other words the 19<sup>th</sup> century German scholars found a more selective ancient name and history for the modern Greeks, now called “Hellenes”.

Unfortunately, both names, “Greece” and “Hellas”, were foreign to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Balkan people who lived in that region.

But, if you ask a Modern Greek person in English today to identify his or her “nationality” they will say they are “Greek”. If you ask them what is that in “Greek”? They will say “Ellinas” or “Ellinida”. There is no word for “Greek” in the Greek vocabulary. If there is it is rarely used and unknown to most Greeks.

According to most modern Greeks today, “Greek” and “Ellines” are synonymous. In other words a “Hellene is a native of either ancient or modern Greece; a Greek”.

The pre-19<sup>th</sup> century Balkan people had no notion of “nationalism” or knowledge of any “ancient City States”.

Encouraged by the European Great Powers, the Balkan people’s main aim was to drive the Ottomans out of the Balkans and replace

their Muslim Empire with a Christian Empire which they themselves could then rule.

But this was not what the Western European Great Powers wanted. As I said earlier, the European Great Powers wanted to break up the “large Ottoman state” and replace it with smaller divergent “nation states” and make sure they never again combined.

The process of “Hellenization” began by educating some of the elite Balkan people about the existence of the old City States and their exploits. People who studied abroad, London in particular, were seduced by the eloquently written, romantic stories the European had written about a people who lived at the bottom of the Balkans a long time ago. These Balkan people were especially thrilled when they were received by westerners as the descendents of those ancient people.

But, not all Balkan people were willing to be Hellenized or convinced to take the Hellenic road, some still wanted to replace the Ottomans with themselves in the existing large state. Unfortunately the Western Great Powers did not agree.

Also, it was one thing to create a theoretical “nation state” and another to give it life and a past. The idea of calling the new state “Greece” and modeling it after the “Romaos” (Romans) lacked uniqueness. All the Christian people in the Balkans, including the Slav speakers, were at some point or another, called “Romaos” and “Greeks” by the Ottomans and by outsiders.

The part of the Balkan Peninsula where Greece began as a modern state was then called “Morea” and occupied the region today called the Peloponnesus.

So, in order to distinguish Greece from Serbia and from other future Balkan states, a better model had to be found for Greece, one that had a unique and long past. And that model was found in the “Hellenes”, the pre-historic people I mentioned earlier.

Unfortunately there was no living trace of the “Hellenes” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which made it difficult to explain how they got to the 19<sup>th</sup> century from pre-history. There was no history to explain that.

But, with some creative imagination, German ingenuity and a lot of convincing, the problem was solved by “re-engineered” history so that it could fit the modern “Hellenes” with the pre-historic or ancient “Hellenes”.

A bridge of “Hellene” continuity connecting the “Ancient Hellenes” from pre-history to the “Modern Hellenes” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was apparently found in the Macedonians. The Macedonians, it would appear, had such continuity from ancient times to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Not only was historic information readily available that proved that there was such continuity but the 19<sup>th</sup> century people in the Balkans, who identified themselves as “Macedonians”, knew about it.

So, after the Great Powers introduced the little state to the world under the name “Greece”, a name which has stuck with the outside world to this day, its “architects”, for reasons mentioned above, decided to call the little country “Hellas” and its people “Hellenes”.

And so a “classical history” was written and introduced to the world which explained the beginning and continuity of the modern “Hellenes” as well as their contribution to our modern world; a classical history which unfortunately only served and still serves the interests of the Western European Great Powers.

In the new classical history Alexander the Great, the most hated man in the ancient so called “Hellenic” world, the man who wiped out Thebes and brutally crushed the spirits of the old City-State citizens, is now the “Great King of the Hellenes” whom the modern “Hellenes” revere and hold in high honour.

But, the only way this continuity between the “Ancient Hellenes” or “Ancient Greeks” as the outside world calls them, and the so called “Modern Hellenes” or “Greeks” to exist is if the Macedonians themselves were “Hellenes”. In more simple terms, in order for the

Modern Greeks to be the descendants of the “Ancient Greeks” the Macedonians would have to be Greek.

But how can the Macedonians be Greek? They were and still are Macedonians?!

According to the re-engineered 19<sup>th</sup> century classical history model, the Macedonians were “Hellenized”. They were “Hellenized”, a process that began sometime just before Philip II’s time. And so, being “Hellenized” makes them Greek.

So, how exactly does this “Hellenization” process work?

The explanation we are given is that Macedonians began to speak the “Attic” language in the Macedonian king’s court, they began to adopt the so called “Greek culture” and they began to act like Greeks... and therefore they became Greeks.

[According to the Columbia Encyclopedia, Hellenism is “the culture, ideals, and pattern of life of ancient Greece in classical times. It usually means primarily the culture of ATHENS and the related cities in the Age of Pedicles [495-429 BC]. The term is also applied to the ideals of later writers and thinkers who draw their inspiration from ancient Greece. Frequently it is contrasted with Hebraism – Hellenism then meaning pagan joy, freedom, and love of life as contrasted with the austere morality and monotheism of the Old Testament. The Hellenic period came to an end with the conquest of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC. It was succeeded by the Hellenistic civilization.”] (Page 930, Columbia Encyclopedia, Third Edition 1963, New York and London)

As I mentioned earlier, historically, the self-perception of the Greeks and the definition of Greekness have varied, but with the emergence and consolidation of the nation-state, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Greekness was redefined along the lines of what some people call romantic nationalism.

Romantic nationalism is the form of nationalism in which the state derives its political legitimacy as an organic consequence of the unity of those it governs. This includes, depending on the particular

manner of practice, the language, race, culture, religion and customs of the “nation” in its primal sense of those who were “born” within its culture. This form of nationalism arose in reaction to dynastic or imperial hegemony, which assessed the legitimacy of the state from the “top down”, emanating from a monarch or other authority, which justified its existence. Such downward-radiating power might ultimately be derived from God.

Greece accepts all those who agree with this principle and rejects those who disagree.

In other words the Ancient Macedonians became “Greeks” because some spoke Greek, believed in the same Gods, and behaved like Athenians... But such behaviours can also be found in people today. Look at me for example, I speak English, I believing in the same God as the English, I live among the English and culturally I sometimes behaving like the English, does that make me English? No. I am still Macedonia.

Ancient history was very clear about who the Macedonians were and the fact that they were not “Greek”. The ancient people from the City States knew the Macedonians were not Greek and said so themselves many times. The ancient authors were also in agreement with that.

Many times history has mentioned that the Macedonians spoke another language, an “unidentified” language, unique to the Macedonian people, spoken by the common Macedonian people.

I am not going to get into details on this here but if you want to learn more about the differences between the Ancient Macedonian and the Ancient Greeks then read Josef S. G. Gandeto’s book, “Ancient Macedonians, Differences Between the Ancient Macedonians and the Ancient Greeks”.

“There is not a single word or fact written by the ancient authors that shows that the Macedonians are Greek. There is not a single word or fact written where the Macedonians thought of themselves as Greeks. There is not a single book written by the ancient authors, including the ancient Greek authors, which has mixed the lineage

and has not shown diverse differences between Macedonians and Greeks.” (Joseph Gandeto)

Also, modern scholars and scientists believe that the Slavic language has its roots in prehistory. A number of ancient inscriptions deemed undecipherable have recently been successfully deciphered by linguists Vasil Iliov, Anthony Ambrozic, Sergei V. Rjabchikov and others, by using the Slavic languages which indicates that these languages have been around a lot longer than previously thought. Even Alexander the Great may have spoken Slavic. It is well known that Alexander spoke at least two languages. We know one was Koine and the other was a language indigenous to Macedonia labeled “unknown” by Greek historians.

But, since no Macedonian or foreign archeologist has even been allowed to dig in Greek occupied Macedonia or examine any archeological findings unsupervised, we can't verify what other language Alexander the Great spoke.

But, in order for the Macedonians to be Greek, as required by the “re-engendered” ancient historical model, the revisionists had to erase and cover up everything that was Macedonian. If the Macedonians were “Hellenized” then they were Greek and no longer Macedonian.

There could be no Modern Greece without the Ancient Macedonians! And there can be no Macedonia and Macedonians if there is to be a Greece and Greeks! It was as simple as that! And thus the slogans “The Ancient Macedonians were Greek”, “Macedonia is Greek” and “Macedonians do not exist”, were coined.

But, what to do with the living Macedonians who knew who they were and who wanted to be Macedonians? And how was the Slavic language the Macedonians spoke going to be explained?

Again, thanks to the ingenuity and brilliance of the western mind, the Macedonian problem for Greece was solved with the creation of a couple of historic revisions.

The first revision had to do with of the so called “Slav Migrations”. The 19th century model of history tells us that a number of tribes migrated to the Balkans, which among them was the “Slav tribe” which supposedly settled in Macedonia and wiped out the Ancient Macedonians. And by that assertion, today’s Macedonians are the descendents of the Slavs.

Even if there were such migrations, the Slavs at this time were not soldiers but harmless farmers traveling together with their families looking for land to settle on and cultivate their crops.

According to historic accounts the Slavs were not conquerors or marauders. They were very happy to settle in forested lands and marshes, even in places that usually were not suitable for crop farming. The Slavs whose main preoccupation was farming would not have easily abandoned their ancestral lands unless they were in grave danger. There was no good reason for the Slavs to have abandoned their traditional homes and endanger their lives by crossing the very difficult Danube River unless they were pushed south by force.

The Slavs did not cross the Danube at will but were forced to do so by the pressures of the invading barbarian tribes. The arrival of the Goths, Huns, Avars, etc., near the Danube forced the indigenous Slav speaking populations to flee south and seek refuge. A great number of the Slav migrations recorded by history, are actual refugee movements of displaced indigenous people from the Danube River region. My supporting evidence for this, in part, is based on Professor Curta’s findings which are based on archeological data derived from settlement excavations. “First, there is already enough evidence to move away from the migrationist model which has dominated the discipline of Slavic archaeology ever since its inception. A retreat from migrationism is necessary simply because the available data do not fit any of the current models for the study of (pre)historic migration.” “It has become increasingly evident that migrations across ecological or cultural boundaries would require considerable planning on the part of the migrants, and should leave substantial and clear archaeological evidence.” “Furthermore, the archaeological evidence... does not match any long-distance migratory pattern.” (Page 307, Florin Curta, *The Making of the*

Slavs, History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region c. 500–700, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

So, if the Slavs were not willing migrants as per Professor Curta's findings then what motivated them to travel south to the Balkans?

The most logical and probable explanation, given the political situation of the time, is that the Slavs were war refugees forced out of their homes by the more aggressive invaders the Goths, Huns and Avars. There are those, including Falmerayer, who believe that the traveling Slavs were not allowed to settle in Macedonia and were driven to the south and west by the Byzantine army. This can be substantiated by the fact that with the exception of one, found north of Skopje, there are no archeological Slav burial finds in Macedonia but a great number of them are found to the west and south of geographical Macedonia. There are also unconfirmed claims that the original Slavs who made their way from north of the Danube region did not speak the "Slav language" that is attributed to them. They learned that language from the indigenous people living south of the Danube.

The second revision has to do with the creation of the Bulgarian "Nation state". When Bulgaria was created it too had to be characterized "different" from Greece and from Serbia so that there can be 'no hope' of any of these states re-combining.

The answer to tying the Macedonian "loose ends" was to eliminate the Macedonian entity all together. If the Macedonians were "Slavs", as per the revised historic model, then they, at some point in time, may want to create a Slavic state of their own or combine with another Slavic state. But if they were to be "eliminated" all together, they would cease to exist.

So, with regards to the Macedonians, what was not Greek was attributed to Bulgaria and what was not Bulgarian was attributed to Greece. Everything Macedonian from Ancient times to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, before the so called Slav invasions, was attributed to Greece and everything Macedonian from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was attributed to Bulgaria.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century creation of Bulgaria was the “answer” to covering up all remaining evidence of the existence of everything that was Macedonian outside of the “Hellenic model”.

Also, in order to give the Bulgarian “nation state” its unique character and make it distance from other states in the Balkans, it was given a non-Balkan name and a non-Balkan identity. The name “Bulgaria” was derived from the river “Volga”, located in present day Russia. This is where allegedly the original Bulgarians came from. We are also being told that the original “Bulgarians”, the ancestors of the modern Bulgarians, were Turkic Tatars, who conquered the northern region of present day Bulgaria and settled there and, over time, were assimilated into the Slavic tribes that lived there.

So, according to the “re-engineered” 19<sup>th</sup> century historic model, the Bulgarians were not exactly “pure Slavs” or pure Turkic Tartars but a mix of both, enough to make them different from the other Slavs in the region. But because the Bulgarians were partly Slav they could lay claim to the post 6<sup>th</sup> century Macedonian heritage.

Being part Turkic Tatar and having arrived in the Balkans around the same time, or maybe a little later than the Slavs, Bulgarians could not lay claim to the ancient Macedonian heritage or anything that was Macedonian before the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Earlier I explained that before these modern Balkan “nation states” were created, out of the remnants of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, the people living in the Balkans had a common past, a common history. But after these “nation States” were created new histories were written for them; a foundation to build on. A myth was created for each state which claimed the state was “homogeneous” consisting of only a single people leaving no room for diversity.

Greece, for example, declared itself “pure Greek”, ignoring the fact that the “Greek” identity did not exist before the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that its population at the time consisted of people who identified themselves as Albanians, Macedonians, Vlachs, Turks, Roma and a few other minorities.

The Greeks, Bulgarians and Albanians, for example, have all made claims that Alexander the Great was Greek, Bulgarian and Albanian, identities which did not exist in Alexander's time... which is fine. But at the same time each claims that he was uniquely "Greek", "Bulgarian", or "Albanian", which is not fine. Alexander the Great was a king of all the people who lived in the Balkans during his time, which would make him king of the distant ancestors of the present day Greeks, Bulgarians and Albanians. He was king of all of our ancestors but at the same time he identified with the Macedonian people, which makes him Macedonian. He may have been everyone's king but he was a Macedonian.

Also, today we have Greeks claiming that the "Slavs" (Macedonians) are "stealing" their Greek history... that the "Slavs" are stealing Alexander the Great from them... We have Bulgarians complaining of the same thing. We have Bulgarians claiming that Kiril and Metodi, the Macedonian Solun brothers, were Bulgarians and that the "Yugoslavs" (Macedonians from the Republic of Macedonia) are expropriating them.

These Greeks and Bulgarians unfortunately are forgetting that those historical figures existed before their nation states were created and Alexander and Kiril and Metodi belonged to the ancestors of all the people in the Balkans. They are not exclusively Greek or Bulgarian.

Kiril and Metodi made contributions to all the Slavic speaking people in Europe but the fact remains that they were from Solun, a Macedonian city and that they were Macedonians.

So, how could the Macedonians have stolen something that already belonged to everyone anyway, including to the Macedonians?

For example, I can claim that my great grandfather was "mine and mine alone" but he is not uniquely only my great grandfather. In fact there are at least a few dozen great grandchildren who can also lay that same claim and accuse me of robbing them of "their" great grandfather. My great grandfather was a common great grandfather to all of us, to all of his great grandchildren; he was never mine and mine alone. The only things I can claim to be "mine and mine alone" are things I acquired after I was born.

We all must accept that fact that before the Balkan nation states were created, Balkan history was common to all the people and belonged to everyone in the borderless Balkans. This is how pre 19<sup>th</sup> century Balkan history must be treated. If we want to be honest about it, we have to accept the fact that the Balkan people, before each nation state was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had a common history and no one should be claiming historical events or historical figures especially at the exclusion of the others.

We must also accept the fact that the Balkan territory also belongs to all the people in the Balkans. Unfortunately that has not been the case and we have hundreds of examples where Macedonians have been driven out of their homes and lands for wanting to be Macedonians and for not wanting to be Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians or Albanians.

On the question of who has the right to the “Ancient heritage”? I would say all the Balkan people do! Unfortunately that’s not how history has been re-written. Balkan history has been “re-written” so that each modern Balkan nation state can fit in its new artificial environment. In other words its past has been changed so that it can fit the present... This is precisely what is causing the problems among the various people in the Balkans experienced today. The accusations of infringing on each other’s territory... on each other’s history... accusations of theft of historical figures... people being exiled from their homes for non compliance... These are symptoms of misunderstanding stemming from the historical myths that passes as history especially written for each of the Balkan nation states by their patrons.

As I mentioned earlier, this behaviour is not accidental, it is part of the long term plan to keep these nation states from recombining; from forming a large state and from reclaiming their common heritage. Being small and existing among “belligerent neighbours”, who constantly have territorial claims against each other, also makes these states dependent on their patrons to protect them.

This is how the Balkans was set up by the Western European Powers after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and this how the situation has remained to this day, 200 years later.

Greece has a custom made history for Greeks only. There is no room for anyone else, even if that “anyone else” is indigenous to the territory today called Greece. Bulgaria has done exactly the same.

Both Greece and Bulgaria took chunks of Macedonia in 1913 but their histories did not change to reflect that; the addition of new people acquired with those chunks of land. Their histories remained unchanged. Non Greeks and non Bulgarians were forced to conform and fit into Greece’s and Bulgaria’s fictional mold because there was no room or tolerance for anything else...

So, when the Greeks today say “Macedonians do not exist” and “Macedonia is Greek”, they literally cut the Macedonian people completely out of existence, not only from Greece, but also from the entire planet, so that the Greek world can conform to its fictional history.

The Macedonian people, however, do exist and have lived on those lands for many generations, side by side with the people who today call themselves Greek, and don’t want to be cut out... assimilated or exiled... Unfortunately this is what has been happening from the day Greece acquired Macedonian territories and Macedonian people.

If you ask me what is the most important period of time for the modern Macedonian people as a nation, the way “nationalism” defines a nation, I would have to say the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time when nationalism was brought to the Balkans. One cannot talk about nationalism before nationalism was invented.

The French Revolution (1789) gave birth to nationalism. As the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought economic change to Europe, the Balkans became the last frontier for capitalist expansion. By the 1800’s Europe’s political, economic and military institutions were rapidly changing. Western governments and exporters were aggressively pursuing Balkan markets on behalf of their western manufacturers. This aggressive pursuit smothered Balkan industries before they had

a chance to develop and compete. As a result, Balkan economies began to decline causing civil unrest and nationalist uprisings.

When Greece was born for the first time in 1832 it was unclear what its national character was? To quote David Holden, “the Greek nation-state was a product of western political intervention-‘the fatal idea’ as Arnold Toynbee once called it, of exclusive western nationalism impinging upon the multi-national traditions of the eastern world. By extension, therefore, at any rate in theory, it was a child of the Renaissance and of western rationalism. (Page 28, Greece without Columns)

None of the modern Balkan nation states had a defined national character or a unique history of their people when they were first created. Like I said, everything was intertwined and everyone was mixed. It took outside intervention to define each nation and give it its unique characteristic which, as I said, in most cases, infringed on the others. For example, Macedonia had to die in order for Greece and Bulgaria to live. There was no room for a Greece or for a Bulgaria to exist with a living Macedonia... Their true histories (not the myths that have been written for them) are so close and intertwined that their distinctions are blurred. The ancestors of the people, who lived in Greece and Bulgaria before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before those two states were created, as I said, have a 2, 300 year-old common existence.

The Macedonian people’s unique history as a modern nation began when the modern Macedonian people made their bid for their independence. Macedonia’s unique history began when the Macedonian people understood what a nation was by definition and recognized themselves as a nation, a unique Macedonian nation. Unlike Greece and Bulgaria where their “nations” were created after their “states”, the Macedonian people considered themselves a nation, unique and separate from the artificially created Greek and Bulgarian “nations” long before they had a state. Unlike the Greeks who had “never” had a state before, and unlike the Bulgarians who only had a “fluid empire” that belonged to a Turkic Tatar tribe, the Macedonian people had a name, a state and an empire on which to build upon and to model their state and nation.

The Macedonian people's first aim was to free the entire Balkans from the Ottomans and to regain the old Eastern Christian Empire under Christian rule. But, as small nation states like Serbia and Greece began to pop up in the Balkans, the Macedonian people started to making their own bid for an independent Macedonia with a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious character. Proof of this can be found in the various Macedonian proclamations and manifestos.

Here is a bit of Macedonian history that deals with that:

[On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1880 the Ottoman government informed the Great Powers that the anticipated reforms had been drafted and prepared for their approval. Many Macedonian intellectuals, however, were not happy because the reforms neglected their demands, including the recognition of the Macedonian language. In May 1880 about two hundred prominent Macedonians signed and submitted a request to the European Commission protesting against the Ottoman Constitutional amendments because, among other things, the Ottomans neglected to recognize the Macedonian language. Unfortunately their written pleas were yet again ignored so a Macedonian delegation lead by Karandzhulov was dispatched to meet with Lord Fitzmorris, the British representative of the European Commission. Even though Lord Fitzmorris met with the Macedonians in person and heard their pleas, the Commission still ignored their demands.

Dissatisfied with the way the reforms were carried out, particularly by the attitude of the Great Powers, Macedonian leaders began to look inwards to find a solution to their problems.

A number of prominent leaders, including Leonidas Vulgaris from Berovo Region, Pop Kostandin Bufski and 30 others, got together and held a National Assembly from May 21<sup>st</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1880 in Gremen, Ostrovo Region (Aegean Macedonia). Among other things, one of the items on the agenda was the Macedonian situation after the Berlin Congress. On this item the Congress concluded that the reason Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans was because of the neighbouring propaganda, mainly that of Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, which falsely represented the ethnic composition of the

Macedonian population. The Congress came to the conclusion that once the foreign propaganda was exposed and neutralized, the Macedonian people would have a better chance of uniting behind a Macedonian cause and creating an Autonomous Macedonian state within the Ottoman Empire or creating a Macedonian independent state. The Assembly also decided to challenge Ottoman authorities on articles 23 and 62 of the Treaty of Berlin which called for political and religious rights for the Macedonian people. If those rights were ignored then the Macedonians would have no other choice but to arm themselves and fight under the slogan “Macedonia to the Macedonians, for reestablishing Ancient Macedonia”. (Vanche Stojchev. “Military History of Macedonia”. Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 252)

The National Assembly was concluded with the formation of an executive authority responsible for carrying out political decisions under a Macedonian Provisional Government called “Unity” which was to represent all ethnic groups living in the territory of Macedonia. Vasil Simov was appointed President of the Provisional Government and Stefo Nikolov was elected President of the National Assembly. Pop Kostandin Bufski and Leonidas Vulgaris were given the task of organizing the Macedonian military.

Decisions made at this Assembly were communicated to the Great Power diplomatic missions in Solun which initially ignored them but later accepted them as the “Macedonian way” of dealing with problems.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1881 the Provisional Government of Macedonia approved a Manifesto and submitted it to the various diplomatic missions in the Ottoman territories.

The opening statements of the Manifesto began as follows:

“Macedonians, our precious fatherland Macedonia was once the most glorious country in the world. The Macedonian people have civilized Asia and mankind by the victorious Phalanx having laid the foundation of military arts, and Aristotle of education and enlightenment. Unfortunately the once so glorious Macedonia today is on the brink of disaster because we have made mistakes and

forgotten our past. Aliens are now trying to take our country away from us and destroy our nationality, the brightness of which can never be darkened.

Macedonia has become a poor widow abandoned by her sons and no longer flies the glorious flag it once flew in triumph by its victorious Macedonian armies. Today Macedonia has been reduced to a geographical term as if someone is attempting to extinguish its glory and send it to oblivion.

Intriguers are digging Macedonia's grave and trying to destroy it by bringing in Austrian- Hungarian troops, but replacing the shackles of one with another will only destroy Macedonia. Macedonia will not be regenerated, and our nation will perish.

This moment is critical for Macedonia- it is a matter of life or death.” (Vanche Stojchev. “Military History of Macedonia”. Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 253)

Realizing that Macedonia had become a pawn of the Great Powers, the Provisional Government of Macedonia called upon all the Macedonian people, regardless of religion and ethnicity, to unite and fight for liberation and the creation of an independent Macedonian state.

“True Macedonians, faithful sons of Macedonia! How much longer are you going to put up with the decay of our fatherland?

Macedonia is calling you, crying out the words ‘You, my faithful children, successors of Aristotle and Alexander III of Macedonia, you who bleed with Macedonian blood, do not let me die, help me!’ What a sad sight it will be for you, genuine Macedonians, if you become witnesses to my death. Do everything in your power, carry my flag of unity and call out the words ‘United Macedonia!’ Be brave, throw out those murderers who hold in their hands the flag of disunity and divide you, my children of various ethnicities.

Gather under the flag of Macedonia, raise it high and write on it unanimously: Long live the Macedonian people! Long live Macedonia! Let them hear the voice of our fatherland; let us gain

liberty, the most precious heritage of nations. Say these words, for the liberal people who will applaud you. Call their noble hearts to hurry and give their help, to join your Holy fight for liberty, which has been away from our precious country for so many centuries. Macedonians, think about our origin, and do not give it up.” (Vanche Stojchev. “Military History of Macedonia”. Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 253)

The Manifesto was signed by President Vasil Simon, secretary Nikola Trajkov and three other members of the Provisional Government of Macedonia, Petro Jovanov, Kosta Bufski and Hriste Gorgov. The signatures were confirmed by two government seals and on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1881 and the Manifesto was taken to Kjustandil where the transcript was translated to Russian and French and distributed to various foreign and domestic diplomatic representatives in Constantinople.

While the Provisional Government of Macedonia operated in Gremen, another Macedonian organization was formed in northeastern Macedonia called the Macedonian League. The League’s purpose was to unite Macedonian immigrants in neighbouring countries, particularly the large Macedonian Diaspora in Bulgaria. After the creation of the Macedonian League and the establishment of a General Headquarters in Pirin Mountain, the League initiated the drafting of a constitution in order to define the aims and structure of a future government in Macedonia. All in all the constitution was divided into fifteen chapters constituting 103 articles. The first article dealt with Macedonia’s territory within Ottoman borders, which consisted of the Solun, Bitola and Skopje sanjak vilayets comprising historic and geographic Macedonia.

Among other things the constitution defined the various ethnic and religious populations living in Macedonia, the ministries and departments necessary to run the administration, the division of power in the legislative body of the government and the regulation of security including the army and police.

The government structure proposed was based on gaining broad autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Through the drafting of the constitution Macedonians made it clear that they wanted an

autonomous Macedonia, based on Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin, emphasizing the distinct Macedonian national identity that was to be separate from the other Balkan countries.

Article 99 of the constitution called for use of military force to be exercised by the Macedonian Liberation Army should Ottoman authorities or the European Powers disagree with the request to form an autonomous Macedonian state within the Ottoman framework.

On matters of the Macedonian army, the Chief of the General Headquarters responsible for drafting the security part of the constitution added a separate chapter to the constitution for regulating the military. This Chapter known as the Military Instruction constituted 246 Articles was divided into two parts. The first part defined the structure and organization of the Macedonian army and the second part defined the tactics required if the liberation of Macedonia became necessary. The second part was put in place in case the Ottoman government or the Great powers refused to grant Macedonia autonomy and the Macedonian people would then have to fight for it.

The constitution drafted by the Macedonian League in aid of establishing a Macedonian government and a military organization was quite detailed and comprehensive, especially the Articles regarding the formation of a Macedonian army. For more information see chapter 14 of Vanche Stojchev's book "Military History of Macedonia".

After the Macedonian League established its General Headquarters it began sending out communiqués. On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1880 it sent a letter with a copy of the Macedonian Constitution to the six Great Power ministries of the European Commission requesting their approval. Expecting no reply, the General Headquarters then went ahead and created a Manifesto calling on all the Macedonian people to organize a united national uprising. Among the signatories of the Manifesto were Iljo Maleshevski, Vasil Dijamandiev and eight other leaders.

Among other things the Manifesto said: Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin was the last hope for our freedom and that hope is now lost. It

is time for us to rise and settle the century-old account with our oppressor. We call on you to unite under the Macedonian flag and fight for liberty and independence. Only united we will be able to reclaim our precious fatherland for ourselves and gain absolute autonomy.

The Manifesto also warned the Macedonian people to watch out for opportunists who claimed to be fighting for the Macedonian cause while they were supporting alien interests.

The Manifesto ended with the slogans “Liberty or Death!” and “Long Live Liberated Macedonia!”

Even though the Manifesto was distributed far and wide, and the call for an uprising was loud and clear, the people could not muster the will because the Ottoman government had learned its lesson in the past and was prepared for such an event.] (Risto Stefov, “Macedonian struggle for Independence”)

As you can see from the above Manifesto, the Macedonian people in the 1880’s knew exactly who they were and what they wanted, even before they had a country. But, it seems, the European Great Powers did not want them to have a country of their own and this is how it has been for them since then until 1944 when the People’s Republic of Macedonia was established.

The Macedonian people in the early 1800’s had high hopes that after Serbia and Greece were freed from the Ottomans, the Greek and Serbian people would help the Macedonia people to also free themselves. Many Macedonians took part in both the Serbian and Greek uprisings in hopes that the Greeks and Serbians would do the same for them when their turn came. Macedonians even participated in the Russian-Ottoman war of 1875 in an attempt to drive the Ottomans out of Bulgaria and Macedonia but in the end the Western European Great Powers intervened and while Bulgaria was given autonomy and eventually independence, Macedonia was handed back to the Ottomans and later was allowed to be partitioned by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Right after Bulgaria was given autonomy the Macedonian people came to the realization that “no one” was going to help them, so they took matters into their own hands and began to prepare for a massive uprising of their own.

The first step they took is to form a national revolutionary organization.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1893 in Solun two high school teachers, Damian Gruev and Anton Dimitrov, together with Petar Pop Arsov, a former editor of the newspaper Loza and Hristo Tatarchev, a doctor, got together in bookshop owner Ivan Nikolov’s house for an informal meeting to discuss the plight of the Macedonian people and what to do about it.

As word got around a committee was formed, more Macedonians got involved and a second (formal) meeting was held on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1894 which resulted in the formation of a revolutionary organization known as the Vnatrezhna (Internal) Makedonska (Macedonian) Revolutsionerna (Revolutionary) Organizatsia (Organization), VMRO (IMRO).

To rally the masses the charismatic Gotse Delchev, a man of vision matched by only a few, dubbed as the father of the Macedonian Revolution and the soul of the movement, was chosen to lead the revolution.

By 1896 IMRO was able to exert influence to a point where it acted like a state within a state, taking over administrative positions from the Ottomans, leading boycotts against Ottoman institutions and offering isolated villages protection from Greek and Bulgarian sponsored brigands.

In time IMRO operatives were able to penetrate Ottoman economic, educational and even judicial functions.

IMRO demonstrated great leadership by its ability to organize Macedonia into seven revolutionary districts (Solun, Serres, Strumitsa, Shtip, Skopje, Bitola and Endrene {Dardanelles}). It also demonstrated its weaknesses. Having allied itself with the poor

village peasants, because no Great Power was prepared to help the Macedonian people, and striving to refrain from obligations and debts, IMRO found itself strapped for finances.

The lack of funds to purchase sufficient arms brought home the realization that this “uprising” was going to be a long one.

Delchev knew what was at stake but tragically the Ottomans killed him on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1903 before he had a chance to put his plans into action. In Delchev’s absence Gruev took charge of the organization and preparations for the uprising began.

In due time plans were made, a military strategy prepared, weapons, medical supplies and food-stuffs were requisitioned and stock piled. Cheti (fighting units) were organized and training drills were performed.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1903, by a dispatch to the Great Powers via the British vice-consul in Bitola, the General Staff formally announced the uprising. Then on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1903 IMRO dispatched mounted couriers to all the sub-districts with the message “let the uprising begin”.

On the same day the Macedonian Revolutionary General Staff informed the Ottoman Director of Railways to warn travelers to choose a different mode of transportation in order to avoid being hurt.

Following Damjan Gruev’s orders from Smilevo, the village Cheti combined forces to form the following: the Smilevo and Giavato Region Cheta (650), the Krushovo Region Cheta (400), the Kichevo Region Cheta (350), the Bitola Region Cheta (250), the Ohrid Region Cheta (880), the Resna Region Cheta (450), the Demir-Hisar Region Cheta (420), the Prespa Region Cheta (300), the Kostur Region Cheta (700) and the Lerin Region Cheta (450).

The Cheti, under the command of capable leaders such as Damian Gruev, Vasil Chakalarov, Petar Pop Arsov, Pitu Guli and others, fared well and enjoyed considerable success in the few weeks before the Ottoman militia began to amass. The local villagers also

joined the movement giving moral support to the fighters. Even men from other regions that had not yet risen left their homes and came to fight. All in all the Macedonian people possessed the will to fight but lacked the rifles and ammunition with which to do it.

As battles raged on throughout western Macedonia, the Cheti put down most of the local Turkish garrisons. They destroyed bridges, railway lines and communications centers, captured most chifliks (Ottoman estates) and briefly liberated some regions such as Kichevo, Demir-Hisar, Kostur, Lerin, Klisoura and Neveska.

The cities of Kostur and Lerin themselves were not liberated. The most successful and highly celebrated of all battles was the storming of the town Krushevo. Nikola Karev led the Cheti in the attack and defeated the local Ottoman garrison with ease. The Macedonians quickly took over the most strategic points like the Post Office, Town Hall and local Police Station and declared Krushevo liberated.

True to their democratic commitments, the leaders of the liberating force constituted the Krushevo assembly which appointed a committee of sixty members, twenty from each of the community's Macedonian, Vlach and Albanian populations. The Krushevo Manifesto was drafted which basically recognized each ethnicity as an equal partner in the struggle and declared Krushevo a multiethnic community.

The committee in turn elected an executive body of six delegates, two from each community, which operated as a provisional government. The government in turn established a financial, judiciary and police force.

[“At Krushevo, under the rays of temporary liberty, fraternity and equality, national hatreds were dispelled and peace and concord reigned. For eleven whole days Krushevo lived as a little independent state, and although in miniature, clothed with flesh and blood that idea which spurred Macedonians to fight, against tyranny up to the Ilinden rising.”] (Page 193, Vasil Bogov, Macedonian Revelation, Historical Documents Rock and Shatter Modern Political Ideology)

The “Krushevo Republic” unfortunately, only lasted two weeks but it was a glorious Republic that will forever remind the Macedonian people of their eternal struggle for independence and thirst for freedom. The liberation of Krushevo imprinted on the new Macedonian generations the legacy of a timeless and irreversible march towards self-determination.

The initial success of the rebellion was a surprise to the Ottomans especially since the Ottoman forces were numerically superior to those of the rebels. The Cheti, however, demonstrated their abilities in battle and more than matched the numbers with will. The Ottomans, unfortunately, were determined to put down the rebellion and amassed additional forces, deploying a total of 167,000 infantry, 3,700 cavalry and 440 pieces of artillery (all cannons).

Krushevo alone was surrounded by 20,000 Ottoman troops with 18 cannons against an encircled force of no more than 1,200 rebel fighters. The battle to retake Krushevo began on August 12<sup>th</sup> with the Macedonians crying out “Sloboda eli Smrt” (liberty or death) against the onslaught of Ottoman cannon fire. Pitu Guli and his men fought gallantly. They provided stiff opposition to the Ottoman advance but were no match for General Baktiar Pasha. Baktiar was a skilled war veteran who overwhelmed the Cheti by attacking the entire region simultaneously. The region was surrounded by soldiers, encircled by cannon fire and every Macedonian stronghold within was attacked simultaneously, cutting off all reinforcements and outside support.

Once Krushevo fell, one by one other IMRO strongholds began to yield, winding down the ten-week-old rebellion. In Krushevo, Baktiar Pasha allowed his troops to kill, pillage and rape for three days. The town was permanently devastated with 117 civilians murdered, 150 women raped and 159 houses burned down.

In the Ilinden aftermath, according to Michael Radin, in total 4,694 civilians were murdered, 3,122 women raped, 12,440 houses burned, 201 villages razed, 75,835 people left homeless and about 30,000 people left the country for good, becoming permanent refugees. (Page 105, “IMRO and the Macedonian Question”)

Besides the atrocities committed against the civilian population in Macedonia, the most significant impact of the uprising was the loss of so many great IMRO leaders.

During 1903, Krste Misirkov from Pella (Postol), one of the most outstanding names in the history of Macedonian culture and the founder of the modern Macedonian literary language and orthography, published his “On Macedonian Matters”, in which he projected the principles for standardization of the Macedonian literary language.

In 1908 Macedonia’s hopes for a better future were again raised with the start of the Young Turk revolution. The Young Turk movement, led by the Young Turk Committee, aimed to reform the last remnants of the Ottoman Empire by making social and political reforms in Macedonia. Many Macedonians, including Iane Sandanski supported the Young Turk ideals. The Macedonian revolutionary organization, through Iane Sandanski and the newly formed national federal party, actively took part in the Young Turk movement with aims at achieving autonomy for Macedonia.

Unfortunately that movement too ended in disaster which paved the way for Macedonia’s partition by its neighbours.

Regarding implementing reforms in the Ottoman Empire. There was a lot of pressure from the outside world, especially from Russia, to bring about religious reforms inside the Ottoman Empire. Russia took it upon itself to be the protector of all the Orthodox Christians, being Orthodox Christian itself. So the Russians pressured the Ottoman Empire to provide religious freedoms to the Orthodox people in the Balkans.

Before the Young Turk Uprising, being a Muslim empire, the Ottoman Empire did not allow political unions, or organizations, or any organized ethnic groups to exist within its boundaries. This was in accordance with Muslim law. The only authoritative entity the Ottoman authorities recognized was religion. As far as the Ottoman’s were concerned the Koran contained everything they needed, including the laws by which their subjects lived. If you were an Ottoman citizen and a Muslim then you had to abide by the laws

of Islam but if you were a non-believer, including a Christian, then you had to abide by the rules of your religion.

The large number of Orthodox Christians living in the Ottoman Empire created a need for governing them, but it had to be outside of Islam, so the Ottoman's allowed the re-establishment of the old Patriarchy, which had existed for centuries, and was the official ruler of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

The patriarchy was re-established in Istanbul, or the city of kings as it was often called in Macedonia. It is important at this point to mention that the capital of Christianity was Constantinople, I am not sure if that city was always called Constantinople (since Constantine first built it) but the Macedonians, as far as I know, have always called it "Tsari Grad" (City of Kings). If we remember our history, the same Constantine was the first Eastern Roman Emperor to recognize Christianity and make it the official religion of his Eastern Roman Empire, also referred to as the Byzantine Empire. So, the birthplace or capital of Christianity is Tsari Grad (Constantinople later renamed to Istanbul by the Ottomans), and not Rome as we are led to believe these days.

INTERVIEWER – Yes, yes I knew that... tell us more about the role of the church in Macedonia...

RISTO – After it was decided to re-establish the Patriarchy in Constantinople, the birthplace and capital of Orthodox Christianity, the Ottoman authorities decided to allow the Orthodox Christians to govern themselves through a Patriarch, to be appointed by the Ottoman Sultan. However, the only way that the Sultan would agree to a Patriarchy was if the Patriarchy was subordinate to the Sultan. In other words, Orthodox Christianity would be subordinate to Islam. And so the Patriarchy, in order to exist, had to agree to all conditions imposed on it by the Sultan, even if they contradicted Christian values.

On top of that, the appointment of the Patriarch was not based on merit or on election by the bishops. The Patriarchy was auctioned off by the Sultan and sold to the highest bidder. Anyone could be a Patriarch if they had enough money and wanted to bid. In other

words, any person who was able to afford it could purchase the patriarchy. The Patriarchy was treated like a commodity in the marketplace... to be bought and sold.

The bishoprics too were handled the same way. Anyone able to purchase a bishopric could become its bishop. This was done right down to the level of the priest. After all the purchases were made, Christianity was treated like a business where parishes could be farmed. From the outside the Christian Orthodox Church looked and functioned like the Byzantine Church. It even employed the so-called “Greek language” in its liturgies. I say “the so-called Greek language” because this was the language of the Byzantine Church, a form of the ancient Macedonian Koine language. Another form of the Koine language was also adopted by the Greek state as the language of the Greek people, sometime in the early 1830’s, after Greece became a state for the first time.

This is what I wrote, one time, about the Greek language:

[There is much to say about the so-called “Greek language” about its inception some 3,000 years ago and about its evolution to what is supposedly spoken in Greece today. But is the language spoken in Greece today a “Greek language”, whatever that may mean, or a mix of various languages?

There are a couple of reasons why I am bringing this up at this time. One is to remind the Greeks that although they call their language “Greek”, implying that it is the language of the so-called “ancient Greeks”, it is not. The second reason is that two can play this game. Greeks tell me that there is no such thing as a Macedonian language and what I call Macedonian is no more than a mix of “Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek and Albanian with some other foreign words added to it here and there”. While these same Greeks claim that there is no such thing as a “Macedonian language”, they boast that they speak the language of the ancient Greeks.

Well let’s put this theory to a test shall we?

First and foremost, the language that modern Greeks speak today is not their mother tongue. When Modern Greece became a country for

the first time in 1829, the majority of the so-called first Greeks spoke Arvanitika (Albanian), Vlahika (Vlach), Turkika (Turkish), Slavika (Slav), etc. The so-called “Greek language” they speak today they had to learn in school.

So once again, the so-called “Greek language” that Modern Greeks speak today was a language they learned in school. Now in contrast to the Greek language, the Macedonian language, call it what you like, is a natural language that Macedonians learned from their mothers.

Macedonian is a banned language in Greece so the Macedonians could not have learned it in school, the only place they could have learned it is from their mothers and relatives. Ever since Greece illegally acquired Macedonian territories in 1913, Macedonians had no access to Serbia, Bulgaria or Albania, so how could Macedonian contain some Serbian some Bulgarian and some Albanian?

Now if we go far back in time you will discover that the Macedonian people spoke the Macedonian language even before there was a Serbia, Bulgaria or Albania. The Serbian, Bulgarian and Albanian literary languages were not established until these states became “nation states” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If the Modern Greek language is the same language as the ancients spoke then why did the modern Greeks need to “purify” it, a process which eventually failed?

Modern Greek is not at all the same as the so-called “ancient Greek” which the Athenians spoke some 2,500 years ago. In fact Modern Greek is yet another “Balkan language” full of colloquialisms and foreign words which the Greek state borrowed from the Byzantine Church and from other foreign languages, including Turkish. Most Modern Greeks today don’t know this and know even less about the history of their own language. That is why they claim ‘it is all Greek’.

Here are some examples of ancient Greek, Modern Greek, (English) words;

Ipos, alogo (horse)  
Hygor, nero (water)  
Onos, gaiduri (donkey)  
Oikos, spiti (house)  
Odos, dromos (road)  
Ihthis, psari (fish)  
Oinos, krasi (wine)  
Ofthalmos, mati (eye)  
Ega, Gida (goat)  
Erifi, Katsiki (kid, baby goat)  
Ois, provaton (sheep)  
Yshoiros, gourouni (pig)  
Kyon, skylos (dog)  
Mys, pondiki (mouse)  
Ornitha, kota (hen)  
Oon, avgo (egg)  
Artos, psomi (bread)  
Ris, miti (nose)  
Naus, plion (ship)

By just this small sample of examples it should be obvious to everyone that “ancient Greek” and “Modern Greek” are not only NOT the same language but they are not even similar! That is precisely the reason why Greek authorities tried to “purify” their language! And yes there are “ancient words” in the Modern Greek language such as “odos” for example but they only exist because of the language purification initiatives Greek purists undertook since 1776 which were finally abandoned in 1974 by the Greek government.

Another reason for bringing up the inconsistencies in the so-called “Greek language” is because I was asked to do it by one of my readers who wanted to see more evidence of what I am talking about, but not from Macedonian sources because it might be dismissed as “Skopjan propaganda” by our Greek adversaries. So without further ado here is evidence on the formation of the Greek language as composed by non-Macedonian authors;

1. “The beginning of the modern Greek language controversy can be precisely dated to 1776, when Voulgaris, in the preface of his logic,

argued that in order to study philosophy it was necessary to know ancient Greek adding that the ‘worthless little books that profess to vulgar language should be hissed off the stage’. By ‘vulgar language’ he meant any variety of modern Greek as opposed to the ancient language.” (“Language and National Identity in Greece 1766 - 1976”, by Peter Mackridge, page 83)

Now who was this Voulgaris character? Here is what Peter Mackridge has to say: “Kitromilides describes Voulgaris as the ‘Patriarch of the Greek enlightenment’ and the first recognized leader of the enlightenment in south-east Europe. Voulgaris studied at Padua and went on to teach for twenty years in Yannina, Kozani, the Athronite Academy and Constantinople.” (“Language and National Identity in Greece 1766 - 1976”, by Peter Mackridge, page 84)

“Voulgaris introduced himself to the Russian empress in 1771 by referring to himself as ‘Slaviano-Bulgarian’ by origin, Greek by birth, Russian by inclination. It is clear that his aim was to ingratiate himself with the empress by asserting that he too, like the majority of her subjects, was of Slav origin; it is not certain how seriously he took this himself, but his surname does imply Bulgarian origin.

The above was quoted from an unpublished manuscript by Batalden (1982: 22), who points out the irony that Catherine was not Russian but German by birth. I am grateful to Elka Bakalova for informing me that ‘Slaviano-Bulgarian’ refers to the Slav Bulgarians as distinct from the Turkic proto-Bulgars.” (“Language and National Identity in Greece 1766 - 1976”, by Peter Mackridge, page 85)

2. “Folk culture, for Koraes, was less a source of proof that the people actively yearned to recover their ancient virtues than evidence of their potential (and need) for extensive reeducation. His own experience, in which a series of lucky chances made it possible for him to acquire some learning at an early age (Clogg 1976: 121-124), may well have influenced his thinking here: the Hellenic virtues could be acquired, given only native diligence and aptitude. That one had to turn to Western Europe in this endeavor was simply a matter of historical circumstance, of the fact that Europe had been the repository of Greek learning during the centuries of Ottoman

rule – a time when the Greeks themselves had acquired a shamefully Turkish patina which now had to be scraped away.

Koraes is today remembered most of all for his leading role in the development of *katharevousa*, the neo-Classical (or purified) form of the modern Greek language which, somewhat ironically in the light of his revolutionary principles, has become closely associated with the political Right and the foreign interests which it represents (Sotiropoulos 1977).

*Katharevousa* was always something of a cultural appeal to the West for recognition, an attempt to demonstrate that the ordinary Greeks of today could speak a tongue which was undeniably their own yet no less clearly Hellenic. Such purism naturally demanded that all words of obviously Turkish origin be eliminated. A recent commentator's description of this deorientalization of the language as "beneficial" (Babiniotis 1979: 4) shows how successful Koraes was in establishing a moral standard by which all subsequent linguistic developments could be evaluated. Ideological criteria of culture, if they are to be judged successful, must in some measure become self-fulfilling prophecies.

The development of *katharevousa* was part of Koraes' wider, educative view of Hellenic regeneration. Culture, rather than physical descent, still seems to have been the main component of Greekness in his day. Educated people throughout the Balkans called themselves Hellenes; in the Romanian princess Dora d'Istria, we shall later meet one of the latest and most flamboyant embodiments of this conceit. It seems, moreover, that language was sometimes thought virtually sufficient to make people forget that they had ever been anything but Greek – in 1802, there appeared a quadrilingual dictionary published by the priest Daniel of Moskhopolis, exhorting "all who now do speak an alien tongue rejoice, prepare to make you Greek" (quoted in Clogg 1973: 20). This attitude was to change significantly later on, after the establishment of the new Greek State, when greater emphasis came to be laid on an essentially retroactive claim to descent from the ancient Greeks." ("Ours Once More Folklore, Ideology, and the making of Modern Greece", by Michael Herzfeld, pages 17 and 18)

3. "Wealthy Greeks, who for the most part had acquired their fortunes abroad, shared to the full the local patriotism so characteristic of the Greeks. This prompted them to provide the funds for schools, libraries and scholarships in their local communities. There was also a more practical motive, for the development of a Greek commercial empire created an increasing demand for numerate and literate Greeks with knowledge of foreign languages.

Schools of a kind had existed throughout the period of Ottoman rule, although with rare exceptions, such as the Patriarchal Academy in Constantinople, they had concentrated on imparting a basic knowledge of reading and writing to their pupils. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, a number of more advanced academies were either founded or revived. Besides the Princely Academies of Jassy and Bucharest, important schools were founded on the island of Chios, in Smyrna (The Evangelical School, 1733, and Philological Gymnasium, 1808) and Ayvalik. In these more advanced schools there was a heavy emphasis on the Greek classics, together with an attempt to inculcate the rudiments of mathematics and the natural sciences. Many of the teachers had studied at the universities of Western Europe, particularly in Italy, and many of their graduates were also to study abroad, thanks to the subventions of the merchants.

Books in Greek for a Greek readership had been printed, in substantial quantities, mainly in Venice, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the eighteenth century, however, the production of books for a Greek audience increased dramatically. During the first twenty-five years of the century just over a hundred such books were printed. During the last twenty-five years well over 700 were published, while some 1300 titles were published during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. They were generally small editions, though they did sometimes run to several thousand copies. A more significant indicator of the intellectual climate in Greece, perhaps, than this dramatic increase in the numbers of such books published was the change in their content.

Whereas at the beginning of the eighteenth century these books were overwhelmingly religious in character, by the years before 1821

their content had become increasingly secular. Numerous translations were published of the works of Western scientists and philosophers, including Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Beccaria and Rousseau. Some Greeks such as Evgenios Voulgaris themselves published learned philosophical treatises, making use of works of philosophers such as Kant. But in essence the 'Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment' was derivative rather than original, its protagonists seeking above all to make the achievements of Western philosophers and scientists known to their fellow countrymen. The works of the Western Enlightenment also began to circulate in the Greek lands in their original languages, often remarkably soon after publication. The most significant aspect of this increasing secularization of Greek culture was the rediscovery by the Greeks of a sense of their own past, a realization that they were the heirs to a glorious heritage that was universally admired by the educated classes of western Europe. During earlier centuries there had been a limited awareness of the ancient world but the nascent Greek intelligentsia embraced the study of Greece's classical past with an intensity approaching fervour during the fifty years or so before the outbreak of the Greek revolt. New emphasis was given in the schools and academies to the study of ancient Greek, new editions of the classics were published and Greeks saw in the wars between the Greeks and the Persians analogies with their present situation. Some Greeks began to baptize their children with the names of ancient worthies rather than the saints of the Orthodox Church. This rediscovery of the past engendered in the Greek intelligentsia a new self-confidence, aptly epitomized by Benjamin of Lesvos' claim in 1820 'that neither the Greeks of old nor the Greeks of today are subject to the laws of nature'.

An unfortunate outcome of this obsession with Greece's classical heritage was the increasingly bitter dispute that developed over the Greek language. Some argued that if the Greeks were truly to become worthy of their great heritage then they should reverse the natural development of the language and restore it to its pristine Attic purity, purging it of its Turkish, Slav and Italian accretions. Others argued that the spoken or demotic language should be made the basis of the written language. Still others advocated an intermediate position, arguing for the 'purification' of the demotic without going to the extremes of the archaizers. The 'language

question' was by no means resolved at the time and has continued to bedevil Greece's cultural development right up until modern times. It must be emphasized that the intellectual ferment that characterized the Greek world in the seventy years or so before the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence was largely confined to a small, predominantly Western-educated intelligentsia, many, perhaps most, members of which actually lived outside the Ottoman Empire. It largely passed over the heads of the great mass of the Greek people, who were mostly illiterate and who remained steeped in a thought world that was essentially Byzantine. The prophecies, folk songs, tales of Alexander the Great and popular romances such as the *Erotokritos* remained the staples of popular culture. The obsession with Greece's classical past was not widely shared. When someone compared the prowess of a klephtic leader to that of Achilles, the former asked 'Who is this Achilles? Did the musket of Achilles kill many?' Moreover the intellectual revival was for the most part resolutely opposed by the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, which regarded the new emphasis on philosophy, the natural sciences and the culture of the ancient world as likely to lead to moral degeneration and indifference in matters divine.

To counter what it regarded as the flood of atheistic and seditious literature circulating among the Greek populations of the empire a printing press was set up in Constantinople by the patriarchate in 1798, where uplifting and improving books were published under strict censorship. If the mass of the Greek population was largely indifferent to its enthusiasms, and the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church actively opposed to them, nonetheless the new intelligentsia did serve a useful function in articulating the aspirations of the Greek national movement.” (“A Short History of Modern Greece”, by Richard Clogg, Second Edition, pages 36 to 39)

4. “Greece has been characterized until recently by a fundamental diglossia between the spoken language everyday (the demotic) and a constructed language (*katharevousa*), which pretended to harken back to the classical idiom but was actually closer to Byzantine Greek, and which was inaugurated as the official language of the state in the 1830s and remained legally so until 1974. (“Dream Nation”, by Stathis Gourgouris, page 89)]

But, despite all attempts by the purists to “purify” their artificially imposed Greek language, in the end their attempts failed and today we still have a language that contains words from the past, from an entirely alien era, and Turkish and other foreign words picked up along the way. So like their modern “fake” Greek identity it is only fair and deserving that the Greeks have a “fake” and bastardized language to be proud of and to call their own.

Greece does not hesitate to call the Macedonian language “non-existent” and a mix of Serbian and Bulgarian but have they ever looked at their own language? I don’t think so, because if they did then they would be less critical of other peoples’ languages.

The Koine language was not the Mother language of the Greek people. It was taught to the Greek people in school. Koine is an ancient language that was widely used in the Balkans and in the Levant as the language of trade and commerce. It was also used by the Byzantine Church.

After the Patriarchy was sold to the highest bidder, Orthodox Christianity became a business in the Ottoman Empire. Some time after the Patriarchy was installed, at its insistence, the Macedonian Church, the Archbishopric in Ohrid to be more exact, was closed down. In other words, at the insistence of the Patriarch in Constantinople, in 1767 the Ottoman Sultan abolished the Macedonian Church by decree. After that Koine speaking bishops and priests invaded the Macedonian churches. They preached in the Koine language which the common people could not understand. On top of that all the money that was collected was sent to Constantinople and the Patriarchate decided how it was to be spent. It was like another form of tax.

INTERVIEWER – So two taxes were collected, one by the church and another by the Ottomans?

RISTO – The church imposed a form of tax on the people, that’s right. Ottoman tax was one thing and a debt to the church was another.

If you defaulted on your debts because you did not have money to pay for church services, real or imagined, then the Church possessed your property. Every village had what we call “Vakovska stoka” (church property). These properties were obtained either voluntarily, left to the church after death, or possessed for defaulting on debts.

Many people lost their properties because they could not read or understand the terms of their agreements with the church. People who did not have enough land of their own to support their families tended to rent land, on a seasonal basis, from the church and if they defaulted on the rent they tended to lose even more of their land.

A lot of the Slav speakers (Macedonians), as they were called, blamed their problems and their unfair treatment on misunderstandings with the Patriarch Church which they believed were done on purpose. The Patriarch church definitely benefited from their losses... which was obvious to them.

And what did this church do for them or for the Macedonian people in general?

Basically nothing! On top of that it preached to them in a language they could not understand.

This unfair treatment of the Macedonian peasant at the hands of the Patriarch church, which the Ottoman authorities allowed to go on, gave Russia reason to intervene in the Balkans, on behalf of the Orthodox Christians, of course. One good thing that came out of all this was Russian insistence that the Slavic language be used in the church services of the Christian Slav speakers.

To make a long story short, this is how the Exarchist Church came into existence. In 1875 the Slavic speaking Exarchist Church was created and installed inside the Ottoman Empire. The only difference between the Patriarchist and the Exarchist churches, outside of its administrators, was the language of prayer. The Patriarchists used the Koine, or “Greek” as westerners like to call it, while the Exarchists used the Slavonic language.

And as Greece earlier claimed the Patriarchist Church and Koine language as its own, after it became a state, Bulgaria too claimed the Slavonic language and Exarchist Church as its own, after Bulgaria became a nation state in 1878.

After that the Exarchist Church was synonymous with the Bulgarian Church. This left the Macedonians without a church of their own and the faithful had no choice but to attend liturgy in foreign churches.

Later came the competing interests and Serbia decided to join the fray. From what was going on inside Macedonia and the fact that foreign churches were allowed to establish themselves inside Ottoman Macedonia, without objections from the Ottoman authorities and with the blessing of the Great Powers, it became evident that Macedonia would not only not be given a chance to become an independent state but there were obvious signs that Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria had aims at annexing Macedonia for themselves... and with Great Power approval... it seems.

Remember, Muslim law prohibited political organizations from being established inside their domain...the only thing they would allow was church groups to function. So after Greece claimed the Patriarchate churches inside Macedonia, unofficially of course because they still belonged and to this day they still belong to the Constantinople Patriarchate, Bulgaria and Serbia, and to a small extent Romania, began to establish their own churches inside Macedonia.

INTERVIEWER – For ulterior motives?

RISTO – Yes, for ulterior motives. On the surface and from the outside it looked like these churches were providing a religious service to the people. But one has to ask “Why was this service provided in foreign languages through foreign churches?” Were the Macedonians not capable of providing these services on their own?

It was obvious that these foreign powers had ulterior motives. But what? There were educated Macedonians who had seen this before

and who believed that the churches were there to assimilate the Macedonian people, turn them into Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians.

This, of course, was dismissed by most, especially by the villagers who made comments like, “I am going to be a Greek as much as a horse can be a donkey” and “You can’t turn a sheep into a goat no matter how hard you try”. Yes, the foreign churches were there to do exactly that, assimilate the Macedonian people but to what end?

Most Macedonians dismissed these assimilation attempts as nonsense. The three competing powers in Ottoman Macedonia, however, needed to prove to their benefactors, the Great Powers that either Greeks, or Serbians, or Bulgarians lived in Macedonia and were in need of liberation from Ottoman treachery in order to justify the annexation of Macedonian territory and call it liberation.

The annexation had to be nice and legal. The Greeks were already established in Macedonia through the Patriarchate church in Constantinople, which was managed by a different body and not by the Greek Church in Athens. But both of these churches were pursuing the same interests and to the outsider it seemed like they were one church, the so-called “Greek Orthodox Church”.

The aim of these competing powers (Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia) was to annex as much of the Macedonian territories as possible and they had to do it along national dividing lines in order to make it acceptable, legal and lasting. But first they had to prove that this was “liberation”, meaning that they were “liberating” Macedonian territories because allegedly their own people lived there.

Unfortunately there were no Greeks, Serbians, or Bulgarians living in Macedonia which was a big problem for them. And this is why they had to “create” them through assimilation. Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria needed to demonstrate to the world that these territories were theirs because Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians lived on them... and not Macedonians.

The Macedonians, and true owners of Macedonia, therefore had to be removed from the equation completely. I don’t know if there was a formal agreement made between the three states but at some point

in time they decided to formally deny the existence of Macedonians altogether.

The Macedonian people in Macedonia were told by these outsiders that they could not be Macedonians if they did not have a Macedonian church of their own.

Faced with the prospect of having no church of their own, the Macedonian people made an attempt to establish a Macedonian church in 1891 but without success. On the recommendation of the Patriarch, the Sultan would not grant the Macedonians their wish to have their own church.

[December 4, 1891

Theodosius, Metropolitan of Skopje, to Pope Leo XIII I, the undersigned Metropolitan of Skopje, Theodosius, by God's Mercy head of Skopje eparchy, am submitting this request both in my name and in the name of the whole Orthodox flock of Macedonia, in which we are begging His Holiness to accept us under the wing of the Roman Catholic Church...Our desire springs from the historical right of the Orthodox Macedonian people to be freed from the jurisdiction of foreign Churches - the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Constantinople Patriarchate - ....The borders of the Archbishopric should conform to the present borders of Macedonia... Archivio della S. Congregazione de Propaganda Fide - Roma: Indice della Potenza - Marzo 1892-93, Somm.XV, f.132-141.]

It would appear that entry for the Macedonia people into nationhood allegedly depended on having their own Macedonian church... and since they did not have a Macedonian church then they could not be Macedonians...

So, having no church of their own, the Macedonian believers in Christ had no choice but to attend the foreign churches for their prayer.

The so called Greek Church was already in Macedonia and operated through the Constantinople Patriarchist church. The Bulgarian church entered Macedonia sometime around 1878 but in a short time

was able to attract more Macedonians than the Greek church. This was because liturgy in the Bulgarian church was conducted in the Bulgarian language, which was familiar to the Macedonian parishioner.

Even those who attended the Greek Church very quickly converted to the Bulgarian church... and later to the Serbian church. The churches were all identical; they were all Christian Orthodox, the only difference was the language of liturgy.

New churches were constantly being built by order of the Patriarch or Exarch. The Macedonian people, at this point, had no idea that their affiliation with a certain church would define their nationality. And those who knew did not believe it.

Now looking back at this, all three competing powers had people in Macedonia producing demographic statistics, almost on a daily basis, of how many ethnic Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians lived in Macedonia based on church affiliation.

Yes, all these demographic statistics were based on religion and not on nationality or ethnicity. None of the statistic showed Macedonians living in Macedonia. And no one questioned them, not even the Great Powers who were willing to accept the idea that Macedonians didn't exist.

Why was this? Because no Macedonians existed or because the Macedonians did not fit into their future plans?

This whole thing was neatly packaged. Because the Ottoman authorities recognized religion as the only political authority inside their empire, everything had to be done along religions lines.

But outside of the Ottoman Empire, especially in the West, the dividing line between people was not religion but nationality. So a connection was made which tied church affiliation to nationality.

This, it seems, solved all problems both for the competing powers and for the Great Powers.

Ever since the Macedonian church was banned by the Sultan in 1767 and replaced with the so-called “Greek church” the Macedonian people who attended the “Greek church” were counted as “Greeks”.

And if I may add, this was also true of all Greeks in modern Greece and not just in Macedonia. Greece had many ethnicities living on its soil. It had many ethnicities even before it became a nation state for the first time in 1828. The only prerequisite for them to become Greeks was to be Orthodox Christian and speak Greek. Naturally those who did not speak Greek, such as the Vlachs, Albanians, Macedonians, Christian Orthodox Turks, and so on, were taught to speak Greek in the Greek state sponsored schools. Greek did not have to be their mother tongue in order for them to be counted as Greeks.

This was also true in Macedonia until the Bulgarian church and later the Serbian church were allowed to operate inside the Ottoman Empire. The Serbians felt they too had a chance of gaining Macedonian territories if they played this religious game, so they too established their own churches inside Macedonia.

So now we have Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek churches operating inside Macedonia and competing for the hearts and minds of the same Macedonian parishioners. But because the Macedonians could actually understand the Bulgarian language they preferred to join the Bulgarian church.

The Bulgarian church seemed to attract more Macedonian people than the other two churches. So the way things were progressing, both the Greeks and Serbians were losing out to the Bulgarians.

It was not difficult for them to see that Bulgaria would eventually win over Macedonia and there would be nothing left for Greece or Serbia.

As a result of this, the situation inside Macedonia began to turn violent. People were coerced and blackmailed to join opposing churches. The competing powers even resorted to killing priests. If a certain Bulgarian priest, for example, was good at his job he was eliminated... exterminated.

INTERVIEWER - And vice versa, right?

RISTO – And vice versa. The Bulgarians were no different and they too were not above killing priests. The unfortunate thing about all this was that most of these priests were Macedonians employed by the competing churches.

When peaceful coercion no longer worked, the competitors introduced armed gangs hired to kill priests, terrorize the people and force them to change churches. Extreme measures were used to force people to convert.

INTERVIEWER – These gangs were called ‘comitagees’ or something, right?

RISTO – Yes, they were called “comitagees’ in Bulgarian and “Andartes” in Greek. They were foreign sponsored armed bands operating illegally in Macedonia.

INTERVIEWER – They were enforcers... right?

RISTO – Yes, they were paid enforcers, gangsters, some were even Macedonian like Pavle from Rula who killed people for gold. Karavangelis, the Greek Bishop of Kostur, actually paid Pavle money to kill people and deliver their heads to him...

You paid them money and they did whatever you wanted. You eliminate this priest or you beat up this person and so on and so forth.

Macedonia became lawless and the Ottomans did not seem to care. So while the Macedonians were going through this violent evolution, the three competing states continued to publish demographic statistics...that were constantly fluid and fluctuated as more pressure was placed on the Macedonian people to change their church affiliation.

So it was a matter of time that church affiliation in Macedonia became synonymous with nationality, as evidenced by the published demographic statistics.

Now that the three powers had convinced the outside world that Macedonians did not exist in Macedonia and that the people living in Macedonia were actually Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians, Macedonia could be divided along national lines. That was the theory. But in reality it was not as simple as it appeared because every village on every part of Macedonia was shown to have all three, so-called Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians living in it.

So how was Macedonia to be divided along “national lines?” Also, what was to happen to the other ethnicities living in Macedonia such as the Albanians, Vlachs, Jews, etc?

All that did not seem to matter to anyone, especially when well made plans began to fall apart after Macedonia was invaded and occupied in 1912.

After the Ottomans were driven out, with Macedonian help, the majority of the Macedonian people believed this was liberation. They were told the foreign armies were there to liberate them... and they believed it. But by then it was too late.

After the foreign armies drove out the Ottomans they refused to leave Macedonia and began to settle in. That’s when the Macedonian people realized that this was not liberation but occupation.

But then this whole liberation-occupation business fell apart when the three competing states turned on each other and began to fight; Greece and Serbia fighting against Bulgaria for more Macedonian territory.

Yes, the Great Powers did step in; but stepped in to halt the fighting not to divide Macedonia “along national lines”.

By this time no one seemed to care about the Macedonians or about “national” lines. Macedonia’s territory was arbitrarily divided along the front lines where the occupying armies were fighting each other.

The 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, by which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Balkan war was concluded, was all about dividing territory. There was nothing in it about people, religion, nationality, or “national lines”. A lot of people don’t understand that in 1913 Macedonia was arbitrarily divided.

Many people, especially the Greeks, think that the Balkan Wars were about liberating the Christians of Macedonia from the Ottomans and that those Christians were Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians. But in reality, the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest was a culmination of everything that happened from 1878 to 1913.

So basically the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest finalized exactly who was going to get what, in terms of lands. The plan for eliminating the Macedonian identity and partitioning Macedonia had been hatched a long time before that, even before the 1878 Russian-Ottoman war when Bulgaria was granted autonomy and Macedonia was given back to the Sultan.

Macedonia too could have been granted autonomy in 1878. But it wasn’t! Why?

The fact that Macedonia was handed back to the Ottomans without a single guarantee that no harm would come to the Macedonian people, especially to those who took up arms to liberate themselves from the Ottomans, tells us that the Great Powers had no intention of helping Macedonia. All the Great Powers knew that the Ottomans would take retribution on the Macedonian population yet no a single one put any measures to ensure that that would not happen. Why?

The message delivered to the Macedonian people here was that no one is interested in your survival and no one is going to help you. Basically you are on your own...And it has been this way for the Macedonian people to this day. But were the Macedonian people paying attention?

After 1878, after the San Stefano Treaty was signed and a greater Bulgaria was created by Russia, the Bulgarians have been obsessed with Macedonia and, over the years, have done everything in their power to possess it. And because of this they have become a great danger to the Macedonian people.

Earlier you asked me what happened to the Macedonian people after 1878, after Bulgaria was granted autonomy and Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans. Outside of allowing the Ottomans to punish the Macedonians for their involvement in the Russian-Ottoman War, the Great Powers basically gave Greece, Bulgaria and later Serbia the signal that Macedonia was now ripe for the picking.

The Macedonian people, unfortunately, did not know that and still saw the Ottoman Empire as their primary enemy. They could not comprehend that the propaganda coming out of Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria that the Macedonians were Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians was even real, never mind a danger to their sovereignty.

They figured that their future was safe... only if they could drive the Ottoman Empire out of Macedonia. Most Macedonians refused to believe that outside forces were actually working against them and that the strongest force among them was Bulgaria.

Some, like Gotse Delchev, believed that Macedonia had a future as an autonomous province inside the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria knew that and did everything in its power to prevent such a scenario.

Bulgaria was anxious to possess Macedonia but knew it would be unable to obtain it from the Ottoman Empire alone. So even before it partnered with the Greeks and Serbians, in its various alliances, it had in mind to start an uprising inside Macedonia in order to weaken both the Macedonians and Ottomans and then finish the job itself.

And to do that it had to provoke a war. However, it could not afford to have the Macedonian people win this war. So to make sure that the Macedonian side did not win, every time the Macedonian people made headway the Bulgarians whacked them on the head.

The Bulgarians had infiltrated the Macedonian liberation organizations and basically knew everything that was going on in Macedonia. They knew who the Macedonian leaders were and how and where they operated. There was a huge Macedonian immigration in Sofia and it was easy to recruit Macedonians into these false organizations. In fact most of the recruits in the External or Supremacist Macedonian Revolutionary Organization were Macedonians.

INTERVIEWER – And they were based in Sofia?

RISTO – Yes, they were based in Sofia. Most of them were military officers in the Bulgarian army. Pretending to work for the Macedonian cause, this organization actually worked for Bulgarian interests and was responsible for starting the 1903 Ilinden uprising early, before the Macedonian people were ready.

So every time the Macedonians got a step ahead the Bulgarians did something to slow them down. In the end the Bulgarians instigated the start of the Ilinden uprising, which decimated Macedonia and brought it closer to its invasion, occupation and partition by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Ironically, despite its grand effort to possess Macedonia, in the end, Bulgaria only received 10% of Macedonia's territory with 51% going to Greece and 39% to Serbia.

The British were well-aware of what was going on in Macedonia and while the Macedonian villages were burning, like bright stars in the night sky; they sat in their ships in the Aegean Sea watching and waiting.

What were they waiting for?

Obviously they were not waiting to help the Macedonians? They could and had the power to stop the Ottomans from burning down the Macedonian villages but obviously they did not. They were probably waiting to pre-empt a Bulgarian invasion in Macedonia.

I believe the reason the Bulgarians wanted to start the Ilinden uprising early was because they wanted it to fail. But in order for them to make sure it failed, they had to take it out of the hands of the Macedonian revolutionary leadership. But in order to do that they had to actually remove the top Macedonian leaders. And how does one do that?

As I mentioned earlier, the Bulgarians already knew who the Macedonian leaders were and where they were located. So all the Bulgarians had to do was betray the Macedonian revolutionary leaders to the Ottoman authorities.

In other words, the Bulgarians gave the Ottomans a list of names to arrest and after they were arrested Bulgaria sent the Supremacists to Macedonia to start an uprising. Almost every one of the leaders was arrested and put in jail except for Gotse Delchev. Delchev was really good at avoiding capture. But Gruev and the others leaders of the organization were not so lucky and they all ended up in jail.

After the Macedonian revolutionaries were betrayed to the Ottomans and arrested, the Supremacists began to take their place and declared, on their own, that an Uprising needed to take place and better sooner than later.

Right after the Macedonians leaders were arrested in February, 1903, the Supremacists arrived in Macedonia and coaxed the various district revolutionary leaders to prepare for an early uprising, even after almost every district reported that it was not ready for an uprising.

Gotse Delchev, the supreme commander of the Macedonian revolutionary forces, was against an early uprising and was determined to stop it. Unfortunately he was killed by Ottoman forces on his way to the meeting.

In order to prove my point that the Bulgarians were indeed involved in a conspiracy to start a war in Macedonia, I would like to raise the following questions:

1. How did it come about that almost all the Macedonian revolutionary leaders were captured and sent to jail at the same time?
2. Why was a massive general uprising raised in their absence?
3. Why was it called by the Supremacists, especially at a time when the people were not ready for a general uprising?
4. Why was Delchev, the supreme commander of the Macedonian forces, bypassed and ignored on this issue, and
5. How is it that the Ottomans could not find and catch Delchev in all those years he operated in Macedonia and yet they were able to find him and kill him on his way to a meeting to stop the early uprising from taking place?

These questions show a pattern. The Bulgarians created the Supremacist organization... why? There already was a Macedonian revolutionary organization working effectively ... The Bulgarians betrayed the Macedonian leaders to the Ottomans... Why?

Something to think about...

INTERVIEWER – Did your great grandfather Filip take part in the Ilinden Uprising?

RISTO – Yes, my great grandfather Filip did take part in the revolution... I don't know much about his involvement but one story my father told me is that one time he was stationed on Prevol, on top of the mountain overlooking Prespa. One story Filip told my father was that he was armed with a rifle and a single bullet. His job was to monitor movements of the Ottoman army and if the army took the road towards Prespa he was to fire that one warning shot... letting the revolutionaries in Prespa know that the Ottoman army was headed their way.

INTERVIEWER – Is that mountain in Oshchima?

RISTO – Yes, Prevol borders my village Oshchima with Prespa, at the top of the mountain. That day the revolutionaries were having a meeting in Prespa. Filip was left on top of the mountain to watch for Ottoman soldiers coming his way.

INTERVIEWER – In other words, he was a lookout?

RISTO – Yes, he was a lookout that day... It's a shame I don't know any more about his involvement in the revolution. My father said that Filip was like an encyclopedia, full of knowledge, but unfortunately his grandchildren hardly paid any attention to him. My father regrets not knowing more about him and his life.

INTERVIEWER – That's a fascinating story. Please continue...

RISTO – So the Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organization, without its own leaders and on the advice of the supremacists began to make preparations for an early uprising.

INTERVIEWER – So at this point the Bulgarians were running the whole show?

RISTO – Yes, the Bulgarians were running the whole show because they were behind the Supremacists. The Bulgarians reassured the Macedonian revolutionaries that Bulgaria was prepared to help them, even by declaring war on the Ottomans if necessary, all the Macedonians had to do was “fire the first volley of shots”.

The Ottomans at the time were aware that something was being prepared and were going from village to village looking for arms. Basically the Ottoman approach was to demoralize the people, punish them for what they were about to do in order to stop them from doing it. This put extra pressure on the Macedonian revolutionaries to get moving with the preparations for the uprising.

They had to make a decision: “Wait and get shot like a fish in a barrel or rise up and fight right now.”

A while later most of the Macedonian leaders were released from prison under a general amnesty. The amnesty came as a result of

external pressure, mainly from the Western European Great Powers. The West was fed up with how the Ottomans treated the Christians in their empire and pressured them to empty their jails. So they opened the jails and let everyone go. But by now Delchev was dead and out of the picture, and he had not been replaced. In the meantime preparations for the uprising were gaining momentum.

After Damian Gruev was released from prison he took Delchev's job and command of the Macedonian revolutionary forces. Unfortunately he had been in jail for about six months and was not up to speed with what was going on.

Gruev called for a Congress to take place, which unfortunately was completely dominated by Supremacists who again voted for an early rebellion. At the same time it was decided to start the rebellion on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. August 2<sup>nd</sup> is a religious holiday – Sveti Ilia, a day of celebration not of violence. The Ottomans would not expect violence during a Christian holiday so it was an ideal time to start the uprising.

The most unfortunate thing about this uprising, however, was not that the Ottomans would be surprised but that the Macedonians were not prepared for such a venture and for its aftermath. They had willing fighters but not the arms and ammunition. It was very difficult to get arms and ammunition. It had to be bought from someone, from somewhere.

The Bulgarians sold the Macedonians their old guns but without ammunition. The Greeks refused to sell them any arms. There was a company in Athens that made guns and some Macedonians who spoke Greek had to lie to them about their use in order to purchase some. But even after purchasing them, it was difficult to smuggle them inside Macedonia. The Ottomans were vigilant and kept their eyes open.

So even though the Macedonians were unable to find sufficient arms to fight an uprising, Gruev, the supreme leader at the time, decided to start the uprising anyway. The Macedonians were damned if they did and they were damned if they didn't start the uprising so they decided to start it. The Ottomans were going from village to village

destroying every village looking for arms, so the villages were going to be destroyed any way; uprising or no uprising.

These were the conditions under which the August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1903 Macedonian National Uprising took place, which ended in disaster.

The Russians had their ships patrolling the Aegean Sea and so did the British, watching Macedonia burn from the distance and they did nothing to stop it.

The brunt of the uprising lasted about 12 days. Parts of Kostur Region, Klisura and Neveska were liberated for a longer period of time but the town Krushevo, as I mentioned earlier, got most of the credit because its liberators declared it a republic, the first republic in the Balkans or maybe even in all of Europe.

INTERVIEWER – Where is Krushevo?

RISTO – Krushevo is located inside the Republic of Macedonia. The entire uprising lasted about 3 months. The revolution was over in just three months. This goes to show you how unprepared the Macedonian people were.

One of the worst things that happened to the Macedonian civilian population was that it lost its leaders and fighters who protected it. Most leaders were killed and now very few were left to protect the people. The Macedonian population was hit hard and scattered all over. Most of the villages were burned down. The Macedonian people were frightened, especially from Ottoman retribution and looked to anyone who offered to protect them, even to the Greeks who they despised.

After the failed uprising, to save themselves the Macedonian people were even willing to join the Greek churches.

The Macedonians were losing all hope, even in their own abilities to protect themselves.

And the Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian propaganda was right there behind them. “Christian brothers don’t worry we are here to save you.”

Where were they when the Macedonians were fighting to liberate themselves, especially the Bulgarians who openly promised to help them? Many volleys were fired and yet not a single Bulgarian soldier came to their rescue!

When will the Macedonians learn not to believe empty words?

Times were desperate for the next ten years from 1903 to 1913 for the Macedonian people, a decade of misery under the Ottoman yoke.

But times were about to get worse.

After the Macedonian people failed to liberate themselves, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria began preparations to invade Macedonia and kick the ailing Ottoman Empire out. They each could not do it alone so they were convinced by Russia, I believe, to form an alliance or a Balkan League, as it was later called. And so in 1912 they invaded and took Macedonia, driving out the Ottomans.

INTERVIEWER – So, at some point the Macedonians of IMRO decided they could not do it by themselves, so in future they looked to the Bulgarians for help... thinking... no?

RISTO – No, that is not correct. The top Macedonian IMRO leaders, including Iane Sandanski, who survived the 1903 Ilinden Uprising and later fought against the Bulgarians, were well aware of Bulgarian plans to annex Macedonia. Sandanski was of the opinion that Macedonia should fight for autonomy, following Delchev’s philosophy. Macedonia could only gain its independence by first becoming an autonomous province inside the Ottoman Empire. Delchev and Sandanski were well aware of the Great Powers and their meddling in Macedonian affairs through their proxies Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria and that Macedonia would eventually be swallowed up by one or all of them.

Delchev had seen what Russia had done with the San Stefano Treaty when Russia gave Macedonia to Bulgaria. He has also seen what the Western European Powers had done with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 when, instead of giving Macedonian autonomy, they gave it back to the Ottomans with absolutely no safeguards for the Macedonian people. So, if anyone was to protect Macedonia from being “swallowed up” by the Great Power proxies, it would have to be the Ottoman Empire. But first Macedonia had to gain its autonomy.

As I mentioned earlier, Bulgaria did not want Macedonia to gain its autonomy and become an Ottoman protectorate and that is precisely why the Supremacists started the Ilinden Uprising.

Let us not get confused here by the Greek and Bulgarian propaganda that “somehow” IMRO trusted Bulgaria to “liberate” Macedonia and create an independent Macedonian state. Bulgaria wanted Macedonia for itself. IMRO wanted an independent Macedonia. Delchev believed that that but could only be achieved through an autonomous Macedonia under the protection of the Ottoman Empire.

There were however Macedonian individuals who looked to the Bulgarians as saviours. You have to understand that the Bulgarian propaganda sounded very attractive to some. The Bulgarians were not saying “We are here to occupy your country and turn you into Bulgarians”, they were saying “Christian brothers we are here to help you...”

We have to remember that Bulgaria too was under the Ottoman yoke until 1878 and because of that some Macedonian people felt that the Bulgarians had sympathy for them and wanted to help.

There is also the fact that IMRO was infiltrated by Macedonians who worked for Bulgarian interests, knowingly or unknowingly. They too were convinced that Bulgaria could be their saviour.

Let us not forget that Bulgaria also promised the Macedonian people that it would intervene on their behalf and help them liberate themselves. All the Macedonians had to do is start the Uprising.

“Just fire one shot and the Bulgarian army will come in and save you” was the message they were getting from Bulgaria.

And why wouldn't the Macedonian people take advantage of such a generous offer?

Well the Macedonians fired many shots and no Bulgarian army showed up. So this proves that Bulgaria's aim was to get the Macedonians into a confrontation with the Ottomans and when the two sides destroyed each other, to walk in and invade Macedonia.

But in the end the Bulgarians did not invade. The Russian King warned them that there would be severe consequences from the Western European Great Powers if they invaded Macedonia. He reminded them of what happened in Berlin in 1878... He also advised them that this time Russia would not be there to save them.

But the Bulgarians kept making empty promises.

The British were probably there, in the Aegean Sea, watching the rebellion play out, to make sure the Bulgarians did not invade.

Ten years later, the same Great Powers, including the British, authorized Bulgaria along with Greece and Serbia, to invade, occupy and partition Macedonia.

Later we find out the decision on “how to divide Macedonia” was left up to the Russian King.

What surprised me the most is that the Russian King, who obviously was biased towards Bulgaria, was put in charge of deciding how to divide Macedonia.

And what did he decide? Did he decide to divide Macedonia along “national lines” as planned? No! When he was asked “How should we divide Macedonia”, the Russian King replied: “No one knows how to divide Macedonia. So go, drive the Ottomans out and wherever your armies stop, that's where you put your dividing lines.”

And that, more or less, is what happened until the Austro-Hungarians (Hapsburgs) decided they were not going to allow Serbia to have access to the Adriatic Sea.

So what happened after that?

Well, hell broke loose and the Second Balkan War started.

Italy and Austro-Hungary called for an Albanian state to be created in the lands that Serbia had occupied. Serbia was not happy about losing those lands and asked Bulgaria for more land because at that time Bulgaria had occupied the largest part of Macedonia.

Bulgaria did not answer the Serbian pleas and kept ignoring Serbia. Serbia was not strong enough to take those lands by force by itself so it asked Greece for help. A secret pact was made to strike Bulgaria. Bulgaria found out about the secret pact and preemptively struck back at both Serbia and Greece and started to drive them out of Macedonia.

Romania from the north sought this opportunity to regain some territories it had lost to Bulgaria and attacked Bulgaria from the north. The Ottomans, having just lost Macedonia, decide to take a chance on getting some of it back and struck Bulgaria from the east.

The Great Powers decided to intervene and stop this from becoming a World War. The Second Balkan War, as I mentioned earlier, ended with the signing of the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest. Again, the division was determined by where the armies stood when the war ended. And that's how Macedonia was divided.

So after their country was invaded and occupied, the Macedonian people faced another prospect; their country was partitioned in three pieces. And as I mentioned earlier, Greece was given 51%, Serbia 39% and Bulgaria was lucky to even receive 10%. But Bulgaria was not happy about that and every time there was a conflict, it tried to take more of Macedonia.

In addition to having their country portioned into three pieces, the Macedonian people were now faced with three new occupiers who were not satisfied with just occupying Macedonian lands but wanted to assimilate the Macedonian people, by force if necessary.

After the Second Balkan War ended in 1913, the Greeks administratively took over the Macedonian territory they occupied and informed the Macedonian people that this was Greece now. They established their military administration and, through parliamentary approval, extended the Greek border to the north to where it is today. After that they sent a ministry, judges, guards, policemen and so on. After they established their various administrations they began to assimilate the Macedonian lands along with the Macedonian people.

INTERVIEWER – Can I just go back one step? There was, I was saying in the village Rabi, a statue of a man called Baskavievus. Now I know from my research that he did not speak Greek, yet he fought with Capitan Kourtas, who your Dad showed me a picture of.

RISTO – I don't recognize the name but like I said before these hired thugs, who worked for Bishop Karavangelis of Kostur and other such bishops, were mostly local Macedonians with very few so called Greeks imported from Crete. These people were criminals and opportunists who would do anything for anyone for money. It is most unfortunate that Greece made them into heroes.

Naturally Greece needs to show the world that it has heroes who fought for its cause but the Macedonian people know exactly what kind of animals these thugs were. Every society has them and they seem to rise and flourish during desperate times.

Karavangelis had these thugs killing people and forcing Macedonians to become Greeks. They did a lot of raping and plundering too. They did that to terrorize the people and turn them into easy prey.

The reason Greece, Serbia and Bulgarian hired local Macedonians is because Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria did not want to get caught conducting criminal activities and interfering in the affairs of the

Ottoman Empire, so they paid local Macedonians to do the dirty work for them.

Later Greece sent Cretins because they were more vicious and therefore more reliable workers.

Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia could not afford to get implicated in embarrassing situations and neither could they sent their own military...so the way they did business was by sending agents or spies inside Macedonia to basically put together armed gangs that were willing to do dirty deeds to their own people for money.

And this is how they established Kourtas's gang, as you call him, and the other armed groups. The agents were good at establishing the groups but they couldn't manage them so they used religious figures like Karavangelis to give them their assignments and to pay them for their work.

INTERVIEWER – Was Kourtas in any way ethnically Greek?

RISTO – I don't know what ethnicity he was but I can tell you that he was not an "ethnic Greek" because, as I said earlier, there were and there are no "ethnic Greeks". Greece itself does not recognize the word "ethnicity" because it claims that "ethnicities" do not exist in Greece. And I don't mean minorities, I mean ethnicities. Do you know why? Because, as I explained earlier, all the people in Greece, the people who live inside Greece's borders today, with the exception of the Christian Turkish settlers and colonists who were brought to Greece from Asia Minor in the 1920's, are indigenous to Greece and none of them are Greeks. And neither are the Christian Turkish settlers and colonists.

If Greece were to recognize that ethnicities exist it would have to recognize that Greece is a multi-ethnic state. But Greece has declared itself a homogenous state populated by pure Greeks only.

I have already explained that Greece is an artificial creation and became a nation state for the first time in the 1820's. The larger ethnic groups that lived in the territory where Greece is today before it was called Greece were ethnic Albanians, Vlachs, Macedonians

and Turks. In other words, the original people who lived in the region now called Greece were Albanians, Vlachs, Macedonians, Turks and a variety of other smaller groups of ethnicities.

The largest of these ethnic groups was the Albanian group which spoke Albanian. The Vlachs, today's staunchest Greeks, were the next largest group. They lived mostly in Thessaly and spoke Vlach, a Latin language. The entire Peloponnesus was occupied by Slav speakers who were either indigenous to the region or were deposited there by the Byzantine emperors.

When Greece was first created Nauplion was its capital. History tells us that when the first Greek parliamentary assembly was called to session it had to use translators because the majority of its members did not speak Greek or even one language.

Athens at the time was just a village populated by Albanians, about five thousand of them. Even the first language considered for use in the newly created Greek state was Albanian. Yes, Albanian and not Greek. This is Greece's true history, not the manufactured history they teach in their schools today.

To put it simply, Greece is a modern creation that came out of the ashes of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Greece was artificially created by the Western Philhellenes who were infatuated with the so-called "Ancient Greeks", another group of Greeks that did not exist, not like the way they are portrayed. But we will leave that story for another time.

Modern Greece was artificially designed to mimic the so-called Ancient Greece, a mythical Greece, in order to give Europe credence and to prove to the world that today's modern civilization has roots in Europe, and not somewhere else.

When Greece was first created it was ruled by a foreigner. King Otto, a German prince, a child who was sent to Greece along with a German administration of over six hundred people.

Why was a foreigner and a foreign administration sent to Greece to rule it? Was Greece incapable of ruling itself, of finding leaders in

its own people? Or was Otto sent to Greece to shape it the way the Germans wanted it shaped?

We know that Otto's father, the King of Germany, was a Philhellene and Otto, being a child, relied on his father for guidance. Otto was helped to create the Greece of today, an artificial Greece, to serve the interests of the Western European Great Powers and not the interests of the people who lived in Greece. And ever since then Greece has been a protectorate of the Western European Great Powers. Why? To protect it from who? To protect it from itself?

Yes, to protect it from itself! The people living in Greece were never asked who and what they were and what kind of state they wanted for themselves, they were told that they were Greeks and nothing more. They were told they were Greeks, descendents of the Ancient Greeks and to forget the rest, including their own real identities.

This was forced upon them and the people were turned into nationalists, fanatics and xenophobes, refusing to face the truth even about their own past.

The Greeks today passionately despise people who live in Greece and claim not to be Greeks and that they belong to ethnicities, especially to the Macedonian ethnicity.

The Greeks refuse to recognize that such an ethnicity exists and discriminate extremely against anyone who claims to be Macedonian.

People have been exiles, beaten, fined, sent to jail and even executed for claiming to be Macedonian.

After the Greeks got their hands on Macedonia they erased everything that was Macedonian including the Macedonian toponyms, people's names, Macedonian inscriptions even the Macedonian saint names from church icons and people's Macedonian names from tombstones.

When Greece established itself as a state and took control of the people who lived within its borders, it published demographic

statistics. Before 1926 it published demographic statistics claiming that modern Greece was populated by 98% pure Greeks and 2% Muslim Greeks.

First, Muslim is not an ethnicity, it's a religion. So your first hint here is that the demographic was based on religion. But how can that be? Did they accidentally omit the word "Christian" in between the words "pure" and "Greeks"? They didn't exactly say "Greece was populated by 98% pure Christian Greeks and 2% Muslim Greeks"?

What are we to assume they meant by that, that Greece is populated by 100% pure Greeks of whom 98% are Christians and 2% are Muslims?

Or are we to assume Greece is populated by 98% pure "ethnic" Greeks and 2% "ethnic" Greeks who happen to be Muslims?

Why create such confusion?

I asked many people what they thought this meant, including my own parents. They all, without exception, said they thought it meant that Greece was populated by 98% ethnic Greeks.

"The total population in Greece rose between 1907 and 1928 from 2,600,000 to 6,200,000." "After the Greek advances of 1912, for instance, the Greek elements in Greek Macedonia had constituted 43 percent of the population. By 1926, with the resettlement of the refugees, the Greek element has risen to 89 percent." (Page 121, Richard Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece*)

According to this new demographic, 89% of Greece was still populated by pure Greeks. This trend continued through the 1920's even though Greece brought over one million Turkish Christian colonists and settlers from Asia Minor and settled them on Greek soil. But we Macedonians knew that these people were not Greeks because many, about 600,000 of them, were settled in Macedonia. They became our neighbours and when we got to know them we found out that they were Christian Turks and not Greeks!

So the question now was where and who were the Greeks in Macedonia that Greece referred to as “pure” Greeks in the Greek demographic?

I decided to look into this a little deeper. I started with my own parents. I said Greece claims that 89% of the population living inside its borders is Greek. I know all the people in our village and no one claims to be Greek, so who are the Greeks in our village?

There were no Greeks in my village, none in neighbouring villages and none in the region where I lived in Macedonia.

In places where everyone seemed to know everyone, people pointed out the non-Macedonians who they thought might be Greeks. They pointed to the grocers the shepherds, the bakers the handymen and so on; who they thought might be Greeks.

But, as it turned out the grocers were Vlachs, the shepherds were Vlachs, the baker was a Jew and the construction crews were Albanians... and so far no Greeks.

The only other people that the villagers assumed were Greeks were the police chiefs, the politicians, some of the teachers, and the settlers and colonists... but all of them turned out to be newcomers to Macedonia who came from south of Olympus and from Asia Minor. In other words they all came outside of Macedonia and we could not identify their ethnicity.

Therefore I had to conclude that there were no “Greeks” who were indigenous to Macedonia. And as I mentioned earlier, the newcomers, the Christian Turkish settlers and colonists from Asia Minor who were deposited in various Macedonian villages, were not Greeks either.

So one has to wonder, “What’s going on here?” Where are the Greeks? Well, there have to be some Greeks further south in Greece?!

To make a long story short, I decided to look deeper into the history of Greece but not through Greek sources.

After going through about 150 books written by such authors as David Holden, Fallmerayer, Edward Blaquiere, William St. Clair, T. J. Winifrith, J. McKeen Cattell, Lucy M. J. Garnett, James Bouchier, La Pouge, Schultz, Rennell Rodd, Michael Herzfeld, Clogg, Nigel Wilson, G. Droysen (the man who actually created Hellenism), Thomas Keightley, G. Bowersock, Nicholas G. L. Hammond \*, Keith R. Legg, Richard Gleason Greene, William Z. Ripley, Colin Wells, Alexandra Halkias, Charles Eliot, G. P. Gooch, Rennell Rodd, G. A. Henty, Balasz Trencsenyi, Michal Kopecek, F.W. Walbank, Peter Green, Neni Panourgia, Vamik Volkan, Karakasidou, to name a few... I could find no “ethnic Greeks” in Greece.

\* [Surprisingly even Nicholas G. L. Hammond, the greatest Philhellene historian and author, has admitted that the Modern Greeks are not what they seem. Nicholas G. L. Hammond in his book “Migrations and Invasions in Greece and Adjacent Areas” on page 57 writes, “It was during this period [1206 to 1260] that the flow of immigrants from the western area began. It became a flood in the fourteenth century. They went as mercenaries, raiders and migrants. The great majority of them were speakers of Albanian, but others joined the movement. Whatever their language they were described by the Greek and Latin writers as ‘Albanoi’ or ‘Albanitai’ or ‘Albanenses’ and the reason of this collective term can only be that they entered the Byzantine world through the district which the Byzantines knew as ‘Albanon’. Thus the Vlach speaking Malakasii who invaded Thessaly in 1334 were described as ‘Albanoi’ by Cantacuzenus 1.474 no less than the evidently Albanian-speaking ‘Albanensium gens’ which raided Thessaly in 1325.]

All these authors said that Greece was a modern creation, created from the raw materials that existed on the Ottoman lands that are now called Greece. There never was a Greece and there never were any Greeks... not until they were created as recently as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So how can there be “ethnic Greeks”?

So once again, Kourtas could not have been an “ethnic Greek”.

The bishop Karavangelis did not work for Athens, he worked for the Patriarchy in Istanbul but cooperated with Athens which supplied him with the necessary gold to commit various crimes in the name of “Hellenism”.

Karavangelis hated IMRO more than the Ottomans did because the IMRO leadership was onto him and got in his way of exercising Hellenism on Macedonia, so he paid these thugs to kill IMRO leaders.

One of those leaders killed in our region was Lazo Poptraikov. Karavangelis hired Kote from Rula to kill Poptraikov. Kote from Rula was a greedy individual and his greed was stronger than his loyalty to his friends. Lazo Poptraikov was an usher in Kote’s wedding and a man who twice saved Kote’s life. But Poptraikov was also on Karavangelis’s hit list.

After a skirmish with the Ottomans in Mariovo, word was out that Lazo Poptraikov had received a wound on the head and was on the run. Kote caught up with him at Turtska Polena in Oshchima and after a long chat the two men said their good byes and Kote left.

On his way to Zhelevo, Kote sent some hood from Zhelevo to kill and decapitate Lazo. Lazo’s head was then taken to Karavangelis to collect the reward. Lazo’s headless body, according to my father, was buried behind the altar in the Sveti Nikola Church in Oshchima.

I just want to add here that the ultimate disgrace for Karavangelis came after the massacre of the village Zagoricheni. Refusing to bend to Hellenism, Zagoricheni, on direct orders from Karavangelis, was massacred to the last person, including the unborn children inside the wombs of pregnant women. Witnesses reported finding bodies of pregnant women with their abdomens cut open. The survivors who escaped refused to bury the dead and waited for days for the European consuls from Bitola to arrive and witness the atrocities the Greeks had committed first hand. And what did these consuls do? Nothing!

The people from the surrounding villages knew Kote from Rula. He was an idiot, a simpleton, a perfect patsy to be used by the

Macedonian people's enemies. Today Kote is a Greek hero. Why shouldn't he be? He helped Greece make Macedonia Greek.

Today there is a statue of him in his native Rula, standing there at the entrance of the village, reminding the local Macedonian population, who knew him, of what an idiot he was and of how he helped the Greeks enslave Macedonia.

For those who didn't know him, Kote is a Greek hero and there is a statue of him to prove it. What idiots, those who admire Kote's statue have no clue how that greatness was achieved and if you tell them they will ridicule you and tell you "You are the idiot!"

At that time Kote of Rula was a simple hood; a crook and a bully who liked to intimidate women and children and to rob people at gunpoint. Some called him a Haiduke. But he was no Haiduke, he was a lazy simpleton and an idiot who would do anything for money, including murder his own friends.

Some of the IMRO leaders sought to recruit him to become a revolutionary but I guess fighting for a cause was not his thing... there was no profit in it... no gold coins. So he chose to work against the Macedonian cause and against his own people. And look at him now! He is a Greek hero with a statue to boot! I don't want to talk about him any more... He disgusts me and does not deserve the attention he is getting.

Let us get back to our story.

Earlier I mentioned the word Haiduk. What is a Haiduk? The Haiduks were the first revolutionaries in Macedonia. In the eyes of the Ottoman authorities they were criminals but they fought to survive. Yes, it is true they were criminals who fled to the mountains to escape persecution. They lived off the land and from whatever they could steal. They tended to rob rich travelers, especially Ottoman merchants. For their safety they gathered in groups, armed themselves and fought against the authorities. They were constantly pursued by the law but they learned how to fight, run and survive. They were seasoned fighters and survivors and made excellent revolutionaries. They were not all criminals, some

were decent people who were falsely accused of crimes they did not commit but had no choice but to flee and pursue this kind of life in order to avoid jail time or the noose.

When the Macedonians were preparing for the uprising the Haiduks were the best contributors. They wanted the Ottomans out more than anyone. They trained the young revolutionaries how to fight and how to survive. There were women among the Haiduks. Some even achieved legendary status. The legendary Rumena was one of them. She had her own Cheta (fighting unit) and so were Kostadinka and Srebra Apostolova. Srebra was from Lerin Region, where I come from.

So, getting back to the paid assassins. There were three or four groups operating in the Lerin and Kostur Regions. These groups were managed by Karavangelis, the Greek Bishop of Kostur.

Let me tell you a bit more about Germanos Karavangelis. Well, I best let Brailsford tell you about him because he had the pleasure of meeting the Bishop. Here is what H. N. Brailsford had to say on pages 209 and 210 of his book “Macedonia: Its races and their Future”:

[The Archbishop's was a character that repelled, yet fascinated. One was never at an end of the surprises which it offered. I remember well our first meeting. We began our conversation in Greek, but in a few minutes we had discovered that we had been at a German university together, and the man I had taken for a Byzantine assumed the guise of a Berliner. Education is rare among the Greek Bishops, and I had never yet met a man among them who spoke a Western tongue. His Beatitude seemed a modern of the moderns. Could this be the fanatic who persecuted Bulgarian (Macedonian) peasants to force them into his Church? Could this be the raging partisan who massed his people to drive the schismatic Bulgarian Bishop from the town? In five minutes he had professed himself a philosopher. In ten minutes he had avowed himself a freethinker. And he had views on psychology. He had read his Lotze, and soon we were criticizing the ethics of Wundt. But there, above my head, on the wall, in a conspicuous place, hung the photograph of a ghastly head, severed at the neck, with a bullet through the jaw,

dripping blood. And then I remembered the tale. That head had belonged to a Bulgarian (Macedonian) chief (this was Lazo Poptraikov's head). A band of bravoes in the Archbishop's pay had murdered him as he lay wounded in hiding. And the tale went on to tell how the murderers carried the bleeding trophy to the Palace, and how the Archbishop had had it photographed and paid its price in fifty pieces of gold. And there, over my head, hung the photograph. Somehow we stopped talking moral philosophy...]

And there you have it. Brailsford, I believe, was a journalist in Macedonia during Karavangelis's time... or maybe he was an English spy, I don't know, he joked about it often enough. But I do have a problem with him calling the Macedonian people Bulgarian. I have seen this many times with many authors and not just Brailsford. He talks about Vlachs and about Albanians but not about Macedonians.

Was it a conspiracy to cover up the fact that Macedonians existed and still exist in Greek occupied Macedonia? I would say yes but it was not the authors that did the covering up, it was their editors and publishers. How do I know this? A friend of mine, a triple PhD, wanted to write a book about us Macedonians and tell our story the way he knew it, the way he learned it from his people. In a very sad voice the 80 year-old professor said to me, "I want to leave something for our future generations before I die, something real and not the garbage they peddle nowadays, but they won't let me. Every time I write something, my editors tell me I can't say that and change it... they are watering my book down. The university will not publish it unless I do what they tell me. I can't tell my own story as a Macedonian but they have no problem with me if I call myself a Greek! I can write whatever I want to if I say I was Greek in the book but I am tired of pretending..." Yes, I am convinced its not just Greece and Bulgaria who don't want Macedonia to exist, there are others out there too... very powerful people... who stand behind Greece and Bulgaria.

Now that we are on the subject of conspiracies, another thing that bothers me is the term "fruit salad" which the French invented for Macedonia. They call Macedonia "fruit salad" because they apparently can't figure out the ethnicities that live there. Such a

complicated task for the French to figure out who is who in Macedonia! Why is that?

Because apparently the Macedonian people themselves “don’t know who they are”! Then tell me, how did A. Den Doolaard, a Dutchman, know exactly who they are and apparently no one else does?

Yes Doolaard was a real person; there is a statue of him in Ohrid, near the lakeshore. I saw it myself and I also read stories about him.

The difference between Doolaard and the other travelers and authors, is that Doolaard went to Macedonia by himself, unannounced and without guards. Looking like a man down on his luck, he mingled with the Macedonian people in their restaurants, cafés, taverns and homes. When the people got used to him and realized he was not there to cause them harm, they opened up to him and told him all sorts of things including who they are and what they want.

But when the other travelers visited Macedonia, they got permission from the Ottomans and were escorted by “guards” especially provided for them, for their protection, especially chosen by the Ottoman authorities. Need I say more?

Anyone who lived in similar circumstances, like those poor Macedonians who were tormented on a daily basis, will tell you that if you want to live you don’t open your mouth and tell a stranger something that will come back and kill you.

So when the foreign travelers asked Macedonians “What they were” most Macedonians said “well, we are Christians, we are poor and uneducated people and we don’t know what we are...” And there you have it. Now there are books written about this... that paint us as ignorant animals... and thanks to the French we are fruit salad.

What do you think would have happened to the Macedonians had they said: “We are Macedonians and we want our freedom... we want to drive the Ottomans out and create our own Macedonian

state...”? Do you think they would have seen the sun rise the next day?

These travelers must have been complete idiots and didn't know what they were doing or they did that on purpose, out of callous. I don't know what else to tell you.

But the things they wrote in their books not only severely damaged the Macedonian cause internationally but gave our enemies a license to do whatever they wanted in Macedonia... because we did not exist... or were too stupid to know who we are. Thank you France!

It turns my stomach to think that this could actually happen and that foreigners could be that callous. It is unbelievable the uncaring path the world has taken towards us Macedonians. Do you ever wonder why that is? Why there are Greeks, Albanians, Serbians and Bulgarians and no Macedonians in Macedonia?

Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria did not do this to on their own; someone put them up to it.

Let me say this again. It is well-known that the Balkans had been borderless since Philip II's time. Then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, exactly after the European Powers were exercising their might they decided to destroy the ailing Ottoman Empire.

Change does not come on its own... People bring change. The Ottoman Empire crumbled under the will of the Great Powers and partitioned into many pieces under the will of the Western Great Powers. Why?

Was it because they did not want a large Orthodox Christian country that rivaled their own countries on the European continent?

On top of that, why change it, why not leave it the way it was - multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious, just like the people wanted it?!

Yes, the people of the Balkans, including the people living in Greece, wanted to replace their Muslim government with a Christian

one. That's what they fought for, not to create something alien like "Hellenism" which they had never heard of before until it was imposed on them by the Great Powers.

Those proud Greeks of today who think they are "descendents of the ancient Greeks" should take a good look at what their great, great grandfathers fought for. They fought to create their own Christian country. They fought and died opposing "Hellenism".

In the end, the Christian people who knew exactly who they were and what they wanted were silenced. They were told to accept their new identities and be happy because this was progress and better for them.

Over time many people did accept their new and fake identities and with time these reformers won. Unfortunately these fake identities also polarized the people and made them despise each other.

This was good for the Great Powers because these new states were not only loyal to them but would remain small and never re-combine and become great and take back what was once theirs.

The Greeks were created in the image of the ancient Greeks, a race of people who disappeared after they were defeated by the Macedonians in Cheronnea on August 2nd, 338 BC.

And wasn't it the Greek philosopher Lycurgus who said, "With the death of Cheronnea was buried the freedom of Greece?"

Then we have the Serbians created in the image of the Sorbs who came to that region from somewhere where Germany is today. How about Bulgaria, was it not created in the image of the Bulgar Turkic Tatars who came to the Balkans from behind the Volva River as elite fighters and settled in today's northern Bulgaria?

The Albanians too are supposedly foreigners in the Balkans because they too came from somewhere in Asia, today's Azerbaijan, from behind an ancient country called Albania.

And let us not forget the Macedonians, the people who created one of the greatest empires the world had seen... An Empire that bridged East and West... Well... today they “don’t exist!” That’s what we are being told... That’s what the Great Power proxy Greece is saying.

But ironically they do exist and are exposing all dastardly deeds. According to our modern history, sponsored by the Great Powers, every country in the Balkans, it seems, has foreign origins. So was the Balkans empty, desolate when these people arrived here? Did they find anyone? And why is it so important to countries like France, Britain and Germany for Macedonians to not exist?

Important questions don’t you think?

At this point I need to mention something about the Macedonian language. I need to mention that the Macedonian language has existed for thousands of years. It existed even before the Old Church Slavonic language was codified by Kiril and Metodi in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The Macedonian language is also the mother of all written Slavic languages because there were no written Slavic languages before it.

The need to pass the word of God to the Christian followers in the language they understood created the need for a written language that was understood by the same followers. In the case of the Slavic speaking people, Macedonian was the first written language to serve that purpose.

There were too many scriptures for the priests to commit to memory and relay to the people, so a way had to be found for them to read these scriptures in the language the people understood.

The solution to that problem was the creation of the Glagolic and later the Cyrillic script initiated by the Macedonian brothers Kiril and Metodi from Solun and later modified and advanced by Kliment and Naum of Ohrid.

The Macedonian language was understood not only by the Macedonians but also by other Slavic speakers in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The written language that Kiril, Metodi, Kliment and Naum created became known to the West as “Old Church Slavonic”.

Instead of calling it “Old Macedonian”, the name it deserves, the West decided to call it “Old Church Slavonic”.

The Macedonian arch-bishopric of Ohrid, which was then recognized by the Eastern Roman emperor as equal in rank to that of Tsari Grad (Istanbul), became the ecclesiastic centre from which the Cyrillic script, or better described as “Old Macedonian”, and the Eastern Orthodox Faith were spread throughout Serbia, Bulgaria and as far north as Old Russia.

Old Church Slavonic or Old Macedonian eventually became the sacred language of a large section of the Slav speaking people and the third international language of Europe. Ever since then the Macedonian language has functioned without serious challenge as the principal literary, liturgical and colloquial language of Macedonia. And therefore the Macedonian standard language is a direct descendant of the Old Church Slavonic which in fact is Old Macedonian.

Unlike the so-called Greek language, especially the Katharevousa which was resurrected after being dead for over two thousand years, the Macedonian language has continuity for more than a millennium.

According to Dimitria Chupovski, a Macedonian patriot and author, the Macedonian language that formed the basis for Old Church Slavonic has not ceased to exist for more than 1,000 years and resounds in all Slavic places of worship. Slav literature is based on Old Church Slavonic which in turn is based on the Macedonian language, not merely for the development of a written language and Christianity but also for art, architecture and literature. We must acknowledge and must never forget that Macedonia became a renowned centre of Slavo-Byzantine culture and its chief city, Ohrid, became the metropolis of Slavonic Christianity. The literary

wealth that accumulated, including some original creations, was to nourish Slavic religious and intellectual life throughout the middle ages. (Chupovski, “Macedonia and the Macedonians”)

The first Westerner on record to mention Old Church Slavonic as simply “Macedonian” was the German humanist Hieronomus Megisser in his works of 1603. According to Megisser a psalm was translated into 21 languages. One of those languages was marked “Macedonian”. Again, according to Western sources, only a few texts approximating the spoken Macedonian language are known before 1790. However, one important historical record is a small dictionary of the Kostur dialect with a folk song in it dating from the sixteenth century. (Stojan Ristevski, *Sozdavanjeto na sovremeniot Makedonski Literaturen Jazik* (Skopje, Studenki zbor, 1988), p. 96.)

But very soon after the first written Slavic language appeared, Macedonia fell under the control of foreign empires which used foreign official languages and more or less squashed the creative spirit of the Macedonian people and the written form of their language. This, of course, continued until Greece occupied 51% of Macedonia in 1912 and outright banned the Macedonian language altogether.

Now the Greeks claim Macedonians do not exist and if Macedonians do not exist then the Macedonian language does not exist either. But how can that be true with all the evidence surrounding us?

Well, the answer to that problem, as I mentioned earlier, came in a neat little package. First they said Macedonians don’t exist and now they say the Macedonians are not really Macedonians but Slavs who came to the Balkans in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD from behind the Carpathian Mountains.

Yet again another newcomer arriving in the Balkans from somewhere else! No explanation given as to what happened to the original Macedonians? Did they all die off from old age?

Even if the Macedonians of today came from behind the Carpathians around 600 AD, haven't they been long enough on Macedonian lands to qualify to be called Macedonians?

And behold, even though there were no borders to stop the Slavs from going into Greece, they all, to the last one, remained in Macedonia... and killed off all of the indigenous Macedonians... to the last one... But never entered Greece! Why? Because they encountered some sort of invisible border?

This is all nonsense designed to keep us running around in circles and to keep the Greeks in and us Macedonians out. The fact of the matter is that the Great Powers wanted to break up the Ottoman Empire into smaller and more manageable pieces and to make sure these pieces never combine again so they gave each piece a unique character and made it feel like a foreigner on its own lands and loyal only to its benefactor.

Macedonia was sacrificed to accomplish two things. One, making sure it would never rise again and two each fledgling country (Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania) that received Macedonian lands remain loyal to their benefactors because what they gave yesterday they could easily take away today. The Great Powers who made those countries could easily un-make them if they chose to.

Well, we are getting off topic here so let us get back to Karavangelis and the aftermath of the failed Macedonian 1903 Ilinden Uprising.

When the Uprising ended Macedonia was in shambles. Most of the revolutionary leaders were killed and basically there was very little left with which to oppose Karavangelis and his ilk from what he himself called "civilizing the dregs of society" and turning them into "Hellenic" aliens.

INTERVIEWER – Has anyone written a book about Karavangelis's crimes?

RISTO – Yes they have. Even Greeks have written about him. The consuls came and documented the carnage. It was also documented

by Dimitris Lithoxou in his book “The Greek Anti-Macedonian Struggle” Part 1, in chapter 9.

It was not difficult to figure out that Karavangelis was responsible for the atrocity committed in Zagorichani. When word came out that he had done it, Karavangelis fled the country and went to Austria. He never came back. But he did write his autobiography where he bragged about how he had murdered people. Greece published his accomplishment and when it realized the implications of what was said in the book, the Greeks tried to pull it out. Unfortunately for them, copies survived and their shame cannot so easily be covered up.

Another notorious name I should mention, who fought in the Anti-Macedonia struggle, was Pavlos Melas. Melas was a well-known notorious Greek armed bandit. He was killed in the village Statitsa, Lerin Region, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1904. The village was later named after him.

This is what Greeks do to us, rub salt in our wounds. His family was from France but they were Albanian servants in Greece. His father was the mayor of Athens. The wealth and status of this Albanian family depended on their Greek masters and it's no surprise that they were “Hellenic” fanatics.

Did you know that Pavlos Melas wrote letters to his wife and he told her that he was learning some “Makedonika” (Macedonian) because the women in Macedonia generally did not speak Greek? It is important to note here that he said “Macedonian” and not Bulgarian, Serbian, or Slavic.

“In what the author calls a ‘reverse journey from myth towards history’, Dimitris Lithoxou draws on primary Greek sources- - consular reports, private letters and diaries- -to turn the dominant heroic narrative of Greece’s Macedonian fighters on its head. The tragic picture of nationalist icon Pavlos Melas that emerges- -a young man from a privileged background, tormented by the isolation and physical hardships of a campaign of terror in an alien, non-Greek land, and ultimately killed by one of his own men- -is a potent and timely reminder of the danger that romantic ideals of

expansive chauvinism pose for human reason and decency- -among perpetrators and victims alike. This book is vivid testimony to the enduring importance of open-minded archival research in preserving the fragile and vital habit of critical thinking.” (Professor Keith Brown, Watson Institute, Brown University).

Anyway, his own men killed him for money. That is what the people in Statitsa who witnessed the murder had said. Melas was a thug just like the thugs he led and in the end they put a bullet in his back. He did not die in glory fighting the Ottomans like we are led to believe, he died attempting to steal gold from a certain house where they believed gold had been hidden.

When Melas came out of the house without any gold, his cohorts did not believe him, they figured he hid it to reclaim it for himself later. And so they killed him for it. Anyway, this is one of the stories that is being told. It is most unfortunate however that we Macedonians did not write things down and depended on oral history and as you know oral history dies if there is an intergenerational interruption, and wars tend to do exactly that. This, unfortunately, is never good because when you lose your history you lose your roots. Your roots are cut off and after that anyone can replant you with fake roots.

This is what happened to the modern Greeks and to a large extent, this is happening to us Macedonians too. It is regrettable to see Macedonians not only calling themselves Greeks but feeling that they are Greeks, especially when their own ancestors fought and died to avoid being assimilated. It is so sad.

INTERVIEWER – Yes and that’s what happened.

RISTO – It was a big problem for us because we had several wars one after another and we lost our continuity as well as our traditions. Our traditions were a roadmap to life. They guided us from day to day, from season to season and from year to year and allowed us to pass our knowledge from generation to generation. It was not easy if you were a self-sufficient villager who depended on your father or grandfather to teach you what to do, when to plant, when to water and when to harvest. Where would you get the knowledge you

needed to do that if you didn't have parents, relatives or people of your own kind... never mind knowing the history of your people?

Even when I lived in the village we were self-sufficient. The only thing we needed to purchase was salt. We also purchased olives, olive oil, kerosene, sugar and items like that which we did not grow in the village, but only because we had money. We knew how to process and preserve practically everything we needed in order to survive and this knowledge was passed on from generation to generation.

INTERVIEWER – This is all in your book isn't it?

RISTO – Yes, I have written all the things we did in an annual cycle in the village. Most of what I remembered I documented in my book “Oshchima”, a monograph about my village where I was born.

INTERVIEWER – Tell me about the tradition of the gold coins because I remember when I went to Greece, I had 3 gold coins given to me by my grandparents when I was little and they were still alive.

RISTO – That tradition goes back to the ancient Macedonians by the way, but I don't know much about it.

INTERVIEWER – These coins are French...1913, 19...

RISTO – Well at that time gold coins were in use. They were called “Napoleons” because they were probably napoleonic coins. I am sorry, I don't know much about them except that our old people called them “napoleoni”.

Anyway, if it was not edible it was useless, even gold. The old people were very practical and wise and depended on their own two hands for their survival and not on coins. They had seen coins come and go, gain value and lose value. They did not trust them. Gold however had universal value and you could trade it for some things. You could buy materials to build a house for example, or pay the construction crews to build it. My grandfather Risto went to Canada and worked for years to accumulate enough wealth to build a house. He brought his wealth home in gold and then went and converted it

to Greek currency and when the Greek government capitulated during the First World War he lost it all. Now you can understand why people did not trust money or the government that issued it.

INTERVIEWER – So it wasn't like an investment?

RISTO – No. People didn't know what investments were and those who knew did not trust the banks or the institutions. Their investment was their children. The more children they had the more they could achieve. Their children looked after them in their old age. The old people were the keepers of our traditions and our knowledge and passed it on to the children when the children were young. The old people were both sitters and teachers and had the time and patience to teach the children "our ways". No schools, no books, just grandparents.

Each person in the family had a role to play - men and women each had their responsibilities around the home and farm. The woman was responsible for everything inside the house. Cooking, knitting, processing, preserving... basically after the crops were harvested the women were responsible for securing them. Then came making and mending all the clothing for the entire family. Nothing was purchased. The women manufactured everything, coats, pants, dresses, shirts, hats... from home grown wool to end product... Men worked the fields and tended the animals. You can see why having boys was preferable to having girls. If a family had a boy when he got married he brought home a wife, another pair of hands to help his mother with the home chores. If a family had a girl, all that effort spent rearing her would be wasted when she got married and left the home, leaving her mother with one less pair of hands around the hose. So you can see the value of a son... The woman preferred to have sons because they brought home wives who would unburden her... Men preferred sons too, to help them do the farm and field work.

INTERVIEWER – And if you had a daughter then you thought what a waste (laughs).

RISTO – Yes that is true a daughter was a waste but I never heard of any parent not loving their daughter just as much as their son. It is

natural to love all your children the same and place no material value on them, it has been this way since Neolithic times, even in times when there were shortages of men. It can happen due to wars or to some natural phenomenon. In times like these a son-in-law becomes more valuable than a son. A son-in-law may even be elevated to become head of the family if he moves into the woman's home to become what we call a "doma zet".

Then we have competition in men willing to leave their homes and marry into wealthier families. It's amazing how flexible, logical and practical these people could become in times of need.

INTERVIEWER – It's all about survival I suppose.

RISTO – Tradition was the engine that powered this society. Unfortunately, because information was passed on orally from generation to generation, their methods of maintaining continuity were very vulnerable.

INTERVIEWER – That was your world. A simple world... did the people know about other parts of the world by more sophisticated methods like newspapers and so on...

RISTO – Yes we had people who traveled. There was a whole tradition of going outside of the village and working in other places within the Ottoman Empire, outside of the Ottoman Empire, even overseas as far as "America". We called it "pechalba", which roughly translated to "making profit" but in time it was synonymous with "seeking work abroad". The people were called "pechalbari".

As families in the villages increased in size and there was not enough land to sustain them, some male family members were sent out to seek employment outside of their own properties. This was temporary and they always returned home and invested their earning to buy more land, food, build a new house, etc. It was not like today where most of us work for someone else. There was no pride in working for someone else in those days. And as prospects for work opened up, people took advantage of them and traveled as far as the United States to get them. When these people returned back to the village they spoke of oceans, ships, trains and all sorts of other

innovations. I even heard stories from the Greek Civil War refugees who saw ships for the first time while fleeing the war. They remembered the stories their grandfathers had told them from when they were in “America”. So yes, people may not have been able to read and write but they certainly knew about some things that existed outside of their own little world.

Life was difficult in the village but families were self-sufficient, relying on themselves for their own survival. Initially, many centuries ago, individuals, usually newlyweds who wanted a property of their own, went out into the wilderness and cleared land for themselves. The homesteads in those days looked something like the farms in Canada today, one or two houses surrounded by farmland somewhere near a river, brook, or spring. Unfortunately, in time, these stand alone farm homes were prone to attacks from marauders. To avoid being attacked and robbed, people began to live together in village communities for protection.

And as the villages grew large people moved on and started new villages. The size of the village was determined by its ability to support the people living in it. When a person had to walk or ride his donkey for long periods of time to get to the fields it was time to move on and start a new village.

When there was not enough water in the brook to irrigate all the fields, it was time to move on. This went on for many years until mechanization was introduced.

Unfortunately this was slow to happen in Macedonia because the Ottomans were not interested in bringing innovation to their empire and so the Macedonian people rotted for 400 years sitting stagnant while the rest of the world moved on.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Empire had fallen so far behind that there was no catching up without exhaustive economic and military reforms, something the Ottoman government could not afford. This meant that products manufactured by hand in Macedonia had to compete with those manufactured by automation in other countries.

While the European farmer used a tractor to plow his fields and a truck to deliver his crops to market, the Macedonian homesteader used a pair of oxen to plow and if he grew anything more than what he needed to survive and pay his taxes, he had to deliver it to the market by donkey because Macedonia had no tractors, no trucks and no roads for them to travel on. That's how bad it was.

Eventually the Ottoman government decided it was time to take itself out of the feudal age and make some progress, so it borrowed money from Western Banks. But in order to get the money to pay back these loans with interest the Ottoman had to further tax the Christian villagers.

Villagers who owned land were taxed so excessively that they had to work on Sunday at road and bridge building to catch up on back taxes. To get such a job they had to resort to bribery. As if that was not enough, in 1889, re-imposing a personal tax of seven shillings per year for each newborn son further increased the tax burden. This was only reduced when the boy was able to work, at age fifteen.

Some of these taxes were raised to assist small-scale manufacturing, which was largely owned by foreign investors. Villagers were forced to sell their most valued possessions, hand-made crafts, old coins and heirlooms, for next to nothing, to pay these taxes.

To further aggravate the situation, lawless acts by the Ottoman authorities, without any avenue for appeal, contributed to the oppressive climate in the villages. In addition to pillaging, Turkish soldiers now plundered the farms and villages for their daily sustenance. The Turkish administration was in such disarray that suppliers of the military were not paid for long periods of time and in turn they were refusing to feed the army. To counter the plundering, peasant militias began to form but were soon outlawed by the Ottoman authorities.

By late 1890, those Macedonians who had land couldn't afford to work it because of high taxes and frequent raids. Those who worked for the Begs (Ottoman estate owners) were at the mercy of their landlord without rights or legal recourse. The courts were clearly working against the Macedonians and beyond "external

intervention” there was no way to challenge their tyrannical authority.

Though the land was fertile there was no incentive to work. Agrarian life became a burden, filling village life with hopelessness and crushing the spirit of the Macedonian villager. Many Macedonian men left their families and turned to pechalba (migrant work), traveling to various foreign countries in search of work but often returning home poorer due to high travel and lodging expenses.

It was during these times that large emigrant Macedonian communities began to form in cities like Sofia, Paris, London, etc. Besides migrant workers, young Macedonian men also traveled abroad to pursue a higher education. They too became involved in the growing Macedonian worker communities. By the late 1890's over 100,000 Macedonian men were working or studying outside of Macedonia.

With time Macedonian men from the villages went out to work further and further away from their homes. Even my Uncle Vasil and grandfather Risto had to find work outside of our village. They became specialist builders. My grandfather specialized in building houses. I am told by people who knew him that he was an excellent chimney builder. He also painted or, I should say, white washed houses and painted patterns of flowers and flying birds inside the rooms, especially in rooms reserved for entertaining guests.

INTERVIEWER – Like a mural?

RISTO – Yes, he even painted murals. Most of his best work was done in Prespa. Everyone in Prespa, I am told, knew him.

They traveled as far as “America” seeking work. The United States and Canada were in need of workers who were willing to do dangerous and dirty work that no American would touch, so these jobs were given to our people. Australia too was opening up its mill and wool industry and was in need of “dagos” as they called our people, to do these jobs.

INTERVIEWER – “Waps” or “wogs” that’s what I think they called them.

RISTO – Here they built the streets of Toronto. In those days they had no asphalt, they used rock. The roads were covered with cobblestones.

INTERVIEWER – Yes, cobblestones.

RISTO – Laying cobblestones was a labour intensive job and it was done by the poor labour force from the Ottoman Empire. Those people were so poor that they were willing to do anything for practically nothing in pay. They worked in industries that were destructive to a person’s health, jobs that no Canadian would touch. So our Macedonian villagers came here with aims at getting enough money and going back to improve their own lives in the village. Some died here and never returned. Some became very ill. My grandfather Risto worked in the tanneries and lost his ability to smell and taste. He also worked with crews laying cobblestones.

INTERVIEWER – How did they find the jobs... did they go through consuls or....

RISTO – They found jobs by word of mouth. Everything was done by word of mouth. Almost all of them were illiterate and depended on those who knew how to read and write to help them fill out their applications and travel papers.

And who in the village knew how to read and write?

The village priest or teacher of course! Now remember what I said earlier that the teachers and priests worked for the foreign churches in Macedonia. And here is another slap in our face. If the priest or teacher worked for the Greek church they tended to register the person with a Greek name and under “race” they wrote “Greek”, and so on. They used the word “race” in those days to identify people’s nationality. And so we were further humiliated by adding insult to our injuries.

From what my father told me, in the early days our church in my village belonged to the Bulgarian church and if you want proof of what I am telling you, all you have to do is look up the names of the people who left for “America” in those days. They all have last names ending with “off”.

The priest made sure to give them Bulgarian sounding names. As I mentioned earlier, most of these people were illiterate and had no idea what was written on their travel papers. So these people went to “America”, made their money and soon afterwards returned. But no sooner had they came back than they needed to go again.

Later, our church in Oshchima was administered by the Greek church and this time the same people, who a few years before had Bulgarian names, now were given Greek names. This practice, unfortunately, was not restricted to people going to “America”. It started with people going to work in “Anadol”, more commonly known as Anatolia in Asia Minor.

INTERVIEWER – Yes I had a great grandfather who went...to Anatolia and in fact my grandfather was born there.

RISTO – Yes, so here’s the situation...a little later we started having bigger problems in Macedonia. We lost the 1903 Uprising which was a big problem for every Macedonian. You know that when you lose in a struggle, no matter if your cause is just or not, you pay for the damages or you die. We had many people working abroad during the short uprising and the uprising did not improve the situation at home. In fact it got worse; many of the people who were abroad saw no prospect in returning. Most of them were young men age 20 when they left and by the time things settled at home they were 25. It was too late for them to return home and start a family. A lot made the heartbreaking decision to remain in “America” and make it their permanent home.

A lot changed their names and picked up English sounding names in order to fit in and not be treated like “dagos”. Many kept their names the way the priest had written it down back home. This is why we have so many Macedonians in the States with Bulgarian sounding names. The big problem with that is that Bulgaria, to this

day, insists that they are Bulgarians. Some of them, from the latest generations, even believe that. Bulgarian propaganda never ceased to this day.

The situation in Macedonia continued to deteriorate as the Ottoman Empire continued to crumble from the inside. By 1875 the Ottomans entered a crisis situation owing 200 million pounds sterling to foreign investors, with an annual interest payment of 12 million pounds a year. The interest payments alone amounted to approximately half the state's annual revenues.

In 1874, due to some agricultural failures, military expenses and worldwide economic depression, the Ottoman government could not even pay the interest due on the loans. On the brink of bankruptcy, to preserve Ottoman stability and to make sure the Ottomans paid up western European debts, the Great Powers in 1875 took over the management of Ottoman revenues.

This was done through an international agency called the Ottoman Public Debt Administration. To continue to receive credit the Sultan had to grant this agency control over state income. Therefore, control of the state budget and internal policies fell into foreign hands. The agents in control were representatives of the rich capitalists and were only interested in profit, and very little else. This was definitely not to the advantage of the Macedonian people who had to foot the entire tax bill as the Ottoman Empire began to shrink, with Bulgaria and other territories gaining independence.

In their zeal to dominate the Balkans for profit, the Great Powers found themselves content with “doing nothing” and “turned their backs” on the Macedonian people. The Ottomans, for the West, were the goose that kept on laying golden eggs. That was one thing...

The other thing was the English and the French, after 1878, unleashing Hellenism on the Macedonian population. They wanted Macedonia assimilated and given to Greece.

No Macedonian, or any human being for that matter, should ever forgive the Western Powers for putting profit ahead of human life

and intentionally turning their backs on the Macedonian people. I know this is a naïve statement but I had to say it.

Let me also add that while Macedonia was being choked by the Ottoman noose of oppression, tormented by Hellenism and frustrated by Bulgarian deception, the Greek army, in 1881, annexed Thessaly and in 1885 the Bulgarian army (with Russia's support) annexed eastern Rumelia.

While the Ottoman Empire was crumbling at the edges it was tightening its grip ever harder on Macedonia, looting and burning homes. Murders were on the rise. More and more Macedonians were made homeless. The Ottomans and their Albanian allies didn't care who they killed. If one Ottoman or one Albanian died in battle, the army took revenge on the next village they encountered. Thousands of innocent women and children were murdered in revenge killings, not to mention the assaults on countless young girls. Homes were burned down and the people were shot as target practice as they ran out to save themselves from the fire. Those too old or sick to move died a horrible, fiery death.

Before we continue with the invasion, occupation and partition of Macedonia let me summarize and make a few points very clear.

Many village civilians died in the aftermath of the 1903 uprising and they were ALL Macedonian. Brailsford, as I mentioned earlier, in his book "Macedonia Its Races and their Future" and Dakin in his book "The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913", which I have used extensively as a source for my books, as well as many other authors, provide statistics that show Greek and Bulgarian civilian casualties in Macedonia.

Let me assure you that beyond some high ranking so-called Greek and Bulgarian clergy (bishops) and consuls, most of who lived in the larger cities, there were no Greek or Bulgarian civilians living in the Macedonian villages at that time. Everyone who died in the villages was Macedonian. The people who were forcibly Hellenized and pledged allegiance to the Greek Orthodox Church were Macedonian. The people who were lured by Bulgarian propaganda and fooled into joining the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were Macedonian. The

informants who were killed by the Macedonian armed revolutionary bands were Macedonian. The Greek informants who informed on the Exarchists were Macedonian. The Bulgarian informants who informed on the Patriarchists were Macedonian. The Patriarchate priests who preached in Greek in the Churches were mostly Macedonian. The teachers who taught Greek in the Patriarch sponsored schools were mostly Macedonian. The Exarchate priests who preached Old Church Slavonic in the Churches were Macedonian. The teachers who taught Bulgarian in the Exarchate sponsored schools were Macedonian. Even some of the Patriarchate and Exarchate sponsored hoodlums and brigands were mostly Macedonian.

What makes this sad affair bizarre is that while Macedonians were dying, at the hands of the Ottoman, Albanian, Greek and Bulgarian armed bands, the Greeks were falsifying statistics, claiming the victims to be Greek and Bulgarian.

Since there were no Greek or Bulgarian civilians living in the Macedonian villages then there could be no Greek or Bulgarian victims.

Brailsford, Dakin and others obtained their information and published their books through “politically correct” official channels. Unfortunately, the politically correct official channels, sanctioned by the Western Great Powers, were quoting biased and unchallenged Greek propaganda sources, which supported Greek interests and the Greek political point of view. There were no official channels to represent Macedonian interests or the Macedonian point of view.

The Macedonian people were exploited by the Ottomans and by the Europeans and were despised for complaining. They were forcibly Hellenized then profaned for not being model Hellenes. They were punished by the Bulgarians for accepting Hellenism and then were forcibly Bulgarized. Those Bulgarized were then violated and murdered by the Greeks for switching allegiance. Such was the fate of the Macedonian people greeted by the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But this was only the beginning...

In 1912, during the first Balkan War, the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies invading Macedonia were welcomed by the Macedonian people because they were led to believe that their Christian brothers were finally here to liberate them. This is what the Macedonian people were told:

“Brothers: - your sufferings and your pains have touched the heart of your kindred. Moved by the sacred duty of fraternal compassion, they come to your aid to free you from the Ottoman yoke. In return for their sacrifice they desire nothing but to reestablish peace and order in the land of our birth. Come to meet these brave knights of freedom therefore with triumphal crowns. Cover the way before their feet with flowers and glory. And be magnanimous to those who yesterday were your masters. As true Christians, give them not evil for evil. Long live liberty! Long live the brave army of liberation!”

Many Macedonians joined the foreign armies and fought to drive the Ottomans out. When the battles were over many of the Macedonians were detained by the same armies they fought with and they couldn't understand why... They understood but only after it was too late...

After the foreign armies drove the Ottomans out they refused to leave Macedonia. Now the people understood what their leaders had been telling them all along.

Then in 1913 as the foreign armies turned against each other in an attempt to gain more Macedonian territory they also turned on the Macedonian people. Macedonians were killed for helping the enemy. If for example a certain position was held by the Bulgarians and then taken by the Greeks, the Greek army would punish the Macedonian population for helping the Bulgarians or for not fighting against the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians and Serbians did the same.

In simple words, the foreign armies were committing genocide against the Macedonian population... which eventually got the attention of the outside world.

The soldiers were committing genocide because they were misled by their own propaganda. Before they were sent to Macedonia to “liberate” it, the soldiers were told that they would find “Greeks” in Macedonia because, after all, these soldiers were sent to liberate the “Greeks” from the dreadful Ottomans and the big bad, terrible Bulgarians.

They were told that the Greeks are your friends and everyone else is your enemy.

And, as the story goes, the Greek army did arrive in Macedonia and found no Greeks, only a few Greek speakers. This frustrated the soldiers and caused them to go into a wild fit of blood lust. People were murdered on the streets, including women and children, as they fled to save their lives.

Finally the Carnegie Commission was put together and dispatched to Macedonia to investigate what was going on.

INTERVIEWER – What year was this?

RISTO – 1913. The report came out in 1914.

INTERVIEWER – Do you have the report?

RISTO – Yes I have a copy of the report.

INTERVIEWER – Can you buy it on the net?

RISTO – Yes you can buy it now. The original report disappeared and when the new Balkan conflicts during Yugoslavia’s breakup started someone decided to re-print it.

INTERVIEWER – Okay I’ll look it up.

RISTO – When war broke out in the Balkans in 1912 and 1913, the Carnegie Endowment dispatched a commission on a fact finding mission. The mission consisted of seven prominent members from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Among them was the distinguished journalist Henry N.

Brailsford, author of the book "Macedonia its Races and their Future".

The commission was dispatched from Paris on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1913, shortly before the end of the second Balkan War and returned to Paris nearly eight weeks later, on September 28<sup>th</sup>. In spite of opposition from the Greek government, the commission arrived in time to witness much of the war's aftermath and record most accounts while they were still fresh in people's minds. The commission's findings were compiled and released in 1914.

In a statement dated February 22, 1914, Carnegie Endowment Acting Director Nicholas Murray Butler said:

"The circumstances which attended the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 were of such character as to fix upon them the attention of the civilized world. The conflicting reports as to what actually occurred before and during these wars, together with the persistent rumors often supported by specific and detailed statements as to violations of the laws of war by the several combatants, made it important that an impartial and exhaustive examination should be made of this entire episode in contemporary history. The purpose of such an impartial examination by an independent authority was to inform public opinion and to make plain just what is or may be involved in an international war carried on under modern conditions. If the minds of men can be turned even for a short time away from passion, from race antagonism and from national aggrandizement to a contemplation of the individual and national losses due to war and to the shocking horrors which modern warfare entails, a step and by no means a short one, will have been taken toward the substitution of justice for force in the settlement of international differences.

It was with this motive and for this purpose that the Division of Intercourse and Education of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Constituted in July, 1913, an International Commission of Inquiry to study the recent Balkan wars and to visit the actual scenes where fighting had taken place and the territory which had been devastated. The presidency of this International Commission of Inquiry was entrusted to Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, Senator of France, who had represented his country at the First and Second Hague Conferences of 1899 and of 1907, and who

as President Fondateur of the Conciliation Internationale, has labored so long and so effectively to bring the various nations of the world into closer and more sympathetic relations. With Baron d'Estournelles de Constant there were associated men of the highest standing, representing different nationalities, who were able to bring to this important task large experience and broad sympathy.” (George F. Kennan. “The Other Balkan Wars” A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1993).

And like I said earlier, according to the Carnegie report, the Macedonians were not the only ones duped. The soldiers of the invading armies were lied to also. “The Servian soldier, like the Greek, was firmly persuaded that in Macedonia he would find compatriots, men who could speak his language and address him with *jivio* or *zito*. He found men speaking a language different from his, who cried *hourrah!* He misunderstood or did not understand at all. The theory he had learned from youth of the existence of a Servian Macedonia and a Greek Macedonia naturally suffered; but his patriotic conviction that Macedonia must become Greek or Servian, if not so already, remained unaffected. Doubtless Macedonia had been what he wanted it to become in those times of Douchan the Strong or the Byzantine Emperors. It was only agitators and propagandist Bulgarians who instilled into the population the idea of being Bulgarian. The agitators must be driven out of the country, and it would again become what it had always been, Servian or Greek.”

It's worthwhile picking up the report and reading it, especially the eyewitness testimonies, the statistics of people murdered and the letters the Greek soldiers wrote home confessing to the atrocities they had committed. The book is authored by George F. Kennan and called “The Other Balkan Wars” A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1993.

The second Balkan War was about grabbing territory and exacting revenge. As the armies clashed there were winners and losers. The

losers took revenge on the civilian population by looting, burning, killing and raping the Macedonian population.

Among many other things, following is the kind of information you will find in the book:

“Deny that your enemies are men, and presently you will treat them as vermin”. (P 95)

“When you have to deal with barbarians, you must behave like a barbarian yourself.” (P 95, a quote from a Greek officer.)

According to the Carnegie report, Greece was the first to instigate aggression by attacking Kukush on July 4, 1913. In retaliation Bulgaria attacked Demir-Hissar on July 7, Serres on July 11 and Doxato on July 13.

On July 12, according to the Carnegie report, King Constantine dispatched the following telegram to the representatives of Greece in the European capitals;

#### KING CONSTANTINE’S TELEGRAM

July 12, 1913.

The general commanding the Sixth Division informs me that Bulgarian soldiers under the command of a captain of gendarmes gathered in the yard of the school house at Demir-Hissar over one hundred notables of the town, the archbishop and two priests, and massacred them all. The headquarters staff ordered the exhumation of the bodies, with the result that the crime has been established. Further, Bulgarian soldiers violated young girls and massacred those who resisted them. Protest in my name to the representatives of the powers and to the whole civilized world against these abominations, and declare that to my great regret I shall find myself obliged to proceed to reprisals, in order to inspire their authors with a salutary fear, and to cause them to reflect before committing similar atrocities. The Bulgarians have surpassed all the horrors perpetrated by their barbarous hordes in the past, thus proving that they have not the right to be classed among civilized peoples.

(Signed) CONSTANTINE, King. (Page 300)

The accounts you are about to read are of those who either witnessed or themselves experienced the Greek atrocities at Kukush.

EVIDENCE OF FATHER JOSEPH RADANOV, of Kukush.

On July 2 he could distinctly see from Kukush that the surrounding villages were on fire, Salamanli among others. Fields of corn and stacks' of reaped corn had been set on fire even behind the Greek positions. The Greeks moreover had fired upon the reapers who had gone to work in the early morning in their fields. The refugees from the neighbouring villages began to arrive upon the heights called Kara-Bunar about a mile away, and were there bombarded by artillery.

Next day (July 3) the battle approached the town, but the Bulgarians retained their position. About midday the Greeks began to bombard Kukush, but when I left no house had taken fire. (Page 300)

FATHER JEAN CHIKITCHEV.

I took refuge after midday on July 3 with Father Michel and meant to stay with him. I saw the shells falling upon the sisters' orphanage. I saw the hospital struck by a shell. There were at this time no Bulgarian troops in the town, although they were in their positions in front of it. The town was unfortified. The bombardment seemed to be systematic. It could not be explained as a mistake incidental to the finding of the range. Quite forty shells fell not far from the orphanage and three or possibly four houses were set on fire. At this point I left the town and fled with the refugees. Next night it looked as if the whole plain were burning.

NOTE.-Both the above witnesses were priests of the Catholic Uniate Church. (Page 300)

MR. C. [the name may not be published] a Catholic resident in the village of Todoraki near Kukush, states than on July 6 the Greek commandant of Kukush arrived accompanied by thirty infantrymen

and eighty armed Turks. He was bound and left exposed to the full sun without food or water from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m. His house was pillaged, and 200 francs taken with all his personal property. On being released he learnt from the villagers that they had lost in all £T300 during the pillage. Two men were beaten and twelve were bound and sent down to prison in Salonica. The women were not maltreated. (Page 301)

PETER SHAPOV, of Zarovo near Langaza, a shepherd.

He was taking his sheep and goats on the road to Demir-Hissar when Greek cavalry overtook the refugees on the edge of the town and began to slash out with their sabres to left and right. They took 600 goats belonging to himself and his two brothers. One of his brothers was wounded by a cavalryman and died afterwards at the Bulgarian frontier. The Bulgarian army was quite half an hour's walk away. There were no Bulgarian troops near them. (Page 301)

MATE, Wife of Petro of Bogoroditsa, near Langaza.

I saw the Greek cavalymen when they entered our village. I fled and in my haste was obliged to leave a baby of eighteen months behind in the village in order to flee with this one which I have with me, a child of three. I saw our village in flames. I want my child. (Page 301)

ELISAVA, Wife of Georghi of Zarovo, near Langaza.

We all fled when the shells began to fall in our village and got safely to Demir-Hissar. Then I heard people saying the Greek cavalry are coming. There was a panic; children fell on the ground and horsemen rode over them. I lost my children, save one whom I was able to carry. My husband had two others with him. I do not know what has become of him, and have not seen him since that day. (Page 301)

INTERVIEWER – But those who committed atrocities were not all Greek, there were Bulgarians also, right?

RISTO – Yes, the Bulgarians and Serbians also committed similar atrocities. You will have to read the report because it's unbelievable what was done to our people. Here is a confession letter to give you a sample of what was done:

RHODOPE, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1913.

This war has been very painful. We have burnt all the villages abandoned by the Bulgarians. They burn the Greek villages and we the Bulgarian. They massacre, we massacre and against all those of that dishonest nation, who fell into our hands, the Mannlicher rifle has done its work. Of the 1,200 prisoners we took at Nigrita, only forty-one remain in the prisons, and everywhere we have been, we have not left a single root of this race.

I embrace you tenderly, also  
your brother and your wife,  
SPILIOTOPOULOS PHILIPPOS.

INTERVIEWER – And how did you find out about this?

RISTO – The report would have been a big deal if it was not for World War I. Just as the Report was published war broke out... again. When World War I was over the report had already been shelved and nothing was done to right the wrongs committed against the Macedonian people by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. As I said earlier, I found out about the report when it was re-printed in 1993.

Someone mentioned to me that such a report existed and when I started looking for it I found information about it on the internet. I just can't forget the gruesome acts committed against civilians by armies which are expected to protect civilians... You can go nuts thinking about it...

INTERVIEWER – Did the Greeks ignore this?

RISTO – The Greeks were against the Commission investigating the situation but had no choice about it. It was a Commission authorized by the international community. All sides (Greeks, Serbians and

Bulgarians) did not want the Commission to investigate and insisted that nothing terrible had happened.

INTERVIEWER – So, if the Serbians and Bulgarians did the same things. Why then did you not mention the other atrocities in your articles? Why just the Greek atrocities?

RISTO – My study of this subject was limited to the Greeks. Today we Macedonians have big problems with Greece which is not only refusing to recognize us as a Macedonian identity, but is still trying to extinguish us. Besides that I don't want to open too many fronts. Today we have no beef with Serbia. Unless this becomes an international issue then we will bring it out. But to take on both the Bulgarians and the Greeks at the same time...? I find it a bit ambitious. I know where I stand with the Greeks, I am from there. Also, I have to tell you that the Bulgarians are vicious and you don't know where you stand with them. This is why IMRO had problems with them in the past.

INTERVIEWER – Who?

RISTO –IMRO... the Macedonian revolutionaries who fought...

INTERVIEWER – Oh yes, IMRO.

RISTO – It was easy to recognize a Greek because the Greeks refused to speak Macedonian. So right away you knew you were dealing with a Greek. The Bulgarians on the other hand pretended to be your friends and stabbed you in the back. The Bulgarians were the first people to say hurrah for Macedonia but refused to recognize the Macedonian identity and the Macedonian language, insisting that they were Bulgarian.

INTERVIEWER – Yes but explain to me how close are the languages and why they are so close?

RISTO – It's very simple. After the Bulgarian nation state was created in 1878, and after the San Stefano Treaty, the Bulgarians became infatuated with Macedonia and desperately wanted to possess it by any means possible. So they did everything in their

power to convince the Macedonian people that they too were Bulgarians and belonged with Bulgaria.

But let me refresh your memory. Modern Bulgaria was built on the premise that its people were Bulgarians and descendants of the Turkic Tatars who came to the Balkans from behind the Volga River, who, by the way, spoke a Turkic language incomprehensible to the Macedonians.

So how was that supposed to convince the Macedonians that they and the Bulgarians were the same people? In order to convince the Macedonians that they were Bulgarians, the Bulgarian state chose a Slavic dialect (and not the Turkic language) as the Bulgarian people's standard language.

This was a Southern Slavic dialect that was close to the dialects spoken in Macedonia. The Macedonian language is an old language and has many dialects, as many as 25 distinct dialects. The Bulgarians chose one of the indigenous Slavic dialects found spoken on their territory and made it their standard Bulgarian state language... and began to call it Bulgarian.

They purposely did that because they had aims on Macedonia and on convincing the Macedonian people that they too were Bulgarians. They still do this to this day. They wanted to prove to their own people, to the Macedonian people and to the world that the Bulgarians and the Macedonians were one and the same people, "two countries - one people". They still say that to this day.

The Bulgarians chose a Slavic dialect that was spoken in Thrace. The people of Thrace spoke a Slavic dialect which is very close to the Macedonian dialects. But like the Greeks, the Bulgarians not only took a Slavic dialect and made it Bulgarian, but by doing so began to encroach on the Macedonian heritage.

Now the Bulgarians claim that the Macedonians speak a Bulgarian dialect and therefore the Macedonian language is Bulgarian.

If that were true then the Macedonians must have acquired this so-called Bulgarian dialect after the Bulgar Turkic Tatars arrived in Bulgaria, right?

So what language did the Macedonian people speak before the Bulgars arrived in the Balkans? And why is the Bulgarian language a “Slavic” language and not a Turkic Tatar language.

Even our fake history today tells us that the so-called “Slavs” of Macedonia came to the Balkans before the Bulgars arrived. So what is the real story here?

I would say that the Bulgarians speak a dialect of the Macedonian language and not the other way around. I would also say that the vast majority of the people in Bulgaria were indigenous to Bulgaria and spoke a Slavic language, probably very much influenced by the Macedonian language. And if I may say, the Turkic Tatars became assimilated and melted into the great Slavic pot and disappeared a long time ago.

So, in my opinion, the Bulgarian identity, originating from the Turkic Tatars, is just as fake as the Greek identity. And without being prejudiced to the Asian people, the Turkic Tatars were Asians with slanted eyes. How many slanted eyed Asians do you see in Bulgaria today? If you are lucky you will see very few in the northern parts of Bulgaria.

It is well-known that the Macedonians had great influence on the entire Eastern European continent from the Mediterranean in the south to Siberia in the north.

One summer day when Professor Angelina Markus from Skopje, Macedonia, was visiting Toronto, I went to visit her. There were rumours that Angelina, during her retirement party on the day of her retirement as a professor, apologized to her students and said to them that she was sorry for “lying” to them all these years... for teaching them false history...

When we got talking I asked Angelina if that was true... if she had apologized...? She laughed and said yes. So I asked her what lies did

she tell. She told me a lot of things... At the time I thought this woman was crazy... But as it turned out I was the one who was ignorant... She was just ahead of my time.

The one thing that is of interest to us here, that is memorable to me, was the questions she asked me: “Tell me,” she said, “why is it that people in Eastern Europe, from the Mediterranean Sea to Siberia, have common names, common toponyms and a common language...?”

Do you think that all this happened by accident?

Also tell me,” she said, “why were all these Slavic speaking people as far north as Siberia asking for priests and teachers from Macedonia during the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, when Christianity was making its way up north?”

You know that the first University in Europe was built in Ohrid, in Macedonia, which educated thousands of priests who were then dispatched all throughout Eastern Europe to bring Christianity and the word of God to the Slavic speakers?” she said.

She would not tell me why but said this to me: “Ask yourself this! Why did the English settlers in the American and Australian continents ask England to send them teachers...? When you figure that out you will have your answer...” she said and laughed.

“Was it because England was their origin and they spoke English?” I asked. She touched her nose and smiled.

Of course almost all English colonists in America and Australia, a long time ago before communities were established, were uneducated and once they began to establish themselves they needed educated teachers for their schools and priests for their churches. And where else were they able to find English speaking educated people except in England? It makes sense.

Unfortunately even this is disputed by the Bulgarians. It would be obvious to anyone that the original teachers, the brothers Kiril and Metodi, being from Solun, were Macedonians. The invention of the

Glagolic and Cyrillic alphabets have been credited to these two individuals and to Kliment and Naum of Ohrid.

Unfortunately, what makes this story a tragic comedy is that both the Greeks and the Bulgarians have laid claim to the Solun brothers. The Greeks say they were Greek... The Bulgarians say they were Bulgarian. How sad and desperate is that?

So here, on one hand, we have a newly created country called "Greece" that never existed before, not even as an empire, laying claim to the Koine language as well as to the entire so-called "Ancient Greek" and Ancient Macedonian heritage and, on the other hand, we have another newly created country called "Bulgaria", with its basis in a Turkic Tatar Empire, laying claim to Old Church Slavonic, a purely Macedonian language, and the entire medieval and modern Macedonia heritage.

And where are the Macedonians in all this? Apparently they don't exist!

Ask any Greek today and they will tell you that they can read ancient Greek. Yes, that is true but so what?

A Greek will tell you they can read ancient Greek because it is part of his or her heritage and because of that they not only feel that they are connected to the ancient Greeks but are their descendents.

Well I am telling you right now that I can speak read and write English but does that connect me to England and make me a descendent from the Ancient English?

Even when you point this out to a Greek, they still have difficulties comprehending... forgetting the fact that "Greek" is not their mother tongue and that they learned it in school.

Well Bulgarians are doing the same thing. They have learned a Thracian language, which is understandable and which is very close to the Macedonian language but that does not make them Bulgarian, Thracian, or Macedonian?

No. They are what they are. I have no problem with that except that they are denying our existence and robbing us of our heritage.

INTERVIEWER – Which is the Thracian language.

RISTO – As far as I know, the people in the part of Thrace that is now under Bulgaria spoke a Slavic language. I don't know what to call it other than what it is, a dialect of the South Slavic language.

Now the Serbians...well they are a different story. Did you know that even after two hundred years of being a country, there are still Serbians out there who speak Slavic dialects? Some I can understand, even though I am from the southern part of Macedonia... but I don't understand much of the Serbian literary language.

The Serbian literary language is totally different from any of the dialects I understand.

How was the Serbian language created?

Well, I don't know. Now let us go even further north... up to Russia. There is no way on God's earth that all the Russian people are ethnically one people because they speak one language. There must be dozens of different ethnicities in Russia, including the indigenous Inuit. Yet today they all speak Russian, a Slavic language. Why?

Because Russia decided to adopt a Slavic language for all its people. Why? Because of Macedonian influence. Because the Macedonians introduced the Russians to Orthodox Christianity in the Macedonian language, in Old Church Slavonic or Old Macedonian.

The Macedonian people greatly influenced Russia during its transition to Christianity. Russia converted to Christianity not too long ago, maybe about 1000 years ago? The Russians used Old Church Slavonic, the Old Macedonia language, in their liturgy. Macedonian priests brought Christianity to Russia and with it the Macedonian language. I learned this from Angelina, the crazy lady. But that's not the whole story.

The Old Russians were a Slavic speaking people. Old Russia was the region today called the Ukraine. When I asked a Ukrainian naval officer, learning English here at Base Borden, what the etymology of the word “Ukraina” was, he did not know but was quick to say that the Ukraine was the “centre of the world”.

Then when I asked him again and this time I said “U” and “Kraina”, he said “at”, “the end”. He recognized the “u” meant “at” and “kraina” or “krai” meant “end”.

Yes, at the end of the world; that’s what the Ancient Macedonians called that part of the world which today we call Ukraine. And you know what? That’s where the Ancient Macedonians sent their “prisoners”... at the end of their world.

The English sent their prisoners to “Australia” and the Ancient Macedonians sent their prisoners to the “Ukraine”.

The officer laughed when I told him that. Is this true? Angelina seems to think so! How else do you explain the similarities in the people’s names, in the place names, in the language... between Macedonia and the Ukraine?

I rhymed off words and sentences spoken in my Oshchimian dialect and asked a number of Ukrainian officers to tell me if they understood anything. The consensus was that they understood about 50% of the words, including the word “salo”, which meant “melted pork fat”. How is that even possible? They have never studied Macedonian and never heard of the Lerin and Kostur dialects!

Maybe Angelina the crazy lady is not so crazy? I just want to say that I call her “crazy” because of her “crazy” revolutionary ideas but I have a lot of respect for Professor Angelina Markus. Her husband was a Russian diplomat with access to a lot of confidential documents and all kinds of resources which were available to her and she knew a lot of things that you and I don’t know.

Our fake modern history today tells us that the Slavs came to the Balkans from the north, from behind the Carpathian Mountains.

Common sense, however, questions that. First, there is no way that a poor, unprepared people could have made the trek from behind the Carpathian Mountains in Romania all the way down the Balkans, penetrate the Byzantine Empire, populate every corner and every village in Macedonia and, in such a short time, completely replace the indigenous people in this region, replace the language in every little spot in Macedonia, settle in villages in the mountains and develop a civilization strong enough to influence Eastern Europe... in what, 3 to 4 hundred years? Sounds a bit far fetched to me.

If Angelina is right, the Macedonian people are indigenous to Macedonia and always spoke an indigenous language that has its origins in the pre-historic Scythian language. But again, we are getting off topic here and we will leave this story for another time.

My point is that the Macedonian people not only existed but contributed immensely to Christianizing and civilizing Eastern Europe. The Macedonian language, the Old Church Slavonic language, was used in an international capacity in Christianizing Eastern Europe. The Macedonian people need to know that. We can't just continue to believe the lies people tell us that we don't exist.

That was also Professor Markus's point. It is time for us to start thinking for ourselves!

Speaking about Romania? Did you know that the liturgy in the Romanian church was performed in Old Church Slavonic? In the Old Macedonian language?

INTERVIEWER – Aren't the Romanians Catholic?

RISTO – I am not sure how many are Catholics. But before the various Patriarchies in the Ottoman Empire, including the Macedonian Ohrid Bishopric, were closed down and replaced with the Istanbul Patriarchy, Old Church Slavonic was the language of liturgy in Romania. Romania became a protectorate of the West much later. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, right after Russia began to interfere in its internal affairs. Before that Romania was predominantly Orthodox Christian.

INTERVIEWER – So, getting back on topic, let us go back to after Macedonia was partitioned in 1913, what happened then?

RISTO – When the Greeks consolidated their power in Macedonia they told the Macedonian people that this is Greece now and that they were now Greeks, and if they didn't agree with it they could pick up what they could carry and leave immediately. Many did just that, particularly those who were affiliated with the Bulgarian church; they just picked up their things and left.

As I mentioned earlier, the Muslims were all kicked out and so were the Macedonians who insisted on being Macedonian and not Greeks, Serbians, or Bulgarians. Those who insisted too much found themselves with a noose around their necks hanging from a tree.

Sometime later Greece exchanged populations with Bulgaria and got rid of more Macedonians who were refusing to become Greeks and imported all kinds of non-Greek people from Bulgaria and from the Caucasus's who claimed to be Greeks.

Greece had no problem accepting anyone who agreed to be "Hellenized" and accept the Greek definition of being Greek. And what was this definition you ask? Just look up the old Greek constitution from the 1820's and you will find out.

It said anyone who was an Orthodox Christian could be a Greek provided they agreed with the Greek philosophy (to be given a Greek name and baptized in the Greek Church and not to work against the Greek cause) and was willing to learn to speak Greek.

People from Armenia and even Russia have claimed to be Greeks. All they had to do to prove this was say that their great grandmother was Greek and have a couple of witnesses sign their claim and they became instant Greeks. That about sums it up...

But allow me the opportunity here to emphasize that by "Greek" I don't mean "Greek citizen", I mean "Greek nationality". I don't know if the same rules apply today but in the past one could not simply be a Greek citizen and belong to an ethnic minority in

Greece. Greece claims no minorities live in Greece, only the 2% Muslim minority, but that is a religious minority and not an ethnic one. These Muslims are considered to be of “Greek” nationality.

We are getting off topic again.

Like I said earlier, after Macedonia was invaded, occupied and partitioned World War I started and everything in Macedonia was left in limbo until the war ended. Right after that the Greeks got it into their heads that they could expand Greece by taking more territory from Turkey.

In the early 1920’s Greece decided to act on the “Megali Idea” (Greater Greece) by attacking Turkey in an attempt to grab more lands from it, just like it had in 1912 when it acquired Macedonian lands.

Again Greece did this under the guise of “liberating” ancient Greek lands in Asia Minor. Unfortunately this time its attempt failed miserably and ended in disaster. Many Macedonians were also killed. Being under Greek control, many Macedonians were drafted into the Greek army and sent to fight. When the war was over the Greek state refused to compensate the wives and children of the Macedonian soldiers who were killed in the war.

I remember, as a child, listening to old men in my village, sitting on the porch telling tales of bygone wars when, as young soldiers, they chased the Turks to Ankara yelling “two Turks to a bayonet”. They also told stories of how it took them sixty days to gain sixty miles and how they lost them in one day of retreat.

I didn’t understand what they were talking about then but it was about the Greek exploits in Asia Minor. After building up a large military presence in Asia Minor, a major offensive was launched in March 1921, and by the end of the summer the Greek armies reached the Sakarya River about forty miles from Ankara.

By early autumn the Greeks were pushed back beyond the halfway point between Smyrna and Ankara, reaching an uneasy military stalemate. Realizing that they couldn’t possibly win militarily or

politically, the Greeks turned to the Paris Conference of March 1922 looking for a compromise. The compromise called for the withdrawal of the Greek armies and placing the Christian population under the protection of the League of Nations. Sensing a victory, Mustafa Kemal of Turkey insisted on an unconditional evacuation of the Greek forces, a demand unacceptable to the Greeks. Still counting on British kindness, in July 1922 the Greeks unsuccessfully attempted to get permission from their allies to enter Tsari Grad (Istanbul).

Turkey launched a full-scale offensive on August 26, 1922 (a dark day for Greece and her Megali Idea) near Afyonkarahisar and forced the Greeks into a hasty retreat back to Smyrna. On September 8 the Greek army was evacuated and the next day the Turkish army invaded Smyrna. The worst came on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> when outbreaks of killing and looting began, followed by a massacre of the Christian population in which 30,000 Christians, mostly Armenians, perished. As a result of the violence 250,000 people fled to the waterfront to escape the catastrophic disaster.

The Asia Minor campaign was over along with the “Megali Idea” of a Greater Greece. Worse yet, as a result of this catastrophic Greek fiasco, over one million Turkish Christians were displaced, most of them into Macedonia. Their settlement affected the demography of the Macedonian landscape as well as the morale of the Macedonian population.

An entire generation of young Macedonian men, who were drafted into the Greek military, were sent to the Asia Minor campaigns and many lost their lives. The Greek authorities never acknowledged their service and no compensation was ever paid to the families of those “breadwinners” who lost their lives. The reason for the omission, according to the Greek authorities, “they were Bulgarian”.

It is, I am told, noble to die for your country. Would it not be “nobler” to die for someone else’s country? How did the Greeks repay those, noble enough to die for Greece? They let their widows and children live in poverty. This is how Greece treated its noblest citizens!

By the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the Greco-Turkish war came to an end. Greece and Turkey signed a population exchange agreement using “religion as the basic criterion for nationality”. (Page 120, Richard Clogg, A Short History of Modern Greece.)

During the 1920's, in its population exchanges with Turkey, Greece imported one million Christian Turks, about one fifth of its entire population, from Asia Minor and settled most of them in Macedonia. These people too became Greeks by force.

The real flaw in the Greek State's genealogical claim to the ancients is that, after eighty years of living on Macedonian soil, it convinced the Asian newcomers that they were the rightful owners of the Macedonian lands and heritage because they were told that they were the real direct descendants of the ancient Macedonians and not the indigenous Macedonian population they replaced.

Let me say this to the modern Greeks who beat their patriotic chests and believe in the purity of Greece: “Your Greek State is not above deception and lies; it even lies to you, its own people... It lies to convince the world that Greeks and Greeks alone are the rightful heirs of Macedonia's lands and heritage. And remember: This is all done at the expense of the real Macedonians who lived on those lands for hundreds of generations. This does not make you patriots... This makes you thieves...”

Before 1913 and before the Greco-Turkish war, the Macedonian people were a majority in Macedonia with minorities such as Albanians, Vlachs, Christian Turks and others. After Greece occupied Macedonian territories it cleansed itself of non-Greeks; it assimilated everyone it could, evicted those who did not agree with its principles, and jailed and murdered all those who caused trouble.

But those who remained in Macedonia were still Macedonians and still a majority in Greek occupied Macedonia, that is until Greece deposited 600,000 Turkish Christian settlers and colonists acquired during the population exchange with Turkey by the Treaty of Lausanne. And, like I said earlier, Greece published demographic statistics claiming that the population in Greece was 98% pure Greek and 2% Muslim Greek.

Another point I want to make here is that Greece recognized a 2% Muslim population on its territory. Doesn't that strike you as odd, that Greece, who evicted every Muslim from Macedonia, would now recognize a Muslim minority in Thrace? Why?

I believe Greece did this in order to preserve the Patriarchate in Istanbul and the Christian people living around it. Greece made an agreement with Turkey to preserve the Muslims in Thrace if Turkey spared the Christian population in Istanbul. Greece had high hopes that, in time, this population would grow, expand and become a majority in Istanbul. But it is disappointing for Greece that the future did not turn out in its favour. While the Muslim population in Thrace is growing, in spite of all obstacles, the Christian population in Istanbul is shrinking.

Did you know that Greece does not allow the Muslims in Thrace to purchase new homes, properties and not even tractors? And as Muslims leave to visit Turkey, they are not allowed to return. Yes, this is going on in Greece today. I saw this in a Greek television documentary as well as heard it from Greek human rights activists.

So, after all that was done to them, there are still Macedonians living in Greek occupied Macedonia. This became very clear during World War II.

But before we get to World War II, I want to mention that right after the Greco-Turkish war, many things in the world had changed. Macedonia was divided and IMRO had problems operating in three different countries with different agendas that did not recognize the Macedonian identity. Communism was on the rise and with Russia turning socialist, a new influence was on the rise. Being unable to reconcile their differences IMRO split. You can say it split ideologically. Countries and people alike were ideologically turning towards communism and fascism and the world was being polarized.

The Macedonian people were caught in the middle of all this and did their best to survive. The socialists recognized the Macedonian dilemma and, to win the Macedonian people to their side, offered

them both sympathy and recognition. The Fascist faction in Greece, especially after Metaxas came to power, of course did not like that at all and began to further oppress the Macedonian people.

INTERVIEWER – So, Metaxas was a fascist wasn't he?

RISTO – He was a Fascist.

INTERVIEWER – Ideologically a fascist?

RISTO – Yes. Metaxas would have joined Germany in a heartbeat. That's how fascist he was but you have to understand that Greece is a British protectorate and you can understand why he couldn't join the German side.

Anyway, the point I want to make here is that Metaxas and his Fascist supporters were extremely anti-Macedonian and wanted everything that was Macedonian erased, including the Macedonian language that the Macedonian people spoke both publicly and in private. This was the only language the majority of the Macedonian people spoke at that time.

While there were some prospects for basic human rights for the Macedonian people in the Greek State in the early 1920's, those prospects died as Greece tightened its grip on Macedonia by implementing more racist assimilation policies. If that was not enough, on December 18, 1936 the Greek Government issued a legal act concerning, "Activities Against State Security". By this act thousands of Macedonians were arrested, imprisoned and expelled from their homeland.

Among other things, Metaxas, on September 7, 1938, by legal act 2366, outlawed the Macedonian language and prohibited people from speaking it by imposing heavy fines and imprisonment.

In 1938 Australian author Bert Birtles in his book "Exiles in the Aegean" wrote, "In the name of 'Hellenization' these people (Macedonians) are being persecuted continually and arrested for the most fantastic reasons. Metaxas's way of inculcating the proper nationalist spirit among them has been to change all the native

place-names into Greek and to forbid use of the native language. For displaying the slightest resistance to the edict - for this too is a danger to the security of the State - peasants and villagers have been exiled without trial.” (Page 112, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation)

We often joke about this because it is so bizarre, but people were also fined for giving commands to their animals or calling out to their pets in their native language.

Another place to stalk unsuspecting victims was at their home. Greek policemen often stood outside people’s windows just to hear what language they were speaking and fined the entire family if they were caught speaking Macedonian.

“The Metaxas regime, haunted by the specter of Slavism and communism, initiated a policy of accelerated assimilation. Applied by incompetent and short-sighted civil servants, it antagonized even Slavophones of the Greek faction. To peasants of Bulgarian [ethnic Macedonian] orientation it served as proof that the Greek state could not offer them a national shelter. In 1941, the occupation of Greece by the Germans and the entrance of Bulgarian troops in eastern Macedonia and Thrace offered the opportunity for accumulated bitterness to reach maturity.” (Kofos. “Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia”. Page 255) I don’t agree with Kofos on many things but I do agree with him on this point.

After the realization set in that people would be fined and even physically punished and force-fed castor oil for repeat offences, fear and suspicion began to set in, forcing people to keep silent. It was best to look down or to look the other way when passing your neighbours on the street because you never knew who might be listening. Keeping silent was preferable than speaking to someone you had known all your life in that despicable foreign Greek language which you so much despised.

“In the past, Macedonian life and events were preserved in the folksongs, thus enabling an articulation of feelings and grief as well as cultural self-expression. When the Macedonian language was proscribed in Northern Greece, the folksongs ceased.” (Kita

Sapurma & Pandora Petrovska. "Children of the Bird Goddess". Pollitecon Publications. 1997. Page 163)

INTERVIEWER – Metaxas was the one who started the assimilation-ist policy, right?

RISTO – You might think so but this assimilation-ist policy was started a long time ago and became evident around 1875 when it became clear that Macedonia would not be allowed to become a nation state and would be divided among the other Balkan nations. Metaxas tightened and accelerated the assimilation process before the communists could do damage to his Fascist Greece.

But what was really scary was not how Metaxas was going to "assimilate" the Macedonian people but how he went about "renewing" Greece.

Metaphorically speaking, in order to build a new building on the foundations of an old building you must first tear down the old building. To get rid of the undesirables inside Greece, which included the communists and the minorities, Metaxas began a hate campaign vilifying everything he did not like. He then used the Greek people to tear them down. First he vilified the communists and then he vilified the Slavs and every other ethnic group he did not like. He convinced a lot of his followers that the real Greeks were superior, more intelligent and God's gift to Greece... just like Hitler did with the German people. The rest of the people, he said, were not only useless, but a danger to Greece and had to be purged.

This created a lot of hatred and xenophobia in the Greek people, which apparently has survived to this day.

Let me tell you that the Fascists inside Greece were never defeated or removed from power; they are alive and well, even today. Just have a look at how Greece is behaving, especially towards the Macedonian people in exile, who Greece exiled after the Greek Civil War. Take a good look how Greece is behaving towards the Republic of Macedonia; that should tell you what kind of country it is.

Unfortunately, as we found out in retrospect, the communists were no better. The Macedonian people never knew where they stood with the Greek communists. First they recognized the Macedonians as an identity but as “Slavo-Macedonians”, then they refused to recognize their rights unless the Macedonians did what they were told to do and won the war against the Fascists.

The communists did take the lead in Greece when Greece was under Fascist and Nazi occupation and, with a lot of help from the Macedonians, won the war and Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Fascist Bulgaria were driven out of Greek occupied Macedonia.

After all that, you would figure the Macedonian people would be rewarded with at least recognition and some basic human rights? But no, the Macedonian people were again entangled in another foreign war, the so called Greek Civil War, which almost exterminated them from their ancestral homes and lands. This was a very tricky war but I want to say a few things about the Macedonian people and what happened to them during World War II, before we get into the Greek Civil War.

The Macedonian involvement in World War II was not about “Communist ideologies” or about alliances or obligations to the Great Powers. It was simply the next stage in the long struggle for “liberation from oppression” and to fulfill a longing for freedom, re-unification and self-rule. The Macedonian contribution in fighting against Fascism is not only under-emphasized but also misinterpreted by historians.

I will once again say that the Macedonian people, during the Second World War, rose on the democratic side and fought against fascism for the liberation of the states in which they lived. The Macedonian people, like other people in the Balkans, fought to liberate their homeland and thus earn their place in the world. This cannot be ignored and must be recognized and recorded in the annals of history.

Word of a Macedonian Partisan movement in Greek occupied Macedonia spread like wildfire. People came out on the streets to freely speak their native Macedonian language, to sing songs and

write Macedonian plays and poetry. The Partisans even set up Macedonian schools and taught children patriotic songs, poems and Macedonian history, using local Macedonian dialects. The younger generations, for the first time, saw written words in their beloved, sacred Macedonian language. The newfound freedom brought happiness to the lives of the oppressed Macedonian people who welcomed the Partisans into their villages as “our own boys and girls”. The newfound confidence and strength projected by the Macedonians terrified the Greeks, especially the gendarmes and the collaborators. For a while they were no longer a threat.

The Germans and Italians did not care one way or another about Macedonian affairs as long as there was no trouble for them. Macedonian interest in Partisan activities continued to climb, bringing new recruits and volunteers to the cause. Youth organizations were created with young men and women recruited to be the eyes and ears of the community and to help defend the villages. Many young volunteers of military age were recruited and trained to perform policing and civic duties in the newly formed organizations.

But once the war (WWII) was over the Macedonian people were betrayed again. In their zeal to divide the world into spheres of influence, Stalin and Churchill decided to put Greece under British influence even though Greece, at the time, was in communist hands.

After this deal was made Britain asked Greece to disarm the partisans and get rid of the Macedonians. It’s not hard to believe that Churchill would want Greece out of communist hands, but it is hard to believe that he would want the Macedonians out of Greek occupied Macedonia, right?

Ideologically I would say at the time the Greeks were 80% pro-communist. The groups that established the resistance movements were all communist organized and so were the armed units of ELAS (the Greek resistance army), among which were Macedonian fighters.

INTERVIEWER – Inspired by the Soviet Union....?

RISTO – Well perhaps... As I mentioned earlier, the Macedonian people were fighting to free themselves... still believing that if they helped the Greeks liberate themselves they would throw a crumb or two towards them, at least recognize them as Macedonians. It was foolish and dangerous but when they saw wolves in sheep's clothing they mistook them for sheep. But the Greeks were no sheep...

INTERVIEWER – So they expected recognition because of communist philosophy...believing that everyone had the right to self-determination?

RISTO – Yes. When issues came to a head about the “Macedonian question” the communists and so-called progressive Greeks did say that “the Macedonians are a minority in Greece and they will achieve equal rights as one of the peoples in democratic Greece”.

However, there was also the Atlantic Decree which offered self-determination to anyone who fought against Fascism on the side of the Allies and the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia fought against the Fascists on the side of the Allies. ELAS was part of the Allied force in Cairo. The British had established a centre of Greek activity in Cairo where a Greek army, navy and air force operated under British command. Much of the ELAS force was Macedonian.

According to the five principles of the Atlantic Charter, all people who fought to liberate their lands from the Fascist occupier had the right to fight for their national freedom and create their own state. The Macedonians took up arms to do exactly that, to achieve the right to free themselves. The Macedonians were prepared to die to the last man to achieve exactly that. But even though they fulfilled the Atlantic charter requirements for self-determination, by willfully and voluntarily fighting against the occupiers and disarming the Fascist groups inside Greece, the Macedonian Partisans in Greek occupied Macedonia received no recognition and no rewards.

No one can dispute the fact that it was the Macedonians who disarmed and disbanded the so called Fascist counter-bands just as no one can dispute that proportionally more Macedonian fighters joined the struggle and fought harder than the Greeks to drive the

occupier out. Yet still the Macedonians received no recognition and no reward; not even a mention in history.

INTERVIEWER – The Greek Communists did that?

RISTO – Yes, the Greek communists did that. The Atlantic Charter offered the Macedonian people a country of their own which called for separating from Greece and no Greek was willing to see Macedonia leave Greece. No Greek, communist or not, was going to say “I am going to help give Macedonia away...”

INTERVIEWER – Give away Macedonia? I understand...

RISTO – So if no Greek was prepared to allow an independent Macedonia then the least they could have done was create a federal Greece, just like federal Yugoslavia.

INTERVIEWER – So we have a federation of Macedonia’s in the North and...

RISTO – No, we have a Yugoslav federation with five Republics and a Greek federation with two Republics, Greece and Macedonia. It would have solved many problems. Unfortunately the Greeks have this inherent fear, introduced to them by Metaxas, I think, that somehow the “Slavs” are going to “steal” their precious Macedonia and that they are not to be trusted. And basically everything after that took a turn for the worst for the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia.

While the Macedonian people who once lived under Serbian occupation achieved their human rights just like the Atlantic Charter promised, the Macedonians in Greece not only lost their promised rights but, in the long run, lost their homes and became exiled and drifters in this world.

Before we continue with the story of what happened to the Macedonian people, I want to take a moment to explain why it happened and who the architects behind it were. I will provide evidence to back my claims.

Allow me to come right out and just say it:

I believe the Greek Civil War was not a Greek Civil War, it was a war perpetrated against the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia to get rid of us once and for all.

This is hard to believe, right?

Well, it is also hard to believe that a million Jews were murdered in gas chambers and that two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, on a civilian population. But these atrocities did happen. So why is it so hard to believe that the Greek Civil War was a perpetrated war; a means to get rid of the Macedonian people from Greek occupied Macedonia?

Do we think we Macedonians are something special?

Just take a good look at our history and see for yourselves how special we are. We have been taken through several planned genocides in the last century or so alone. These were not secret acts perpetrated against us and no one knows about them? These genocides were done in the open and yet no one who had the power to do something has done anything. Why?

These acts of genocide have been purposely committed against us to eradicate us from our native land in Greece. What prevents us from seeing the truth is our own inability to see that there are people out there who want to do us harm.

For generations we have been programmed to believe that everyone is good and would do us no harm... Even during moments when we witnessed atrocities we still believed that “no, they will not do that to us because they are our friends...” Our own value system is keeping us from seeing the truth and as long as we allow our own values to guide us in dark allies, we will be victims.

Earlier I mentioned that the British wanted ELAS disarmed and the Macedonians fighters removed from ELAS. Why do you think the British wanted the Macedonians disarmed and out of ELAS?

Because they were planning to get rid of them, push them out of Greece. I did not believe this myself until I found the following information in a British declassified government document. Here is the document in its entirety:

[Balkan States – Report 1 - December 11, 1944

Mr. Leeper to Mr. Eden  
Athens 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1944

Sir,

I HAVE the honour to submit the following comments on Research Department paper of the 26th August, 1944, on the subject of Macedonia. (1)

2. The two formidable Macedonian problems in which Greece is concerned are: (a) that of Greek relations with the Slav world as represented by Serbia and Bulgaria, both of whom must be expected in the immediate future to be under strong Russian influence and to have Russian sympathy for their aspirations; and b) that of the surviving Bulgarophone minority in Western Macedonia.

3. The former problem turns chiefly on that of Serbian and Bulgarian access to the Aegean, the subject discussed in paragraphs 35-40 and 41-43 of the paper under reference. There is clearly no case for handing over to Slav Powers any part of the North Aegean coast, which in 1940 had nowhere anything but an infinitesimal minority of Slav inhabitants. On the other hand, the strategic position of Greece here, even with Turkish backing, is very weak, vis-à-vis the Slav world, so that even in her own interests it behooves Greece to come to terms with her northern neighbours. The only possible solution-however difficult in practice under present conditions-seems to be that referred to in paragraph 51, namely, a return to, and preferably an extension of, the system of free zones. A Serbian free zone at Salonica is not difficult, but a Bulgarian zone at Kavala, or even at the outlying Alexandroupolis, would probably be out of the question for a considerable period to come, in view of the passions aroused by the atrocious conduct of the Bulgarians in Northern Greece since 1941. It remains,

nevertheless, a Greek no less than a Bulgarian interest that Bulgaria's desire for access to an Aegean port should be satisfied so far as possible; since otherwise Bulgaria's southward political aspiration, which are now largely artificial, will be kept alive by the real and continual irritation of an unsatisfied economic need. (How far this need might be met by the alternative of a free zone at Durazzo is a matter for separate study.) It may further be pointed out that the grant of free zones at her northern ports would, in fact, be of direct financial benefit to Greece herself through the revivifying influence of increased trade on the life of those ports in general and through the restoration of a natural degree of intercourse between these Greek ports and their Slav hinterland.

4. The problem of the Western Macedonian Bulgarophones, who are briefly mentioned in paragraph 7 of the paper, also remains serious and formidable, in spite of its limited dimensions. This minority, which extends through the region from Florina and Kastoria through Siatista to the plain of Yannitsa, has proved exceedingly unreliable during the war. Satisfactory data are not available, but it appears from events during the occupation that the dissatisfied minority must be considerably larger than is suggested by Greek census figures; and it is certain that successive Greek Governments have shirked facing the problem and have preferred to persuade even themselves that it did not exist. On the assumptions (1) that the policy of His Majesty's Government is to treat Greece as the most important Balkan country from the point of view of British interests, and to support those elements in Greece which are most stably pro-British and (2) that Greece does not wish to belong to a Balkan Federation in which there would be a large Slav majority, it would appear to follow that Greece had better not contain any Slav minorities at all. And since the amputation of the Slav areas in Western Macedonia and their annexation to a Slav Federation is a practical impossibility and would also be economically disastrous for Greece. It would follow that, difficult as it may be, a home must be found for perhaps 120,000 Slav Macedonians north of the Greek frontiers of 1941.

5. I have sent copies of this dispatch to the Resident Minister at Caserta, to Mr. Houstoun-Boswall at Sofia and to Mr. Broad at Bari.

I have, &c. R. A. Leeper.

(1) See “Balkan States” print section, 26<sup>th</sup> August, Section 6.]

I would like to draw your attention to part 4 of the report, particularly the sentence “It would follow that, difficult as it may be, a home must be found for perhaps 120,000 Slav Macedonians north of the Greek frontiers of 1941”. This was a shocker for me which sent me into a tail spin. Before that I believed that Greeks were doing this, tormenting us, all on their own. After that I began to look at the situation in a different light.

And why were the British planning to get rid of the Macedonians from Greece?

Well that too is in the above report. Take a look at part 2. Britain could not stand Greece, its protectorate, being influenced by Russia. Greece had to be under British influence, at any cost, even at the extinction of the Macedonians in Greece.

You see, Britain does not want to allow Russia access to the Mediterranean waters and does not want it to encroach on its sphere of influence. It is clear from the report that Britain does not trust the Macedonian people and passionately despises Russia.

Now that we have established who was behind the idea of getting rid of the Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia and why, let us have a look at how they were planning to do it.

First it had to be done nice and legal for both Greece and Britain and second it had to be done out of necessity. The Macedonians had to leave voluntarily. But how? Surely one cannot ask 120,000 people to leave their homes and go to another country? Surely you can't force them to leave and not be noticed?

One way to do it nice and legal and out of necessity was if the Macedonian people were either convinced or instigated to pick up arms and fight against Greece in a bid to liberate themselves or to carve out Greek territory. In this scenario Greece would have no choice but to fight back and defend its integrity.

That kind of war, a controlled war that Greece was sure to win, if conducted on the territory where these Macedonians lived, would also create a flood of war refugees. These refugees would then be driven to flee their homes and exit the Greek borders to save themselves. Then all Greece had to do was close the border and ban them from returning, thus exiling them forever. Problem solved!

Isn't that exactly what happened?

But how do I support this theory? In retrospect how can I be sure that what happened was not purely a coincidence?

To show that this was a perpetrated war we need to examine and analyze what happened, how this war was started, how it progressed and how it ended. We need to look for evidence and patterns that support this theory. But first let us look at some critical points that support my arguments.

1. The so-called Greek Civil War was unnecessary. The Great Powers, Russia and Britain, had already decided that Greece would remain under British influence. It would remain intact with Greek occupied Macedonia in it. Since super power Russia was in agreement and a part of this deal, who was going to support the communists in Greece to gain power? Nothing can be achieved without the support of the Great Powers. The communists in Greece should have known that. And I believe that they did, at least the top communist party leadership knew. But it seems, as it turned out, gaining power in Greece was not their real objective.

Russia's position in all this was clear: Stalin wanted to interfere in capitalist affairs even though it had been decided and he had agreed with the Western Powers that: Greece in its entirety, Greek occupied Macedonia included, was going under the English and American spheres of influence. This was done under the Yalta Agreement which guaranteed that no socialist system would be implemented in Greece. This Agreement negated and made the need for the Greek Civil War unnecessary. So if the War was not about "installing" socialism in Greece, then there was only one other option left: internationalize the problem, crush the communists and legally ethnically cleanse the ethnic Macedonian population in Greek

occupied Macedonia and then replace it with the new Asia Minor colonists and settlers, commonly known as “Prosfigi”. But how? By instigating them to pick up arms and start a war.

2. Nikos Zahariadis, the person who started the so-called Greek Civil War, was a German prisoner. He was freed by the British and sent to Athens on a British plane to take over the Communist Party of Greece. Now ask yourself why would the British send a known and influential communist to Greece, to take over the communist party, especially when Greece was in the hands of the communists already? It doesn't make sense. It was in Britain's interest to weaken the communists in Greece, not to strengthen them. The only thing that actually makes sense is if Britain sent Zahariadis to Greece to control the situation. In the end, that is exactly what happened.

3. Being in control of all of Greece, why would the communists sign the Varkiza Agreement passing control to its arch enemy, the British supported Greek government of Athens?

The Varkiza agreement was signed on February 12, 1945 requiring all Partisan and other bands to demobilize and surrender their weapons. The British, once again, confirmed their allegiance to the Greek Government by giving Athens full political and military support, committing their willingness to fight to prevent a Partisan victory. The biggest losers of the Varkiza agreement were the Macedonians. As soon as the agreement was signed, all anti-Macedonian laws were back in force and the Macedonian people lost all that they had gained during the German occupation, including the right to form their own state as per the Atlantic Charter. The Greek Communist Party made absolutely no effort to safeguard Macedonian rights in the agreements with Britain. This was not only a betrayal to the Macedonian people but it also left them vulnerable to persecution from the Greek Fascists.

4. Why was NOF, the Macedonian Liberation Front, created in Yugoslavia and sent to Greek occupied Macedonia to prepare for a new conflict right after World War II ended and before the Greek Civil War had started?

The ELAS fighters who earlier had left Greek occupied Macedonia and went to Yugoslavia came under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPY/CPM). It was from these fighters that, in Skopje on April 23, 1945, the organization NOF was formed under the initiative of the CPY/CPM and sent to organize the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia in preparation for a new conflict - the Greek Civil War.

This shows that the Greek Civil War was foreseen before it happened. It was anticipated. Yugoslavia knew about it and was probably part of it. The top Yugoslav leadership must have known about it. And how was that possible? Could they see into the future? The only way Yugoslavia would have known was if Yugoslavia was part of the conspiracy to get rid of the Macedonians from Greece. And surprise, the classified document I posted earlier was dated December 11, 1944, which means that, at the diplomatic level, this plan was already in motion by 1945 when NOF was created. There was no way that Britain could have gotten rid of the Macedonians from Greece without Yugoslav help. The fact that Yugoslavia put together NOF to start a new war in Greece proves it.

NOF was created on April 23, 1945 before the Greek Civil War was even thought of. The Greek Civil War did not officially begin until March 31, 1946 by a decision of the CPG Second Plenum held on February 12, 1946. It did not happen by accident, it was planned.

After the Second World War, the Greek Civil War was a new test for the Macedonian people. The war had a dual purpose; one, to expel the Macedonian population, and for that reason the war was located inside Greek occupied Macedonia; and two, to liquidate the Communists who obviously were grossly misinformed and wanted to create socialism inside the British Protectorate of Greece.

5. When NOF was unable to motivate the Macedonian people to re-arm themselves and go to the mountains, the Greek political right escalated the so-called “white terror” campaign and began to torment the Macedonian population to no end.

The war (WWII) was over, so why was there a need to torment the population? Most people after World War II wanted to end all hostilities, to rest and live in peace. They were craving peace. The Macedonian people were craving peace. They had had enough of wars. That is why the Macedonian people were reluctant to pick up arms and go to the mountains. When NOF failed to motivate the Macedonian people to rise and fight, the Greek reactionaries stepped in and resorted to using Metaxas's tactics to terrorize the people and get them to fight back or leave their homes and run off over the border. This was the expected reaction.

[“The idea here was to have the Macedonian people raise arms against Greece so that Greece would have ‘no other choice but to defend itself against an aggressor who wants to carve out parts of its territory’! Yugoslavia, for the sake of having good relations with the West, naturally prepared the groundwork through the creation and indoctrination of NOF and AFZH (Women’s Anti-Fascist Front) with aims at starting an armed uprising in Greek occupied Macedonia. The Macedonian people, however, did not want to fight and initially refused to participate. To get them motivated the Greek right, the Fascists, pitched in and initiated what was later termed the “white terror”. Greeks indiscriminately began to kill people and burn properties and homes. Fearing for their lives many Macedonians fled to the mountains (Vicho and Gramos) where they were armed and trained to protect themselves. And this is how the conflict was started. This was a war that would be fatal to the Macedonian people; it had to be an ideological war in order to involve the international factor (US and Britain); a war that Greece would have no choice but to fight in order to save its territory. This was going to be a legal genocide because these ‘Slavs’ were prepared to carve out Greek territory! The Macedonians were told they needed the guns to protect themselves but as soon as the shooting started they were told they were fighting to ‘re-unite their Macedonia’ and after Yugoslavia abandoned them they were told they were fighting for their human rights to gain equality with the Greeks. Then, when the war became very hot, they were told to fight for their lives; ‘to fight or die!’...”] (Stoian Kochov).

There was not a single Macedonian in those days that not only publicly proclaimed that he or she was fighting to re-unite

Macedonia, but many Macedonians were made to believe that it was possible to do that! And why do you suppose they believed that? Because the architects of this war, through NOV and AFZH, told them so..., naturally through lies and deception!

Again, there was no reason for starting this war because it had been decided by the Great Powers that Greek occupied Macedonia was staying with Greece and the most likely reason that actually makes sense, was to eradicate the communist menace and exterminate the Macedonian population.

6. During the Greek Civil War: (a) the Macedonian people were led to believe that they were fighting to re-unite Macedonia and to gain their human rights, even though they were robbed of their rights afforded to them by the Atlantic Charter, (b) the Greek people were led to believe that the Partisans were actually “Slav bandits” and, with the help of the “communists”, were attempting to carve out Greek territory and give it to Tito’s Yugoslavia, and (c) the outside world was led to believe that this was a Civil War - Greeks fighting against Greeks.

There is not a single word in Western history that “Macedonians” were actually involved and that they were fighting for their human rights. Why the three different narratives about one and the same war?

The British and the Americans were the “overseers” and “architects” of this war; couldn’t they tell who was involved and what the war was about? According to the classified documents from that time, and I have hundreds of them, the British and Americans knew exactly what was going on and who was fighting against whom. Why then call it a Greek Civil War? To cover up the truth?!

Even though, proportionally, the Macedonian people were a larger factor in this war, they were never mentioned. Why? Was it done to cover up what was done to them? To cover up that they suffered genocide at the hands of the British and Americans?

[“What do the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia remember about the Greek Civil War and how do they interpret

what they remember? Many I have spoken with remember what they had done and the events that took place around them. It was an intense moment in time. Human life did not matter much and hardly anyone cared to pay attention outside of trying to survive. A giant wave hit them and swept them away. In their struggle to survive they listened to the guiding voices coming from above and did what they were told! They remember these times as an era of brutal propaganda with destructive goals calling out on the people and wanting more of their blood... After the war ended it was followed by a half a century of fear and silence... no matter where these people were... at home or exiled abroad. This fear and silence kept them from talking about what happened during the war... about the genocide they experienced... a forgotten genocide... an unreported genocide... an un-registered genocide with world institutions and with the international community... a guilt free genocide for those who had committed it!”] (Stoian Kochov).

7. The so-called Greek Civil War was a controlled war that was concentrated in Greek occupied Macedonia and in the rural areas where Macedonians were the majority. But apart from that, what qualified it to be called a “controlled war” was the fact that this war was guided strictly by Greek hands and their British and American handlers.

It would be no exaggeration to say that of the 25, 000 fighters mobilized into the ranks of the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG), 50% were Macedonians, most of who were forcibly mobilized.

Looking at this in proportion, it means that half of the fighters came from the Greek population of 6 million and the other half came from the Macedonian population of no more than 300 thousand people.

So in terms of percentages, the Greek population contributed 0.21% of its total population while the Macedonian population contributed 4.17 %, that ratio being 20 to 1. In the long term, throughout the entire Greek Civil War, the total Greek contribution amounted to 18-20 thousand fighters while the Macedonian contribution amounted to 15-20 thousand fighters. The sum of the armed forces possessed by the Athens regime, on the other hand, was more than 300,000

soldiers belonging to all branches and armed with the latest weapons.

Let us also not forget that on March 1, 1947 - U.S. President Harry Truman announced the decision to proclaim the “Truman Doctrine” for engaging the U.S. in Greece. Greece was granted credit and advanced military equipment to equip its government army. At the same time Van Fleet, an American General anti-guerrilla specialist, was made available to the Greek government. (See: Todor Chepreganov, 1997/178.)

“... Immediately after the ‘Truman Doctrine’ was proclaimed, information services were established in Greece by FBI and OSS agents. An American military mission was also sent to Greece. Invited by the Greek government, representatives of the United States began to arrive in Greece in order to assist in the preservation and sovereignty of Greece as a nation. They were there unarmed with aims at regulating material assistance and providing advisory functions. Upon its arrival in Greece however, the American mission took over the most important headquarter functions in the army, navy and aviation as well as the organization and management of military operations, which were established to fight against the rebels...”

Given the number of Macedonian fighters involved, the lack of Macedonian leadership both in DAG and in the CPG, the organizational tactics, the number of governments involved, the location where the war took place, do you still think this was a grass roots “Civil War”?

Also, given the numbers and proportion of Macedonian fighters involved, don't you think the Macedonian fighters deserved their own leaders? Why were Macedonians not allowed to lead their own people in battle and in the political field? Why was every aspect of this conflict strictly controlled by Greeks on both sides, with the British and Americans pulling the strings on both sides? Why were the Macedonians not allowed to fight freely and for Macedonian interests? Why did they have to be tightly controlled by Greeks on all sides? The entire top DAG and CPG leaderships, the people who actually made all the decisions, were Greek. The Greek leadership

determined what battles were going to be fought and where. The Greeks then led those battles. The Greek leadership determined and controlled the composition of fighters in the units and what units to deploy where. The Greek leadership determined how many Macedonians could be armed; who and how many could join DAG, and so on. In other words, the Greeks controlled this war by keeping a tight leash on the Macedonians. Why?

Because this was a “controlled war” especially designed so that the Macedonians would fail and be driven out of their homeland.

One more thing...

“It is well-known that in 1947 DAG had not resolved either the issue of military supplies or the issue of arming its fighters with ordinary battle machine guns and other battle assets, as well as ammunition. It also remains to be explained why, on the one hand, Zahariadis gave Markos orders to increase the number of fighters in DAG to 60,000 while Ioannidis gave Markos orders to acquire arms for only 4,500 fighters. It is also well-known that Markos, in 1947, ended up sending home thousands of Macedonian fighters who wanted to voluntarily enter the ranks of DAG.” (See: “DAG-strategic issues and management tactics,” G. Maltezos Dzhumerkiotis, p. 354.)

The question here is: “If this was not a controlled war, then why did General Markos conduct an illegal mobilization only in Macedonia, mobilizing young and old and wreaking havoc on the Macedonian population?”

8. Speaking of the Greek leadership, let us examine who were the top leaders in Greece who led the Macedonian and Greek partisan forces. Who were the top leaders who led the Communist Party of Greece and the Democratic Army of Greece?

The two top leaders were Nikos Zahariadis, whom I mentioned earlier, and General Markos Vafiadis. They were the leaders of the political and military pillars of the rebellion or of the one side of the Greek Civil War. Both Zahariadis and Vafiadis were Asia Minor colonists deposited in Greek occupied Macedonia in the 1920’s.

Nikos Zahariadis was born on April 27, 1903 in Edirne, Eastern Thrace. His father was employed as a clerk at “Razim”, a French commercial tobacco company based in Constantinople. From 1911 to 1912 Nikos Zahariadis lived and attended school in the “Ibin Paiko” settlement in Skopje, where his father worked as a representative of the “Razim” Company. In 1913 he moved to Solun. In 1922 and 1923 he worked as a sailor, a job which took him to the Soviet Union where he became a member of the Communist Party. In 1924, with the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece, Zahariadis’s family was moved to Greece. In 1924 he visited the famous Communist University of Eastern European nations, KUTVE in Moscow. Nikos Zahariadis was leader of the Greek communist movement and secretary general of the CPG from 1936 to 1956. Zahariadis treated the CPG like a cult and had absolute confidence in Stalin and his Communist Party, which he believed to be infallible. He himself admitted to this. Zahariadis committed suicide in 1973 while serving a prison sentence in Sorgun, Siberia.

General Markos Vafiadis was born in the village Tosi near Ankara, in Asia Minor, and was planted as a colonist in Greek occupied Macedonia in 1922, a man who we, again and again, meet throughout our history, who for some reason that escapes me, we see as some sort of “great legend”, when it is well-known what he told the magazine “Epikera” about us Macedonians when he returned to Athens. Markos, at best, was an ordinary person; he was no General let alone the great general who headed the army with more than 50% of the soldiers being Macedonians. He was also not a Greek... he was a pseudo-Greek at best, just like Zahariadis.

And to add insult to our injuries, when Markos returned to Greece, after the Greek Civil War had ended, he was welcomed with hugs by the Athens press in Athens airport, as the Chief of Staff of the armed forces of Greece who fought in the Civil War. At that point a journalist from the weekly “Epikera” asked him a question alluding to the “struggle” and if it was worth it. Markos replied: “The sense was that the Slavo-Macedonians were driven out of the northern parts of Greece and that Macedonia remains Greek.” (See “Nova Makedonija”, February 25, 1992.)

This was said by Markos Vafiadis, the main culprit who led DAG during the so-called Greek Civil War and who contributed to this disaster in which so many lives were lost. He was a colonist from Asia Minor brought to Greek occupied Macedonia. His role in the war was to lead DAG as a General and, as he said “he fought to preserve Greece by driving the Macedonians out of their homeland”... This has been our fate so that the Christian Turkish colonists could have more of our lands and Greece could live in the glory of knowing that Greek occupied Macedonia was only populated by “pure Greeks and Greeks by genus”... even though none of them are Greeks... But that does not matter! What matters to the Greeks is that there are less Macedonians in Greece today!!

“And this is how this colonist dog, General Markos, was prepared to solve the Macedonian National Question. And we, the Macedonian army, gave ourselves to him to lead us to our death.” (Stoian Kochov, a partisan under Markos’s leadership.)

During the Second NOF Congress, held on March 25, 1949, just prior to DAG’s liquidation, Zahariadis said: “You Macedonians have a right to secession, within a Balkan federation...”

But what did Stalin recommend, most likely based on what was decided between Stalin and Churchill in Yalta and in Moscow from October 5<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> 1944, during the division of spheres of influence of the Balkans between the Great Powers? Stalin’s clear and undeniable position was that the USSR was against Zahariadis’s decision to announce the creation of a “United and Independent Macedonian state within a Balkan Federation” passed during the CPG Central Committee 5<sup>th</sup> Plenum.

Stalin’s dislike of this is made very clear in the correspondence files between the USSR leadership and Chernishov, Soviet Ambassador to Athens.

In his speech, which he made during the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenum, Nikos Zahariadis said the following: “... And here we need to openly say that, if provocateur Tito’s role was known in 1946 the CPG would not have taken a resolution to take up arms and enter the War. It

would have been assigned to another time and by a different method of struggle...” (See “I trihroni epope tu DAG, 1946-1949”, p. 422.)

Zahariadis here not only put the blame on Tito for his own failure but also identified Tito as one of the culprits in this disaster.

“They should stop telling us that we need to respect Zahariadis’s Testament otherwise known as the ‘Communist Pledge’ for a ‘United Macedonia’, which was nothing more than a ruse to draw us into the communist camp so that we would be wiped out to the last one! The Greeks understand why Zahariadis did this! Why can’t some Macedonians? Why are they still beating the communist drum and asking us to respect someone who tried to destroy us... to the last one?” (Stoian Kochov)

So at this point I need to ask. Why would two Christian Turkish colonists deposited in Greek occupied Macedonia, who were given illegally confiscated Macedonian lands to live on, want to help the Macedonian people liberate themselves? The Christian Turkish colonists were the very so-called Greeks who had occupied Macedonia and living on confiscated Macedonian lands. What did they and their kind think would happen to them if Macedonia was freed of them? Wouldn’t they be thrown out of Macedonia? So why do we think they were “helping” the Macedonians and not “hurting” them? Who can we blame but ourselves if we allowed our enemies, the very people who replaced us in our native lands, to lead us?

About the only thing that makes sense in this scenario is that the Christian Turkish colonists and settlers led us to our destruction in order for them to acquire more of our homes and lands. Which is exactly what happened... The Macedonian people were driven out of their homes and native lands during the so-called Greek Civil War and replaced by the colonists, the likes of Zahariadis and Vafiadis.

9. The February 12, 1949 battle for Lerin was one of the bloodiest battles in the so-called Greek Civil War, which was unnecessary because the partisans were already losing the war. But Zahariadis insisted on capturing Lerin because, as he said, if the Partisans won

this battle and captured a city then they would be taken seriously by the outside world. So Zahariadis was granted his wish.

The available forces for that battle were as follows: In its composition DAG had brigades 13, 103, 14 and 107. It also had the school of officers, one mining battalion, one sanitation battalion and one battalion for transferring the wounded. DAG had approximately 5,354 soldiers at its disposal. The government forces stationed in Lerin numbered about 4,000 soldiers. After about eight hours of fighting DAG suffered devastating losses: 334 dead, 1500 heavily wounded and 199 missing.

But that's not the whole story. A lot of the partisans who fought in that battle were local and untrained young Macedonian boys and girls, some of whom I interviewed for my books.

In part here is one of those stories:

“Her final mission before the war was over was the attack on Lerin. After spending a couple of weeks in Karadzova they were told to prepare for battle at an undisclosed time and location. When they arrived at Bigla, they saw that the artillery and machineguns were set up to face the city Lerin but still they were not told when the battle was going to take place. They expected the attack to be a surprise ambush carried out at night. When the order to attack was given, however, it was already dawn and the Partisan frontline was in full view. After the initial contact, the response from the Royalist side was quick, fierce, and decisive. No sooner had the battle started than the Partisans were in retreat. Those like Leffa, in support of the frontlines, were trapped. They had two choices, surrender and face the consequences or run and take their chances dodging machinegun fire. Those brave enough ran and lost their lives in the process. Most, however, were too afraid to run and waited for a rescue attempt which never materialized. By the time it was over, six to seven hundred young Macedonian men and women died, cut down by machinegun fire and buried in a mass grave. Among them was Leffa's friend Trena Boglevska, from Oshchima. It seemed like moments ago that Leffa and Trena hugged and wished each other good luck before they parted company. Trena was working on the opposite side of the frontline from Leffa. She was dead now, cut

down in her prime by a Greek bullet. To this day, Leffa still mourns her loss.

In a few hours the battle was over and huddled together with two male officers, thirty Partisan women were trapped in a school awaiting their fate. Leffa ripped off the pins and symbols from her uniform and threw them away. Soon after, the Greek soldiers came accompanied by an old General. The General went from girl to girl as they sat on the floor, patting each on the head and whispering to them in a soft voice, “You saved your life by surrendering.” The women were expecting the worst, but no harm came to them. After their capture each woman was sprayed with pesticide to kill the lice and was placed under arrest in the Lerin prisons. Six days later, Leffa was transferred to Kozheni, a larger prison camp that looked like a town of tents. There, Leffa endured three months of daily interrogations being asked the same questions day after day after day. Leffa insisted that she was drafted by force by the Partisans and stuck to her story. Leffa is grateful to her brother Naso for his frequent visitations to the prison and for making life a little more bearable.

Thanks to UNDRRA, Leffa was given a change of clothing that was a welcome contribution in prison. While Leffa was in prison, her family was working on her immigration papers to Canada. With her record there was no future for her at home. Leffa’s father came to Canada in 1947 and wanted to give his daughter a better life away from the conflict. Leffa arrived in Toronto on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1949, and soon after took a job in a laundromat where she worked for two years.” (Stefov/Oshchima, 2003.)

Even so, today there are no graves or markers to commemorate the sacrifice of our fighters who fought to take Lerin, but certainly there are graves and markers for the soldiers of the government army. There is no trace of our people anywhere in Lerin because they were buried in a ditch, in a mass grave; both dead and heavily wounded - but still alive, were buried together in a common grave. This, however, is only one part of our whole tragedy; those who were buried we buried everywhere, wherever they fell, most without markers on their graves. Many we left where they had fallen, for nature to take care... we ran for cover to save our own lives... What

is most tragic about all this is that we were victims of someone else's doing... victims of someone who wanted to start a war... the Greek Civil War... in order to turn us into casualties... for their own interests.

This problem may look complicated but it is very simple... if we open our eyes, set our prejudices aside and look impartially at it, we will discover the truth. We don't need to look at how historiography reflects the facts, because history is written by those who won and who want to change the past to reflect the present; history is written by those who want to put the blame elsewhere... All we need to look at is exactly what happened and ask ourselves "why did it happen the way it did?"

First we were not ready or able as a people to seek justice with fire and sword. But we did anyway... Following the lead of strangers... Second, we were led by Greek generals, the likes of Markos, whose interest was not for us to win the war. In other words, the Greeks who led us had a lot more to gain if we lost the war and were driven out than if we won and stayed in our homes. Looking at this from a different angle, if the Greeks wanted us to "win" like they said they did, then they would have allowed us to have our own generals! And why did we not have our own generals? Why did we need "permission" from the Greeks to have our own generals? Because, as I said earlier, "we were not ready or able as a people to seek justice with fire and sword" on our own! And thus we not only relied on strangers to lead us, we believed their lies until it was too late and we all became sacrificial casualties... for foreign interests.

The end result? Many of the fighters who fought in the Lerin battle were young people from the neighbouring Lerin villages. They died for nothing. They were taken and told the fight would be over in hours, they did not need to be prepared... but then they were left outside, all night long... in the cold; they were not allowed to light fires. By morning they were all frozen and demoralized. Most of them were 17 to 19 year-old girls. There was snow on the ground. They were visible as they ran towards the Greek front line. By the time the battle was over the snow had been painted red...

10. One of the most devastating acts in this so-called Greek Civil War, which leads me to believe it was a perpetrated war, is the fact that there was no negotiation for surrender and no exit strategy for the partisans and for the refugees, except to leave the country. There was no plan B, no “what happens if we lose the war”. It was always assumed that the partisans would win the war and anyone who thought differently was a coward and a traitor. Even when the partisans lost the war, Zahariadis spun it and told the fighters to go to Albania to regroup; the war was not over... and they were going to win it. All the fighters left their positions and went to Albania believing they would regroup and return to fight.

Many Macedonian fighters still believed Zahariadis when he told them that DAG was going to win the war and that it was only a matter of time! They only stopped believing after Zahariadis accused the NOF leaders of losing the war, of being traitors and Tito’s agents and after Zahariadis sentenced them to live out the rest of their lives in the Siberian camps... Initially Zahariadis wanted the NOF leaders executed but because they were on Albanian soil, the Albanian authorities would not allow it.

The Macedonian people, including the majority of NOF leaders, were completely taken by this change of events and surprised and confused by the development of them being guilty of losing a war they did not lead? They were well aware of their duty which was to urge the Macedonian people to fight; i.e. to do as they were commanded by the Greek leadership, especially Zahariadis; and they did exactly what they were told! And now they were being accused of losing the war; especially after Zahariadis kept telling them that they were winning it? If they did not trust the Greeks, then they surely trusted the Yugoslavs who, only a short time ago, had passed them on to the CPG and told them to follow the CPG’s lead because the CPG would look after their interests? Surely the Yugoslav’s would not put them in such a harmful position... at least not intentionally?

Well, no! Or perhaps yes! But the fact of the matter is that DAG was ordered to go to Albania, outside the Greek border and was never allowed to return and fight... and win the war, as promised. Once the fighters and the Macedonian civilian population, driven out by

the war, were outside the Greek border, Greece closed its borders. The partisans were completely confused as to what had happened and did not know what to do...

Here is what Vera Foteva, leader of AFZH, had to say about the last moments of that dreaded war:

[From August 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>, 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 10<sup>th</sup>, 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 30<sup>th</sup>, 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.

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 2<sup>nd</sup>, 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 2<sup>nd</sup> was designated International Day of Peace in honour of the International Congress which was held in Prague on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 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.]

Vera was one of Zahariadis’s staunchest followers and she truly believed they were going to win the war, like Zahariadis had told them.

There are volumes of evidence in our history books and among the eye witnesses who survived the dreaded Greek Civil War, which leads me to believe that the Greek Civil War was a perpetrated war to get rid of the Macedonians from Greece, just like the British wanted. But, I believe, the 10 points listed above are sufficient evidence to give credence to my theory and to also confirm the behaviour of the players in this war which otherwise would seem illogical.

Keeping the above ten points in mind, we will now continue with our story.

The moment Germany invaded Greece, the Greek government capitulated and the troops fighting against Italy on the Albanian front were abandoned. The majority of the soldiers fighting at this front were Macedonians and after Greece surrendered they were abandoned, left without provisions or support. Without orders to disband they remained at the front. The Germans found them starving. After disarming them they sent them home.

Some time after Greece was occupied by Germany, Greek occupied Macedonia was placed under German, Italian and Bulgarian control. Kostur Region was placed under Italian control but the Macedonian people living there were still having problems with the Greek Fascists who used every opportunity to harass them. So, some of the village elders turned to the Italians for protection. But instead of protecting them, the Italians gave them arms so that they could

protect themselves and the Macedonians were able to repel the Greek tormentors.

In the absence of the Greeks the people in Kostur, as well as in other places in Greek occupied Macedonia, found a new freedom they had never experienced before in their lives. The Italians allowed them to speak their Macedonian language openly in the streets without being arrested, fined, or jailed. The Macedonians took advantage of this freedom and began to read and write in Macedonian, even perform liturgy in the Macedonian language in church.

INTERVIEWER – During the occupation?

RISTO – Yes, during the occupation. The Kostur Region village Macedonian armed bands protected their villages from Greek attacks and combined together to form larger bands to protect themselves from bigger dangers. They became a formidable force in the region.

“This Macedonian patriotism was put into action on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1943 in Kostur Region when an Assembly of 48 members, representatives of the various villages, was convened and decided to form the “Macedonian Committee” for Kostur Region whose aim was to defend the 54 to 60 villages in that region. They were allowed to arm themselves because they needed protection from the Greeks. Everything else that has been said about them is a lie.” (Stoian Kochov)

Unfortunately, being occupied by Italy, an ally of Bulgaria, the Bulgarians too had access to Kostur Region and used their propaganda to not only convince some of these Macedonians to support the Bulgarian cause, but also to convince the world that these bands were “actually Bulgarian”. Some of the fighters in the Kostur bands did join the Bulgarians and began to spread Bulgarian propaganda among the people and as tensions mounted they did commit crimes against the Macedonian people. Both the Greeks and Bulgarians unfortunately used these incidents to vilify all the Kostur bands and label them criminal and Fascist.

People still write me to tell me that these people were “no-good Bulgarians”. But what leads me to believe that they were neither criminals nor Bulgarian Fascists, with the exception of a few, is the fact that they spoke Macedonian, allowed the Macedonian language to be taught and to be used in church. They also operated under a code of conduct that protected the Macedonian people and supported the Macedonian cause.

The fact is the Kostur rebels were guided by Delchev’s philosophy and by the Macedonian freedom fighters who believed that if you die for something then die for Macedonia. And this is exactly what led them to create their own Macedonian army and refused to be subservient to the Greek government or to the Communist (internationalists) and that is exactly why they were vilified and destroyed.

History will record the strategy of the eternal rebel desire: to have our identity and language returned, to protect our families, properties and villages and to remain masters of our grandfather’s hearth.

“First: The rebels, as the rightful sons of these Macedonian lands, brought back the Kostur dialect of the Macedonian language, which for years had been prohibited from being spoken, by Greek law;

Second: The rebels re-opened the Macedonian churches and liturgy was conducted in the Macedonian language and so were other rites including baptisms, weddings and funerals;

Third: The local militia addressed the people in their native Macedonian language.” (Stoian Kochov)

The Kostur rebels believed in driving the Greeks out of Macedonia and forming a united Macedonian state. Why would they do that if they were fighting for the Bulgarian cause?

At about the same time, when Russia began to push the Nazis out of Russian soil, a resistance movement started growing in the Balkans with aims at driving the occupiers out. This resistance movement was organized by the communists at a grass roots level. The

Macedonians also began to organize their own resistance movements in the various regions of Greek occupied Macedonia including Kostur, Lerin and Voden.

Unfortunately, instead of combining and forming a single Macedonian force, the Greek communists “convinced” the Macedonians to join the Greeks and fight a united front against the occupier. From this point on the Greeks took the upper hand and began to control the entire movement including the one started by the Macedonians.

The National Liberation Front (EAM) in Greece was formed on September 27, 1941 without any Macedonian markings. Its aims were to expel the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupiers, establishing the integrity of Greece, establishing the self-determination of Cyprus, the Dodecanese and Northern Epirus but nothing was said anywhere about the Macedonians.

After EAM was formed and joined by the CPG, it called on the entire Greek population to resist fascism. Then, in a joint meeting with the CPG Central Committee, it called for organizing a resistance army. This new Greek Army, appropriately named ELAS, was created on February 15, 1942 with the appearance of its first ELAS military units. The first detachment of ELAS formed in Greek occupied Macedonia was in Kostur on December 7, 1942 and it consisted of 10 Macedonians, 7 Greeks and 2 Vlachs.

Here is the ELAS oath that everyone who joined ELAS had to take: “I swear that I will fight to the last drop of my blood for the complete liberation, stability and independence of Greece. I will fight to preserve the integrity of the Greek people and the establishment of order and basic human rights... by performing due diligence and demonstrating discipline. I will follow orders and instructions from my superiors and I will avoid every process that may turn me into a traitor against the Greek people.” Still nothing about the Macedonian people.

And as the allies started to gain the upper hand over the occupiers and the German army began to retreat, the armed groups, such as the ones I mentioned earlier in Kostur Region, started to become a

problem for the Greeks. EAM and the CPG communists wanted them eradicated.

The Greeks could have put a Greek armed force to pursue and eradicate the Kostur rebels but they didn't. The CPG decided to create an all Macedonian force and let it deal with them.

“The CPG, EAM and ELAS leaderships, ‘concerned’ about the situation that existed in Greek occupied Macedonia, especially in Kostur, Lerin and Voden Regions, decided to create a separate Macedonian organization; SNOF (Slavo-Macedonia National Liberation Front). SNOF, for Kostur and Lerin Regions, was created on October 20, 1943 and for Voden Region a little later. The people who created SNOF were Greeks who belonged to the CPG District Committee for Western Macedonia; Hristos Kalfas (Andreas), Antonis Andonopulos (Periklis), CPG District Committee Secretary for Kostur Region and Thanassis Kartsunis, CPG District Committee Secretary for Kozhani Region.” (See the book: “Giorgi R. Peikov (1915-1991)” by Stoian Kochov, Skopje 1995, for more information.)

Why did the Greeks insist on using the prefix “Slavo”? There were no “other” Macedonians in Greece! They used the prefix “Slavo” to distinguish them from whom? Why were the Greeks so keen on hiding the Macedonian identity in Greek occupied Macedonia? If not to, yet again, deny the Macedonian people their rights and their rightful place in their own homeland? Who were these “Slavo-Macedonians”?

SNOF was allowed to recruit only for a short period of time, after that its fighters were subordinated to ELAS. On September 16, 1944 all military units belonging to the Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Army (SNOV) were disbanded.

It is a historic fact that the CPG and EAM leadership, up until April 1944, used SNOF for its own political and military aims, primarily in dealing with the armed bands. Then in the beginning of May 1944 the CPG disbanded SNOF and SNOV (its armed wing) because they say SNOF had become an obstacle in the CPG's negotiations with

the Greek government in exile and with the other coalition government parties scheduled to meet in mid-May 1944.

The CPG did not explain who was objecting and why they were having problems with the Macedonians being armed, even though they were allies in the struggle against the occupiers and even though SNOF was instrumental in the removal of the armed bands in Greek occupied Macedonia. The CPG did not even object to the British and Greek government request to disband SNOF.

So, less than 6 months after it was created by strangers and foreigners, SNOF was disbanded, again by strangers and foreigners, even after proving that it was a great asset to the CPG.

Clearly, the Greeks on the entire political spectrum had a problem with the Macedonians, both with SNOF and with the armed Kostur bands.

So after getting SNOF to do the dirty work for the Greeks the CPG ordered SNOF to disband.

SNOF and its fighters were told, through Greek communist propaganda, that the armed bands in Kostur and other regions in Macedonia were “Bulgarian Fascists” who were fighting for the Bulgarian cause. The Macedonian partisans that were sent to destroy them had no idea that these bands were Macedonian. In other words, through deceit, SNOF was sent to liquidate its own people.

This was yet another “unfortunate” Macedonian mistake in a string of historic mistakes.

Macedonians “must” learn not to be so trusting! Macedonians must learn that they cannot depend on foreigners and strangers to lead them and tell them what to do! Macedonians must grasp the fact that the world around them was built on lies and deception and no one cares about them!

In short, the Macedonians were lied to and used to disarm and destroy the village bands.

Even before SNOF was disbanded, relations between the Greek communists and the SNOF leadership were abysmal to say the least.

The Greeks were promising “cooperation” between SNOF and ELAS but that cooperation never materialized.

Many Macedonian leaders, particularly Gotse, a Macedonian battalion commander, were upset and unhappy about the Macedonian situation in Greece.

Then tensions came to a climax in October when Gotse found himself face to face with ELAS units deployed in front of his SNOF units ready to attack them.

Instead of fighting, Gotse, along with 800 of his fighters, crossed over the Yugoslav border and entered the Republic of Macedonia. He did not want a direct confrontation with ELAS, especially with the Macedonian fighters who had joined ELAS. And especially not on Macedonian soil. The implications would have been horrendous to say the least...

INTERVIEWER – How big was the battalion?

RISTO – In those days a battalion numbered around 600 soldiers.

First the Greeks wanted to disband the battalions, later they wanted to move it south, outside of Macedonia. But Gotse refused their orders. He told the Greeks that the fighters in his battalion were all Macedonians and wanted to stay in Macedonia to protect their families and the Macedonian people. His fighters were all volunteers; kids who joined his force to fight for Macedonia and not for Greece.

INTERVIEWER – Like your uncle?

RISTO – Yes like my uncle. Initially my uncle was a policeman in the Macedonian forces but later joined all kinds of youth groups.

He was ready to fight... for equality. The Macedonians were fierce fighters and very patriotic. Unfortunately they were easily

manipulated because of their strong patriotism. They were simple people who were fed up with Greek aggression and wanted it to end.

Their strength was in their patriotism and that worried the Greeks. But the Greeks used their patriotism against them. First, they used it to destroy the Macedonian armed village bands on account that they were allegedly “Bulgarian bands”. Then they promised the Macedonians political and military cooperation. Later they promises the Macedonians human rights and equality...

This was purposely done to get the Macedonians to do their bidding.

The Greek communists even promised the Macedonians complete independence.

But, none of these promises materialized... They were all Greek lies. But were they believable?

In those days anything was believable because the world was in constant flux. The Macedonian people on the other side of the artificial border, the ones who had been occupied by Serbia not too long ago, just gained their independence and now had their own country, a Yugoslav Republic... with human and national rights...

So, yes, it was believable! The Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia felt they too could and should be recognized and given their human and national rights. Why not?

The need to “believe” unfortunately clouded the Macedonian mind and blinded the Macedonians from seeing the signs and the fact that they were being manipulated.

Everything was always within their reach but always out of their grasp. The Greeks made sure of that. The Greeks took full advantage of their patriotism and used it against them.

But, this was nothing new. The Bulgarians manipulated the Macedonians during their 1903 Ilinden Uprising to get them to rise up against a stronger opponent and they did... I already explained what happened.

So, let us now get back to our story.

As I mentioned earlier, the turning point for Greece was when Stalin and Churchill decided that Greece would go to the British sphere of influence and no socialist system would be allowed to take place in Greece. But given that Greece was over 80% in favour of a socialist system, Stalin pushed the point that Greece's future should be decided by an election. Both Churchill and Stalin agreed on that point and decided to put that matter into the hands of the Greek people.

It was agreed that an election would take place. It was also agreed that the election would take place under certain conditions. One of those conditions was that all armed groups inside Greece were to be disarmed, including ELAS, the communist led army.

And, as I mentioned earlier, the Macedonian units were to be disbanded and all Macedonian organizations were to be shut down and eliminated. That was Churchill's request.

The British and the Greek political right were certain they could not possibly win the elections fair and square so they began to take measures against their opposition.

As the national election date in March 1946 approached, terror and pressure on the Macedonian people increased dramatically. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1946 members of the National Guard jailed 10 people from the village Nered. They were all taken to court and, without a shred of evidence, accused of being members of illegal organizations. Similar events took place in the villages Neokazi, Popozhani, Boreshnitsa and Sekulevo.

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1946, 10 people from the village Petoratsi were sued in the Lerin court and were given 10 to 15 year prison sentences. They were accused of belonging to illegal socialist organizations. Among those sued were Bitko Mijalev, Lazo Damianov, Naso Zhinzov and Vasil Popov.

Another 18 people from the village Setina were also sued by the same court and handed 8 to 10 year prison sentences. These people were accused of various crimes. Their accuser was the teacher Miltiadis Dulukas who was a witness at their trials.

The amount of violence used by the Greek government was much greater than in the past. Even the death penalty was used against Leftists between 1945 and 1950. This overshadowed the violence perpetrated in all previous and subsequent periods.

It is interesting to point out that while Greek governments in the immediate postwar period were disinclined to carry out death sentences against known and convicted German collaborators and war criminals, such reservations were much less in evidence against the Leftists and against Macedonians especially after the 1946 elections.

While the British and the Greek press continued to speak of free elections in Greece, the nationalist and chauvinistic elements continued to rain terror on the civilian population arresting and imprisoning people uncontrollably. By the time the elections took place on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946, almost all of the former resistance fighters were either missing or serving jail sentences under trumped up charges.

Terror and persecution escalated before the elections and peaked on the day of the elections, prompting even Sofulis himself, who was running for office, to say: "It is impossible to hold impartial elections under these conditions." Not only were people terrorized to vote for whoever their tormentors wanted but there were also all sorts of other irregularities which were being ignored by the state apparatus.

Interestingly some of these irregularities were confirmed by British, Colonel Shepard who was quoted by the newspaper "New Democracy" on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1947 as saying: "During the election a Greek officer was watching a British officer and finally got enough nerve to speak to him. The Greek officer boasted to the British officer about how his regime was capable of creating conditions where 100% of the people would vote for the royalists.

‘Even if not 100% then at least 95% and for those 5% who vote differently we will call them the enemies of the regime and invent reasons as needed to bring them in’ explained the Greek officer.”

The March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 Greek elections were a total farce, not only because of the coercion by the rightist regime forcing voters to vote for them but also because of the perpetrated election fraud. In most European countries like France, Italy and others the population had naturally shrunk because of the war but not in Greece. In spite of the half million deaths due to starvation and war, Greece, according to the number of people who voted in 1946, showed a massive population increase, much greater than those voting in 1936. For example, 1,753,000 voters participated in the 1936 elections and 2,200,000 voters participated in the 1946 elections (voting in Greece was mandatory). Above that another 250,000 voters, known democrats were intentionally left off the lists so that they could not vote.

Please note that NOF was formed on April 23, 1945 under Tito and Kolishevski’s leadership and was dispatched to Greece by Kolishevski in the fall of the same year. The elections in Greece were scheduled to take place on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946. Why would Tito and Kolishevski prepare and dispatch NOF to Greek occupied Macedonia to start a new conflict even before the elections had taken place unless they knew something beforehand? The election was the key to ending the conflict by letting the people decide what course to take.

Right after the CPY and CPG agreed on what to do regarding the continuation of the war in Greek occupied Macedonia, Lazar Kolishevski, Secretary of the CPM Central Committee, invited the NOF Board, headed by Paskal Mitrevski, for a briefing during which Kolishevski said the following: “Now you go down there (in Greek occupied Macedonia). The CPG is now responsible for you. You must have faith in the CPG. Its policy on the Macedonian question is clear. Any questions that may surface will now be decided by the leadership of the CPG Party. Be careful not to splinter or stray from the Party. You are to work under its directives. You are to struggle and fight to strengthen your unity with the Greek

people and fight hard with all your strength against chauvinism, separatism and localized tendencies.”

Also let me remind you of what Rakovski said: “... During our meeting with Kolishevski when we were preparing to return to Aegean Macedonia in order to lay the foundations of the revolution, Kolishevski, in his first class cynical speech, said to us: ... ‘That we Macedonians were a talented people, with appallingly visible international and revolutionary orientation, with a sense of tact and strategy’ and that Tito told him: ‘Now is your moment!’ ...”

The elections in Greece were scheduled for March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946. NOF was already dispatched to Greek occupied Macedonia in the fall of 1945 to start a conflict.

Immediately after the March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 elections, when it was made abundantly clear to everyone that the elections in Greece were neither fair nor democratic, many Macedonian small groups re-armed and took to the mountains, Kajmakchalan, Pajak and Vicho, not only to save themselves but to fight back and provide protection for their families and villages.

Many detachments led successful battles in several villages including Lukovits in Voden Region and Sarakinovo in Lerin Region. Thousands of Macedonians expressed their readiness to fight for freedom in Greek occupied Macedonia and many more were prepared to leave the ranks of the regular army and join the Partisan units.

The first fighters to show desire to abandon the regular army and cross over to the Partisans were a group of soldiers from a unit stationed in the village Pondokersija in Kukush Region. Similar desires were expressed by a group of men from the 5<sup>th</sup> division stationed in Kozheni.

When the Greek authorities found out, the men were court-martialed by a military court which sentenced 14 soldiers and 1 officer to death, 22 soldiers received life imprisonment and 23 others were handed down lesser sentences. All the above mentioned soldiers were accused of cooperating with the Partisans.

Most historians would argue that the Greek Civil War began on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944 with the bloody demonstrations in Athens when the police opened fire and killed a number of demonstrators. But it would be more appropriate to attribute the beginning of the Greek Civil War to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 the day of the elections, the day when, instead of voting, many Partisans re-armed and rebelled against the Greek Government.

The rebellion manifested itself as an attack on the Greek right which began in the village “Lithohorion”, situated in Thessaly east of Mount Olympus directly south of Katerini. Other attacks soon followed and in no time the conflict escalated into a full scale war, engulfing not only Greece but also Greek occupied Macedonia.

In a bizarre turn of events, the National Liberation Army of Greece, which less than a year before had turned their guns on Macedonian fighters, now regrouped as the Democratic Army of Greece and extended its hand in friendship. It seems that all was forgiven and forgotten when the former National Liberation Army of Greece leadership asked the Macedonians for their help. This time the Greek communists came with offers of “equal rights”, “recognition” and even possibilities of “re-unification with the Republic of Macedonia”.

Many Partisan fighters from Greek occupied Macedonia who had crossed over into the Republic of Macedonia the year before got their chance to return home. On their return they organized themselves under a new organization bearing the name the National Liberation Front (NOF).

Many Macedonians were well-aware of the saying “beware of Greeks bearing gifts” and knew that the Greek offer was too good to be true. But there was always that small ray of hope that perhaps this time the outcome for Macedonia might be different. Besides, their families, homes and lives were in Greek occupied Macedonia. What other choice did they really have?

They returned because they were lonely, loved their families and because they had to live with the guilt of having to leave their loved

ones in dire straits. Every Macedonian born in Macedonia, even in the most desolate places, knows the feeling of homesickness and yearns to return.

And so the seeds of deceit that were planted earlier began to germinate. The Macedonians were fooled into joining the so-called Greek Civil War knowing nothing and perhaps suspecting very little of where this storm was going to take them. And where did this storm take them? To their own extinction, just like Britain wanted.

After the conflict started, details about which can be found in my books, in Stoian Kochov's books and in Petre Nakovski's books which I translated from Macedonian to English, Greek occupied Macedonia began to be emptied of its population in a dramatic way.

Just to give you an idea of how dramatic, just look at my own village Oshchima. In 1939 my village had 600 residents. In 1949 it had only 60 residents. This was not a small loss this was a disaster from which the village never recovered.

By the time I left Oshchima in 1966, there were less than 10 people, only three families left. In 2015 there was only one family left. The entire village is in ruins.

A lot of people were killed fighting in the war, being bombed by Greek planes and being murdered by the Greek fascists. The majority left and crossed over the border into Albania; pushed north and out of their homeland by the Greek army.

This was typical of all the villages in Lerin, Kostur and Voden Regions.

A flood of people ended up in the camps over the Albanian border that no one wanted. They left their homes to save themselves from the Greek bombs and to return when the conflict was over. That was their plan. They left their homes because they were told to.

[“The front has been breached! The front has been breached!” voices called out, bringing fear and spreading it among the people. The

horror grew. People were frightened and panic filled the air. It was time to flee, to run away.

Messengers on horseback were running around everywhere warning people, telling them to leave, showing them which way to take and where to go. Irritated, they spurred their horses to run through the village streets while they yelled: "Leave! Leave! The Greek army is coming! Leave now!"

With the pounding of horse hooves, for as long as the warnings lasted, like echoes repeating again and again, was the message: "Leave! Leave! The front has been breached! The Greek army is coming! They will beat you, rape you and kill you! They will hang people and burn everything! Leave now!"

The horsemen who had orders to sow the seeds of fear and horror into the people crossed over Preval and split up at the crossroads, one ran to Bukovik, L'k and Drenovo and the others took the road to German.

People in Prespa were gathering their most important things, from what remained, and packing them in sacks. There was yelling, screaming, pleading and crying. The roads were packed with people leaving. A woman was wailing at the top of her voice looking up and cursing the sky. Winds of fear hovered over the people spreading panic and horror, making them run. The people who passed Perovo, the narrow passage where the water flows between the two lakes, and took the road to Vineni, could see the rising smoke and flames behind them. They could also see the same horsemen who had warned them to leave, burning the wheat fields. Flames were now consuming the mature grains from which bread was made...

The thick smoke generated by the cannon and mortar fire covering the mountains and valleys was blown away by the wind and the sky had opened up. The broken stones were warmed by the summer sun.

No one dared move. The hill seemed dead. The enemy was monitoring the region with binoculars from over yonder. They were

combing every bush and every stone. The slightest movement awakened the cannons and the hill was on fire again.

Explosions burned the piles of broken rock. The days in August were long. Tired, numbed, faces were glued to the ground, coiled they squatted in the shallow trenches. The sun was hot and the earth was burning. The Sergeant repeated the order: “Not a single step back, hold your ground to the last one!”

Every attempt to take a new position was met with death. There was not even 300 meters to the forest behind them. It would be safer there. The space between them and the forest was bare like a shaven head. The silence and anticipation was torturing them.

The earth was baked by the sun and burned by grenades. They broke stone with their dull pickaxes. They shoveled soil and broken stone with their bare hands. Their hands were raw, bleeding and full of sores. Their bodies baked, burned and blistered with bubbles full of yellow fluid.] (Petre Nakovski).

The Greek government closed the border behind them and would not allow anyone back, not even the women and children. No Macedonian was allowed to return ever since to this day. The Macedonian refugee children who were evacuated in 1948 are still not allowed to return. Having no prospect of returning home, the Macedonian flood of refugees and fighters was settled in the camps in Albania until a place could be found for them to go.

Russia decided to take the fighters. Most of the civilians were taken by Poland. The refugee children who were evacuated earlier were taken mostly by Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary with some being taken by other countries including Bulgaria.

INTERVIEWER – None stayed in Albania?

RISTO – Some of the refugees remained in Albania, but a very small number. Albania took some, Germany took some.

INTERVIEWER – Germany? Oh East Germany?

RISTO – East Germany took a small number of the refugee children. Most went to Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. These children left home in 1948. They were sent to Yugoslavia first and then they were separated and sent to the other countries. The children were not told that they would be separated.

INTERVIEWER – Why did they separate them?

RISTO – Well basically for educational purposes, they wanted them in different age groups and certain countries wanted a certain age group and so on. So the younger ones ended up in Yugoslavia.

When the Royalist and Republican Greek Government began to use heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, the idea for evacuating the children quickly gained CPG support and the “save the children” program was born. Before the program was put into action it gained approval from the Macedonian National Liberation Front, the Women’s Antifascist Front and the Red Cross. The host countries, willing to look after the children, were contacted to gain their approval and information campaigns were begun to inform the people about the program. The district and village organizations were also asked to participate and were eventually given the responsibility of organizing and implementing the actual evacuations.

When the authorities in the Greek Government found out about the “save the children” program they initiated their own so-called “pedomazoma” (collect the children) campaign. The Greek army upon capturing Macedonian villages was ordered to evacuate the children, by force if necessary. After being gathered at various camps the children were eventually sent to the Greek Island Leros. There they were enrolled in schools to study religion and became wards of the Greek Queen Fredericka.

After the conclusion of the Greek Civil War (1951-52) some children from the “pedomazoma” were returned to their homes in Macedonia. Most, especially those whose parents were killed or had fled the country as refugees, became wards of the Greek State and

remained in dormitories until adulthood. All the children who remained at Leros were completely Hellenized and were never heard from again.

The Leros camps became active again after 1952, this time with children who had returned from the “save the children” program from Eastern European Block countries who had to declare themselves Greek in order to be allowed back. As a result of Red Cross intervention some children were allowed to return home. Unfortunately the Greek authorities collected them and sent them to the camps in Leros where they were kept until the fall of 1959 before they were released.

Pressure from the community prompted organizers of the “save the children” program to expedite the evacuation process to stop the “Burandari” (nickname for Greek Government soldiers and policemen) from taking more children.

The evacuations carried out by the Partisans were done strictly on a voluntary basis. It was up to the child’s parents or guardians to decide whether the child was to be evacuated or not. No child was ever evacuated by force or without consent, but fear and peer pressure were certainly motivating factors.

The evacuation zones were selected based on the severity of the conflict and the degree of danger it posed to the children. Central command organizers decided on the selection criteria and qualifications for which children were to be evacuated. The lists included all children between the ages of two and fourteen as well as all orphans, disabled and special children.

Before the evacuation was put into effect, women over the age of eighteen were enlisted from the local population and from the Partisan ranks to be trained to handle young children.

Widows of fallen Partisans were also recruited as “surrogate mothers” to accompany and assist the children through the evacuation process and during their stay in the host countries.

The evacuation program began to gain momentum in early March of 1948, starting with the recruitment and training of the special teachers. The actual evacuations were carried out en masse starting on March 25<sup>th</sup> through to March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1948 until all the designated villages were evacuated.

Most children were transported through Yugoslavia and were sent to Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Some were evacuated through Albania and Bulgaria. As the numbers of the evacuated rose, children were also sent to East Germany and the USSR.

It is estimated that about 28,000 children in all were evacuated, most of them from northwestern Greek occupied Macedonia. Although smaller in number some orphans, children of Partisans and children of families who were in trouble with the Greek Government authorities were also evacuated.

When their turn came the children from each village were summoned and escorted by Partisan guides to the closest designated border crossing. For their safety the children traveled under the cover of darkness and away from the main roads. In some cases, due to heavy aerial attacks and falling bombs, some villages evacuated their children in haste without escorts and they became stranded in the snow-covered mountains without shelter.

Mothers prepared luggage, a change of clothing, food and eating utensils before escorting their little ones to the designated meeting places. With eyes tearing, mothers said goodbye to their loved ones before sending them into the hands of destiny. Their cries could be heard for a long time as they disappeared into the distance. It didn't take too long before the emptiness was felt and many mothers could not stop crying, contemplating the fate of their little ones.

The children walked in single file behind their surrogate mothers, holding hands. The older children comforted the young as they moved into seclusion.

Under the cover of darkness they silently slipped over the terrain, avoiding roads and open spaces, being constantly reminded by their

Partisan guides to keep quiet. They crossed over high mountains and steep slopes ever mindful and vigilant of the flying Greek menace above as they made their way to the borders.

The lucky ones spent the nights indoors in designated villages. The others slept outdoors in the open spaces of the frigid mountains questioning the wisdom of their elders and wondering, which was more dangerous the falling bombs or the freezing cold.

INTERVIEWER – The Queen’s orphanages or whatever they were called. Was that one of those?

RISTO – Yes. The orphanage in Leros was created especially for that purpose.

INTERVIEWER – By Queen Frederica?

RISTO – Frederica was its sponsor and supporter. Regarding the orphaned Macedonian children who ended up in Leros and in the hands of Frederica, they were adopted by Greek families and brought up as Greeks. Some of them later found out that they were not Greeks. I know one lady from Zhelevo, my mother’s friend, who was brought up by a Greek family. But she found her way back.

INTERVIEWER – So the people that stayed in Northern Greece, North-Western Greece after the end of the civil war, were they discriminated against in terms of travel passes...? I was reading your Dad’s story...

RISTO – The people who remained behind were mostly supporters of the Greek regime in power. There were also those, the unfortunate ones who were caught, before they could leave and who belonged to families that openly identified as Macedonians. And let us not forget those who were socialist sympathizers.

After the so-called Greek Civil War was over only horror and fear ruled the land. Those who fought on the losing side became reclusive and wanted to forget the past... but they were constantly harassed and reminded of it by those who won.

The Greeks expressed great hatred for those Macedonians... who only fought for human rights and for wanting to be free. This fear became ingrained in the people's psyche and by the time I was born, it was normal to be afraid and reclusive, it was part of daily life in Greek occupied Macedonia. That's why we left Greece... That's why the villages kept emptying.

One of those unfortunate people to get caught and remain in Greece, after the Greek Civil War was over, was my father Nikola. Nikola was forcibly taken from his village, along with a number of other men, on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1947 and sent to the Greek island prison camps. He was kept in prison until January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the day he arrived back in Oshchima.

On several occasions I asked my father what he had done and why he was sent to prison but to the day he died he did not know, because no one would tell him. All he knew was what his jailers told him, "that he was a danger to the Greek state".

Later, as I began to research the so-called Greek Civil War, I found out that my father was a victim of American policies in Greece. He was a victim of Lieutenant General James A. Van Fleet's military tactics.

On March 1, 1947, U.S. President Harry Truman announced the decision to proclaim the "Truman Doctrine" for engaging the U.S. in Greece. Greece was granted credit and advanced military equipment to equip its government army. At the same time Van Fleet, an American General anti-guerrilla specialist, was made available to the Greek government.

With Van Fleet's strategy and tactics applied in the last battles fought in the Vicho and Gramos battlefields, DAG was defeated and ejected outside of Greece.

So what exactly was Van Fleet's strategy and how did it involve my father... and he didn't know about it?

Van Fleet was familiar with the concept of how to starve a guerrilla army. In order to do that, he said, you will have to rob it of the ability to feed itself and of the ability to recruit new fighters.

Most of the food and recruits that supplied the partisan army came from the Macedonian mountain villages.

To stop the food supply all residents from the small villages were removed and placed in towns and large villages. These places were guarded by the Greek army and by the Greek police. Curfews and restrictions of movement were then placed so no one could move without authorization. This cut off most of the food supply to the partisans.

To stop the partisans from recruiting new fighters, the Greek government arrested basically every man, capable of carrying a gun, who was not loyal to the government or was affiliated with the partisan movement. All these people were sent to the Greek island prison camps.

My father was affiliated with the partisan movement. All his brothers and sisters were partisans and fighting in the war. He was the only young person left home to look after the farm and his aging mother and father, so he became a target of Van Fleet's strategy.

So, to starve the partisans out, Van Fleet basically emptied all the small villages of their population and arrested every man who might be a potential partisan.

The people from the small villages were moved to the large ones because the Greeks didn't have enough policemen to send to every village to defend them. The move, of course, was done by force.

INTERVIEWER – All of them – they moved all the villagers out?

RISTO – Yes they moved them all. All the villagers were moved. They moved them into already occupied houses and told the people that they had to share the space and the food. Then the Greeks went looking for and hunting down partisans who were on the move.

The civilian people had limited mobility and curfews were in effect, even in the large villages guarded by the police.

But in spite of what Van Fleet had done, his Greek forces still could not defeat the Partisans.

On August 10 – 14, 1949, a Greek government offensive was initiated against DAG. A force of 60,000 Greek government troops, commanded by General Van Fleet of the U.S.A., organized in 6 divisions from all branches of the military, with 200 tanks and armoured cars and with about 100 aircraft of all types, was unleashed on Mount Vicho.

Opposing this force was commander Michos Vlandas of the resistance with 9,863 fighters and 40 cannons. DAG was defeated in the period during August 13 and 14 with 1,859 dead, wounded, missing and captured fighters. The Government side sustained only 256 dead and 1,336 wounded.

On August 15-16, 1949, DAG units retreated into Albania but in the following days about 6,000 were transferred to reinforce the fighting in Mount Gramos.

On August 20, 1949, the CPG Central Committee Politburo held a meeting and promised its fighters that “Gramos has all the means necessary to deliver the enemy a death blow” and coined the slogan “Gramos will become the tomb of the Monarcho-Fascists Government troops”. That, however, never happened! All Zahariadis wanted to do was kill more Macedonians.

There is now a bust of General James A. Van Fleet in the city Kostur, who did a lot for the Greek government army to end the Greek Civil War.

This is yet another statue to rub in the faces of the Macedonian people to remind them of the genocide they experienced at the hands of the Greeks and foreign powers.

In spite of everything the Greeks had done, even with American help, they still could not defeat the partisans. So they began to use napalm.

Here is what Van Fleet said to a number of Greek officers during a meeting while pointing at a map:

[“Well, dear generals, you only have to take two handfuls of space. Two handfuls of space and nothing more! We dressed and fed your army well and armed it with the best weapons we have. Now you have everything! The most modern aircraft, the most modern cannons, mine throwers, mortars, napalm bombs and bazookas!”]

Van Fleet paused for a moment, looked at the audience and continued:

“Being in possession of such weapons should boost your courage but for only five days, gentlemen, in just five days you can put an end to this war”. He hit the map with his left hand and continued, “here 90 aircraft will drop their bombs and napalm, hundreds of artillery pieces will thunder and just as many mortars will be dropped. On top of that, nearly 80 thousand troops, assisted by over two hundred tanks and armored cars will be stomping this ground! For no more than five days! Don’t take the communists out of the trenches and bunkers, leave them there dead...”

You have five days and if you don’t destroy the enemy in these five days, adios amigos, we’re gone... The American taxpayer spent a lot of money for you and for this war,” concluded Van Fleet.] (Petre Nakovski)

On the tenth day (August 20<sup>th</sup>) since the beginning of the “great battle” for Gramos, with the approval of General Van Fleet, head of the U.S. military mission in Greece, the air force renewed its attacks, this time with napalm bombs, thus unleashing a new, never before seen horror against the Partisans... And still the front could not be broken... It did not even move...

[That day the airplanes came shortly before noon. They did not drop bombs or fire on us with their machine guns. First they flew low

then high and we could see barrels being dropped from not too high above our positions which exploded about fifty to a hundred meters above us. Fire and flames fell on us. Everything began to burn. Everything burned, the ground, the trees, the rocks, the mountain, we were burning too... Those people, who unfortunately got splashed by this never before seen burning fluid, caught fire and burned like candles.

There was squealing, screaming and many sounds of horror as people rushed out of the trenches looking to the sky and begging for help. All you could see are flames running at you screaming and begging for help, flames that you had to put out with your bare hands?! We fought the flames all day, then, at night, under the light of a full moon, we buried the burned corpses in mass graves.

The aircraft attacked us in this manner, with that damn fire, several more times, but we quickly learned we could avoid being burned by burying ourselves deep into the ground. We dug tunnels in the bunkers and trenches and before the barrels fell we hid underground like moles.] (Petre Nakovski)

The offensive began on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1949 but the war did not end until August 30<sup>th</sup> 1949.

Earlier I mentioned that the partisan fighters were sent to Russia, more precisely to the Soviet Union; to Uzbekistan. Why do you think only the fighters were sent to the Soviet Union?

If you recall, during the Greek Civil War Stalin was having difficulties with Tito which led to Yugoslavia breaking relations with the other socialist countries.

According to secret CIA documents, the conflict between Stalin and Tito was about Tito not adhering to the idea that the Soviet leader did not want problems with the allies America and England because of the Yalta agreement. So Tito continued to supply the communist rebels in Greece with weapons, equipment and officer corps to fight on the Greek partisan side. Stalin sent a letter to Tito criticizing him for opening the "Greek line" and for helping the Greek communists who started a fight that had no chance of success because Athens

was supported by America, “the most powerful country in the world”.

One of Greece’s most prominent historiographers - Tassos Vournas, in his book “History of modern Greece – the Civil War”, on page 176 wrote that Stalin, on February 10, 1948, literally told the Yugoslav delegation in Moscow that: “I do not agree with you, my Yugoslav comrades that the revolution in Greece should continue. That struggle has no hope of success. What do you think the UK and the USA, the strongest countries in the world, will allow it to bring down a line of communication with the Mediterranean Sea? Nonsense! And there’s almost nothing of naval forces! No! The revolution in Greece should stop, as quickly as possible.”

So, why would Stalin want the Macedonian fighters from the Greek Civil War, especially since he did not approve of the struggle, to be sent to the Soviet Union? And why did Tito want to continue helping the struggle after Stalin told him to stop and gave him a good reason for it. And then, before the war ended, why did Tito close the border and refuse to allow Macedonians fighters entry into Yugoslavia unless they disarmed? Yes, Yugoslavia would not allow them entry unless they surrendered their arms.

I have not found evidence to support this, but I was told that Stalin had threatened Tito with creating an independent Macedonian state out of the People’s Republic of Macedonia with aims at breaking up Federal Yugoslavia. And he was going to use the Macedonian fighters to do it.

But since none of this materialized, I am led to believe that it was only a bluff. But this does not answer the question as to why Tito continued to support the struggle in Greek occupied Macedonia, knowing full well that the struggle was not going to succeed because the United States was about to crush it. On top of that, why didn’t the United States object to Tito’s involvement in supporting this conflict? In fact Yugoslav and American relations were never as good as they were during this period of time?

It doesn’t make any sense, does it? Unless, of course, Yugoslavia was working together with the United States and with Greece, in an

attempt to control the war inside Greece and prevent it from ending prematurely.

To make conditions so unbearable so that all the Macedonian people would leave and abandon their homeland just like Britain wanted.

And is this not exactly what happened?

INTERVIEWER – Some of the new areas I want to explore with you are about your father... The trauma of his imprisonment on the island and the discrimination he suffered after it must have impacted greatly on his life... I felt that he was very bitter about the treatment he received and that he never really got over it. I wonder how this also impacted on you as a child... whether he told you stories about his life and whether you then took on his trauma and made it your own. I wonder whether this is why you now spend your time writing history, translating texts and trying to right the wrongs of your father's generation.

RISTO - Like I said before, my father was basically kidnapped by the Greek authorities and thrown in jail without being informed why. Wouldn't you be bitter if that happened to you, especially if you didn't break any laws? Well, this is how it was in Greece for us Macedonians! He wasn't just thrown in jail, he was tormented and tortured and as far as he was concerned, he had done nothing wrong!

Macronisos was by far the worst experience in his life. No one and nothing deserves to be treated the way they were. Routinely, in the hottest hours of the day, they were forced to run up hill single file between two rows of policemen, while they beat them with sticks to unconsciousness. Rarely did anyone make it to the top standing. It was a sad sight to see, especially the streams of blood running downhill, painting the sand red. What was even sadder was the aftermath, the humiliation of being forced to sign false confessions of acts they had never committed and on top of that swear loyalty to the same regime that imprisoned and beat them.

After a while many of the captives became crazed with fear and had to be isolated in wire cages. Even a glimpse of a uniform threw them into a frightful screaming fit.

On many occasions they had visits from the Greek and sometimes the foreign (French and English) press but no one dared complain. The same policemen who tortured them were walking among them exchanging uniforms for prison clothes every time they had visitors.

The press was reporting fair treatment and compared the prison to paradise with their blessings. In fact they were so afraid that they would have agreed to anything. If the guards said pigs fly they would have agreed. At one point the authorities were so convinced of their rehabilitation that they allowed them to vote in the national elections. To their surprise they didn't vote the way the authorities expected.

The elections, however, brought change and improvements to their situation. They could finally complain without fear of retribution. Unfortunately everyone was so convinced by the exemplary reports in the press that no one believed them. Even the minister of corrections who paid them a visit in person one day refused to believe them. He found the mere mention of abuse preposterous until some of the men, one by one, dropped their drawers to show him their mutilated genitals. The minister and his visitors were so shocked at the sight that they brought up charges against the general in charge.

The abuses inflicted upon them were not limited to their bodies, they were forced to work for free like slaves and on top of that they were robbed of their prisoner entitlements. With their money the prison guards purchased building materials and with their labour they built sleeping quarters, offices and recreational facilities. Even after they complained, not even a dragma was returned to them. They had to do with very little to survive. They survived only because they were able to organize the people into a skillful labour force willing to work for anyone and for whatever they could afford to pay them.

After almost two years of enduring life in the military camp, it was time for some of them to be released. To qualify, however, each had to sign a statement admitting to crimes they did not commit and swearing loyalty to Greece (the ruling regime). They were given two choices. Sign a confession and leave or remain a prisoner for life.

They were allowed to withdraw previously signed confessions given that most were signed under duress. Macedonians received the most abuses. How could one tell a Macedonian from a Greek, by his confession? Without exception all Macedonians, even the uneducated farmers, were accused of being members of the Communist Party. To the Greek regime, at that time, being a communist was the worst crime one could ever commit.

But my father's ordeal did not end when he was released from prison.

He arrived in Oshchima on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1952, penniless and with no material possessions.

He found his house empty, every member of his family was gone, they were refugees, found somewhere outside of Greece. He was all alone. His father's house was looted and stripped of all possessions. Everything was gone, his father's tools, their farming tools, furniture and clothing, everything.

His parents, brothers and sisters, along with ninety-percent of Oshchimians, abandoned everything and fled the country in a hurry to avoid death by Greek bombs. When the war was over no one was allowed to return.

The day after his arrival in Oshchima, as required, he reported to the police station in Zhelevo. He showed the authorities his release papers and in return he received his identification card and travel pass which restricted him to a radius of thirty kilometers.

Three days later he received a summons to report to the military headquarters in Zhelevo. The moment he walked into the office, the man in charge looked at me and said, "You will die at a blink of an eye." He then told him to turn around and go home. To the last day of his life my father pondered the meaning of his remark without knowing what it meant.

A day later he received another summons to report to Zhelevo for an interview with the plain clothes police. When he inquired as to why

he was summoned, one of them asked him what was happening in Oshchima. In response my father recounted his day's activities, i.e. what he did that day, which fields he visited and so on. The policeman then asked him not to be naïve and to tell him what he was interested in, i.e. about his neighbours' activities, not his own.

After telling him that he didn't associate much with his neighbours, the policeman got upset and told my father to leave and come back the next day. When my father asked why he had to come back the next day the policeman's reply was, "To keep an eye on you." His smart remark made my father mad so he sarcastically said, "Why don't you give me a bed next to yours so that way you can keep an eye on me all the time, even when I am asleep?" The policeman became furious and told him off. He then changed his mind and told him he wanted to see him once a week on Sundays.

The next Sunday he again asked my father, "What is happening in your village?" Again my father gave him the same answer. This time the policeman told him to get lost and never come back, which suited my father fine. I think he was trying to turn my father into an informant to spy on his neighbours.

A little while later the police again summoned my father to Zhelevo. This time they gave him a letter with instructions to report to the military authorities in Maniuk, Kostur. After he arrived there and showed them the letter, they told him to go back home. They said there was no need for him to be there, as they hadn't asked for him. My father didn't even care to speculate about what games the police were playing with him.

A couple of years later, the plain clothes police again summoned him to Zhelevo. This time they confiscated his travel pass. They also informed him that, until further notice, he was under house arrest and confined to the borders of Oshchima. No reason was given except that he now needed permission from the chief of police to travel.

This is how my father was treated by the Greek regime in his own native home where he was born.

My father told me all kinds of stories of his experience, not just in prison, but of his entire life. But did that make me bitter? Did it make me take on his trauma? Did it make me want to spend my time translating texts and trying to right the wrongs of my father's generation? No.

But it made me think. I was born in Oshchima and I admit I am a product of the traumatized generation but I did not know that. I was born and grew up in that environment and that was normal for me.

Fear, suspicion and mistrust, especially of strangers, were a normal thing and part of daily life. This is how it was for us, for me, the Macedonian generation that was born in Greece after the Greek Civil War. But, in spite of all that, I turned out to be one of those curious ones who wanted to know more. Not just what happened but "why" it happened.

I heard our stories, our narrative, a dozen times over, but no one seemed to be able to tell me why these things were happening to us, over and over in our history.

This is, I think, what made me want to know more and when I found out more I wanted to write and translate our narrative, our history, to learn why things happened, not just what happened but why it happened.

It is good to know why things happened for all our sakes... to avoid repeating our mistakes. We, as a Macedonian people, are more than the "non-existent" people our occupiers have made us to be and we need to know that. Our long occupation has left us with a terrible inferiority complex. We need to shake it off. But before we can do that we need to know who we really are and not just what our Balkan neighbours and the Great Powers have made us out to be.

We have been robbed of our past, of our glories and of our heritage and we need to take them back. We have always existed and still exist. We have been a nation before we had a state. Not the other way around; like the Greeks.

I am one of the first writers to expose the Greek “falsity” and the Greek artificiality, and now every Macedonian that has read my articles knows that.

I am not bitter or angry at Greece and the Greek people; I am disappointed however with how Greece treats us. I believe Greece is not alone in this. Greece is just another pawn of the Great Powers; an instrument, and has to do what it has to do in order to survive... but it is sad to see that after it was given custody of Macedonia and the Macedonian people, instead of nurturing them it did everything in its power to destroy them. And in doing so, it not only demonstrated its intent but also its lack of humanity, its lack of compassion and lack wisdom.

It is important for Macedonians to know who they are even if they can't do anything about it. One day circumstances will change and they need to be prepared. That's all I can tell you for now.

Now let us get back to our story.

Greece was created by the West and has been supported by the West. Greece has been the bulwark for Britain in the prevention of Russia entering the Mediterranean waters.

In the old days, the British were sympathetic to the Greek cause but at the same time they wanted a strong Turkey to counter Russia. Initially, the British were prepared to support Turkey to prevent Russia from gaining control of the Turkish Straits and threatening the Mediterranean trade routes.

“Canning (a British politician, 1812-1862) had planned to head off Russia's advance, not by direct opposition, but by associating her with England and France in a policy of emancipation, aimed at erecting national States out of the component parts of the Turkish Empire. Such States could be relied upon to withstand Russian encroachment on their independence, if once they were set free from the Turk. The creation of the Kingdom of Greece was the immediate outcome of Canning's policy” (Page 372, Trevelyan, British History in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century)

Earlier I explained that Greece was a “Western creation” for the purpose of achieving two objectives. One, to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean Sea and two, to break up the Ottoman occupied Slav lands into small, nationally divergent, easily manageable and loyal states.

Created by the Western Powers, the new Balkan States would be loyal to their creator; British politicians were counting on it. The Western Powers introduced “nationalism” in the Balkans as a way of replacing the Ottoman Empire, not with a single state but with many “divergent”, manageably sized states. Nationalism, however, was not a way with which Balkan people identified before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As I mentioned earlier, for over 2,300 years the region was without borders and without a sense of national identity. For over 1,800 years the people in the region lived with “religion as the only unifying force” which brought them together and allowed them to live in peace. Lack of borders and freedom of movement allowed the diverse people to travel anywhere within the empire to settle and mix with other people.

So, how does one create “national consciousness” where one does not exist?

Ignoring the fact that the Ottoman Empire of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural pluralistic society, the Western Powers initiated the nation building process anyway.

To them, it didn’t matter what kind of “nations” they were building, provided that the new nations were a “non-Slav” singular society that agreed to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean Sea.

Unfortunately, Macedonia did not fit the Western Power mold and was never allowed to become an independent state. And to make sure it never did, it was partitioned into four parts and given to four different and divergent states with aims at destroying it.

So, what happened to Macedonia during the Greek Civil War was a continuation of what had been happening to it for over 150 years

since the modern Serbian (1806), Greek (1828) and later Bulgarian (1878) and Albanian (1912) states were created.

After the Greek Civil War ended and the Greek borders were closed to the Macedonian fighters and refugees, Greece took measures, legal measures, to prevent the Macedonian people from re-entering the border and returning to their homes.

Let me backtrack a bit and say something very important because this is evidence, I believe, that the Greek Government, even before the Greek Civil War had ended, had plans “to deal with the Macedonians in Greece”.

“In 1947, during the Greek Civil War, legal act L-2 was issued. This meant that all those who left Greece without the consent of the Greek government were stripped of their Greek citizenship and banned from returning to Greece. The law applied to Greeks and Macedonians, but in its modernized version the act is binding only on Macedonians. It prevents Macedonians, but not former Communist Greeks who fought against the winning side, from returning to Greece and reclaiming property.

On January 20, 1948 legal act M was issued. This allowed the Greek government to confiscate the property of those who were stripped of their Greek citizenship. The law was updated in 1985 to exclude Greeks, but still binding on Macedonians. (See pages 116-117, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece, The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation)

Clearly acts L-2 and M were designed to work against the interests of the Macedonian people. Even innocent Macedonians who left before the Civil War were not allowed to return. The way acts L-2 and M were enforced over the years brings another question to mind.

If there were no Macedonians living in Greece, as the Greeks claim, then what nationality were these people the Greek Government refused to allow back?

Why is it that Greek law makes the distinction between Macedonians and Greeks when it suits Greece but not when it benefits the Macedonians?

This also reinforces my theory that Greece all along intended to exile as many Macedonians as possible and enacted these laws in preparation for it.

As mentioned earlier, in the spring of 1948, to save the children, a temporary evacuation program was introduced and implemented on a voluntary basis. It is estimated that about 28,000 children from the ages of 2 to 14 were rounded up and taken across the border into Yugoslavia. From there they were sent to various Eastern European Block countries.

Again, I want to point out that the evacuation program was sponsored and organized by the Greek Partisan Leadership which was fully versed in “Greek Law” (act L-2). Yet they carried out the children’s evacuation program and lied to the trusting mothers that the evacuation was only a temporary measure and that the children would be returned.

Almost all the Macedonian children who were evacuated in 1948 are still not allowed entry into Greece. Don’t tell me that the communists did not know that these children would never be allowed to return?

They knew that there were laws that would prevent every refugee who left Greece without government permission, from returning to Greece. Yet this information was never made available to the Macedonian parents. Why?

INTERVIEWER – You know, during the civil war or during the time when the communists had the democratic, the communist state in the north, they established Macedonian schools didn’t they?

RISTO – You mean when the Partisans established the free territory in the Prespa and surrounding area?

INTERVIEWER – Yes. Because I heard there were schools operating in some places in the free territory.

RISTO – One positive thing that the CPG did was allow the Macedonian people to establish Macedonian language schools in the so-called “liberated territories” (Partisan held territories).

A school to educate teachers in the Macedonian language was opened in the village German in Prespa Region in December 1947. The aim here was to prepare Macedonian language teachers who in turn would teach Macedonian children the Macedonian language.

Among the regions that received Macedonian language education at the time were the villages in the free territories of Vicho and Kaimakchalan. Even though this program only lasted several months, 87 Macedonian schools were opened with the participation of over 10,000 students.

You must be thinking of the schools that operated in German during the Greek Civil War.

INTERVIEWER – Yes but also the schools which operated in the Second World War which the Italians allowed to operate...

RISTO – Well, from what I am told, the Italians didn't care what the Macedonians did as long as they didn't interfere in Italian affairs... the Italians were gone soon after that.

INTERVIEWER – But they were quite happy to allow Macedonian to be taught in the schools.

RISTO – Like I said, the Italians did not care. The Macedonians were happy to be taught Macedonian in school. The Greeks were the ones who were not happy. The Macedonians knew very well that they were under occupation and played by the rules. They had seen occupations come and go and no one was sure what the future would bring. But the Greeks, even in areas where they were a minority, were not happy to see Macedonians speaking Macedonian and learning to read and write in Macedonian.

INTERVIEWER – Another thing. I’ve heard that in the free territory Markos used to hide in a cave. There was a big sign that said “Zahariadis’s cave” and somewhere further down in the mountain there was a hospital, a military hospital. I’m just wondering where I can find out some more about that.

RISTO – I don’t know the specifics of where that was but here is what Petre Nakovski, who visited those places, wrote:

[Excited by the beautiful scenery we decided to go and visit Nivitsi. The village is located on the lakeshore and is surrounded by rocks on which stunted oak trees grow. It has been said that, in the past, the people of Nivitsi lived off the “tsironi” (smelts, tiny fish) that they caught in the lake and sold to people in the most remote villages in Lerin and Kostur Regions. Unfortunately no one got rich from selling tsironi so today the people of Nivitsi stave off poverty with tourist money. By joining forces the people of Nivitsi built a hotel with a restaurant that offers famous Prespa carp and other local Prespa dishes. They also fixed up rooms in their old houses and now can accommodate paying guests. The hotel parking lot was full of buses. A well-established advertising campaign also brings them tourists from all over Greece.

But we did not come here for the hotel or for the famous carp. We came here because of a significant wartime event that took place in the Sveta Nedela (Golema Bogoroditsa) village church. The Second Congress of the People’s Liberation Front was held here on March 25, 1949. It was here that resolutions were adopted to invite the Macedonian people to join the struggle (Greek Civil War) en masse. It was here that the Macedonian people were told and retold by the Greek Communists that they would allow them to create their own Macedonian state, unlike the Republic of Macedonia which was under Yugoslavia. But there was a condition, a catch. For that to happen, every able bodied Macedonian man and woman had to join the struggle. “All to arms – everything for victory,” read one slogan.

There were many slogans written especially in honour of Zahariadis, the so-called “greatest”, wisest and most respected son of Macedonia and then, a little later, no one wanted to believe that he was the “greatest” liar and cheat! But the leaders of NOF (National

Liberation Front) and all those serving under him, believed and trusted him and that is why they all suffered and many died; because of those beliefs! Everything is known now!!! The entire nation suffered. The older people know and remember... but the younger generation did not want to listen. Now, hopefully, they learned from their mistakes.

We took the rarely used winding circular cobblestone path, now overgrown with grass, to Vronderon which, according to the old map, used to be called Grazhdeno in Macedonian. On the way there we passed a place where the village Piksos, known as Orovo in Macedonian, used to be. There is hardly anything left of Orovo now. The only building left standing is the church now hidden under the shade of a tall oak tree grove. While visiting Grazhdeno we had a great desire to visit the large cave which served as a hospital for the Partisans during the struggle. Wounded Partisans were treated there after the houses serving as a hospital in the villages Nivitsi, Orovo and Grazhdeno were bombed. We expected to find only ruins and empty space in Grazhdeno but, to our surprise, we found new houses and children running in the streets... but the language spoken was Albanian. We surmised that the Greek authorities had populated this village with farmer and pastoralist settlers, refugees from Albania. They spoke to us in Greek but between themselves they spoke Albanian. They said it was easier to understand each other if they spoke Albanian.

After our visit to the cave, the former Partisan hospital, which still has remnants of wooden beds placed in layers of three, we took the road to Pili, or Vineni as it is called in Macedonian. Vineni was the first village in Prespa Region to receive Asian colonists, who, after the Asia Minor disaster, following the Greek-Turkish war, were settled here. The Macedonians call these people Madzhiri. They are distinguishable from the indigenous people not only in speech but also in appearance. They have black hair, bony facial features, convex eyes and eagle noses. They call themselves Pontii, meaning former residents of a region situated above the shores of the Black Sea. During the struggle most of the Pontii fled to Lerin and resided in the city. Their abandoned houses were occupied by the so-called Democratic Provisional Government of Greece, which was established in December 1947 in the village Asamati located in

Prespa Region in the Republic of Macedonia. Before the village entrance, to the left of the road we noticed a piece of plank nailed to an oak tree which read: “Σπηλια Ζαχαριαδης” (Cave Zahariadis).

There is a narrow, uphill path leading to the cave and in front of the cave, under the wide canvas spread under the shade of the oak trees, the path turns left. There is another wooden sign with the same writing and about ten steps after that there are two connected rocks. Above the rocks there are old cracked oak trees growing with their roots stuck in the crevices of the rocks. Under the low hanging branches, facing west is an ugly, dark chill-giving, gaping hole; the cave entrance.

I turned on my battery powered lantern and carefully put my foot on the first step carved out of stone. There were three or four more steps like that going down and after I took the last one I was in total darkness... This, at one time, may have been a bear cave, but then, during the struggle (Greek Civil War), a brain came to live here. When the brain was here the cave was not a cave, it was a cabin. The floor was covered with smooth planks and hand woven carpets, believed to be gifts from Tito, given to Zahariadis in better days. To the left there was a large desk, a telephone apparatus and a radio transmitter. To the right there was a long table covered with a red cloth and chairs stacked in a pile. These were for the members of his immediate political and military leadership. There was a colour portrait of Stalin, a personal gift, hanging on the front wall. There was also electric lighting and heating.

This is where the brain of one side of the war resided, where political and military solutions were conceived and decisions were made. This is where the decision to attack Voden, Negush and Lerin was made. And this is where not a single bomb was dropped. Vineni and the cave were two places where the government air force did not drop a single bomb. In those days there were few who knew and were able to cross the road to find the cave. Today many come to visit it. The cave that once was a home to bears, bats and spiders and the seat of darkness and misfortune, is now a tourist attraction... ] (Petre Nakovski, “On the Road of Time”)

If that's not enough information and you need to find out more, you can get a hold of a Greek author. But I must tell you that the Greeks will not tell you what I am telling you. They will tell you how they saw things from their perspective. And even though we, the indigenous people, the Macedonian people, are the real victims of this war, perpetrated to destroy us, the Greeks still see us as the perpetrators of a conspiracy to steal land from them. They don't see things the way we see them...

INTERVIEWER – Yes that's how I can fill in those gaps.

RISTO – I have used books from Greek authors in my research.

Some time ago when I was writing my book "Macedonians in Greece" I quoted Koliopoulos (Koliopoulos, John S. *Plundered Loyalties; Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia, 1941-1949*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 1999). He is a young author who wanted to write a bit more about the Greek Civil War. He went to the various villages but no one would talk to him. He tells about this in his introduction.

The following segment was taken from John S. Koliopoulos's book "Plundered Loyalties" but it represents the Greek point of view on the situation in Macedonia.

"In Eordaea, where large numbers of refugees had been settled in the houses and lands abandoned by the Muslims, officials struggled to squeeze out more land, especially in or around Slav-speaking villages like Emporion and Komanos. In the village of Karyochori in the same district more than 200 families were given the land which had previously sustained less than half that number of Muslim families. About 3.25 hectares for each family were allotted, of which only one-third was fertile; or so they maintained ten years later, when 122 inhabitants petitioned the authorities to resettle them elsewhere, preferably in the plain of Central Macedonia. It should finally be mentioned that ever since 1913 a steady trickle of Christian families from the newly-founded independent Albanian state settled mostly in villages in the districts of Kastoria and Kozani and, almost as a rule, with relatives. This kind of settlement went on more or less unnoticed by the authorities, but by contrast everyone

appeared to take an interest in the refugees from European and Asiatic Turkey, who became an instrument of national policy. The opposite would have been surprising. A few hundred Anatolian refugee families were even settled in the brigand preserve of Servia to strengthen communities against the swift-footed and predatory pastoralists of Mt Chassia. Above all, refugees were sent north to settle around and amidst Slav Macedonians in the hope that such settlement would facilitate their 'Hellenisation', in speech no less than in sentiment.

However, the need to unburden the country's port cities of several hundred thousand destitute refugees as quickly as possible did not allow time to send north 'suitable' refugees or take proper account of the capacity of the receiving places to secure a tolerable existence for the newcomers. Thus almost half the refugees settled in the district of Florina spoke Turkish and little or no Greek. Many Pontians spoke Turkish, and the Caucasians spoke a form of Greek unintelligible to most Greek-speakers, let alone to the Slav Macedonians whom the refugees were expected to Hellenize in speech. Hordes of destitute humanity went north determined to take root in lands claimed or already occupied by the indigenous peasants. The newcomers brought with them, along with the determination of the survivors of a great disaster, the support of the authorities who were eager to secure the contested region in the way their counterparts across the border were trying to secure their own lands, namely by strengthening the dominant linguistic and cultural element of the national state against all other groups. The influx of refugees in villages where the available land was insufficient to satisfy their needs created unbearable pressures on the Slav Macedonians to leave their homes for less inhospitable lands than those they were obliged to share with newcomers whom they despised. Those who chose to remain did so for all the reasons why peasants everywhere have always chosen to live next to unwelcome newcomers and under unfriendly rulers.

As a result of this type of settlement, old cleavages and conflicts, dating from the Greek-Bulgarian conflict at the beginning of the century, already described, were intensified, especially in mixed villages and towns. One reason for the intensification of conflict concerned land. Indigenous peasants, Greek- and Slav-speaking,

resented the distribution of Muslim and communal land to the refugees. Cultural differences between these people and the refugees kept the two communities further apart. And administrators from southern Greece, bearers of an ideology and policy aiming to obliterate linguistic traces other than Greek, put Slav Macedonians at a disadvantage compared to other Greeks and turned the existing gap into a dangerous chasm.

Many villages, particularly mixed ones, quarreled over disputed land, and were torn apart and bled white as the result of costly lawsuits. It took more than ten years to draw village boundaries on pastureland, while many disputes over arable land were settled only after the Second World War. Officials of the Commission for the Settlement of Refugees, who were themselves refugees or associated with refugee interests, were expected to favour the newcomers in their disputes with the indigenous peasants over lands.” (John S. Koliopoulos. “Plundered Loyalties”. Pages 42-43)

Following is a segment from John S. Koliopoulos’s book “Plundered Loyalties” that deals with the subject of Macedonians and communists during the 1930’s but represents the Greek point of view in this matter.

“In December 1929 the district governor of Florina reported that on visiting the Slav Macedonian villages of Ano Hydrousa, Sphika and Karyai he encountered not only resentment against state and communal taxation but also ‘anti-state sentiments’. He discerned the same sentiments in the refusal of the inhabitants of five ‘indigent’ villages of Lake Prespa to cooperate in leasing the taxes on the lake fishery. Mikrolimni, Agios Achilleios, Bronteron, Kallithea and Pyksos apparently harboured ‘anti-state’ sentiments. Such an attitude and the inroads the communists were able to make in Slav Macedonian villages in the 1930s led to stringent legislative and administrative measures, especially by the right-wing dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (1936-41). In addition to banning the speaking of Slav Macedonian in public, the dictatorship imprisoned or deported an unknown number of communist cadres of the region, many of them Slav Macedonians or simply sensitive to their grievances. Gendarmerie and administrative and appointed communal officials, in their effort to curry favour with the strong men of the day, were

prepared to go out of their way to combat communist and 'anti-state' sentiments. Pastoralists of the region were obliged to provide evidence of their true Greek sentiments to be able to rent summer grazing land. Gendarmerie officers and appointed village headmen had to be satisfied that applicants for such transactions were 'God-fearing family men' and 'nationalists'. Neither Slav Macedonians nor refugees were considered to be above suspicion.

A Maniot gendarmerie officer named Periandros Poulakos was representative of state officials of the period in the region. As commanding officer of the Amygdala gendarmerie station, he made a name for himself in the district of Eordaea as a ruthless guardian of law and order as conceived by the Metaxas dictatorship. In December 1938, assisted by the village chief of the National Youth Organization (Ethniki Organosis Neon) (EON) and under orders from the district governor of Kozani, he arrested an inhabitant who was seen in the village cafe when he was expected to attend church like others. In March 1939 the same officer arrested, again with the assistance of the Youth chief and the president of the village of Koila, an inhabitant of that village who opened his coffee shop, which he also used as a barber's shop, on Independence Day (25 March) to shave two village men. Several inhabitants made statements under oath that from that and similar behaviour in the past they were convinced that the barber was a communist sympathizer. Several months later Poulakos arrested a Slav Macedonian in the village of Ermakia and other members of his family and kept them in custody, longer than was permitted in an effort to extract the depositions he was demanding. The Slav Macedonian with another man of the same village beat the village field guard, a refugee who had caught them stealing grapes from a vineyard.

Had it not been for the war and the ensuing foreign occupation of the region in the first half of the 1940s, the ruthless drive to transform the region in the ways described might possibly have succeeded. However those events put an end to this process of assimilating different linguistic and cultural groups into a homogeneous national community and initiated, instead, developments that further intensified existing cleavages." (John S. Koliopoulos. "Plundered Loyalties". Pages 44-46)

“The first intimations of what was to come had been sensed before the Axis occupation, as early as the winter of 1940-1, even as Greece was fighting Italy people wondered about the attitude of the Slav Macedonians: would they fight with the rest of the Greeks? The great majority of them did fight the Italians even more tenaciously than most southern Greeks, if only because the fighting was taking place not far from their homes. The local army units were the first to repulse the Italian invaders in October and the first to march into Albania in November...

A related warning was the deportation of a number of Slav Macedonians during the war for security reasons. They were mostly communists, or people whom the authorities did not trust to move freely in the zone of military operations.” (John S. Koliopoulos. “Plundered Loyalties”. Page 50)

“A contemporary Partisan view adds another side to the issue. ‘The friction between our bands and the Greek Antartes in the region of Kastoria and Florina,’ Tempo and Ortche wrote in one of their reports to the Partisan GHQ in August 1944, ‘has been caused by the Greek Antartes, when they moved into the region and started pressing Macedonians into their units. The Macedonians, according to their leaders, maintained that they were prepared to fight the Germans, but that they waited for their own units to be formed so as to enlist in them. The Greeks did not approve [the formation of the units] and instead started oppressing the Macedonian people. The result was an exodus of the Macedonians in the direction of Monastir, where Michailov waited to press them into his own units and fight against the Greeks. Faced with this situation, our political commissars let the fugitives, after consulting Radosavljevich, form their own units in the Florina-Monastir area of operations. Some of our commissars then started spreading the idea that the Macedonians could enlist in our army and that service with us would be as if they were serving in the Greek army, since both we and the Greeks are fighting against the fascist conquerors. At this point the Macedonians started enlisting in our army en masse, and the Greeks intensified their pressure on the Macedonians. The commanders of the Antartes issued orders for the confiscation of the property of those who enlisted in our army, and this caused confusion. In the

talks conducted by Radosavljevich, a member of the KKE (CPG) Macedonian Bureau said that it was preferable for the Macedonians to be on the side of the Germans than on our [the Yugoslav]. The Greeks in general appear to share this view. Our representatives pressed the Greeks to accept the formation of a Kastoria-Florina battalion, but they are opposed. We are convinced that the Greeks must somehow find a way to form such a battalion. If they don't, we'll have to form it ourselves, in which case we'll clash with the Greeks.” (John S. Koliopoulos. “Plundered Loyalties”. Pages 127-128)

INTERVIEWER – Oh yes – John Koliopoulos. I bought that book.

RISTO – The stories told by Koliopoulos are similar to my stories but are told from a different point of view. For one, he uses the Greek toponyms ignoring the fact that these place names had Macedonian names and did not exist by their Greek names prior to the 1920's when Greece changed all the place and people's names from Macedonian to Greek. He also looks at what was done to the Macedonians as fair, as if these Macedonians were somehow undeserving... in their own native lands. And, on top of the abuses they received at the hands of the Greeks, he gives the impression that he expects the Macedonians to be loyal, obedient and grateful to their Greek masters. That's the way I see him telling the story... he has separated himself from the Macedonians, who by the way are Greek citizens and just as much a part of Greek society as the rest of the people living in that country... But to be fair to all sides I decided to also quote Koliopoulos here...

INTERVIEWER – Oh well yes but I haven't read the book...

RISTO – He was so apologetic in the introduction and as I read his book I found out he did not write what the people had told him. At some point he even admitted that.

INTERVIEWER – Maybe they were afraid.

RISTO – You means maybe he was afraid? He could not publish what the people told him because what the people told him did not fit with the Greek narrative. Remember, according to the Greeks, we

Macedonians do not exist. We are Slavophone Greeks. Greeks is the operative word... Look at what happened to Anastasia Karakasidou. The Greeks were prepared to blow up the publishing house if it published her book. And why? Because she said a few things the Greeks did not agree with.

Here is what she said:

“If Greece exists today as a homogeneous ethnos, she owes this to the Asia Minor Catastrophe. If the hundreds of thousands of refugees had not come to Greece, Greek Macedonia would not exist today. The refugees created the national homogeneity of our country. (Antonios Kandiotis, Metropolit of Florina, in Anastasia Karakasidou’s book “Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood”. Page 141)

According to Karakasidou, almost half of the refugees were settled in urban centres and rural areas in Macedonia. “Searching for locations in which to settle this mass of humanity, the Greek government looked north to the newly incorporated land in Macedonia...” “...by 1930, 90 percent of the 578,844 refugees settled in rural Greece were concentrated in the regions of Macedonia and western Thrace. Thus Macedonia, Greece’s newly acquired second ‘breadbasket’ (after Thessaly), became the depository for East Thracian, Pontic, and Asia Minor refugees.” (Anastasia Karakasidou. “Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood”. Page 145)

The act of forbidding the use of the Macedonian language in Greece is best illustrated by an example of how it was implemented in the Township of Assarios (Giuevezna). Here is a quote from Karakasidou’s book Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood.

“[We] listened to the president articulate to the council that in accordance with the decision [#122770] of Mr. Minister, General Governor of Macedonia, all municipal and township councils would forbid, through [administrative] decisions, the speaking of other idioms of obsolete languages within the area of their jurisdiction for the reconstitution of a universal language and our national glory. [The president] suggested that [the] speaking of different idioms, foreign [languages] and our language in an impure or obsolete manner in the area of the township of Assirios would be forbidden.

Assirios Township Decision No. 134, 13 December 1936.” (Page 162, Anastasia Karakasidou, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood)

As far as I am concerned there was nothing offensive written in Karakasidou’s book to anger the Greeks, yet they were angry, angry enough to threaten to burn down a reputable publishing house.

Now let us continue with our story.

As I mentioned earlier, by 1928, 1,497 Macedonian place names in the Greek occupied Macedonia were Hellenized (LAW 4096) and all Cyrillic inscriptions found in churches, on tombstones and icons were destroyed (or overwritten) prompting English Journalist V. Hild to say, “The Greeks do not only persecute living Slavs (Macedonians)..., but they even persecute dead ones. They do not leave them in peace even in the graves. They erase the Slavonic inscriptions on the headstones, remove the bones and burn them.”

It is traumatic to have a people’s history ripped from under them like the Greeks did to the Macedonians, to have every place name and every person’s name changed. We feel that trauma to this day.

I have people write me, asking me to tell them the Greek name of their village because they only know the Macedonian name. These are people who are born in Canada, the USA and Australia whose parents have already died and who now want to go to Greece and visit the village of their ancestors but they don’t know what it’s called in Greek.

Some had already gone to Greece but returned disappointed because no one could tell them where the village was because they never heard of its Macedonian name.

We even have problems identifying each other as people. There are many people from my village who I don’t know by their Greek names. Unless they tell me their Macedonian name and which Macedonian family they belong to, I won’t know who they are.

My village “Oshchima” was renamed to “Trigonon” by the Greeks in the 1920’s and there is no history of it before that because it was

not only renamed, its Macedonian name was completely erased. This was done to every village, town, city, river, mountain, lake and every person's name. We were erased out of existence.

Even before Greece had secured its grip on Macedonia, officials were sent to administer "the new lands". The first official Greek administrator arrived in Solun near the end of October 1912, accompanied by two judges, five customs officials, ten consulate clerks, a contingent of reporters and journalists and 168 Cretan soldiers.

Among other things, the first order of business was to "Hellenize the New Lands".

"After the Greeks occupied Aegean Macedonia, they closed the Slavic language schools and churches and expelled the priests. The Macedonian language and names were forbidden, and the Macedonians were referred to as Bulgarians, Serbians or natives.

By law promulgated on November 21, 1926, all place names (toponymia) were Hellenized; that is the names of cities, villages, rivers and mountains were discarded and Greek names put in their place. At the same time the Macedonians were forced to change their first and surnames; every Macedonian surname had to end in 'os', 'es', or 'poulos'.

The news of these acts and the new, official Greek names were published in the Greek government daily *Efimeris tis Kiverniseos* no. 322 and 324 of November 21 and 23, 1926.

The requirements to use these Greek names is officially binding to this day. All evidence of the Macedonian language was compulsorily removed from churches, monuments, archeological finds and cemeteries. Slavonic church or secular literature was seized and burned. The use of the Macedonian language was strictly forbidden also in personal communication between parents and children, among villagers, at weddings and work parties, and in burial rituals." (For more information see page 109, John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece, The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation*)

In the years following World War I, the Macedonian people underwent extensive measures of systematic denationalization. The applications of these “denationalization schemes” were so extensive and aggressively pursued that in the long-term, they eroded the will of the Macedonian people to resist.

“In Greece, in 1929 during the rule of Elepeterios Venizelos, a legal act was issued ‘On the protection of public order’. In line with this Act each demand for nationality rights is regarded as high treason. This law is still in force.

On December 18, 1936, Metaxas’s dictatorial government issued a legal Act ‘On the activity against state security’ on the strength of which thousands of Macedonians were arrested, imprisoned, expelled or exiled (EXORIA) on arid, inhospitable Greek islands, where many perished. Their crime? Being ethnic Macedonian by birth.

As mentioned earlier, on September 7, 1938 legal Act No. 2366 was issued banning the use of the Macedonian language. All Macedonian localities were flooded with posters: ‘Speak Greek’. Evening schools were opened in which adult Macedonians were taught Greek. Not a single Macedonian school functioned at the time.” (See page 8, What Europe has Forgotten: The Struggle of the Aegean Macedonians, A Report by the Association of the Macedonians in Poland)

Many Macedonians were fined, beaten and jailed for speaking Macedonian. Adults and school children alike were further humiliated by being forced to drink castor oil when caught speaking Macedonian.

Such was the life for the Macedonians under Greek rule... in their own ancestral homeland and place of birth no less.

INTERVIEWER – What happened to the Macedonian people after they left Greece?

RISTO – Macedonians have been leaving Macedonia since Macedonia was occupied by the Romans. Many went north and east and established Macedonian colonies. More recently, many had fled Macedonia during the various uprising against the Ottomans and some ended up north of Macedonia as far north as Russia. There was a Macedonian colony established in Russia during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

More recently, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many fled to Bulgaria. When Bulgaria became independent it attracted Macedonian pechalbari (migrant workers), who left their homes before and after the failed 1903 Ilinden Uprising. Many decided to make Bulgaria their permanent home. According to Macedonian activists in Bulgaria, as many as 2 million Macedonians have settled over the years in Bulgaria.

After 1878, while the Ottoman economy in Macedonia was crashing down by leaps and bounds, the Bulgarian economy was improving dramatically. This was partly due to the cheap labour provided by a large influx of Macedonian pechalbari (migrant workers). Experiencing a very different life in Sofia, in contrast to life in the village, many Macedonian pechalbari were seduced into believing the Bulgarian propaganda that Macedonians are Bulgarians, and many decided to make Bulgaria their home.

What is interesting about that is that the descendants of those Macedonians today are the staunchest Bulgarians, even though they know that they are Macedonians. The Macedonians who decided to remain in Bulgaria were not attached to the lands. In other words they had no land or farms of their own to work on and their options of finding good paying jobs were limited.

Many decided to become educated to widen their prospects. Being educated they were able to take on work in the Bulgarian government and advance upwards. Georgi Dimitrov, leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party and Secretary of the Comintern, for example, was a Macedonian. Even today there are many members of Parliament in the Bulgarian government who are of Macedonian descent.

I have a friend, an Armenian academic, a PhD, who runs a museum in the States. He was educated in Bulgaria. He told me that most Bulgarian academics know the truth about Macedonia but will not talk. I am sure most academics in Greece know the truth about Macedonia also and they don't dare say a word either. They can't say anything because they will lose their jobs.

The Macedonian immigrant population in Russia from the 18<sup>th</sup> century has already been assimilated and today it is lost. A lot of names of prominent Macedonians who left for Russia have been recorded in history but it would be difficult to find their descendants because Macedonian names are so similar to Russian names. But it should be easier to find Macedonians in Bulgaria because they emigrated more recently. Unfortunately they can't declare themselves Macedonian because Bulgaria does not recognize the Macedonian identity.

Things in Greece haven't changed much either. It's quieted down but it is still oppressive, especially after the Greek Civil War. From what I am told, about 85% of the Greek people before the civil war were in favour of having a socialist system but they had to settle for what they got, an "oppressive system", at least for the Macedonians, because that's what Britain and the United States wanted.

I know this was not what the Macedonian people wanted but this couldn't have been good for the majority of the Greek people either. Perhaps that is why so many Greeks dislike Americans...

Both Greece and Bulgaria have painted themselves into a corner with regards to "the Macedonian National Question", i.e. what to do with the Macedonian people, especially now that the Republic of Macedonia has emerged as an independent Macedonian state.

The Americans, the British and their Western allies created the "Macedonian problem" by being belligerent towards the Macedonian people since the Ottoman Empire began to fall apart... but to be more accurate, since the Roman Empire conquered and partitioned Macedonia into pieces.

It was the end of Macedonia and Macedonian independence. Perseus, the Macedonian King, was taken to Rome as a prisoner of war, or as Peter Green puts it, “to adorn Paullus’s treasure rich triumph”. The Macedonian monarchy was abolished and Macedonia was demilitarized and partitioned into cantons so that it would never again be able to fight back. As further insurance of its passivity, Macedonian leaders were rounded up and taken to Rome.

The real horror of the Macedonian defeat was not Pydna but what the Roman army did afterwards. Before leaving Macedonia, the Roman army was unleashed on the civilian population and allowed to loot, pillage and rape uncontrollably. It has been said that an unimaginable amount of treasure, including gold, jewels and art, was carried off to Rome. A large segment of the population was taken into slavery. Severe restrictions were placed on trading commodities including lumber, and most of the state taxes were now diverted to Rome. According to Livy, Macedonia was divided into four regions, each with its own Roman council, and was forced to pay half the tribute to Rome. This would have otherwise been paid to the Macedonian king. If that was not enough, Paullus lent the Aetolians (Greeks) five hundred soldiers so that they too could exact their own brand of revenge on the Macedonians. What happened next is a tragedy of great proportion that not even the old authors dare describe. The Romans indeed proved themselves to be ruthless, the “true barbarians” that they were, but this was only the beginning.

In 27 BC Augustus declared Macedonia a Senatorial province and had its territory significantly reduced. With time, in the decades that followed, Macedonia was partitioned into territories. After Diocletian’s reforms, Macedonia became part of the Diocese of Moesia and at the time of Constantine it became part of the Illyrian Prefecture. At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, Macedonia was split into two provinces, Macedonia Prima with Solun (Salonika) as its capital and Macedonia Salutaris. Later during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries another name appeared: Macedonia Secunda with Stobi as its capital.

As mentioned earlier, after Perseus’s defeat at Pydna in 168 BC, Macedonia was partitioned into four regions and became Roman territory. It was particularly during this period that Macedonia was

robbed of its cultural treasures including the many monuments of art located in Solun, Pella and other culturally rich cities. Macedonia's treasures were transferred to Rome and paraded as trophies of Roman victories on Roman streets during triumph festivals. After 148 BC the four regions of Macedonia were united again but made into a Roman province with Solun as its capital. What is also interesting is that all city states and jurisdictions south of Macedonia, including Athens and Sparta, were also annexed and added to this large Roman province called Macedonia. This merger lasted for about one hundred and twenty years until 27 BC. In 27 BC Augustus separated the region to form the province of Macedonia and the province of Achaia. For one hundred and twenty years Solun, not Athens, was the capital or "mother city" of this vast province called Macedonia.

It was no coincidence that Macedonia was again partitioned in 1913 and given to four divergent states to assimilate its people and remove them from this planet forever. Macedonia was a powerful force very much despised by the West as evidenced by the West's behaviour towards it.

Even today the Americans and their European allies are behind the so-called "name dispute". They want Macedonia to change its name because they want Macedonia to cease to exist! They want Macedonia to change its own name as the first step to self-destruction.

Every single international convention and every single human right in existence has been violated in order to achieve this objective – "persuade Macedonia to change its name so that it can begin to self-destruct". This is the road the Great Powers have taken today to solve the Macedonian problem.

I am convinced Greece on its own does not have the power to have done all these things, including commit genocide against the Macedonian people, several times, and get away with it. Greater powers are at hand behind Greece, pulling the strings...

And now back to our story.

Regarding the Macedonian people who were driven out of Greek occupied Macedonia by the violence of the Greek Civil War, as I mentioned earlier, initially they were sent from Albania to the various Eastern European countries but mostly to Poland and the USSR. A few years later many made attempts to move to the Republic of Macedonia, Canada, the USA and Australia but were restricted by the iron curtain.

In fact, what is ironic about this is that the Macedonian people were led by Zahariadis and his partner Tito into believing that they could unite Greek occupied Macedonia with the People's Republic of Macedonia while an international border, i.e. "the iron curtain" ran between them.

Years later, after re-uniting with their children who were living in different countries, most Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia settled in the Republic of Macedonia.

Those who had family members living in Canada, the USA and Australia emigrated over the years to join them. The situation, after the 1970's, has basically remained static. These Macedonians, having declared themselves as Macedonians, are still unwelcome by Greece which has not only exiled them but has also confiscated their properties.

INTERVIEWER – Tell me about the Greek Macedonians.

RISTO – Years ago when the communists on the left of the political spectrum decided to recognize the existence of Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia they decided to call them "Slavo-Macedonians". The Greeks belonging to the middle and the right of the political spectrum did not recognize the existence of any Macedonian group living in Greece. For them there were no Macedonians living in Greece.

So what does this mean? Why Slavo-Macedonians and not just Macedonians? There were no other groups of people who were called "Macedonians"? So why Slavo-Macedonians, to distinguish them from whom?!

I believe the word “Slavo” as a prefix to the word Macedonians has a different meaning for different people.

To the Macedonians it means “Slavic” Macedonians, an acceptable term at the time, which defined them as Slavic speaking Macedonians. Well, at least it was better than calling them “endopii” (indigenous) Greeks.

To the progressive Greeks the word “Slavo” meant they were Greek people who spoke a Slavic language and lived in geographic Macedonia.

To the fascist Greeks it meant foreigners who came to Greece from the Slavic countries pretending to be Macedonians so that they could carve out a chunk of Macedonia and steal it from them.

According to the Fascists, with Metaxas as their idol, only pure Greeks who descended from the ancient Greeks lived in Greece.

To the people of the outside world, who have been conditioned to associate Macedonia with “Ancient Greece”, “Slavo” implied “Slavic”, a people who do not belong in Macedonia. In other words, to the outside world, a “Slavo-Macedonian” was someone who was not of Macedonian origin, who was a Slav, a settler and a newcomer, whose ancestors arrived in Macedonia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. In other words, a “Slavo-Macedonian” could not possibly be a Macedonian because the “real” Macedonians were Greek.

Well, let us look and see what happened after the Republic of Macedonia surfaced as an independent state.

In 1988 when it became inevitable that a new Macedonian State was about to be declared, from the breakup of the Yugoslav federation, the word “Macedonia” became very popular in Greece.

After attempting to extinguish the name for seventy-six years, the Greek State reversed its policy and made Macedonia a very popular word in the Greek vocabulary. It even renamed its northern province (Greek occupied Macedonia) to Macedonia, claiming for historical

reasons that it was the only legitimate Macedonia and belonged to Greece.

Also after all the years of claiming that only Greeks lived in Macedonia, Greek authorities almost overnight “invented” a new ethnicity called “Greek Macedonians”. This new ethnicity, it appears, is Macedonian but of Greek origin, descendents from the ancient Macedonians and rightful heirs to the Macedonian heritage.

The present population of Greek occupied Macedonia is approximately 2 million people. Approximately 1 million are of direct Macedonian descent. After nearly a century of systematic effort to denationalize the Macedonians, many have succumbed and developed a Greek consciousness and refer to themselves as Greeks or “Greek Macedonians”. But this only happened after the Republic of Macedonia became an independent state.

The Greek state has always portrayed the Greek identity as being more cultured and superior. The Macedonian identity has always been portrayed as an uncivilized, barbaric and dirty presence within a pure Greek space.

As I mentioned earlier, the psychological aim was to make people abandon using the Macedonian language. It has gotten to the point where one is looked down upon for speaking Macedonian. The language is referred to as the “local idiom.”

It is interesting to note that the Macedonian language is recognized internationally, but it is forbidden in Greece. After three generations of policies of denationalization by the Greek state, the Macedonian consciousness among the population has been badly damaged to the point where those who retain their Macedonian consciousness fear to declare it openly.

This fear is difficult to comprehend by those who grew up in free and open societies. You have to experience it to understand it.

Among the older generation of Macedonians the fear is pervasive and ingrained. It is as if the person is always on guard for his actions

and words for fear that he will be betrayed or heard by Greek authorities.

When one Macedonian was pressed further on this issue he blurted out in exasperation, “It (fear) has gotten into the genes!”

The other 1 million of the 2 million people, who live in Greek occupied Macedonia, are non-Greek colonists and settlers who were brought to Greek occupied Macedonia over the years, predominantly from Asia Minor, as late as the 1920's.

In fact, according to the same Greeks who yesterday were yelling and screaming that “there is no such thing as a Macedonian”, a sentence that has been yelled in my face many times, were now claiming that there are Macedonians. They were saying that Asia Minor Christian Turk colonists are the “real” Macedonians and we, the rightful heirs to the Macedonian heritage, were “Slavs”, “Skopjans”, “Bulgarians”, “Old Bulgarians” and many other derogatory words that they found in their vocabulary.

At this point I would like to summarize the history of how Macedonia became Greek.

1. It is a well-documented fact that Greece, in 1912, 1913 during the two Balkan wars, entered and forcibly occupied Macedonian territory illegally without the consent of the Macedonian people. It then, along with its partners Bulgaria and Serbia, went on a rampage bombing Macedonian villages and indiscriminately killing and murdering entire populations (first genocide).

2. It is a well-documented fact that as soon as Greece consolidated its hold on Greek Occupied Macedonia, it murdered or forcibly exiled all Macedonians who refused to accept its conditions (second genocide).

3. It is a well-documented fact that after ethnically cleansing the Macedonian population, Greece brought Greek settlers from Asia Minor, Epirus and other regions and settled them on Macedonian territory, mostly on the lands of the exiled Macedonians, without their consent.

4. It is a well-documented fact that during the early 1920's Greece began a campaign of denationalization by banning the Macedonian language and making it illegal to speak Macedonian in Macedonia. It then proceeded to forcibly change all peoples' names and toponyms.

5. It is also a well-documented fact that during the Greek Civil War, Greece exiled a large part of the Macedonian population, including the refugee children, illegally expropriated properties and issued them to new settlers (third genocide).

The territory which Greece today calls "Greek Macedonia" is in fact "Greek Occupied Macedonia" and has been occupied since 1912. The so-called "Greek Macedonians" are not really Macedonians at all, in fact the majority of them are Christian Turks and other settlers and colonists who Greece has been depositing on Macedonian lands since the Balkan wars (1912, 1913).

During 1989 to 1993 the Greek Foreign Ministry, headed by Andonis Samaras, used a secret fund to pay Greek journalists \$130 million dollars (US) to promote the "Greek-ness" of Macedonia! Although these funds were originally intended for external promotion, according to the testimony of former Prime Minister Constantinos Mitsotakis, they ended up in the pockets of Greek journalists.

There is much, much more that can be said about the Greek position and its denial of the existence of the Macedonians but all they are doing is lying to themselves and to the world in order to cover up what they have done and hope that we will go away and leave them alone.

The Greeks refuse to look at the problem from our point of view, from the Macedonian point of view, and see how much damage they have done to us and how badly they have hurt us over the years.

So let us get on with our story.

INTERVIEWER - For people like Koliopoulos and some of the other authors in Greece who at the moment is writing... how are they viewed by the Greek state? Are they viewed as troublemakers who are opening up a can of worms?

RISTO – There are certain segments in Greek society that oppose opening up old wounds no matter how pro-Greek their motives may be. Karakasidou is one example. I read her book and found it to be pro-Greek, upholding and abiding by the Greek point of view. She did not recognize the Macedonians. In fact the only thing she said was that there were people there who still speak “Bulgarian” in the village where she did her study. Yet the local Greek people became violently upset and were threatening her with violence.

One thing I found about the Greek authorities is that they don’t really care about regurgitating what has already been written and is public knowledge. It is already available in library books and on the internet anyway. So why worry? If Risto Stefov wants to summarize it and pass it on to his readers, let him!

The Greek authorities are only concerned with “new”, never before seen information. They want to preempt that and have answers for it before it becomes public knowledge. It’s the same with Koliopoulos’s work. In fact Koliopoulos is good for the Greeks because he doesn’t exactly agree with what’s been said outside of Greece, but presents another, a different point of view... to muddy the waters even further.

INTERVIEWER – Earlier you mentioned Endopii... indigenous. What’s that all about?

RISTO – It is ironic that the Macedonian people are called “indigenous” and at the same time they are called “Slavs” who don’t belong in Macedonia. Again, here the Greeks painted themselves into a corner. The moment they prohibited their own people from calling them Macedonians, they had to call them something. Initially they called them “Bulgarians” and “Serbians”. Then, when Greece declared itself 98% pure Greek and 2% Muslim Greek, they had very little left to call them... to distinguish them from the “loyal” Greeks... so they began to call them “locals” but “locals” what?

Everyone was local, even the newcomer colonists. So they began to call the Macedonians “endopii” meaning indigenous.

When a Macedonian arrived in the Greek court and the judge asked him to present his case the lawyer would say he is “endopios” for whom a translator would be required. There were actually educated Macedonians, certified by the Greek government, to be court translators. These certificates are still in existence. I have seen one.

INTERVIEWER – Where did you get it from?

RISTO – From someone in Greece.

INTERVIEWER – A person gave it to you?

RISTO – Yes, someone from Greece gave it to me. And do you know what this means?

It means Greece had recognized that the Macedonian people spoke a unique language in the region that was not Bulgarian or Serbian, which they called an “idiom”. The age-old Macedonian language that enlightened Eastern Europe, the Greeks called an idiom. How bizarre is that?

I also have a copy of a Greek personal identification card that has the name “Oshchima” on it as a place of origin; a place that today Greece says does not exist... and never existed.

And then we have the “Abecedar”, the Macedonian primer.

A book of great importance to Macedonian linguistics and historiography was published in Athens; was the primer entitled ABECEDAR (A B C), printed in the Latin alphabet, and intended for the children of the Macedonian national minority in Greece.

“In 1920 Greece signed before the League of Nations a treaty obliging it to grant certain rights to the minorities of non-Greek origin in Greece. Four years later, in 1924, at the suggestion of the League of Nations, Greece and Bulgaria signed the well-known Kalfov-Politis Protocol under which Bulgaria was obliged to grant

the Greek minority in Bulgaria their minority rights (language, schools and other rights), while Greece, recognizing the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia as a 'Bulgarian' minority, was to grant them their minority rights. This agreement was seemingly very much in favour of Bulgaria, but when in 1925 the Greek government undertook certain concrete steps towards the publication of the first primer made for the specific needs of that minority, it made it clear that there were no grounds on which Bulgaria could be officially interested in any 'Bulgarian minority' or expect the primer to be in Bulgarian, for that minority - though speaking a Slav language - was neither Bulgarian nor Serbian.

The very fact that official Greece did not, either de jure or do facto, see the Macedonians as a Bulgarian minority, but rather as a separate Slav group ('Slav speaking minority'), is of particular significance. The primer, published in the Latin alphabet, was based on the Lerin - Bilola dialect. After Gianelli's Dictionary dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Daniloviot Cetirijazicnik written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was yet another book written in the Macedonian vernacular. The primer was mailed to some regions in Western Aegean-Macedonia (Kostur, Lerin and Voden), and the school authorities prepared to give Macedonian children, from the first to the fourth grade of the elementary school, instruction in their own mother tongue. (Grigorios Dafnis, 'Greece between the two world wars', 'Elefteria' newspaper, March 15, 1953, Dionisios Romas in 'Elefteria' newspaper of October 9 and 12, 1954 and Dimitrios Vazuglis in Racial and religious minorities in Greece and Bulgaria, 1954)

The Greek governments have never made a sincere attempt to solve the question of the Macedonians and their ethnic rights in Greece. Thus, while measures were being undertaken for the opening of Macedonian schools, a clash between the Greek and Bulgarian armies at Petrich was concocted, which was then followed by a massacre of the innocent Macedonian population in the village of Trlis near Serres. All this was aimed at creating an attitude of insecurity within the Macedonians so that they themselves would give up the recognition of their minority rights and eventually seek safety by moving to Bulgaria. The Greek governments also skillfully used the Yugoslav-Bulgarian disagreements on the question of the

Macedonians in Greece, and with organized pressure on the Macedonian population, as was the case in the village of Trlis, tried to dismiss the Macedonian ethnic question from the agenda through forced resettlement of the Macedonian population outside of Greece.

The ABECEDAR, which actually never reached the Macedonian children, is in itself a powerful testimony not only of the existence of the large Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece, but also of the fact that Greece was under an obligation before the League of Nations to undertake certain measures in order to grant this particular minority their rights” (Hristo Andonovski).

INTERVIEWER – Have you got the abecedar?

RISTO – Yes I do, I have a reprint of the original abecedar. The abecedar, unfortunately never reached the schools in Greek occupied Macedonia.

Here’s what happened back in 1925;

During this period of immense suffering, the Macedonian people had a glimmer of hope that conditions might improve as a result of the Treaty of Serves which Greece signed earlier in August 10, 1920. According to conditions of the Treaty, under Articles 7, 8 and 9, the Greek government was to undertake certain obligations regarding “the protection of the non-Greek national minorities in Greece”. These Articles specifically stated free use of language and education. Initially Greece sought to neglect its obligations, however in March 1925 the League of Nations directed Greece to fulfill its obligations. By May 1925 an elementary school reader was published in the Macedonian language, it was known as the ABECEDAR. The ABECEDAR was to be used by Macedonian children in Macedonian schools which were yet to open in Aegean Macedonia.

Strong reactions immediately came from Serbia and Bulgaria.

Serbia and Bulgaria were caught totally by surprise, both were furious that the Macedonian book ABECEDAR was not printed in the Serbian or Bulgarian language respectively.

Serbia threatened to break its treaty of alliance with Greece and to commence negotiations with Bulgaria for the division of Aegean Macedonia. Threats came from the Bulgarians, protesting loudly that they had previously signed an Accord with Greece which recognized the Macedonians as “Bulgarians”.

What occurred next is truly a rare example, the Greek representative at the League of Nations Vasilis Dendramis responded by defending the Macedonian language as being “neither Bulgarian nor Serbian, but an independent language”. He listed various linguists and linguistic maps as evidence to support his claim of the independence of the Macedonian language. This high-ranking Greek official representing the Greek state not only recognized the existence of the Macedonian identity, but openly defended and supported it.

However Serbian and Bulgarian objections, together with internal opposition in Greece, prevented the Abecedar from ever reaching the Macedonian children. The Abecedar was destroyed but remains as a reminder to the Greek government of the Macedonians as a separate national entity.

Another thing worth mentioning here is what was found in newspaper archives. While the Greeks were screaming and yelling that Tito created the Macedonian and that no Macedonians existed before Tito, western libraries began to digitize their archival materials, especially the newspapers from the early 1900’s. And guess what?

These newspapers were saying Macedonians existed and were fighting against the Ottomans during the 1903 Ilinden Uprising and not “Bulgarians” as the Greeks were claiming.

Before major libraries started digging up old newspapers, scanning and digitizing them and making them available online and accessible from the internet, the Greeks had us convinced that Macedonians did not exist; they had all died off a long time ago. But when we pointed out that there are people today who call themselves Macedonians and showed them examples, they brushed that off and said those people were not “real” Macedonians but “Slavs.” But when we

asked for an explanation as to how they become Macedonians, the Greeks explained that “Tito created them when he created the People’s Republic of Macedonia.” And what purpose would Tito have to create these Macedonians, we asked? Most Greeks believed that “Tito created these Macedonians in order to lay claim to Greek-Macedonia!” You know, the one that the Greeks “liberated” in 1913.

The Greeks had convinced the entire world that “Macedonians did not exist” and that “the Modern Macedonians were created by Tito.” To this day I get e-mails from Greeks attesting to this “fact!”

But when old newspapers, especially major dailies from the late 1800’s and early 1900’s were made available on the internet, we began to see that Macedonians did exist even before Tito was born. This was indeed a puzzling problem, especially if we were to believe both the Greeks who tell no lies and all the major daily English language newspapers which reported on the Macedonians even before Tito was born.

Faced with this dilemma a number of us got together and after many hours of brainstorming, thanks to a fellow called True Macedonian, we found our answer.

The only thing that explained how Tito could have created the Modern Macedonians as per Greek testimonies and how Macedonians existed before his time, as documented by all those newspapers, was that “Tito must have had a time machine and went back in time to create the Macedonians”.

Like today’s major dailies that report on world events on a daily basis, so did the dailies of a century or so ago. The newspapers were reporting on all sorts of activities in the Balkans and in Macedonia, including on the Macedonians preparing and executing the 1903 Macedonian National Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman Empire.

If we “must” believe that Josip Broz Tito, the Yugoslav dictator, along with the Communists, “invented” the Macedonians then we must also believe that Tito possessed a “Time Machine” because the Macedonians existed way before Tito’s time.

Almost every e-mail I have received from Greeks in the last half a dozen years or so mentions the name “Tito” as the “creator” of the Macedonian ethnic identity. “You are not Macedonians, you are Slavs and you came to the Balkans in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD” seems to be the standard Greek definition of a Modern Macedonian. But if we are all Slavs and came to the Balkans in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD then how did we become Macedonians? Well the Greeks have a ready answer for that too. They say “Tito created the Macedonian ethnic identity”.

Greeks, it seems, feel very uncomfortable when a question pops up for which they have no ready made answers but on the question of “How did the Macedonians become Macedonians?” they are pretty sure Tito created them.

“Greek propagandists and Greek government officials have brainwashed their Greek citizens into believing that Josip Broz Tito, the Yugoslav dictator, along with the Communists, ‘invented’ the Macedonians. The Bulgarians too, like the Greeks, are in denial when it comes to the existence of a Macedonian nation,” says True Macedonian.

True Macedonian knows Tito’s secret because he, along with Marty and Doc, accompanied Tito on his voyages back in time watching Tito “create” these Macedonians. But unbeknownst to them I, Risto Stefov, too accompanied Tito, Marty, Doc and True Macedonian watching things unfold as I hid in the back seat of the Delorean, recording events as they unfolded.

So why don’t we all take a trip back in time and let’s see exactly when and where Tito landed and how he “invented” these Macedonians.

One puzzling question however. “What identity were these people before Tito ‘made’ them into Macedonians?” I guess we will have to turn to the Greeks for that answer!

The best trick Tito ever pulled was to assemble his best scientists to create his time machine. Upon being pushed to 88 miles per hour his time machine broke the time barrier and disappeared back into the future. Tito’s first trip was to 1985 where he acquired a Yugo engine

for his Delorian. From then on he traveled under his own power and went wherever he wanted just by setting the time machine's time dial. I snuck up and boarded the Delorian while it was briefly visiting my neck of the woods on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000. My first ride was to 1907 when Tito went to Pennsylvania to do some dirty deeds. (Story inspired by True Macedonian.)

After landing in Pennsylvania Tito took a trip to the Statistics office and ordered the statistician to enter the following;

“Iron and Steel Supplement – Labor...Macedonians...17” (“Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania”, Part III, Industrial Statistics, Vol. XXXV, 1907, page 73)

By the way registered on page 73 you will also find Greeks...159 and Slavish...3,408.

“Labor Supplements – Sole and Harness Leather...Macedonians...43” (“Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania”, Part III, Industrial Statistics, Vol. XXXV, 1907, page 191)

Registered on page 191 you will also find Greeks...20 and Slavonians...285.

“Labor Supplements – Tanning Extracts...Macedonians...3” (“Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania”, Part III, Industrial Statistics, Vol. XXXV, 1907, page 247)

Tito's best work in convincing the statistics office in 1907 to record 17 Macedonians working with iron and steel, 43 Macedonians working with sole and harness leather and 3 Macedonians working with tanning extracts. It was quite an accomplishment for Tito to create 63 Macedonians just like that!

After visiting Pennsylvania, Tito decided to jump back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century to add some Macedonian in an English-Arabic dictionary. He knocked off a few shots of rakia for courage and then bribed the

dictionary author with some more rakia. When the author was drunk and passed out Tito ordered True Macedonian to modify the dictionary as follows:

“Saklabah, The Sclavonians, supposed by the Arabians to be descended from Seclab, a son of Japhet. Under this name, however, the Mahometans comprehend often the Servians, Bulgarians, Moesians, Thracians, Albanians, Macedonians and the northern parts of Greece.” (“An English Arabic Dictionary” by Josiph Catafago, 1858, page 131)

Not satisfied with modifying just some statistics and one definition in a dictionary, Tito figured it was time to influence some newspapers so he set the Delorian time dial to the year 1897. February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1897 to be exact. Here Tito influenced the New York Times to write the following:

“Mr. Gladstone and the Balkan Confederation. – The Byron Society, which is actively engaged in disseminating appeals in Greece and Bulgaria to help the cause of the Macedonians, has communicated to its agents a letter from Mr. Gladstone for distribution in the vernacular in South-Eastern Europe. The Society aims at inducing the Greek, Servian and Bulgarian governments to come to an early agreement in reference to the Macedonian question. The letter is as follows: - ‘Hawarden Castle Jan. 19, 1897. Dear, Sir, the hopelessness of the Turkish Government should make me witness with delight its being swept out of the countries which it tortures. Next to the Ottoman Government nothing can be more deplorable and blameworthy than jealousies between Greek and Slav and plans by the states already existing for appropriating other territory. Why not Macedonia for the Macedonians as well as Bulgaria for the Bulgarians and Serbia for the Servians? And if they are small and weak, let them bind themselves together for defense, so that they may not be scattered by others, either great or small, which would probably be the effect of their quarreling among themselves. Your very faithful, W. E. Gladstone.’” (“New York Times”, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1897.)

Bravo Tito, I don't know exactly how you did it but you convinced a British Prime Minister to say "Macedonia for the Macedonians" which became a rallying cry for the Macedonians before your time!

Still not satisfied that enough was done, Tito set the Delorian time dial to August 11, 1900. Here he convinced a reader to write the following to the New York Times Editor;

"Christians in Turkey

To the Editor of the New York Times:

The writer read with much interest a letter in THE TIMES of to-day relating to the Macedonian disturbances. It has been said that 'The worst Christian Government is better than the best Muslim Government', but Mr. Burman, the writer of the letter in question, apparently thinks Turkish rule good enough in its way or feels that international justice demands that Turkey in Europe be preserved at any price. He speaks of 'acts of retribution on the part of their (the Macedonians') Turkish masters.' As the Turks have long referred to the Christians in their dominions as 'dogs' the term is perhaps a very apt one.

K. C. Bataille, Orange N. J., August 11, 1900."

Oh, I forgot to tell you. When everyone was busy keeping the "dictionary guy" company and drinking rakia, I borrowed the Delorian for a brief while and took a trip to London to January 12, 1814 where I convinced Reverend Hughes to write the following;

"The Serai stands in an open space, near the south-east corner of the Castron: it is a vast irregular pile of buildings... The great hall of this building was crowded with attendants of every variety in costumes, from red-shawled Macedonians and turbaned Osmanli, to the Albanian with his shaggy white capote, and the Greek archon in robes of ermine and enormous calpac." ("Travels in Sicily Greece and Albania" by Rev. Thos. Smart Hughes, 1820, page 472.)

By setting the return time dial to seconds after I left for London, I was able to spend considerable time in London without Tito

discovering his Delorian was missing. I just hope he doesn't keep track of the "time mileage".

And now I will leave you with this; "Since the Christian era, as we have said, a successive downpour of foreigners from the north into Greece has ensued. In the sixth century came the Avars and the Slavs, bringing death and disaster. A more potent and lasting influence upon the country was probably produced by the slower and more peaceful infiltration of the Slavs into Thessaly and Epirus from the end of the seventh century onward. A result of this is that Slavic place-names to-day occur all over the Peloponnesus in the open country where settlements could readily be made. The most important immigration of all is probably that of the Albanians, who, from the thirteenth century until the advent of the Turks, incessantly overran the land." ("The Races of Europe A Sociological Study", by William Z. Ripley, Ph.D., 1910, page 408).

So tell me now, who are the "real" Slavs, the so-called Greeks or the Macedonians?

This is only a very minute sample of what there is out there about how Tito created the Macedonian identity as per Greek claims. I have an entire book written about this with quotes from newspaper articles from major European, American, Canadian and Australian newspapers from the late 1800's and early 1900's when, supposedly, no Macedonians existed. The book is called "Come take a Ride in Tito's Time Machine".

I am at a loss for words about how the Greek people can lie to your face with such overwhelming evidence that disproves their claims and still expect to be taken seriously!

In my opinion these Greeks have zero credibility and have done injustice not only to the Macedonians but to their own cause. But then why should they care? They are inside our homes, nice and warm, while we roam the streets freezing and looking for justice.

And who is going to provide this justice?

The Great Powers or the international law wielded by the same Great Powers? When are we going to learn?

INTERVIEWER – Do you have these newspaper articles?

RISTO – I have hundreds of them. They are all available in most library archives. New York Times and various other newspaper archives as well.

INTERVIEWER – And these are all in your book?

RISTO – I published some of them in my book to give you an idea that they exist. You will need many volumes of books to publish them all. But what would be the point... All you need is a few dozen or so articles to blow away the Greek lies.

INTERVIEWER – And how did you find these?

RISTO – They actually found me. You wouldn't believe the kinds of articles people send me and the kinds of requests they made of me....

INTERVIEWER – The internet, right? That's how I found you.

RISTO – Yes through the internet. People find what I write agreeable because it fits with their reality of events. It fits with what their grandparents had told them. That's what they tell me.

INTERVIEWER – Can you put requests for this kind of material on your website...I mean for people to come to you...?

RISTO – I did. I did exactly that in 2006. I started an electronic monthly magazine called the “Macedonian Digest” which began in January 2006. This gave my readers a forum, to say what they wanted to say and reveal unusual stuff. Then people started sending me things; information about all sorts of things. I found out of all kinds of measures the Greek government had undertaken to get rid of us.

INTERVIEWER - What sort of measures?

RISTO – Greeks marrying Macedonians to assimilate them. Kindergartens especially opened to stop Macedonian children from learning their Macedonian language from their grandparents; Macedonians leaving Greece for Australia having to sign a declaration that they would not return... But you have to fault the Macedonians for signing such declarations without reading what they signed..., and so on.

INTERVIEWER – Really this is all on paper? And people sent this to you?

RISTO – Yes. The Greeks actually sent military and administrative personnel to Greek occupied Macedonia and ordered them to marry Macedonian women so that they could assimilate the Macedonian population. They were doing the same thing the Ottomans were doing. They were putting people in certain places to hold power. The silly thing about that is that the mother is usually the one who teaches the children who they are and the first language they speak. That is why it is called “the mother tongue” and not the “father tongue”.

And this is why Greeks are intellectually superior to the Macedonians.

INTERVIEWER – Is there any Macedonian life left in Greece today?

RISTO – Well, even though the world was changing all around us, the Macedonians in Greece continued to suffer abuses at the hands of the Greek government.

During the late 1950's inhabitants of several villages in the Lerin, Kostur and Voden Regions were forced to take oaths swearing loyalty to Greece and denouncing their Macedonian ethnicity and mother language.

This policy of denationalization continued to meet with resistance however, as the Macedonian people continued to feel Macedonian and speak their Macedonian language in secret.

With the imminent breakup of Yugoslavia, the oppressed Macedonians in Greece also began to feel the fervor and started to form their own movements, which gave birth to such organizations as the Macedonian Movement for Balkan Prosperity and Vinozhito.

In regards to developments with the Macedonians in Greece, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1995 members of the ethnic Macedonian political party in Greece, the RAINBOW PARTY, also known as the “VINOZHITO PARTY” in Macedonian, opened an office in Lerin.

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1997 a Second Conference of the “RAINBOW” party was held in Lerin and was attended by 76 delegates of all local units. A Political Manifesto and Organizational Principles were adopted and a Central Council comprised of 19 members was elected.

The Central Council held its first session in Voden on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997 and elected a five-member Political Secretariat, an Economic Commission, an Editors Council, etc.

In its Political Manifesto “RAINBOW” has aired its wish to cooperate with all democratic and anti-nationalist forces in the country in its struggle for peace and European integration.

The RAINBOW PARTY is a member of the European Free Alliance which has been standing up for the rights of stateless nations, peoples and regions for decades.

Other development with regards to the Macedonians in Greece includes the opening of the Greek branch of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL), an organization dedicated to the preservation of lesser used languages in Europe.

Across the European Union, no fewer than forty million people speak languages in their everyday lives, which are different from the official language of the state in which they are living. At present this figure represents 10% of the total European population but shortly, with the expansion of the Union, the number of people speaking a different language from the official language of their state will be

much, much greater. Greece, too, is no exception; however vigorously the state may deny it, the facts tell their own story. A by no means negligible section of the Greek population is bilingual. It is not possible to provide precise figures, since none of the censuses carried out to date has included a question on language. The one exception was the census of 1920, yet the figures it yielded for the northern regions of the country were never published.

Moreover, the long-standing policy of marginalization and suppression has succeeded, naturally enough, in reducing the actual number of those speaking the non-official languages. This hostile treatment of heteroglossy in Greece had its beginnings in the early days of the modern Greek state, 190 years ago. In those areas of the country where Arvanitika (Albanian) was prevalent, every effort was made to discourage its use. There was perhaps some justification for this in the desperate efforts being made to unite the regional populations into a single Greek state, using as a means to this end a policy of homogenization of the various populations.

Macedonians such as Nase Parisis, who is currently President of the Greek branch of EBLUL, are striving to introduce the Macedonian languages into the Greek educational system.

In 1995 Human Rights Watch - Helsinki condemned Greece for the oppression of its ethnic Macedonian minority, which Greece denies exists. Both Amnesty International and the European Parliament urged Greece to recognize the Macedonian language and to stop oppressing ethnic Macedonians living within its borders.

In regards to Macedonians in Bulgaria, political changes after the capitulation of fascist Bulgaria and the September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944 coup d'état positively influenced the Macedonians in Pirin. On August 9, 1946 the Communist Party of Bulgaria, under the leadership of Georgi Dimitrov, officially recognized the Macedonian nation and the right of the Bulgarian controlled part of Macedonia to attach itself to the People's Republic of Macedonia. After World War II the Macedonians in Bulgaria were recognized as a separate and distinct ethnicity. Demographic data from a free census in 1946 revealed that the majority of the population in Pirin Macedonia declared itself to be ethnic Macedonian. There was a period of

cultural autonomy and affirmation of Macedonian national and cultural values. The Macedonian literary language and national history were introduced into the educational system and almost 32,000 students were taught Macedonian. In 1947 in Gorna Djumaja (Blagoevgrad) the first Macedonian bookstore, reading room and Regional Macedonian National Theater were opened. Macedonian newspapers such as “Pirinsko delo”, “Nova Makedonija”, “Mlad borec” etc. were also published. Literary, cultural and artistic associations were founded contributing to the spread of Macedonian culture.

In the 1956 census conducted by the Bulgarian government, 63.7% of the population living in Pirin Macedonia declared itself Macedonian. Since that census, and after Tito broke relations with Russia and Bulgaria, Bulgaria changed its attitude and negated the existence of Macedonians thus forbidding the expression of the Macedonian ethnicity and language. Another census conducted in 1965 shows only 8,750 or less than 1% of the total population living in the district of Blagoevgrad to be Macedonians. This was a region with the highest percentage of Macedonians shown to live there by a previous census.

In 1989 a group of Macedonians formed the United Macedonian Organization - Ilinden (OMO Ilinden) with aims at gaining cultural and national autonomy for the Macedonians in Pirin. OMO Ilinden PIRIN was a political party of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. It was registered as a political party in 1999 and participated in municipal elections in October 1999, where it elected five local officials. However, on February 29, 2000, the Constitutional Court in Bulgaria declared OMO “Ilinden” - PIRIN unconstitutional. This was in direct violation of the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom from discrimination.

The Bulgarian government refuses to acknowledge the existence of the large Macedonian minority in Pirin Macedonia and continues to violate its basic human rights. Members and supporters of OMO Ilinden PIRIN (political party and human rights organization) and OMO Ilinden (human and minority rights organization) have been videotaped, harassed, beaten, fined and even imprisoned simply for asserting their ethnic Macedonian identity.

In regards to the Macedonians in Albania, at the local elections in Albania, held on February 18, 2007, a Macedonian from the party Macedonian Alliance for European Integration (MAEI) was, for the first time, elected as mayor. Edmond Temelko, a 36-year-old veterinarian turned politician won the mayoral position in Prespa municipality, making him the first Macedonian elected in Albania.

Macedonians in Albania are still unable to fully exercise their basic human rights such as obtain schooling in their mother tongue, using Macedonian national symbols and participation in state institutions. Macedonians fought hard to register their political party, the Macedonian Alliance for European Integration with success which is a major accomplishment for Macedonians, because they demonstrated maturity and voted for themselves. By doing so they showed Albanian society that they were part of it and would take an active role in dealing with issues in the country.

The Prespa municipality has nine towns, inhabited mostly by ethnic Macedonians who speak their own language and foster their own cultural heritage. The Macedonian language will become the second official language and all Macedonian landmarks will be given their original names which were changed during Enver Hodza's regime.

Albania gained the Mala Prespa region from Greece in 1919 in exchange for some Albanian lands in Epirus.

In regards to the Macedonian people in the Republic of Macedonia, as federal Yugoslavia began to disintegrate in the late 1980's the Macedonians in the Peoples' Republic of Macedonia sought their chance to finally create their own state. On September 8, 1991, in a referendum, 95% of eligible voters approved of a sovereign and independent Republic of Macedonia with Kiro Gligorov as its President.

The will of the people was confirmed on September 18, 1991 at the Macedonian Parliament with the declaration for acceptance of the results from the referendum.

The next important step in strengthening the state was the adoption of the Constitution on November 17, 1991, which was supplemented after the 2001 conflict and signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

The internationally legal subjectivity of the state was recognized on April 8, 1993 with an acclamation of the UN General Assembly. Macedonia was admitted as the 181<sup>st</sup> full-fledged member.

Fearing that it might lose its Macedonian occupied territories, Greece was first to object to the Republic of Macedonia's independence.

Although the European Community acknowledged that Macedonia had fulfilled the requirements for official recognition, due to the opposition of Greece which was already a member of the community, the EC decided to postpone the recognition. Greece, afraid that Macedonia might put forward a historical, cultural and linguistic claim over Aegean Macedonia, insisted that the new nation had no right to use of the name "Macedonia" and use the emblem of ancient Macedonia on its flag. In July of 1992 there were massive demonstrations by Macedonians in the capital Skopje over the failure to receive recognition. But despite Greek objections, Macedonia in 1993 was admitted to the United Nations under the temporary reference (not an official name) "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Full diplomatic relations with a number of EC nations followed, while Russia, China, Turkey, Bulgaria and most nations ignored Greece's objections and recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia".

Greece, dissatisfied with the results, in February 1994 imposed a trade embargo on Macedonia in an attempt to force President Gligorov to make changes to his country's name, nation and language and amend the Constitution to remove Article 47 which stipulated that "the Republic of Macedonia cares for the statue and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighboring countries, as well as Macedonian ex-parties, assists their cultural development and promotes links with them." Ironically, Greece also has a similar article in its own Constitution,

as is normal for any country in the world to care for its minorities in other countries.

Faced with an economic collapse and left without any support from the international community, Macedonia had no choice but to change its flag and constitution, after which Greece lifted the embargo.

Still reeling from the Greek embargo, from the internationally imposed embargo on Serbia, its traditional trading partner, and from unresolved issues with Greece, the Republic of Macedonia was faced with a new set of problems, a war at home.

Due to the conflict north of Macedonia and as a result of the NATO bombing of Serbia, an influx of war refugees numbering in the three hundred thousand entered Macedonia. This created economic as well as political strain on impoverished Macedonia which on one hand, had to cope with a 15% overnight population increase and on the other criticisms from various human rights groups for the ways it handled the refugees.

No sooner was that crisis was over than armed bands of Albanian fighters, spilled over from the Serbian conflict, began to infiltrate and stir up trouble in Macedonia. In 2001 these illegal bands, first branded as terrorists and later as “freedom fighters”, began to occupy camps and later villages in western Macedonia. Initially these bands were seen as benign but as they started to assert themselves by restricting travel, kidnappings, torturing civilians and cutting off electricity and water supplies to various communities, the Macedonian police and military began to pursue them. There was an immediate backlash from the western media which, in spite of their violent acts, viewed the Albanian bands as human rights fighters and the Macedonian government and people as aggressors.

This war placed great strains on Macedonia’s economy and created a long-lasting divide between the Macedonian and Albanian communities inside Macedonia, communities that coexisted peacefully for centuries.

The war lasted approximately six months and officially ended with the signing of the Ohrid agreement on August 13, 2001.

“According to the Ohrid Peace Agreement, the international community was invited to support the challenging road of Macedonia from the brink of civil war in August 2001 to peace, stability and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

In response to a request for NATO assistance, made by the Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski on June 20, 2001, this military organization drew up the operational plan that was dedicated to the peace and stability of the Republic of Macedonia. However, NATO had imposed three conditions for its help in resolving the crisis: conclusion of political agreement between the various parties in the Republic of Macedonia, armistice linked with amnesty for the members of the so-called NLA and finally a pledge of full demilitarization from the so-called NLA. Once the Macedonian political parties signed the Ohrid Peace Agreement, the way was opened for NATO’s first mission in the Republic of Macedonia. The NATO military support to the Republic of Macedonia effectively commenced on August 27, 2001, with Operation Essential Harvest / Task Force Harvest (TFH). This UK-led mission involved the rapid deployment of 4,600 Allied troops that were initiated to fulfill NATO’s promise to assist the Macedonian people by collecting and destroying arms and ammunition on a voluntary basis from ethnic-Albanian extremists.

INTERVIEWER – Thank you for your participation in this interview.

*Analysis of historical  
events in Greek  
occupied Macedonia  
Part 2*



**An interview with Risto Stefov**

Analysis of historical events in Greek occupied  
Macedonia  
An interview with Risto Stefov  
Part 2

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INTERVIEWER – Risto, there was quite a response to the interview conducted earlier, which was mostly about the past, so I would like to ask you some more questions, concerning the present if possible. For example what is going on with the so-called name dispute and what is that all about? What can you tell us about the name dispute?

RISTO – Thank you. But since I published the first part of the interview I received a number of comments, all of them positive, a couple of which I would like to discuss with you before we continue with the interview.

One of the questions was about the Greek language and the other about the Slavs and the Macedonians.

One reader wanted to know if the so-called “Greek” language was around for thousands of years, as the modern Greeks claim, then how come “no country” outside of today’s Greece speaks it and even those Greeks who do speak it today have learned it in school?

Dear reader, this is a question for the Greeks. They should be the ones explaining why “Greek” is not their mother tongue or the mother tongue of their nation or any other nation for that matter. But, before giving us an explanation as to why this is, they need to first ask themselves: “If their so-called ‘Greek language’ existed for thousands of years, as some of them claim, then why is it spoken only in Greece and nowhere else?” Greece became a country in 1828 but before that it existed without borders for about 2,300 years. How was it that this ancient language was not spoken more widely and outside of modern Greece’s borders?

Unfortunately, the reason it was not spoken anywhere else or by more people is because the so-called “Greek language” was a dead language, just like the Latin language. It was used only by governments and Church institutions. On top of that it was not a mother tongue of the modern “Greek” people. It was adopted after Greece became a country and taught to the “Greek” people in school.

And the reason, if I may add, as to why the “Greek” language never caught on anywhere else in the world is because it was never a

common people's language. Even since Alexander's time, when the Koine (or so called Greek) language began its life, it has been a language of trade and commerce used in government institutions and later in the Christian Orthodox Church. This is how it survived. Then when Greece became a nation state for the first time in 1828, it adopted it as the language of its people and taught it to its people in school.

Why do you think the Greeks banned the Macedonian language in Greek occupied Macedonia? They banned it so that the Macedonian people could be taught Greek. This is an ongoing process that exists in Greece to this day. It's called Hellenization.

Just to be fair I would also like to say a few words about the Macedonian language but first I would like to take up the next question... the Slavs.

A friend from Slovenia sent me the following:

“Dear Risto,

In your interview you seem to avoid talking about the connection between the Slavs and the Macedonians. Why is that?

It wasn't too long ago when Slovenian warriors, fighting in the “Solun Front” during WW I, came into contact with local Macedonians and your Macedonians were very proud to say that they were not Greeks but Slavs.

Weren't the Slavs ubiquitous in (Greek occupied) Macedonia? These people who claimed to be Slavs were Macedonians from Greece, not from the Republic of Macedonia.

Also, I get the impression that you missed an important point in Curta's book, namely his economic analysis of the situation in the Byzantine Empire.

According to Curta, after the worldwide climatic crisis in 535 AD, caused by the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano, and towards 540 AD, more and more peasants were commandeered from the Balkans

which was followed by a drastic depopulation of the area. This depopulation was followed by the incursions of “Slavs”, who apparently were familiar with the situation in the region, affecting mainly the towns. These Slavs were coming into Macedonia from the north to plunder it and then were retreating back across the Danube, and not settling in Macedonia. Most of the time they were able to avoid the Byzantine military. But the citizens of Tsari Grad (Constantinople) and Solun soon realized that these Slavs were very similar to the “Slavs”, i.e. to the Macedonians who lived around these cities. No Slavs settled in the region until about 700 AD, which is the upper time limit in Curta’s book.

Following Curta’s presentation, mentioned above, it is my understanding that the intruding “Slavs” were in fact the Macedonians who had escaped and had fled north of the Danube over time. So you can say that there was an influx of Slavic Macedonians out of Macedonia and not foreign Slavs settling in Macedonia.

Good luck with your research.

Regards, your friend from Slovenia”

I would like to thank my dear Slovenian friend for that information and for all the helpful information he has given me over the years.

As for the Macedonian language, no doubt it is an ancient language which has taken root in prehistoric times and has evolved and exists to this day. To me it doesn’t matter where it began and how it got there but from what I have learned it is a language that is closely tied to nature and has all the elements to make it a very old language. That in itself and the fact that there are so many dialects attests to its old, old age.

The Macedonian language is truly a people’s language and the mother tongue of every Macedonian born in Macedonia. And, unlike other ancient languages, such as Latin and Koine, which were languages of institutions and which eventually died, the Macedonian language has survived and thrived, particularly through Christianity

when the word of God was in the process of being spread to the common people in the language they understood.

Traditionally the Macedonian language had been an oral language passed on from generation to generation along with the traditions necessary for living. This is why, I believe, there is very little of it recorded. Then, when the time came and the word of God needed to be delivered directly to the common people, the Macedonians were the first to step up to the forefront and create a written form. Since then the Old Macedonian language, known to the west as “Old Church Slavonic”, became the language of enlightenment. This was more than just a “mere” language, it was an international language created to serve everyone who understood it. This language has been used in every aspect on life in dozens of countries and for more than one millennium. That much we know for certain. Yet our enemies say “it does not exist”.

My response to that is “look around”, the Macedonian language not only exists but is one of the oldest people’s languages in existence today. It has survived everything that was thrown at it and is still thriving.

Now, if we are to examine the Greek explanation as to who the Slavs were and where they came from, as well as why they only “invaded” and settled in Macedonia and not Greece, we will find that there is not enough information to adequately explain the so-called “Slav Migration” supported by mainstream history. In fact, from my observations these Greeks don’t seem to care to explain the Slav migration theory other than to say that it “happened” and to quote authors who support their point of view. On top of that they use the word “Slav” in a derogatory manner to put down the Macedonians. They also seem to be silent on the question of why the Slavs stopped their migration in Macedonia and did not migrate into Greece, when in fact we know Slavs existed in Greece and they still exist to this day, as my Slovenian friend kindly pointed out to me. In fact there are people in the Peloponnesus villages who still speak Slavic to this day.

Here is what I found in the history books:

“Macedonian king Perseus was defeated at the Battle of Pydna in 167 BC. After that Macedonia was divided into four parts and put under Roman domination. Macedonia was deprived of external independence but was allowed to retain internal self governance. The four parts (meres, partes, regiones, T. Liv., XLV, 30, 2) were forbidden from mutual marriages, from trade and from mining the gold and silver mines. All prominent Macedonians older than 15 years old had to leave Macedonia ‘voluntarily’, under the threat of death, in order to prevent renewal of the country and rebellions from taking place against foreign dominance.”

It has also been said that a large segment of the Macedonian population fled Macedonia during the Roman-Macedonian wars, especially when Macedonia was defeated. These people went north. Of course there was no other direction to go because Macedonia, at that time, bordered the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Adriatic Sea to the west, the Black Sea to the east and the Danube River to the north.

Taking the safest route out, the Macedonians escaping the horrors of wars fled north across the Danube River.

A lot of Macedonian people fled north! And where did they go? We are told they went north of the Danube River, where the Slavs were later found.

So, my first question is “What happened to these Macedonian people?” To these many Macedonian people who fled “north”?! Could they be the “Slavs” who later returned to Macedonia and found people there speaking the same language?

My second question is “How far north did these Macedonians go?” Did they go as far north as Siberia? If they did then that would explain why there are toponyms and people’s names in Russia that are exactly the same as the ones existing in Macedonia. Or is this a coincidence?

And most importantly: if these Slavs “from north of the Danube” and the Slavs from around Solun spoke a Slavic language then what does that tell us? It tells us that there was a linguistic relationship

between the Macedonians in Macedonia and the Slavs north of the Danube! Or is this too a coincidence?

Now we need to ask ourselves how did this “linguistic relationship” come about and did the Macedonians who fled Macedonia during the Roman-Macedonian wars speak a Slavic language or a “Greek” language as the Greeks would have us believe? If the Macedonians spoke “Greek” then why does “no one” north of the Danube River speak “Greek” today... or at any other time in recorded history? There is no trace of “Greek” anywhere north of the Danube.

If I was asked: “Did the Macedonians fleeing the Macedonian-Roman wars speak Greek?” I would have to say “no” because if they did there would be some “archeological traces” of Greek found somewhere north of the Danube. And there are none!

Many ancient authors have claimed that Alexander the Great and his Macedonians spoke another language outside of the Koine language and that language was not only unique to the Macedonians but also their mother tongue. So, is it not possible that the “mysterious” language the ancient Macedonians spoke could in fact be the Slavic language?!

INTERVIEWER – Are you implying that the ancient Macedonians spoke the Slavic language? Didn’t the Slavs come to Macedonia much later, during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD?

RISTO – Yes, I am implying that it is more of a possibility that the Ancient Macedonians spoke the Slavic language than to conjecture that they spoke “Greek”. Remember “Greek” or the Koine language as it is properly called was the language of trade and commerce, and only the educated Macedonians spoke it. Also, the Koine language was not the mother tongue of the Ancient Macedonians. If the Macedonians from 2,200 years ago who fled north of the Danube River spoke Greek then where is the evidence? Who today speaks Greek north of the Danube River? The answer is NO ONE! Who speaks Slavic? The answer is EVERYONE!

And no, I don’t believe the “Slavs” came to the Balkans for the first time during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. I believe the Slavs have been in the

Balkans since the Stone Age and that most of the Slavs of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD were in fact Macedonian refugees returning back to Macedonia after centuries of absence.

Look, all I am saying is that we know from history that the ancient Macedonians spoke an “unidentified” language and a little later in history we find the same Macedonians speaking a Slavic language. Doesn’t it make sense to connect the dots and bravely defy mainstream history and say that the “mysterious” language the ancient Macedonians spoke was in fact the Slavic language? There is plenty of indirect historic evidence that supports this. For example:

1. Many ancient Macedonians fled north, north of the Danube River, during and after the Macedonian-Roman wars, settled and remained there for centuries.
2. Many people, the vast majority of people in Eastern Europe today speak a Slavic language, slightly evolved but the same Slavic language spoken in Macedonia today.
3. There is no doubt that these languages have a common past. For example there are names of people and toponyms in the Ukraine and Russia that are identical to names in Macedonia. This cannot be a coincidence!

And yes, some Slavs “returned” to Macedonia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD and found a people with whom they shared not only a common language but also common customs and traits.

And let us not forget, and I can’t emphasize this more strongly, that Macedonia was a large country in those days, before the Romans conquered it. It extended from the Adriatic Sea in the west, to the Black Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the south to the Danube River in the north. The Danube River was its northern boundary.

Also, let’s be realistic here. Not only was the situation more complex in those days than we make it out to be but many groups of people, including elite fighters like the Goths, Huns, Bulgars, Avars,

etc., ventured into Macedonia but no one seems to be interested in talking about them. Why?

Because the “Slav phenomenon” is largely a political phenomenon with little historical significance. The reason all this is attributed to the Slavs as opposed to the Goths, Huns, Bulgars, Avars, etc., as being the culprits for the invasions and for the devastation of the Balkans is to explain the wide use of the Slav language. In other words, the “Slav phenomenon” is a modern 19<sup>th</sup> century creation designed to explain the prevalent use of the modern Slav languages.

It is most unfortunate, however, that modern scholars choose to ignore archeological evidence that links the 6<sup>th</sup> century Slavs to the ancient prehistoric Veneti. “Archeological research has already provided an enormous amount of evidence in support of the idea that the Veneti were Slavs.” (Page 13, Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs, History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region c. 500 – 700*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Accepting the hypothesis that the Veneti and the Slavs are connected not only provides linguistic continuity for the modern Macedonians to the ancient Macedonians but also identifies the so-called “elusive” Macedonian language of ancient times. With this in mind, we cannot ignore claims that the Slav language was most probably spoken by Alexander’s Macedonian soldiers and settlers and was spread throughout the vastness of the uncivilized regions of Eastern Europe and northern Asia. Also, it would not be far fetched to hypothesize that Alexander’s Macedonians colonized parts of European Russia, which would attest to the many common toponyms that Macedonia and European Russia share.

Let us also not forget that the Ancient Macedonians after Philip II’s time were a mixture of people that included Illyrians, Thracians, Paeonianians, Phrygians and others and these people were NEVER Greeks. They eventually, over time, also became Macedonians. We also know for a fact that some of the toponyms in Macedonia from that time had Slavic names.

So it is easy for me to conclude that, based on its widespread use in Eastern Europe and on the evolution it has experienced, the Slavic

language must be a very old language which has probably existed from prehistoric times. This means that the Slavic language was spoken in Macedonia before the Attic and later Koine made their appearance.

INTERVIEWER – But isn't that in total contradiction of what mainstream history is saying?

RISTO – Yes. But I have no faith in mainstream history!

INTERVIEWER – Why?

RISTO – Would you have faith in a history that claims you don't exist? As far as I am concerned mainstream history has been "cooked" to fit the political agenda of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in support of the newly created Balkans states, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and later Albania, created after the Ottoman Empire fell apart.

We the Macedonian people have existed as Macedonians throughout the Macedonian, Roman, Eastern Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires from about 800 BC until the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD and then, suddenly after 1913, we completely disappeared. The Ottomans had no problem with us being Macedonians and neither did the western press while we were fighting the Ottomans for our independence and to create an independent Macedonian state.

I have hundreds of newspaper articles reporting on our 1903 Ilinden Uprising in which the western press calls us Macedonians. Then all that disappears after Macedonia was invaded, occupied, partitioned and annexed by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria in 1912, 1913. After that we simply did not exist except in top secret diplomatic dispatches and reports.

Pick up a history book, any history book written by a western author and show me something said about the Macedonians, their existence, their contributions or their sacrifices. The majority of the fighters that held fascist Italy back at the Albanian front during WW II were Macedonian; half of the partisans who fought to expel the WW II occupiers from Greece and from Yugoslavia were Macedonians... Where is that mentioned in these history books?

NOWHERE! Why? Because apparently we don't seem to exist! But we do exist! And how do I know that?

I have looked at hundreds of declassified secret reports and diplomatic dispatches and I have seen many references where we are undeservedly mentioned as Macedonians. Since 1913 we have been referred to as Macedonians in the secret diplomatic world and yet we don't exist in the ordinary western world or in its history books!

And this is precisely why I have no faith in Mainstream history!

Only recently, after the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence, did we start hearing about Macedonians and about a Macedonian minority existing in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania and this is mainly from human rights organizations.

For years Mainstream history has neglected the Macedonians, like they never existed.

There was no western textbook published after 1913, by any reputable publishing house, where you could find Macedonians mentioned as an ethnic identity, particularly in Greek occupied Macedonia. Yet we Macedonians fought on the side of the allies during the Second World War and made many, many sacrifices to liberate us all from Fascism and Nazism, yet there is nothing written about our contributions in the Western history books. Many Macedonians fought against the Italian Fascists and died at the Albanian front and all our sacrifices have been attributed to the Greeks.

So for those reasons I don't trust mainstream history and I don't like how it has misrepresented the Ancient Macedonians, the Slavs and how it has completely neglected the modern Macedonians.

In fact I am going to say that I believe the Slavs are the oldest stratum of people in Europe and that they have been grossly misrepresented by mainstream history.

I also want to thank my Slovenian friends who not only came in support of my beliefs but encouraged me to speak up about them and about our modern connection to the Ancient Macedonians.

INTERVIEWER – Wait a minute, wait a minute here. Are you serious about this? The entire world knows that the Slavs are newcomers to the Balkan Region and that they arrived in Macedonia sometime after the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. Now you are telling us that the Slavs have been in the Balkans basically forever? Don't you think you will be ridiculed about this? What do you say to that?

RISTO – Well, what can I say? I have developed a thick skin over the years. I have been ridiculed about many things, many times, just google “Risto Stefov” on the internet and you will see for yourself.

But to your remark about the entire world knowing that the Slavs are newcomers to the Balkans, I say prove it! Just because the entire world knows that, it does not make it true... One time, not too long ago, the entire world “knew” for certain the earth was flat... Well, the entire world was wrong about that! It is fine with me to be ridiculed as long as I am not “burned at the stake”... I can live with being ridiculed.

Besides, who is going to ridicule me? The Greeks?! The Macedonians?! How can the Greeks ridicule me when their entire history is fiction! If they are going to ridicule me then they better look at themselves first... The Macedonians may ridicule me... and I don't care because I was one of those people who strongly believed in mainstream history and ridiculed others, calling them “crazy people”. I ridiculed true patriots because they had the courage to speak and tell the truth... like Professor Dr. Angelina Markus whom I mentioned earlier in the interview. We Macedonians need to push the envelope further and further... and no doubt we will be ridiculed for it.

We as Macedonians know that there is a connection between the “Slavs” and the Macedonians but lack the courage to speak about it. The first line of defense taken by our enemies is that we don't exist, “Macedonians do not exist” and that we the modern Macedonians are “Slavs”, the scourge of the earth. The second line of defense our

enemies have taken is that we are “only Macedonians” and not Slavs. Many Macedonians have bought into this. Yesterday we were “just Slavs” and today we are “just Macedonians”, why not both? After all, we are Macedonians, a Slav speaking tribe who rose up two thousand years ago and conquered the world and in doing so united and enlightened half the world! Can you imagine the implications of that? Macedonia in those days was like Britain was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century... It left its cultural and linguistic marks everywhere... And it did it again during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century AD through Christianity...

INTERVIEWER – Okay, okay then, can we move on to my first question – the name dispute?

RISTO – Well, to a casual observer the so-called “name dispute” which Greece has concocted, may seem like something new... Like something that has just surfaced. This was a surprise not only to Macedonians in the Diaspora but also to many Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia. It hit them like they were totally unaware of what the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia have been facing in Greek hands.

This was also a wakeup call for some diplomatic level Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia who were caught with their guard down and who made mistakes in the process of handling the Greek initiated problem.

We, the Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia, have been warning the people in the Republic of Macedonia about what Greece was like but our warnings, it seems, were ignored. For many years we were seen as “complainers” and our complaints have often been ignored. One Macedonian once even said to me “...if I am to believe what you are saying...” when I was describing the abuse we were getting from Greece. “If he was to believe what I was saying...?! What does that even mean? That I was making things up?!”

I found his statement both sad and offensive... But then when Greece placed the crippling economic embargo on the Republic of Macedonia... and they got a real taste of what Greece was like... their tune changed fast...

Let's say that the "Name dispute" sounds like something new... like something that just surfaced... This is only because people are unfamiliar with the so-called "Macedonian Question" and what has been done to the Macedonian people in the last 200 years or so, particularly to the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia.

The Macedonian Question is an old issue which surfaced after the Eastern Crisis ended. The Eastern Crisis was basically a question of what to do with the remnants of a crumbling Ottoman Empire.

The Eastern Crisis ended after the Great Powers decided to create the new national Balkan states Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria out of the crumbling edges of the Ottoman Empire, while leaving Macedonia intact and in the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

And so the Eastern Crisis soon evolved into the "Macedonian Question", of basically what to do with Macedonia and the Macedonian people when the Ottoman Empire was completely driven out of the Balkans.

In the first part of the interview we dealt mostly with the problems that faced the Macedonian people from about early 1800 up to 1913 when Macedonia was annexed by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Basically, according to Great Power plans, the Macedonian question was to be solved by dividing Macedonia between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria and assimilating the Macedonian people in those states.

And as it happened, with Great Power approval, Macedonia was invaded, occupied, partitioned and annexed by Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and later Albania and great attempts were made to turn the Macedonian people into Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians and Albanians.

Unfortunately for the Great Powers and for Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania, the Macedonian people refused to be assimilated and since then, as our history has shown, have resisted.

But that has not stopped or even slowed down the Great Powers, Greece and Bulgaria from continuing the assimilation process to this day.

Simply put, by continuing this assimilation process, the Great Powers are hoping to eventually turn every Macedonian person into a Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, or Albanian and completely erase their existence as Macedonians. But again, unfortunately for them, the Macedonian people are refusing to be erased and to die forever.

The birth of the Republic of Macedonia as an independent state re-energized the Macedonian people's desire to continue with their struggle but at the same time forced the hand of the Great Powers, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and even Serbia, to renew their measures and tactics against them.

The dispute between Macedonia and Greece over the name "Macedonia" is one of those tactics. But I can assure you that this issue has nothing to do with "the name". This is one more step in the 200 year-old journey that Greece and the Great Powers have undertaken to eliminate the Macedonian identity and everything that is Macedonian.

And why do I say this with such certainty?

Well, because for years Greece and its patrons have been trying to extinguish the name "Macedonia". The "M" word was a dirty word in Greece from 1913 up until the Republic of Macedonia was about to declare its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, then the word "Macedonia" became the most precious word in the Greek vocabulary. Why?

Well, this is because at that very moment, given the political situation and world political correctness, Greece had nothing else to hold over Macedonia. That is, nothing else that was not controversial or that could backfire on Greece and its patrons.

In other words, Greece had to find an issue to pick bones with and that issue had to be risk free for Greece but devastating for Macedonia.

And precisely for that reason, Greece and its patrons chose to challenge Macedonia on its “name” claiming that the word “Macedonia” was Greek and so were a number of historic symbols which Greece claimed to also be exclusively Greek.

In other words, Greece and its patrons wanted to stop Macedonia in its tracks by accusing it of “historic theft” and entangle it in a legal tangle that would take years and years to get out of... and all of this for Greece to be risk free.

During our last interview I explained that Greece is a modern and artificial creation and none of the above, not the name “Macedonia” and not the Macedonians symbols, belong to Greece. But in spite of all that and while grasping at straws, Greece and its patrons have managed to not only make an issue out of a non issue but managed to make it look like Macedonia was entangled in an idiotic issue – a dispute over ancient history. And while Greece is telling the world that this is only a dispute about ancient history, it is holding the Macedonian people by the throat and choking them in full view of the entire world.

Let me say that, for the Macedonian people, this is not about “ancient history”; it’s about survival. The Macedonian people are fighting for their survival while Greece is calling it “a theft of ancient history” about which no one cares!

Macedonia is NOT disputing its own name. It is happy with it! Greece is objecting to Macedonia’s name! So this is not a dispute between Greece and Macedonia but an attempt by Greece to again derail the Macedonian people. The Macedonian people are nothing if they are not Macedonians... Neither do they care to be anything but Macedonians. If they did, by now they would all have been Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians, or Albanians.

Like the many times it did before, this is yet another attempt on Greece’s part to put a stumbling block in front of the Macedonian people’s attempts at gaining recognition as a nation. It is an attempt, if not to stop them, to at least to slow them down from making any gains in their struggle for their human rights even in their own

Republic of Macedonia. If Greece and its patrons are doing this to a people in a sovereign and independent state outside of the Greek borders, then can you imagine what they are doing to the Macedonians inside Greece?

Greece wants to mire down and entangle the Macedonian people into a controversy focusing on ridiculous issues while the Macedonian people face a struggle of life and death.

Greece and its patrons have been leading the world into believing the “name dispute” is about something trivial like “ancient history” which, like I said earlier, no one cares about.

Greece and its patrons, on one hand, are telling the world that Macedonia is foolishly “arguing” over ancient symbols and on the other hand are trying to erase the Macedonian identity from the face of the earth.

Greece is leading the Macedonian people to a battleground of its own choice and forcing them to focus their energy on this nonsensical dispute while trying to keep them away from focusing on essential and critical issues such as the rights of the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia and the several genocides they have suffered at the hands of the Greeks and their patrons.

Greece has raised this issue and set the stage because it wants to control its outcome and, as I said earlier, make a trivial issue for the world and a risk free issue for itself. At the same time it wants to focus away from critical issues like the atrocities committed during the Greek Civil War, a staged and genocidal war, orchestrated to drive the Macedonian people out of their homeland. And as I have shown in the previous interview, with British and American approval and support.

The entire Greek argument that “Macedonia is Greek” and everything Macedonian is Greek and that the Macedonians are “Slavs” and have no claim to the Ancient Macedonian heritage, are baseless arguments that hold no water except to draw attention away from the real issues of today.

These are arguments that tell the world that the Macedonians are fighting for stupid things and that this is nothing more than an academic exercise in futility. A way to entangle everyone in endless nonsensical debates and arguments.

Unfortunately, not being aware of this trap, many Macedonians, including diplomats in the Republic of Macedonia, have taken the bait and have been drawn into something that they are finding hard to escape from.

Now, while the Macedonian people are truly fighting to survive, the world thinks they are fighting over something completely stupid.

Instead of us Macedonians challenging Greece on matters of importance to us, we have allowed Greece to lead us by the nose and challenge us on matters that make no sense, except to Greece. On matters like the “name” Macedonia which until yesterday Greece tried to erase from the world map.

Instead of us Macedonians proving evidence to the world of the atrocities committed against us by Greece and its patrons, we have accepted Greece’s challenge to negotiate our own name with them. And what does that really mean? We all knew that until yesterday Greece tried to bury that name. Even foreign academics were not allowed to say “Macedonia” while visiting “northern Greece”. This is how the term ‘the “M” word is a dirty word’ was coined. And now Greece claims “Macedonia” is a proprietary Greek word?

Does anyone see anything wrong with this picture? And yet here we are about to be erased from the face of the earth while negotiating with Greece about something Greece does not even want? What is the value of the “M” word for Greece? It has no value... It is worthless... Greece is only doing this to punish us for wanting to be Macedonians! Like it always has in the past. Ask yourselves, “How many people served lengthy sentences in Greek jails and concentration camps for speaking Macedonian?” Just for speaking the only language they knew! Greece cannot be underestimated on how far it will go to extinguish the Macedonian identity and what extreme as well as ridiculous means it will use!

Greece has set the parameters, controls this game and plans to win with our capitulation... with us committing suicide.

Greece has purposely concocted the so-called “name dispute” game because, no matter how stupid it sounds to the world, it has no consequences for Greece but spells doom for us Macedonians and only because we choose to play it. We CHOOSE to play it!

This is why it is important to know our history well... and understand the issues well... before we jump into any games, especially with Greece and its patrons.

I repeat, this whole “name dispute” was carefully concocted by Greece and its patrons. It was a trap set to trap the Macedonian people into a quagmire of nonsensical issues, debates and arguments from which there is no escape, except if we capitulate... Greece made the rules and controls the game and we Macedonians are playing it. A game we cannot possibly win! What more can I say?

But as I said before, Greece is not alone in this. Its powerful patrons are there, right behind it, stirring the pot and making life difficult for the Macedonian people.

And how do I know this?

Well, where do I begin?

First, allow me to say that nothing of importance, like border changes, new states emerging, prohibiting other states from choosing a name for themselves and so on, ever take place without Great Power approval. Smaller states, especially protectorates like Greece, need Great Power approval and backing in order to survive. So, nothing is done without Great Power knowledge or approval.

As I mentioned earlier, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania were created by the Great Powers and are protected by them. At the same time these states cannot do anything on their own without facing dire consequences and that is why they must consult with their patrons on important matters before taking measures that may have consequences for them. And to take measures against an

independent state, like the Republic of Macedonia, in order to prevent it from choosing its own name, which is legally allowed under international law, has grave consequences.

This means that Greece had to get permission from its patrons in order to act and its patrons must have approved.

But, as I said earlier, the so-called “name dispute” is only one of many Great Power attempts to “get rid” of the Macedonian identity.

There was the Treaty of San Stefano for example, which Russia signed with the Ottoman Empire on March 3, 1878. By this Treaty Russia gave most of Macedonia to Bulgaria without the Macedonian people’s consent and without Western Great Power approval. This Russian stunt unfortunately gave the Bulgarians the idea that Macedonia belongs to them. And like a sailing ship without a rudder, Bulgaria, ever since, has pursued the same course attempting again and again to possess Macedonia at all costs to itself and to the Macedonian people.

Then there was the Berlin Conference during which the Treaty of Berlin was signed in July 1878. The Conference was convened in order to revisit the San Stefano Treaty during which Macedonia was given back to the Ottoman Empire, not only without the Macedonian people’s consent but without any guarantees against Ottoman retribution against the Macedonian population. The Macedonian people were again left to the mercy of the Ottoman Empire.

“The essentials of this compromise were agreed upon between England and Russia before the meeting of the European Congress, which took place at Berlin under the chairmanship of Bismarck, and formally substituted the Treaty of Berlin for the terms of San Stefano” (Page 377, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century)

“To our (British) eyes the real objection to the San Stefano lies not in its alleged increase in Russian power, but in the sacrifice of the fair claims of Greeks and Serbians, who would not have remained long quiet under the arrangements which ignored their racial rights and gave all the points to Bulgaria. Lord Salisbury felt this strongly, especially on behalf of Greece.”

“Beaconsfield’s success, as he himself saw it, consisted in restoring the European power of Turkey. It was done by handing back Macedonia to the Port (Turks), without guarantees for better government. This was the essence of the Treaty of Berlin as distinct from the Treaty of San Stefano. ‘There is again a Turkey in Europe’ Bismarck said. He congratulated the British Prime Minister – ‘You have made a present to the Sultan of the richest province in the world; 4,000 square miles of the richest soil.’ Unfortunately for themselves, the inhabitants went with the soil. Since Beaconsfield decided, perhaps rightly, that Macedonia should not be Bulgarian, some arrangements ought to have been made for its proper administration under a Christian governor. Apart of all questions of massacres, the deadening character of the Turkish rule is well known. Lord Salisbury seems to have wished for a Christian governor, but nothing was done in that direction. A golden opportunity was thus let slip.” (Page 378, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century)

What else can I say? Macedonia and the Macedonian people were already promised to be given to Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria as early as July 1878. Lord Salisbury of England felt this strongly, especially on behalf of Greece. From then on forward it was only a matter of time.

The Macedonian people made a bid to obtain their own Church but were denied. Why? Russia was instrumental in helping the Bulgarians get their Church. Why did they deny the Macedonians?

The Macedonian people pleaded with Russia to help them liberate themselves from the Ottomans during the earlier Uprisings (Kreshna and Razlovtsi). There too they were denied.

No Great Power offered assistance to the Macedonian people before, during or after the 1903 Ilinden Uprising. Ten years later, the same Great Powers sanctioned Macedonia’s partition between Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania by signing the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest.

This proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that not only did the Great Powers remain blind and deaf to the Macedonian people's pleas for help, but they were instrumental in allowing Macedonia to be brutally invaded, occupied, fought over, partitioned and annexed by Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania. They later allowed these states, under dreadful conditions, to assimilate the Macedonian people and turn them into Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians and Albanians and to completely wipe out their identity. I have given you proof of that during our first interview. In Greece, for example, the Macedonian language was banned, people's names were changed and even the Macedonian toponyms, which existed for many centuries, were also eliminated.

And then, during World War II, when the British discovered that Macedonians were still living in Greek occupied Macedonia, Britain and the United States took extraordinary measures to get rid of them by concocting the so-called Greek Civil War. And with Yugoslav help, as I have shown you in our previous interview.

Unfortunately this Great Power effort to bring demise to the Macedonian identity has not stopped. It is alive and well to this day. Proof of this is the "name dispute". Greece could not have possibly "pulled off" the so-called name dispute without British, French and American help.

If the Macedonian people ever decide to change their country's name then it will be a fast slide down the slippery slope...

INTERVIEWER – So, is it your understanding that the name dispute has reached a stalemate? And no progress can be made beyond this point?

RISTO – Yes. Given that we are in discussion with Greece or "negotiating" our name with Greece as it is called, given that Greece has nothing to lose if these so-called negotiations go on forever, and given that Greece is encouraged by the Great Powers to continue these name negotiations, then yes we have reached a stalemate.

INTERVIEWER – What proof do you have that the Great Powers, the United States for example, are supporting Greece in this?

RISTO – First, let me say that no Great Power, not even the United States will do anything that does not support its current or future interests.

Second, Greece alone could not have influenced the United Nations to refuse Macedonia's entry into the UN by the name "Macedonia". This was done at a level of which Greece had absolutely no control. Only a super power like the United States could have convinced the United Nations Security Council to deny Macedonia its entry into the UN. This was done to a point where the United Nations broke its own rules, the coveted December 10, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees people their human rights including the right to choose a name for their country. This rule was broken when the UN refused to register Macedonia under its chosen name. Do you think Greece alone has that kind of power?

You can't simply say that "Greece objected to Macedonia's use of the name Macedonia" and that the majority of state representatives in the UN Security Council simply blindly acted on Greece's objection. If the US, Britain and France wanted Macedonia to enter the UN as "Macedonia" then they would have challenged Greece, carefully examined its objection and would have found it to be trivial and downright "stupid".

Look, when the conflict in Kosovo turned into a full scale war there were fears, especially from Serbia, that Kosovo was going to separate. But the United States reassured the world that "no borders would change in the Balkans" because the region was much too volatile. Then, about six months later, the United States was the first country in the world to declare Kosovo independent! Do you think Serbia did not object to that? Serbia certainly did! Why then didn't the United States act on the Serbian objection? Serbia objected all right... and was severely punished for it.

Kosovo was created because it was done in the interests of the United States. Greece's objection to Macedonia joining the UN by its proper name, which gave birth to the so-called "name dispute", was also done in the interests of the United States. That is why it was fully supported by the United States.

INTERVIEWER – So what do you think needs to be done to break the stalemate in the name dispute?

RISTO – Well, let us have a look at the possibilities. Two things are possible. One, any one of the two states, Macedonia or Greece, can exit the talks or two, the talks can continue indefinitely until one of the states gives in to the demands of the other, which is not likely to happen.

Greece is not likely to “exit” the talks because it believes it has Macedonia in a good stranglehold and there are no better options available to it at the moment.

Macedonia “cannot” exit the talks because it will have to admit that it made mistakes by entering the talks in the first place which can be unforgiving. So, if Macedonia cannot exit the talks, it means that under this option, the “name negotiations” will continue indefinitely or until something drastic happens.

Another important thing to mention here is that Macedonia has no better prospects if it exits the talks. If it leaves the talks then what choices does it have? Stand alone in the world? Apply again to the United Nations?

If it stays neutral and alone Macedonia opens itself to attacks from basically all its neighbours. It will be 1913 all over again. The Bulgarians are ready to make claims on Macedonia on account that they feel the Macedonian people and the Macedonian language are Bulgarian. The Albanians, through the 2001 war, have already made bids to claim Macedonian territory with American blessings. Greece has already declared that Macedonia is Greek and will not hesitate to gain more Macedonian territory. And Serbia, Serbia is still hanging onto the Macedonian Church claiming that it belongs to Serbia. So, the vultures are circling and waiting for such an opportunity.

If, on the other hand, Macedonia exits the talks and goes back to the UN with the same proposition, it will again not only be rejected but punished for leaving the so-called “UN sponsored name negotiations”. The United States will make sure that happens.

So, even though a lot of Macedonians are calling on Macedonia to exit the “name negotiations”, including many Diaspora organizations, they have not thought this through very carefully.

If Macedonia exits the talks it will face an unpredictable outcome which could be worse than the current predicament it is in. But by continuing the “name negotiations”, Macedonia, at least in principle, has some control over its destiny and is familiar with what is at stake. All it has to do is endure. It’s the Macedonian thing after all... If it exits then its future becomes grey and unpredictable because the Great Powers still have a “thing” for us Macedonians.

Allow me at this point to summarize Macedonia’s options and possible outcomes with the “name negotiations”. Macedonia basically has three options:

1. Change its name. End result Macedonia commits suicide.
2. Macedonia exits talks. End result Macedonia becomes isolated and open to unpredictable outcomes, possibly occupation and further partition.
3. Macedonia continues with talks. End result status quo, talks continue forever with no results. Macedonia is kept out of world institutions.

All three outcomes are bad for Macedonia and good for Greece and its patrons.

INTERVIEWER – In your second option, Macedonia leaving the talks, you said Macedonia will become isolated and open to unpredictable outcomes. That’s kind of a vague explanation; can you elaborate for us what you mean by that?

RISTO – I should have explained myself better because this is very important for Macedonia’s future. There are several factors at play here. One, if Macedonia leaves the talks then what are its options? Macedonia has no options because those who control the talks also control its options. Let’s face it, Macedonia is not allowed to join

the UN by its proper name because its patrons and Greece, as the front man, don't want it to join. If, for example, one of those patrons is the United States, a powerful UN member and a member of the Security Council, then it has control over all of Macedonia's options and no matter what Macedonia attempts to join it will be rejected, for one reason or another, with demands to change its name first. If it leaves the talks Macedonia will be isolated.

Two, if Macedonia leaves the talks voluntarily it will be told: "First you wanted to talk, we decided to help you, now you changed your mind and you don't want to talk... If you don't want to talk then you are on your own...solve your problem on your own..." And how is Macedonia going to solve this "problem" on its own when this "problem" was specifically created from the outside to "paralyze" Macedonia? It can't. Being on its own with no International help Macedonia will become vulnerable. Greece or perhaps Bulgaria, Serbia, or Albania, or all of them, might decide to invade Macedonia if such an opportunity arose, and no one is going to help it because Macedonia chose to solve its "problem" on its own.

But as long as the "name talks" are ongoing they are ongoing under UN auspices and no one from the outside can touch Macedonia. And this is exactly how Greece and its patrons want it. They want the situation to continue this way until Macedonia is destabilized from the inside. They know Macedonia will not change its name and they know they have it cornered. The 2001 War was not a coincidence and neither were events like postponing and missing elections, not having done a proper census and so on. And have you noticed all these 'negative' events taking place lately? They have occurred with outside interference, mainly from the United States. That is why we must move forward cautiously and with our eyes fully open.

The one thing that the Macedonian people can do, however, which they have not done well so far, is to sway world public opinion. Macedonians need to make their side of the story well known and public knowledge worldwide.

There are many things done to Macedonia and to the Macedonian people over the years which the world public is not aware of and at this point in time Macedonia must close that gap. Macedonia must

tell the world its side of the story. It must tell the world what the so-called “name dispute” is truly about. This will definitely influence public opinion and level the playing field.

Greece had access to the world for two hundred years and has filled the halls of public opinion with its lies and treachery... and that with the blessing of the Great Powers.

Now that we have been cornered in a blind alley and are fighting for our survival, we Macedonians can no longer remain silent and must stand up and tell the world our side of the story. Tell the world everything... and spare nothing. That’s what I believe should be our next step in our struggle as a Macedonian people.

Greece should be publicly challenged, not at the diplomatic level, but in the public forum. It has to be challenged about what it has done to the Macedonian people. Macedonians need to emphasize that Greece has prohibited Macedonians from speaking the Macedonian language; Greece has fined people and sent them to prison for speaking Macedonian, the only language they knew!

Think about this very carefully and tell me how you would feel if your government one day told you “you can’t speak English any more”! It is illegal for you to speak English, the only language you know!”

It is mind blowing isn’t it?! Yet we Macedonians have lived through that and still have chosen to be silent!

My father was sent to jail in the Greek concentration camps for five years and Greece never had the decency to tell him why. He had done nothing wrong! Many Macedonians, by the thousands, were sent to the Greek concentration camps for having done nothing wrong. And yet I have not seen a single complaint about this anywhere. Didn’t the Americans, the British and the French politicians and diplomats know about all this? Of course they knew! And what did they do stop it? NOTHING!

And if we Macedonians don’t speak up about the atrocities committed against us who will? The Americans? Which Americans?

The American government? The American government, in large part, was responsible for the genocide committed against us during the Greek Civil War. They were the ones who tried to destroy us.

The American public? The American public doesn't even know where Macedonia is, never mind what has been done to the Macedonian people!? And whose fault is that? Ours, of course, because we failed to inform them. We have failed to inform the entire world public.

Now I hope you can appreciate why I am advocating for pushing this interview and for "telling the world our side of the story"!

INTERVIEWER – What else can the Macedonian people do to advance the Macedonian cause and make all these problems known to the world?

RISTO – Well, the Macedonian people need to learn their own history first before they can tell it to others. But how can they? Up until 1991, before the Republic of Macedonia became an independent state, we were under the influence of foreign powers. Someone else taught us our history, someone else, whose interests were anti-Macedonian, told us who we were and what kind of people we are. And I can tell you it wasn't a pretty picture.

Do you know how many times I have been told that "Macedonians don't exist" and that I am nothing more than a "dirty Slav"?

But I have accepted not only who I am but also the demonic force that is behind this campaign to destroy my identity. I have learned as much as I can about my history, about who I am, and what is happening to our people... and I am ready for the challenge!

I would never be caught dead debating with a Greek because I know the cards are stacked against me and because, to this day, I have never found a single reasonable Greek who is willing to hear my side of the story.

Here is what Vladimir Ivanovski, a Macedonian language Professor, had to say about the Greeks:

“...many shocking testimonies of suffering, horror and repression have surfaced which speak about the Macedonian people in the hands of the Greeks. With their omnipotent low malevolent experiments, procedures and organized acts in continuity, the Greeks with the same intensity in all periods, have a single aim: to assimilate and destroy everything that is Macedonian, with the pronounced sustainability of Greek Phanariot dramatism, egoistic-racist attacks on everything that is not Greek. The Greeks employ Machiavellian aggressive aspirations towards everything foreign like it is automatically and deservingly theirs. For generations the persistent Greek gene has been coded with trends for counterfeiting, lying, stealing, hypocrisy and pretense. One time, the famous first century Roman, Juvenal said that the deceptive Greece is capable of forging its own history...”

The only way to win against Greeks is to NOT let them lead you! Macedonians must choose their own battlegrounds and not allow the Greeks to draw them into nonsensical debates like “ancient history”. The Greeks must be drawn out and made accountable for what they have done to the Macedonian people, not because of insinuations that the Macedonian people might be “Slavs”, or not because of insinuations that the Macedonian people might exist or not, but because the Macedonian people are people first and Macedonians second. The Macedonian people have been violated as a people regardless of what ethnicity or nationality they are. The December 10, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees people their human rights, is very clear on that.

Did the Greek state prohibit the Macedonian people from speaking the Macedonian language or not? If they did, and we all know they did, then the Greeks are guilty of having violated the December 10, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and for that they must be publicly and loudly exposed! The Greeks must be held accountable for what they did and it is up to us to bring them to justice.

This is only one example of the many kinds of measures the Macedonian people must undertake while the so-called “name dispute” is still ongoing. The people of the world must be told what we are struggling for and, at the same time, what Greece is doing to stop us. That’s the least we can do for ourselves.

The Macedonian people need to clearly inform the world that their human rights have been violated and that the so-called “name dispute” is yet another violation. They must tell the world that the “name dispute” has a different meaning for the Macedonian people than it has for Greece. The world needs to know that by negotiating with Greece over our name, the Macedonian people are in fact fighting for their survival. Then perhaps this “Greek tragedy” will take a different turn.

Without a clear understanding of what the underlying issues are we sound like barking dogs, barking away at every little thing. That is why it is important for the world to understand that our problems are real.

Greece over the years, with its lies and deceit, has made us out to be the villains and itself the victim, when clearly we are the victims and it is the villain. Unfortunately the world doesn’t know that... yet.

Given the circumstances in which we find ourselves in the world today, we don’t have much to offer in terms of resistance, especially since “public opinion” is against us because Greece has made sure that public opinion is against us, so the least we can do is sway public opinion to our side. The truth is on our side.

Public opinion can be a powerful tool. Just take a look at what the Jews have done with it and the success they had in promoting their genocide. We can do the same.

INTERVIEWER – And how do you propose to go about “exposing” Greece for what it has done to the Macedonian people?

RISTO – We must do what every good lawyer does. Prepare our case carefully and comprehensively, but not to take Greece to a court of law but to take Greece to the court of public opinion. There

are volumes and volumes of information that detail our tragic narrative. All we have to do is organize it in a comprehensive way and present it in a summary. The best way to present it today is through the internet and social media.

I am doing as much as I can to inform the English speaking Macedonians so they too can learn about our tragedies. The Macedonian people in the Diaspora are our ambassadors to the outside world and must be engaged in this.

Every opportunity must be exploited to present our case. Every time the media makes an incorrect reference to our identity we need to jump on it, inform the medium and give its people a lesson as to why we object. Greece does this every day by using lies and deceit, why can't we do it using the truth?

We can do television ads, purchase editorials in newspapers and so on. The possibilities are endless if we can muster the will and the resources. Let the Greeks attack us and let's see how far they will get with their racist ways!

Is Greece going to deny, for example, that it outlawed the Macedonian language? How is Greece going to explain what it did without looking racist and chauvinistic? And who is going to side with Greece?

This is precisely what needs to be done for every single wrong that Greece has committed against the Macedonian people. We can start with a few issues, the ones that relate to the so-called "name dispute" and prove to the world that this is not a "dispute over the name" but an attempt to rob the Macedonian people of their right to exist as Macedonians.

Explain to the world the risks that the Macedonian people are taking while they are negotiating their own name with Greece and the consequences that may befall them if they pull out of the negotiations.

Prove to the world that Greece does not care about the name and is only interested in "extinguishing" the Macedonian identity.

Someone also needs to have a frank talk with the United States and find out why it is targeting Macedonia and the Macedonian people. What have the Macedonian people done to upset the United States? It would not hurt to know what the United States has to say. Perhaps there is something we can do as a people to alleviate American concerns without losing our sovereignty.

INTERVIEWER – This all sounds good but who is going to do it, the Macedonian government?

RISTO – We all have to play a role in it. Everyone who is interested in Macedonia’s survival must take part, including the Macedonian government. The first step before doing anything, however, is to become informed. Become familiar and understand the problem. We all need to learn and understand the real issues associated with this so-called “name dispute”. Nothing can be taken for granted no matter how silly or preposterous it might sound. Greece and its patrons had 200 years to prepare for this. Did you know that the United States has a 100 year plan? It does!

INTERVIEWER – Earlier you mentioned that “the name” is not the real issue between Greece and Macedonia. In your opinion then what is the real issue and can you define it for us? How does it all work?

RISTO – It’s easy for me to define the “issue” because I am familiar with Greece, what Greece is doing and how Greece operates in general. And nothing about Greece is as it seems. This is why it is very important to know both Macedonian and Greek history. It is important to know who the Greeks are, what they want and how they have gone about to get it.

You must also appreciate the fact that the Greeks will not come out and tell you the truth as to what they really want and how they will try and get it. This is because the methods they use are unacceptable in today’s societies around the world.

First, let me say that Greece is an artificially created state, created to serve Great Power interests. There is no doubt about that.

“Canning (a British politician, 1812-1862) had planned to head off Russia’s advance, not by direct opposition, but by associating her with England and France in a policy of emancipation, aimed at erecting national States out of the component parts of the Turkish Empire. Such States could be relied upon to withstand Russian encroachment on their independence, if once they were set free from the Turk. The creation of the Kingdom of Greece was the immediate outcome of Canning’s policy.” (Page 372, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century)

Second, Greece has two histories, a mythology created by outsiders to serve its existence as a Greek nation-state and a real history of its people as former Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Macedonians and other ethnic people who lived on the soil of today’s Greece and who were assimilated over the years. And let me say that the Greeks are not who they say they are. They are not a direct extension from the so-called Ancient Greeks. Also, the so-called “Ancient Greeks” were neither pure nor Greeks at all but have been lumped together as Greeks to conveniently support the existence of the Modern Greek nation state. So, in summary the Modern Greeks are not who they say they are and the “Ancient Greeks” are not properly represented in today’s mainstream history. It is important to understand that!

So, what is modern Greece then, and who are the Modern Greeks?

Like I said before, Greece and the Greeks are an artificial creation created by assimilating the local ethnicities such as the Vlachs, Albanians, Turks, Macedonians, Roma and every other ethnic group that lived in the geographical region of today’s Greece. Since the Greeks did not exist before their state was created in 1828 there could be no Greek history before that. So, their history before that is an artificial creation, just like their identity. The people who lived in today’s Greece were told by outsiders they are now Greeks. They were assimilated into the new Greek nation, some forcefully, as was the case in Macedonia.

So then “How could the name Macedonia belong to Greece” when Greece did not exist before 1828 AD?

This is why one cannot believe Greek claims to history before Greece's 1828 creation, because all these claims are false. These people that we today call Greeks were not Greeks at all until 1828... before that they were Vlachs, Albanians, Turks, Macedonians, etc.

Now let us have a look at who the Macedonians are. The Macedonians, until the People's Republic of Macedonia was created on August 2, 1944, were an ethnic nation without a state. They have a history and a culture that extends back many centuries and lived in ethnic Macedonia and beyond, as was defined before it was partitioned in 1913.

The Macedonian people fought in many uprisings including in the Ilinden 1903 National Uprising, in an attempt to free themselves from the Ottoman Empire and to create their own independent Macedonian national state. Unfortunately the Great Powers did not want that and allowed the newly created Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria to invade Macedonia, occupy it and in 1913 partition it and assimilate the Macedonian people into the Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian and later Albanian fold. The assimilation process was forceful and brutal and not all Macedonians were assimilated.

Macedonia and the Macedonians occupied by Serbia in 1913, as I mentioned earlier, created their own state in 1944 under the Yugoslav federation. Then in 1991 they broke away from Yugoslavia and declared their independence initiating the Republic of Macedonia.

So as an independent state the Republic of Macedonia now had the potential of exposing many things about Greece and about its patrons. For example;

1. That Greece is an artificial creation and has nothing to do with the ancient Greeks and most of those so-called ancient Greeks were actually Ancient Macedonians with their own unique identity and culture and they never belonged to the Ancient City States from whom the Modern Greeks claim ancestry.

2. Macedonia might potentially inform the world of how Greece acquired part of Macedonia and how it has brutally treated the Macedonian people in its quest to become homogeneous.

3. Macedonia might demand that Greece recognize the Macedonian people living in Greece and compensate them for the damages Greece has caused them.

4. Macedonia might prove to the world that Greece acquired Macedonian territories by war and by imperial means from a people who did not want to be occupied, which could lead to grave consequences for Greece and for the Great Powers who awarded the Macedonian territories and people to Greece.

5. Macedonia might prove to the world that Greece mistreated the Macedonian people it acquired and forcibly tried to assimilate them causing several genocides in the process, which might lead to many lawsuits against Greece.

6. Macedonia might demand of Greece to restore illegally acquired properties confiscated from the exiled Macedonians, which could also lead to huge reparations for Greece.

These are only a small sample of what might happen if Macedonia is recognized internationally and allowed to join the International Community.

So, Greece and its patrons had to think of something fast to stop Macedonia in its tracks.

I believe Greece and its patrons were not prepared for Macedonia's separation from Yugoslavia because they believed Yugoslavia would not allow it. They also believed that the Macedonian people were incapable of living independently without Serbian support.

So here is the "real" issue. Macedonia wants to become an independent state. It wants to join the other independent states in the world. But because of fears, as I have shown above, Greece and its patrons don't want an independent Macedonia.

INTERVIEWER – And who are Greece’s patrons today?

RISTO – The United States of America, Britain and France; the very same states which today dominate the United Nations Security Council and tackle international issues including the so-called “name negotiations”, Macedonia’s entry into the United Nations, Macedonia’s entry into the European Union, NATO and so on. In other words, they decide if Macedonia can enter these international organizations or not... and they decide whether Greece’s “objections” are reasonable or not.

As I said earlier, Greece and its patrons had to think of something fast that was not only devastating for Macedonia but risk free for themselves. This is why they “concocted” the so-called “name dispute” and stopped Macedonia in its tracks.

I hope I have answered your question.

INTERVIEWER – You have. But the more I hear about this the more I believe that you are right. You really need to understand not only the issues but also the entire history. The Greeks and their patrons, as you call them, had taken measures in this to protect themselves and their interests. Do you think you can win?

RISTO – Yes, we can win but we need to challenge Greece and its patrons in the public forum and expose what they are doing. The truth is a powerful weapon... and, should we choose to use it we can stop them and we can win... or be obliterated. I always go back to the example of the “flat earth” theory when the entire world believed the earth was flat until a few people pointed to the truth... Now no one believes the earth is flat...

INTERVIEWER – On several occasions you have mentioned that the Macedonians were “assimilated” by Greece and made into Greeks. How does that work?

RISTO – Well, I have to take you back in history and show you what was done that may be considered “assimilation”, but first let’s define what we mean by that.

According to the Oxford English dictionary the word “assimilate” means “absorb or be absorbed, people into larger group, make alike, become similar to next...”

But in the case of Greece assimilating the Macedonian people, the process was applied by completely stripping away the Macedonian consciousness from the Macedonian people and then replacing it with an artificial Greek consciousness. In other words the Greeks “prohibited” the Macedonians from being Macedonian and “forced” them to be Greeks.

Well, historically the Greeks first attempted to convince the Macedonians that they were Greeks by using propaganda in the Greek educational system. This was just before and after a part of Macedonia was annexed by Greece in 1913. When that did not work the Greek state erased their names and gave them Greek names. It also erased all Macedonian toponyms, hydronyms and every Macedonian landmark in existence that would remind them that they were Macedonians and replaced them with Greek ones. This was done during and after the 1920s. When that failed, the Greek authorities banned the Macedonian language and made it illegal to be spoken. This was done in the 1930s. When that failed the Greeks punished the Macedonians with castor oil, salty fish, beatings, jail sentences, evictions and death. This was done during the Metaxas dictatorship. When that failed the Greeks perpetrated genocide in order to exterminate and exile the Macedonian people en masse. This was done during the Greek Civil War.

Today the Greeks and their patrons are attempting to stop the Republic of Macedonia from joining the International community. And if they succeed, that is if the Macedonian side makes a mistake to either exit the so-called “name negotiations” or to change Macedonia’s name, then the Republic of Macedonia will again become a victim of imperial aspirations just like Macedonia did in 1912, 1913. And no one is more ready and ravenous to take advantage of that situation than its own neighbours the Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians and Albanians, to name a few.

Those Macedonians who chose to become assimilated not only had to forger their Macedonian identity but also had to accept a foreign,

alien and fictitious identity. They became Greeks, descendants of the ancient Greeks with a glorious historic past that extended back five thousand years. Unfortunately it was all fake!

Bizarre isn't it?

INTERVIEWER – What does it mean to you to be Macedonian? Given what has been done to the Macedonian people why would you still want to be Macedonian? Why not Greek?

RISTO – It is a curse to be Macedonian isn't it? What else can I be? I am Macedonian, that's what I am. I am not going to lie to myself, to my friends, to my family, to my children, to my grandchildren and tell them that I am not Macedonian when that's what I am. What kind of a person would I be if I did that? Would you do that? And why should I do it... to please a nation that itself does not know what it is? No, I would not want to be anything other than what I am and I am Macedonian. That was ingrained in me since I was very young and that's what I am.

I share with my fellow Macedonians a common past, a common history, a common culture, a common language, common customs, common beliefs and all the torment and pain that the Macedonian people have endured...

What could I possibly share with the Greeks? Their dead language?! Their glorious artificial Ancient Greek heritage? Their mythical history? How can I do that when I know it's all fake?!

Let me tell you a little story that made me think about why I am Macedonian and why I am proud to be Macedonian. A few years back a new batch of five Macedonian army officers arrived in Base Borden, here in Canada for a four and a half month course to learn English.

The day after they arrived I went to see them. I had never met any of them before. After I welcomed them and had a bit of a discussion with them, a younger officer, a lieutenant, said to me "Uncle Risto", he called me "uncle" out of respect, "I have just met you and only knew you for twenty minutes but I feel like I have known you all my

life...” I looked at him and did not know what to say. He made such an impression on me that I still think of his words to this day. I came from Greek occupied Macedonia and basically grew up in Canada. He was born in Prilep and had never been out of Macedonia all his life, and yet here we were in Canada sharing something sacred. This is what it means to be Macedonian! Can I do that with a Greek? I don't think so! A Greek will loath me and look down on me and, given a chance, will insult me by saying “you are a worthless Slav”! And no matter how hard I try to be a Greek I can never measure up because I will always be a “filthy Slav” to them; to be loathed... Even the most staunch Greko-phils have experienced this.

INTERVIEWER – Interesting! But I want to get back to the name dispute and I want to ask you if what happened in 2001 with the Albanians... if that is somehow connected to the name dispute? I have read somewhere in your articles that you think there is a connection. Is there one?

RISTO – Yes. But to understand what it is you have to look at the big picture; that the Great Powers still want the Macedonian identity to disappear.

Let us look at the “problem” from a higher point of view. I will make it simple. Ask yourself: “Is the United States for or against Macedonia?”

If you say it is “for” Macedonia, like many people believe, then why did it instigate and allow the 2001 war to take place and why did it aid and protect the Albanian side? And why did it do everything in its diplomatic power to humiliate Macedonia?

Let me say that the United States did everything in its power to assist the Albanians because it wanted to partner with them for something. Let's say for now that I don't know what that something is, but it did partner with the Albanians to the detriment of the Macedonians.

The United States has made absolutely no effort to “help” Macedonia get out of this so-called “name dispute” but, on the other hand, it has made every effort to keep Macedonia from moving

forward by insisting that Macedonia negotiate its own name as a pre-condition...

Yes, I would say all these problems Macedonia is experiencing are due to the mixed signals coming out of Washington and Brussels. In other words, the Republic of Macedonia is on its own and the vultures are circling, waiting for it to make a mistake and its 1913 all over again. In other words, nothing has changed in the last 200 years and its still up to us to shape our own destiny. And if we make a mistake, like we did in 1903 and in 1946, we will suffer another devastating setback! Are we going to quit trying? I don't think so!

The name dispute with Greece, the Church dispute with Serbia, the Macedonian language and identity dispute with Bulgaria and the territorial dispute with Albania are part and parcel of the same dispute; someone high up wants us to disappear as Macedonians! Why? I don't know.

INTERVIEWER – So, do you think it will be the end of the Macedonian identity if the Macedonian people decide to change the name of your country?

RISTO – Yes! But only for the short term... Macedonians will never give up being Macedonians and, as we have seen, they can't be forced to. There is no one in the world who tried as hard as Greece to change us, or I should say extinguish us, yet we are still here... So, now the powers to be are trying to squeeze us to voluntarily commit suicide. But that's not going to work either. Eventually the winds of fortune will favour us and we will get back on track. All we have to do is endure... And as I learned from my elders, enduring is the Macedonian way.

INTERVIEWER – Why do you think you are so staunch and stubborn?

RISTO – Do you think we are? And here I thought we were not stubborn enough and not firm enough and that is why we are being pushed around by basically everyone in the world... and so openly.

You are right. We are stubborn but also pliable... Flexible to bend but not to break... This is what has kept us alive for many centuries. If you examine our history you will find that we needed to be flexible to survive because each time we came out firm and strong we were cut down and beaten to pulp. We are like the water pulled down by gravity. We go around hard objects and wear them down over time. We have been doing this for so long it has become part of our genetic makeup. And I believe this is our strength... it has allowed us to survive... to endure and to never lose hope...

INTERVIEWER – Do you think your personal work has helped your cause?

RISTO – I see myself as part of our struggle but I cannot compare my contribution to the sacrifices so many Macedonians made, including giving their lives, to keep our struggle going. I am doing what I can under the circumstances. I am doing what I believe is right under today's conditions and that is to educate the Macedonian people on their past so that they can be more prepared to face the future. The first step to doing anything is "knowing" how to do it. I have also been trying hard to warn the Macedonian people of the historic traps we have fallen into in the past in hopes that we can avoid them in the future. In fact this entire interview is about that.

INTERVIEWER – Many times you have mentioned that there is some sort of conspiracy on the part of the Great Powers, as you call them, to get rid of the Macedonian identity. I know you explained your historic experiences with them but you have not explained why the Great Powers want you gone?

RISTO – That is the million dollar question I cannot answer, about which I can only speculate.

I can tell you that the Romans divided Macedonia into four parts because they were afraid of the Macedonian people rising up against them.

“In June 197 BC, at Cynoscephalae in Thessaly, the unbeaten Macedonian army came face to face with the Roman legions. With a massed charge the Macedonian phalanx gave the Romans a

terrifying battle which they would never forget. During the first charge the Macedonians were successful and won. It was a horrific spectacle for the battle-hardened Romans, who for the first time had made serious contact with the Macedonian phalanx.

After the catastrophic battle at Cynoscephalae, Philip V rebuilt his military and replenished his losses but Perseus was still unwilling to go to war. From 171 to 168 BC he remained on the defensive and committed only to minor engagements, all the while hoping that a peaceful settlement could be reached.

The four year war (Third Macedonian War) came to a climax on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 168 BC when the Romans marched en masse northward and met the Macedonian army at Pydna in southern Macedonia.

In the style of his predecessors, Perseus struck first by unleashing the full might of the Macedonian phalanx. This was not the usual phalanx. It was reinforced with spears all round like a hedgehog, especially at the flanks. ‘Aemilius Paullus, a veteran commander, declared afterwards that this advance was the most terrifying thing he had ever witnessed’ ...” (Page 430, Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age*)

According to Livy, Macedonia was divided into four regions, each with its own Roman council, and was forced to pay half the tribute to Rome.

All I can tell you now is that Macedonia was again divided in 1913... but I don't know why. I don't believe it was an “historic” coincidence... I believe the Macedonian people hold the key to many things about which an entire encyclopedia can be written... most of which have been attributed to the so-called “Ancient Greeks” and “medieval Bulgarians”, including the knowledge built up in Alexandria in Egypt and on Mount Athos (Sveta Gora), Christianity being introduced to Eastern Europe, the Cyrillic Script, the Slavic language and many, many other things. I believe some people want these things to be forgotten forever. And they will be if Macedonia is prevented from rising again. I believe it is Macedonia's destiny to rise up again and take its place among the nations in this world. And it is only a matter of time. I also believe

all these wrongly attributed things will eventually be revealed and correctly attributed to the Macedonian people.

INTERVIEWER – But before Macedonia “rises up again” as you put it, it has to overcome its current problems. Is that even possible?

RISTO – The Macedonian people were looking forward to possibly re-uniting Macedonia culturally through the opening of the European borders, through the Republic of Macedonia joining the European Union and sharing open borders with Greece, Bulgaria and eventually Albania when it joined the European Union. But, as we have seen, it seems someone, very powerful, doesn’t want Macedonia to join any international institutions. That someone, it seems, wants Macedonia to stay isolated. But until when? Until Macedonia is destabilized from the inside?

We Macedonians have a lot of historic baggage that needs to be unpacked and sorted out before anything can happen. I believe this baggage to some extent is holding us back. We need to define what this baggage is at the outset and up front. For example the Macedonian people were wronged many times by several countries over the years. These countries don’t know what we are going to do once we join the international world but they need to know if we expect them to support us... or not.

Today they are not prepared to deal with us under the current circumstances. And unless we clearly define what we expect from them in the future, they will not deal with us and will try to suppress us. Are we going to sue Greece, for example, for damages? If we are then we had better define up front what these damages are. If we are not then we had better let Greece know up front.

We need to take the first step and clearly state our conditions. What do we expect from them? List these conditions so that these countries, against which we have conditions, can be informed up front. This will serve a couple of purposes. One, let these countries know what our intentions are and two, let the world know that we have grievances against them.

Also, let us not be naïve and assume they are going to let us in without us making many compromises. But last time we walked in without any pre-defined conditions they defined the conditions for us. Every country will do everything it can to protect its own interests. And since we walked in with nothing they basically asked for our “unconditional surrender” and so we fell into that trap.

I am sure most countries in the world, outside the United States, Britain, France, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania, would have looked at our situation differently had we publicly offered our side of the story up front and made our conditions for joining the UN, for example, very clear before submitting our application for membership. But we didn't do that. Why? Because we were threatened by the Greek Embargo, for example, which made us feel insecure and from fear that the Yugoslav army might return. We rushed to the UN unprepared and were caught off guard.

What I am saying may sound ridiculous - Macedonians making demands on countries we expect to help us join the UN for example, knowing full well that they won't, but these countries are not the only countries in the world that we need to convince. It is to our advantage to be up front with our intentions and let the world know who we are, what was done to us and what we expect.

The United States, Britain, France, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania for example will not help us no matter what we do, so we need to stop trying to convince them and carry on with our long-term plans by going around them and making our story known to everyone else.

The United States, Britain, France, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania for example want us where we are today. They know we won't change our name and they have got us where they want us, in a never ending limbo negotiating our name; something that is non-negotiable. And they will have no problem doing this until they destabilize us from the inside, which is taking place as we speak.

We haven't even sat down as Macedonians to decide what we want to do. The Jews did this after World War II. Before launching a lawsuit against Germany they sat down and discussed their problems

in an open forum. The Israeli government invited every single Jewish organization and individual, worldwide, to register its complaints and when all that information was compiled the lawsuit was launched and it was very successful.

On top of that we need to ask ourselves, for example, how important is it for us to join all these international organizations and how much are we willing to sacrifice for joining them. Once we do that then we basically have a measure and a basis for “negotiating” with the UN for example. Right now we have nothing. We have not defined our limits, or “red lines” as the Greeks like to call them, or any conditions, yet here we are “negotiating”. Negotiating what? Our demise?

Worse than that is the fact that our politicians are not even given any guidelines acceptable to the people on how far they are allowed to maneuver. And every time these “name negotiations” come up, we all sit on pins and needles praying that our politicians will not make any more compromises and, God forbid, any more mistakes.

Our politicians have already made enough mistakes, big mistakes, especially when they blindly entered the never ending “name negotiations” and put the Macedonian people in jeopardy and in a lose-lose situation.

Right now they (the United States, Britain, France, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania) are asking us to “voluntarily change our name” knowing that we will never do that! So, where does that leave us?

In limbo and most of the world does not even know why, this is because of our failure to inform it, to come up with our demands... with our narrative.

And if we do change the name of our country then what happens? That too is undefined and very dangerous with grave consequences. First off we will be erasing the Republic of Macedonia off the map. That part of Macedonia will become an “undefined” entity and separate from the rest of Macedonia. The next thing that will happen is that the same people who demanded that we change our name will

demand that we change our identity. They will argue that we cannot possibly be Macedonians if our country is not Macedonia. If you think this is “ridiculous” then is this more ridiculous than saying “you can’t use the name Macedonian because the word ‘Macedonia’ is Greek?” Nothing is ridiculous and nothing can be discounted!

And if we are not Macedonians how then can we make any claims to what is Macedonian? We can’t!

So, it is very important right now to make our move and register our wishes, complaints, grievances, demands, etc., with the United Nations and let the world know what we intend to do in the future and against whom we have grievances. But before we do that we need to first bring every single Macedonian on board with all this so that we have a united and common front for moving forward. We need to move forward, we can’t wait for things to happen on their own. Let us go to plan B if plan A is not working.

We need to make a comprehensive list of grievances that need to be addressed regardless of whether they are viable or not, regardless of whether they are acceptable or not. All they need to be is factual. Once we do that then we have a definition of our starting point for negotiations.

Unfortunately we missed our opportunity to do this before and now we are stuck in limbo negotiating our name. But it is not too late...

Once we compile our list of demands we can add it as an addendum to the so-called “name negotiations” and at the same time start a worldwide information campaign telling the world our story and the problems we are facing, both historical and current, as well as the diplomatic infractions committed against us as we speak, and let the world be our judge and the judge of those who put us in this predicament.

The only thing we need is “willpower” and to be brave enough to do it. That is my opinion on this matter.

INTERVIEWER – In other words, you are proposing that the Macedonian people initiate a public campaign to air out their

grievances. Is that correct? What makes you think the world cares about you?

RISTO – Yes, I am proposing that we start a public campaign to let the world know what has been done to us. We need to do this in order to move forward. And yes, you are correct that no one might care but it is better than doing nothing. That is why it is important to properly prepare such a campaign and make our plight public knowledge regardless of whether the general public cares or not. The general public can't do anything for us directly anyway but Greece and its patrons may have to act in a proactive manner in order to save their own images from being tarnished. I am sure people in this world, neutral countries in particular, will react differently towards us once they find out what has been done to us. They may even see our struggle with the so-called name dispute in a different light...

INTERVIEWER – So, basically, from what you are saying, you have two options available to you to continue from here on forward. Is that correct?

RISTO - Yes, but none of them are viable for us. We can quit the so-called “name negotiations”, or we can continue with them... Thus far those have been our options.

Quitting the name negotiations, something that I had been asking for in the past... that is before I thought about it carefully, will bring us nowhere closer to where we want to be. In fact it will tell the world that perhaps we were wrong...? And if we were wrong about that then how many other things were we wrong about? Also, if we quit the name negotiations the UN, US and other powers will wash their hands of us and say you are on your own now. And without “involvement” from the International Community we can't be sure what will happen to us in the future. Will we be open to intrigue from our neighbours? Most likely!

But, while negotiating our “name” with Greece under the current conditions, embracing as it may be, at least we know where we stand... at least we know we have some control over our destiny.

At the same time, if we continue to go in this direction we may never achieve what we want. That is why I believe it's important for us to take a step sideways and basically tell the world our story why we are where we are and take our chances that more countries will side with us...

Even Greece may take a softer approach if our predicament is made public and known throughout the world... Greece then will have nothing to hide and may take a softer approach...

I just want to mention at this point that problems cannot be "solved" by force or by repression. Force and repression will delay problems but will not make them go away. Problems can only be solved through discussion, understanding and compromise. This is another reason why we need to speak up and tell our side of the story.

Another thing I can tell you is that blackmailing Macedonia to "change its name" will not work in the long term. If the people are not happy with something they will try and change it. If Macedonia's name is changed today, sometime in the future when conditions are right the Macedonian people will change it back. So in essence the so-called "name negotiations" are nothing more than a stall tactic. But in no way do I support a "name change"... The name should never be touched by anyone... at any cost!

INTERVIEWER – What about the Macedonians in Greece? What should their role be in all this?

RISTO – Unfortunately the Macedonian people living in Greek occupied Macedonia are in worse shape than we can imagine. They have faced and are still facing the full brunt of "Greek fury" which has left them in a vulnerable position. The expulsions, the changing of names, the banning of their language, the mass expulsions, the stigmatization, the genocides, the assimilation... all these factors have negatively influenced the people.

Those Macedonians who were assimilated over the years and chose to call themselves "Greeks" are caught between a rock and a hard place. The non-Macedonian Greeks (Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, etc) from the south and the Christian Turks, brought to Greek occupied

Macedonia from Asia Minor in the 1920s, don't trust them and to this day resist their advancements in society and in positions of responsibility.

Those Macedonians, on the other hand, who have remained true to their Macedonian consciousness loathe these “neo-Greeks” and see them as “sell outs” and “traitors” to their own identity. They call them “Grkomani” or “Greko-philes” and see them as something they are not.

The Macedonians who “feel Macedonian” still have to hide their sentiments because they are afraid that they will be “stigmatized” and “persecuted” not only by the state but also by their Greek neighbours. So they feel like they have been trapped...

The Macedonians in Greece are also experiencing something that we in the west are not familiar with; xenophobia and mistrust of strangers. In addition to fearing one another, these Macedonians fear and distrust strangers. This has been ingrained in them since Ottoman times and has remained with them to this day. This is because every time someone spoke to a stranger something bad happened to them. So from young they were taught to not trust strangers because nothing good comes out of them.

You can say that it has become part of their every day lives. This is the norm for them. I experienced this myself first-hand when I lived there and was reminded of it when I returned back in 2015 for a short visit.

INTERVIEWER – Considering what has been done to your people, if you were given a chance what would you say to the Greeks?

RISTO – To be honest with you, to this day, I have not found common ground with any Greek. It's like we are from different worlds in constant conflict. When you mention Macedonia or Macedonians to a Greek they see red like a raging bull. The only thing they want to do at that point is attack. How can you expect to find common ground with people like that?

What has happened to us and what is still happening to us to this day is so bizarre... it blows the mind. Just recently I was talking to a Canadian woman who is married to a Macedonian man. She works for the school board in Toronto with a Greek woman. One day they got into a conversation and, after finding out this other woman was Greek, the Canadian woman mentioned to her that her husband was Macedonian. To her surprise the Greek woman freaked out and told her in a loud voice that “there was no such thing as a Macedonian”...

The Canadian woman was stunned by the reaction and did not know what to say... she did not want to upset the Greek woman any further.

One day, when we met again, the Canadian woman asked me why the Greek woman reacted this way and what had she done to make this Greek woman so angry?

Well, this very well explains the Greek mentality and their attitude towards us Macedonians. We are victims of every kind of perpetration and yet in the public eye we are treated like we have done something wrong. You can see why it is so important to have our side of the story told. I gave the Canadian woman a few of my books to read and she promised me she would read them. Whether that was enough or not to explain our problem, I don't know. It was better than doing nothing...

The problem with the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia is so severe that it is unbelievable. I have faced many people, including Macedonians from other parts of Macedonia and from the Diaspora, who refuse to believe that a civilized and democratic Greece, which gave the world “everything” can behave in this manner. So, how does one defend themselves against this? Certainly not by keeping quiet; and this is what we have been doing since 1913 when Greece occupied and annexed part of our country.

I mentioned earlier that I went back to Greece in 2015, for the first time in 50 years since I left for Canada. I wish I had never gone back! I was so disappointed with what I saw. I was pretty sure the border guards would not allow me to go back but, just to humour my

relative who wanted to take me via the Greek-Macedonian border, or as some Macedonians call it the artificial Macedonian-Macedonian border, I went along. My relative asked me to stay in the car while he took my Canadian passport and presented it to the Greek border guard who looked bored sitting inside his booth. To my surprise the border guard just stamped the passport, without even looking at it, and tossed them back at my relative. “We are in...” he said and off we went. “They don’t care much about who comes in any more,” my relative said, “as long as they spend their money in Greece.”

So, I still don’t know if I am allowed to legally enter Greece or not...

The first thing I noticed after crossing the artificial border was the flat Macedonian plain that for so many years was the breadbasket of Greece, was almost all fallow... looking like it was abandoned. From the exterior the villages we passed looked identical to the villages in the Republic of Macedonia. Except the villages in Greek occupied Macedonia were almost empty and devoid of people. When we arrived in Lerin we saw not the city I knew, but an empty village, also devoid of people. When we asked where the people were, we were told “gone”. Gone where? “Gone!”

After that we took the road over Bigla towards Kostur and stopped in a of couple villages. The only people we found that were willing to speak to us were a couple of men who had lived in Toronto. I knew one of them.

We took a trip to my mother’s village and went to a café, which 50 years later looked exactly the same. I decided to take a picture to show my mother. A man sitting some distance in front of me put his hand over his face. I know what it is like to have your picture taken by a stranger and felt terrible for doing that to the man. But I wasn’t taking his picture. I was taking a picture of the café. When I got enough courage I got up, went over and asked the man if he understood Macedonian. He said yes and so I explained to him why I was taking the picture. My explanation made no difference; the man just shook his head and continued drinking his coffee and quietly conversing with his friend. It was too far away for me to tell what language they were speaking, as they were speaking quietly.

After that we went to my village where I was born, which I had not seen for 50 years. It was in ruins, I could not recognize it. I was so disappointed. We saw a total of 3 new houses existing throughout the ruins. A Macedonian family lived in one of those houses. I don't know what kind of people lived in the other two.

As we entered the village in my relative's car, we saw a couple of young ladies in two different houses doing laundry. The moment they saw the car approaching they disappeared inside.

We went to the house where the Macedonians lived and I knocked on the door. A long time later the young woman, who earlier was hanging clothes on the balcony, came out. I asked her if she could understand what I was saying in Macedonian. She said no!

I explained to her who we were and that we were originally from this village and were relatives of theirs. I asked to see her grandfather. She told me in Greek that he was not there. I don't know if he was there or not but I got the feeling that I was not welcome. We left disappointed.

We went to Kostur and on our way back we stopped off in a village to have a cup of coffee. The place was dead quiet and the only person we spoke with was the waitress... we spoke to her in English.

When we came back to the Republic of Macedonia I made a point of mentioning to my relative the differences in the attitude between the villagers in Greek occupied Macedonia and those in the Republic of Macedonia. Being a stranger in town, everyone in Greek occupied Macedonia was mindful of your presence and was careful of how they conducted themselves in your presence whereas in the Republic of Macedonia the people were open and would converse with one another without any care. And if they did notice you and found out you were visiting from abroad, they were likely to invite you to their home for coffee. And that was the difference between our people who have been brought up under different regimes.

Also, let us not forget the so-called Greek Civil War and what that did to our people in Greece, about which we talked about in our last interview. Even though in reality the Macedonian people were unwitting pawns in a massive plot to get rid of the Macedonian people from Greek occupied Macedonia, in the eyes of the Greeks they were made to look like traitors trying to “steal” Macedonia from Greece... which stigmatized them badly, a guilty feeling the Macedonian people carry to this day. The Greeks still see them as perpetrators of a crime... a crime they never committed. Greek occupied Macedonia is still in Greek hands, the Macedonian people were driven out of Greece and permanently exiled just like Greece and its patrons wanted, and yet in the eyes of the Greek people the Macedonians are still the guilty party... And that hurts.

Unfortunately the world public perception is that Greece is a civilized democratic country and the Republic of Macedonia is a poor and democratically impoverished and backwards country. Who would have ever thought...?

INTERVIEWER – Very interesting... If you had the opportunity how would you change the situation for the Macedonians in Greece?

RISTO – The only way you can save those people, the ones that want to be saved, is to show them that there are many ways a person can live their lives. We who have left Greece a long time ago have forgotten how it was... not to be able to trust anyone you did not know... not to be able to speak Macedonian without checking around to make sure no one was listening... not to be able to say I am Macedonian or I come from Macedonia... not to be able to call yourself what your mother had named you at birth and not what the Greek priest named you at your baptism. I cannot even begin to tell you the kinds of choking restriction our people in Greece live under.

Change in Greece has to come from the inside. The Greek government must take the first step and recognize the Macedonian identity in Greece with full rights and privileges. It then has to fight against the century-old stigma and general Greek chauvinistic attitude towards the Macedonians, which may take generations to reverse.

Unfortunately I don't see that happening in the near future unless there is tremendous pressure put on Greece from the outside. Greece must also, one, abandon the idea of "homogeneity" and two, its fear that its part of Macedonia is "somehow" going to be taken away from it by the "big bad Slavs".

The most important thing for the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia today is to survive as Macedonians and in order for them to do that; they need to know who they are.

Greece has failed to assimilate the Macedonian people on its territory because of the restrictions it has placed on them. On the one hand it wants to assimilate them and turn them into Greeks and on the other it does not trust them and thus is turning them into a second and even into a third class Greek citizen. No one appreciates being treated that way, especially not the Macedonians who are willing to give up their own precious Macedonian identity to become Greeks. Let me be clear about that here. To many Macedonian people these "neo-Greeks" are still "traitors" but, even so, the Greeks still will not give them a break and treat them as equals.

Still, change in Greece must come from the inside and all we can do today is highlight and publicize our problems with Greece. This way Greece can no longer hide behind its façade of being a civilized and democratic country and once discovered for what it is, it will have no choice but do one of two things. Recognize the Macedonians in Greece or be stigmatized by the world for the tyrant that it is.

But I have to tell you... I am really disappointed with Greece. It has done nothing to develop Greek occupied Macedonia. The place where I visited looked devastated and devoid of life. The villages are in ruins and the forests have been cut down. There is no movement or sign of progress anywhere. It is worse than it was many years ago. Greece has done nothing to develop it. It is so disappointing and on top of that Greece will not allow the Macedonian people born there to go back... not even for a visit. What are the Greeks afraid of? That these people might find a paradise? Greece has devastated their homeland! Nothing makes sense when it comes to Greece...

INTERVIEWER – Earlier you mentioned the stigma of the Greek Civil War and the effects it had on your people. Can you tell us a little more about that?

RISTO – Yes, the Greek Civil War. For reasons I mentioned in our last interview I don't like to call it the "Greek Civil War" because first, it was not a "Civil War" and second it was not "Greek". It should be appropriately named "The Macedonian genocide in Greece". This was a "perpetrated" war to get rid of the Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia and it was done with outside help that involved Yugoslavia, Britain and the United States. But I am not going to talk about that here because enough was said, I believe, in our last interview. Here I am going to talk about what the war did to the Macedonian people inside and outside of Greece. To simplify the story I will speak only of the Macedonians living in Greece and the interactions between them.

As you know, mainstream history has completely neglected the Macedonian people. In fact, as you know, the Macedonian people, after Macedonia was invaded, occupied and partitioned in 1912, 1913 have been de-emphasized so much so that they "do not exist" for the Western world.

The Eastern world on the other hand, particularly Yugoslavia, has written its own version of the Macedonian people's history, tailor made to fit its own political agendas. So the Macedonian people, from Greek occupied Macedonia in particular, have been left out and have suffered in silence for many years.

What I am going to tell you here is little known and hardly spoken outside of Macedonian circles.

It is hardly a secret that the Macedonian people are divided but very few people are aware what this division is and what it has done to them.

Even before Macedonia was annexed by Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania, the presence of foreign propaganda, propagated through the foreign schools and churches in Macedonia, created

divided loyalties among the Macedonian people which often came into collision.

After a part of Macedonia was annexed by Greece, some Macedonians accepted Greek dominion and became the “neo-Greeks”. Being Greeks, even “pretend” Greeks, they quickly gained advantages over their fellow Macedonians. This created friction between them.

These “neo-Greeks” were not some isolated groups existing somewhere far away; they were neighbours, a brother or a sister, or even a husband or a wife. They lived next door to one another or even inside one house.

The worst thing about these “assimilated” people was that they began to see themselves as “Greeks” and better than their Macedonian brethren. They began to look down on the Macedonians.

These neo-Greeks even began to lie to their children telling them that they were “Greeks, descendants from the Ancient Greeks” and that they had nothing to do with “natives” in this land. To avoid using the word “Macedonians” the Greeks and neo-Greeks called the Macedonian people “natives”. The Greek perception of these so-called “natives” was that somehow they were “foreigners”, “Slavs”, “Bulgarians”, “Gypsies”, and even agents of foreign powers that had somehow settled on ancient Greek lands.

The neo-Greeks were always in support of Greek governments and collaborated with the various Greek authoritative and repressive regimes. Many even acted as the eyes and ears for the police and other security services.

The degree of support for the Greek regime varied from mild to extreme. Those who were strongly dedicated to the Greek cause naturally were granted powers to act against the “natives”.

I need to mention here that these “neo-Greeks” or “Grkomani” (Greco-philes) as the Macedonians called them, were a very small number in proportion to the rest of the Macedonian population.

In conflict situations between individuals from the two groups, the Greek authorities always took the side of the neo-Greeks.

Greece over the years, up until WW II, was a very repressive state and consistently persecuted and abused the Macedonian people as well as the progressive elements in that country.

Then, after Nazi Germany invaded Greece, the Greek repressive regimes suddenly collapsed and before the occupiers had a chance to take control, a communist regime came into existence and leveled the playing field between the neo-Greek Macedonians and the “native” Macedonians.

The communists didn't do that because they “liked” the Macedonians, they only did it because they “hated” the repressive elements in Greece and because they wanted the Macedonian people on their side. Let me be clear on that.

But even though the persecuted Macedonians got the upper hand on their neo-Greek abusers, they never acted against them or attempted to pay them back for the abuses they received. They just left them alone.

Then, after WW II ended, the Great Powers, the USA, Britain and Russia, decided to place Greece under British influence which again brought back the repressive Greek regime. This, naturally, infuriated the Macedonians and pushed them en masse into the hands of the communists.

The Macedonians did not like the communists for their ideological standpoint but decided to join them because the communists allegedly offered them a better alternative. This, by the way, never materialized.

To attract them to the communist side, the communists offered the Macedonians what the Macedonians wanted: to form a united and independent Macedonian state. Basically they lied to the Macedonian people to get them committed to the war effort to drive

the occupiers out of Greece. The Macedonians took the bait and began to join the communist sponsored organizations en masse.

Then, somewhere down the line, the British found out that Macedonians existed in Greek occupied Macedonia. The Greeks had been telling the world that “Macedonians don’t exist” while British agents on the ground, during World War II, were reporting that Macedonians not only existed but were in large numbers in Lerin, Kostur and Voden Regions and that practically half of the anti-fascist fighting force in Greece was Macedonian. In other words, almost half of the ELAS (National Liberation Army of Greece) fighters in Greece were Macedonians.

The existence of Macedonians in Greece, coupled with the fact that they were armed and were being offered independence by the communists, caused quite a stir in Britain and, behind closed doors, the British decided that these Macedonians had to go. But go where? This was their home.

According to declassified documents they had to go outside of the current Greek borders, somewhere north. And soon after this decision was made a home was found for them in Yugoslavia. The Fascist government of Yugoslavia had offered to take them. But before this plan could be implemented, Tito’s communists took power in Yugoslavia and the plan was put on the back burner.

Britain was worried that Russia might intervene on behalf of these Macedonians and put Greece in jeopardy by calling for their recognition and offering them the option of choosing their own destiny in accordance with the Atlantic Charter. So the best choice for Britain was to “get rid of them” from Greece. But how, and send them where without raising suspicions? After all it was illegal to just uproot people from their homeland because they just didn’t fit with Britain’s political agenda and interests.

Just as World War II was winding down, Britain was faced with a couple of problems. It had to destroy the communists in Greece and get rid of the Macedonians.

I should mention here that even though ELAS was a communist force it was placed under British control and not under Russian control. So it was no problem for Britain to disarm ELAS and take control of Greece. And that is exactly what it did. Britain ordered ELAS to disarm and surrender its weapons and Britain installed a regime of its choosing as a Greek government.

To get rid of the Macedonians unfortunately was a more complicated matter because one, the war (WW II) was over and two, it needed outside support; someone to take them. It is easy to push people around during a war but impossible to do it during peace time. This is why the “Greek Civil War” was invented. Wars generate refugees and refugees flee over borders to save themselves.

I am not going to talk about the Greek Civil War here in detail because we covered it in our last interview but I do want to say that this War was invented and served as cover to get rid of the Macedonians from Greece. It was a controlled war, controlled by Zahariadis who was sent to Greece by the British to crush the communists and get rid of the Macedonians.

Since we are talking about divisions in the Macedonian people, I would like to say that outside of the polarization of the neo-Greek and Macedonian division, there were also other divisions forming. During the war the neo-Greeks supported the Greek government which stood on the political right. The Macedonians stood on the side of the Communist Party of Greece which stood on the political left. The left and right at the time were at war with each other. Then additional new divisions began to surface in the left block as a result of the various promises made and actions taken by the CPG.

The Macedonian people on the left side knew that they had been betrayed when the CPG agreed with Britain to install what the Macedonian people considered a “fascist” political party in Greece. They knew that the fascist Greeks would be back in power and would resume the torment. So when Britain ordered ELAS to disarm, some Macedonians units refused. This brought them onto a collision course with ELAS and a war between them was imminent. So to avoid this collision these units fled over the border into the Republic of Macedonia and came under Yugoslav control.

The expectation of the Macedonian people supporting the left side of the political spectrum was that the Macedonian units that left for Yugoslavia were specifically created to protect the Macedonian people from Greek aggression and from the neo-Greeks. But because these Macedonian fighters left for Yugoslavia, they were seen as traitors by some, leaving even their own families behind to be abused by the Greeks.

Then, as the Greek Civil War escalated, some of these fighters who left for Yugoslavia later returned but many stayed behind. And so the division between those who returned to fight in the Greek Civil War and those who remained in Yugoslavia began to widen. Those who left Yugoslavia accused those who remained behind of being “cowards”, of wanting to save their own skins at the cost of their own people, even at the cost of their own families. And those who remained behind in Yugoslavia were accusing those who left for Greece, of “treachery” and of “helping” the Greeks to protect Greece. The CPG also manipulated the situation and widened the division by accusing those who remained in Yugoslavia of being “deserters”.

The Macedonian division began to widen even more, and turned into an unbridgeable chasm, when Tito began to fight with Stalin and the Macedonian people were caught in the middle of their dispute. So, now we had a four-way Macedonian division.

1. Macedonians on the political left fighting against the Macedonian neo-Greeks on the political right.
2. Partisan Macedonians fighting against Macedonian soldiers in the Greek army.
3. Macedonians fighting in the Greek Civil War against Macedonians in Yugoslavia opposing the Greek Civil War.
4. Titoist Macedonians fighting against Stalinist Macedonians.

All of these divisions were deeply rooted and still exist in the Macedonian people to this day.

Unfortunately all of these divisions were due to external factors that tore apart the Macedonian fabric and pulled the Macedonian people in many directions. Some Macedonians accepted the idea that if you can't beat them, join them and decided to "assimilate" into the Greek fold. Others liked what the Greek communists were offering and decided to join them. Unfortunately what the Greek communists were offering became very confusing and changed over time. That is because the Greek communists were dishonest about what they were trying to do. They had hidden motives of wanting to get the Macedonian people involved in a "perpetrated" war so that they could "remove" them from Greece. So when the Greek communists wanted the Macedonians involved in the war they offered more of what the Macedonians wanted. When too many Macedonians became involved in the war the Greek communists scaled down on their offers. This was done so that they could control how many people joined the struggle, making sure it did not run away on them.

The purpose of the war, however, was a constant; to get rid of the Macedonian people from Greece by legal means. This is how Britain wanted it. So a plan was concocted to start a new war in Greece and to involve the Macedonian people en masse. The moment the Macedonian people picked up arms, Greece would then have no choice but to fight back and drive them out. Yugoslavia was also involved in this because it created NOF (National Liberation Front). NOF's purpose was to start a "revolution" in Greek occupied Macedonia. But when it arrived and began to agitate the people it found that the people did not want to fight. The Macedonian people did not want to fight another war, for them the war (WW II) was over and they were ready to enjoy peace.

Unable to motivate them to fight for a free Macedonia to be united with Yugoslavia, something new and something more drastic had to be done. "White terror" was introduced. The political right unleashed its fascist forces on the Macedonian population killing people, burning homes, raping women, beating and jailing people, and so on. This naturally frightened the Macedonian population and left it with two options "fight back" or "die". So, people began to flee to the mountains where they were organized and armed by NOF.

NOF was there to organize and assist them. This, however, was not a NOF initiative; the NOF leadership simply followed orders blindly and basically did what it was told.

Initially the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was in control of events on the ground but then when Zahariadis was dispatched to Greece by Britain to take control of the Communist Party of Greece he took over control of NOF. After Zahariadis consolidated his power over the communists he took control of NOF and, through NOF, took control of the Macedonian people.

Please allow me at this point to summarize some of the points we discussed in the previous interview, about why at this time a war in Greece was not practical and why the promises made to the Macedonian people by the CPY and by the CPG were not achievable.

The purpose of the Greek Civil War, as we are being told by mainstream history, was to install a communist system in Greece. This, however, was not possible because Stalin of Russia who supported the political left in Greece and Churchill of Britain who supported the political right in Greece had already decided to place Greece under British influence and both leaders had agreed that “there will be no communist system in Greece”.

So, how then was Zahariadis going to create a communist system in Greece, as he promised, when he had no support from Greece’s patrons, the Great Powers? He wasn’t! His sole aim was not to create but to destroy the communists in Greece and to get rid of the Macedonians once and for all.

In order to motivate the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia to fight harder and in greater numbers, both the CPY and the CPG offered them independence and the choice of uniting Greek occupied Macedonia with the Republic of Macedonia under a Yugoslav federation. But this offer had a catch. This offer was only valid if the communists took power in Greece which, as I mentioned earlier, was not possible.

The truth is that an International border, the iron curtain, was running between Greek occupied Macedonia and the Republic of Macedonia, which was an impossible “barrier” to breach without Great Power cooperation. And the Great Powers at the time were not cooperating and have not cooperated since then to this day.

At the same time this was going on in Greece, the Greek people were told that the “Slavs” from the north and the “Slav speaking” Greeks were causing all these problems in their country. The Slavs assisted by the communists were attempting to break up Greece and give their Greek-Macedonia to Yugoslavia. While all this was going on, the rest of the world was led to believe that this was a “Greek Civil War” where the communists were attempting to “impose themselves” on Greece.

This was a great cover to not only cover up the fact that a genocide was being committed against the Macedonian people but to also make the Macedonian people think that they were fighting for their rights and that it was their fault for not only losing the war but for starting it in the first place. This also made the Greek people feel good thinking that they had fought against outside forces and won in their attempt to protect their country. As for the rest of the world, this War was all about politics and ideologies.

The conflict inside Greece was not recognized as a “Greek Civil War” until the 1970’s. Until then it was thought of as a “bandit” war. This is because the Greek people, during the war, were told that the war was being fought between the “treacherous Slav bandits” and the “patriotic Greeks”. How can it be a “Greek Civil War”? A generation or two had to pass before they could again pull the wool over their own people’s eyes.

When massive numbers of Macedonian refugees began to arrive in Poland, the Polish people thought they were Greeks fighting to install communism in Greece. Most ordinary people in the Eastern European countries, where many Macedonians ended up, had no idea that these people were Macedonians; they didn’t even know that Macedonians existed until they met them. They were told the refugees were Greeks.

The moment the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia picked up arms and fought back to defend themselves, the plan to exterminate them was put in motion and the Macedonian genocide became legal. What was Greece to do? It had to fight back to defend itself, insisting that the war was imported from the north. It even had a United Nations Commission investigate it to prove that it was provoked and supported by outsiders, mainly by Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania.

I mentioned earlier that the so-called “Greek Civil War” was a controlled war. At this point I would like to say a few words about that.

The many Macedonians with whom I have discussed this war have insisted that if we Macedonians had our own leaders and if we Macedonians were allowed to fight the way we wanted, we would have won the war. But what most Macedonians on the ground don’t understand is that the “architects” of this war did not want the Macedonians to “win”; they wanted them to “lose” that is why it had to be a controlled war.

If the Greek communists wanted the Macedonian people to gain their independence, like they were promising, they would have allowed them to conduct their own business; they would have allowed them to appoint their own leaders, choose the type and number of fighting units they wanted, choose their own battles, and so on. The Greek communists did not do any of those things because they wanted to control the Macedonian movement. But in order to control it the Greek communists had to impose themselves on the Macedonian people and restrict and control their activities. They especially had to control the Macedonian leaders in NOF and steer NOF in the direction they wanted it to go. Then when the CPY surrendered NOF to the CPG, Zahariadis took control of everything. After that he basically manipulated every outcome of the struggle. This was no coincidence; it was purposely planned this way from higher up. Even General Markos was dismissed because he refused to enter a “frontal” war with his opponent. Markos knew that if the partisans, who were successful in hit and run operations, were placed in a stationary position they would be demolished. But those above Zahariadis did not want this war to linger on and wanted the

partisans crushed as soon as possible and what better way to crush them than to put them up against a much superior enemy in a frontal war. Zahariadis dismissed Markos and took command of the partisans himself and ordered them to form front lines and fight in a front.

“...When Markos refused to step down, Zahariadis accused him of being a spy and sent him to Russia to be treated for a mental disorder. When the wheel of history turned, General Markos sent a letter to the KPSS Central Committee in which he accused Zahariadis of being a spy and an international traitor. According to Markos, the main reason for sending the letter was not to indict Zahariadis but to clear the air about himself. Markos wanted to dissociate himself from Zahariadis and from speculation and gossip that he too was an agent of British intelligence just like Zahariadis...” (Stoian Kochov).

Then when the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) was destroyed by the Greek government forces, Zahariadis, to throw attention away from himself, accused the leaders of NOF of being responsible for the defeat because, according to Zahariadis, “they were working for Tito”, they were Tito’s agents. This was yet another cover up to throw attention “somewhere else”, away from himself, from being discovered that he not only destroyed the communists in Greece and exiled the Macedonians, but that he was a British agent.

A long time ago Stalin had ordered both Tito and Zahariadis to end the armed struggle in Greece, not only because it was futile but because it reflected badly on Stalin and on the agreement he had made with Churchill. On top of that Stalin was not sure how the United States was going to react if this armed conflict escalated or was prolonged. Stalin himself was worried that the United States might retaliate against the Soviet Union if, for some reason, it thought the Soviet Union was assisting the war effort in Greece. Stalin wanted no part of that. This is why he specifically ordered Tito to stop supplying the war effort and Zahariadis to scale the war down and end it.

But Tito decided to defy Stalin, perhaps, I am assuming, because he had made a secret deal with the British to assist in the “destruction”

of the Macedonians? In any case Tito's disobedience angered Stalin which resulted in Yugoslavia being thrown out of the Cominform in June, 1948. Tito was found guilty of disobedience and all Eastern European communist governments, under the influence of the Soviet Union, were ordered to break relations with the CPY.

After that Tito and Stalin became arch-enemies and Zahariadis always found it convenient to blame "everything" on Tito, including the continuation of the war, the defeat of the partisan army and the destruction of the communists in Greece. In other words, to hide his own actions and from being discovered that he himself was a British agent, Zahariadis basically told Stalin that it was Tito and NOF that continued the war and that he had nothing to do with it. This naturally further divided the Macedonian people because Zahariadis told them that the "culprits" of losing the war were the leaders of NOF who followed Tito's agenda, which had aims to sabotage their struggle. Many believed Zahariadis.

Unfortunately Stalin was in agreement with Zahariadis and exiled the Macedonian NOF leadership to serve a life sentence of hard labour in the Siberian prison camps. After Stalin died, having found no proof of wrong doing, the NOF leaders were freed and returned to Yugoslavia where most were welcome as "heroes" despite the fact that they were pawns in a game to destroy their own people.

Upon their return to the Republic of Macedonia, almost the entire NOF leadership was welcomed back with open arms, given homes and jobs in government positions and made responsible for welcoming the returning Macedonian refugees, including the fighters, who were scattered all throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Now one can only imagine how the former fighters must have felt after they came back to find their former "traitor" leaders in charge of their destiny... again... Remember Zahariadis told the fighters that the reason they lost the war and were driven out of their homes and homeland was because these very same NOF leaders betrayed them.

I personally was witness to an argument between two Macedonians about this, only about a decade ago, when I heard a Zahariadis supporter yelling “Zahariadis was right”. These Macedonians, who fought under his command, believed Zahariadis was a “hero” and the NOF leaders were “traitors”. I guess no one, especially those who “adored” Zahariadis, was prepared to accept the fact that they were used by Zahariadis to commit a heinous crime against their own people. No one wants to believe that they were made fools of and that they sacrificed themselves to destroy something they believed they were fighting to protect and preserve. Even most of the NOF leadership believed and trusted Zahariadis... until they were betrayed by him in the end.

To make matters worse, the returning refugees including the former fighters were not welcomed as heroes when they returned to the Republic of Macedonia. The moment they arrived they were sent to Idrizovo Prison in Skopje for debriefing and treated like criminals by the interrogators. One woman with three little children was locked up in jail for two whole days until her turn came to be debriefed. She demanded to know what she had done to deserve this treatment. She received no answer...

And what did they ask during the debriefing? The most important question was “political allegiance”. “Are you with Tito or with Stalin!?” God help those who said “with Stalin” because they are probably still rotting in camps to this day. I asked about that and was told that only very few remained in the camps... those who were suffering from “mental illnesses”...

To make matters even worse, the Macedonians who had deserted the war and were labeled “traitors” and “deserters” by the Communist Party of Greece and by the DAG fighters were put in charge of providing “character references” for the returning fighters. This felt like grinding salt in their still open wounds.

Every effort was made to make life very difficult for the Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia, which in the end not only made them bitter but also made them feel like they were guilty of everything that went wrong in the war. It was their fault for not winning the war. It was their fault for being stupid to follow the

Greeks. It was their fault for being driven out of their homes and for abandoning their homeland. There was no end to their misery... and no one wanted to hear about it... And so they suffered in silence until Yugoslavia disintegrated and the Republic of Macedonia divorced itself from that nightmare in 1991.

People who ask me “why are we so divided?” have no clue what we have been through and what we are going through to this day.

INTERVIEWER – Earlier you said the returning Macedonians were questioned about their “political allegiance”. “Are you with Tito or with Stalin!?” What was that all about?

RISTO – Well, as I said earlier, at the time Tito and Stalin were involved in a verbal war and Stalin did many things to have Tito brought down, including assassination attempts. Among the many threats made, Stalin also threatened to “break up” Yugoslavia by creating an independent Republic of Macedonia. Stalin threatened to organize a Macedonian army and send it back to break away Tito’s part of Macedonia. That was the reason why Tito closed the Yugoslav border and refused to allow DAG fighters to enter Yugoslav territory armed. That was also the reason why Stalin took the Macedonian fighters to the USSR, to Tashkent. Stalin’s actions, however, pushed Tito even further towards the “Western camp” and if Stalin touched Tito he knew he would have WW III on his hands.

So, fearing that the returning Macedonian fighters might still be a threat, Tito had his people screen them as they entered the Republic of Macedonia and who was better equipped to screen them than those who knew them from the war, the deserters who Tito trusted.

This war is a mystery in itself which will take many years to unravel because nothing about it is what it seems. The 60 years of silence unfortunately did not help.

Let me say that the fact alone that Greece closed the border on the Macedonian civilian refugees, on the innocent people fleeing to save themselves from being killed, and prevented them from returning back to their homes, speaks volumes. This act by itself verifies that the Greeks had aims at permanently “exiling” the Macedonian

people. One does not need to know the whole story to figure out what went on in Greek occupied Macedonia during that war.

Also, the communists who started the Greek Civil War had no exit strategy in case the war went sideways... There was no negotiated settlement for ending the war... There was no negotiated settlement for returning the refugees including the 28,000 children who were evacuated in 1948... There were no safeguards put in place to protect the innocent... Every single Macedonian was told by Zahariadis and his cronies that “we are winning the war it’s only a matter of time before we defeat the enemy...” Even after what remained of DAG withdrew to Albania, Zahariadis still insisted that the war was not over and that they were re-grouping to go back and fight... There was no end to the lies and deceit...

INTERVIEWER – You said a person does not need to know the “whole story” to figure out what happened during the Greek Civil War? How do you figure that?

RISTO – It’s easy in hindsight. By process of elimination and by examining what was said and what was done.

For example every time Zahariadis needed more Macedonians to sacrifice he said “by joining this struggle en masse you Macedonians have earned the right to self-determination and to create your own country”. First of all who was this Zahariadis to make such promises, God? This was not possible without the consent of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania and without Great Power approval. So obviously Zahariadis was “lying” to the Macedonian people.

Zahariadis later said “by joining this struggle en masse you Macedonians have earned the right to be equal to the Greeks” but he could only guarantee these rights if the communists in Greece won the war. Did Zahariadis not know that one, Greece was under British influence and that the British would not allow the communists to win in Greece? Two, how were the Macedonians expected to win the war when the Greek communists controlled everything associated with that war? So obviously Zahariadis “lied” about that too.

So, how many lies must be told to discover that something isn't right?

Look at what the Macedonian people were offered and look at what they received. They were offered a country of their own and human rights and they received "genocide". Was this a coincidence? No! It was perpetrated! Everything that was said and done after the fact was to bury the evidence and let the guilty get away with murder.

Our "genocide" has never been reported or investigated. One should be able to see how this can make some people... even some countries, nervous. The surface of the so-called "Greek Civil War" is now being scratched and it stinks of "genocide" to high heaven. What more can I tell you?

INTERVIEWER – You said that Yugoslavia was involved in this too?

RISTO – Yes, I believe it was but only a few people in Yugoslavia knew about it. Think about it. Tito knew about all the things I mentioned earlier. The iron curtain, the sphere of influence Agreement between Stalin and Churchill, how the British felt about the communists in Greece... about the Macedonian presence in Greek occupied Macedonia... all of it. And as I mentioned earlier Tito even had a tiff with Stalin about supplying the war effort in Greece.

Also please note that NOF was formed on April 23, 1945 under Tito and Kolishevski's leadership and was dispatched to Greece by Kolishevski in the fall of the same year. The elections in Greece which initiated the Greek Civil War were scheduled to take place on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946. Why would Tito and Kolishevski prepare and dispatch NOF to Greek occupied Macedonia to start a new conflict even before the elections were decided unless Tito knew something beforehand?

Then, look at how Tito's cronies treated the Macedonian fighters when they were returning to their homeland. He treated them like "criminals"! Why? So that they wouldn't ask too many questions?

I don't believe the NOF leadership was involved in the conspiracy. I believe they were patriots in their hearts who allowed their hearts, instead of their minds, to guide them. They lacked the courage to ask "why" and just did what they were told.

So Yugoslavia was involved alright! Some of the top leaders were part of the conspiracy, the rest were too busy being loyal sycophants to notice anything. Survival in those days depended on who you knew and not on what you knew. Not many cared about what you knew. That's how it was for us Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia living under Yugoslav rule.

INTERVIEWER – Do similar divisions, the kind that existed in the Republic of Macedonia after the war, exist in the Diaspora?

RISTO – No. I have not observed such divisions here. But I will tell you a story of how I discovered them.

I had just published my book "Macedonians in Greece 1939-1949" when I visited the Republic of Macedonia for the first time and, naturally, with the subject still fresh in my mind, I was anxious to discuss the issues with our compatriots there. What happened was embarrassing. People there were talking about issues I had never heard of before. I just published a book on the subject and found I was completely in the dark. That's how bad the situation with us Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia is. The 60 years of silence were real. That information never made it out of the Republic of Macedonia. Why was that? Because no one cared about our problems. Yugoslavia was more concerned about "its good neighbourly relations" with Greece than about its own citizens.

I thought I knew everything there was to know... but I was wrong. I thought no more books existed on the subject... but I was wrong.

There were literally hundreds of books written and available... all in Macedonian with no effort made by any government institution to have them exported to the Diaspora or translated into English.

I was very disappointed about this and complained as to why nothing was ever done to inform the rest of us, especially those Macedonians living in the Diaspora, like myself who couldn't speak or read Macedonian. Many of us in the Diaspora came directly from Greece and grew up in places like Canada, the US and Australia with very little opportunity to speak, never mind read and write Macedonian.

I was given a suitcase full of books from the various people I met there, and ever since then I have made it my mission to translate as many books as possible and make them available to our people for free. My first objective was to learn to speak and read Macedonian. Since then to this day (September 2016) I have translated 23 books and I am working on translating more. They are all available on the internet in both languages. Translating has become an obsession with me because I want our people to know more about ourselves... it has answered many questions for me and helped me see the "bigger picture" which I am sharing with you today.

There are no visible divisions "of that kind" in our people here in Canada because people don't know about them. There are divisions in the Macedonians in the Diaspora but they have to do more with "loyalties" and "obligations". We have the "Grkomani" (Greco-phils), "Bugaromani" (Bulgaro-phils", few "Serbomani" (Serbo-phils) and so far I have not met any "Albanomani" (Albano-phils). There is also a small division, perhaps too minor to worry about, almost racist, between the so-called "Egeitsi" Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia and "Vardartsi" Macedonians from the Republic of Macedonia. This is more like a class division than a political division mainly because of "sour grapes".

The Macedonian refugees who fled Greek occupied Macedonia during the Greek Civil War, including the refugee children, who ended up in Eastern European countries and in the Soviet Union were offered great opportunities to educate themselves. Almost every child and adult took the opportunity to advance themselves. They were encouraged and deeply believed that education was necessary for rebuilding their homeland back in Greek occupied Macedonia. They believed that when they returned they would be useful in rebuilding their country. Greece had never offered them

such an opportunity so they worked extra hard to succeed and they succeeded. Between themselves they were educated and skilled in practically every field.

When these people arrived in the Republic of Macedonia they found the country in desperate need of rebuilding. Their education opened many opportunities which were not available to the less educated local people who followed traditional methods of working on the farm. So, the so-called “newcomer Aegeans” were seen as people who came to the Republic of Macedonia to take jobs away from the local people. Much like us here in Canada who blame the immigrants for taking our jobs when clearly they work hard to earn them and we sit on our laurels feeling privileged because we are Canadians.

Unfortunately “Aegeans” are still seen as some sort of “culprits” even today, even here in Canada. By the way it is insulting to call people “Egeitsi” (Aegean) in the Republic of Macedonia but this word is freely used here in Canada by many Macedonians.

INTERVIEWER – You mentioned that other divisions exist in the Diaspora, are you going to talk about them?

RISTO – Yes. I believe it is important not only to talk about them but to also understand their fundamental causes. The most prevalent divisions in the Diaspora are those between the Macedonians and the Bugaromani (Bulgaro-phils) and Grkomani (Greco-phils). These groups, more or less, stay out of each others’ path but sometimes they come into contact in demonstrations and more often in donut shop discussions, where they exchange insults.

I have to admit that I have not been in contact with many because they (Bugaromani and Grkomani) despise me... I think for speaking out and for not giving them attention.

Let me say that there are no Grkomani in the Republic of Macedonia, at least not in the open. But I have heard that there are Bugaromani... maybe? But I have not met any. The Grkomani “phenomenon” exists only in Greece and in the Diaspora.

One might think that here in Canada we are free from the Greeks and we can freely choose our own destiny... But unfortunately it doesn't work like that. A long time ago I used to work with an elderly Macedonian woman from Lerin region. One time I asked her a question, I said: "I can understand why Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia behaved in the way they do back home because they have no choice, but what possible reasons could they have to behave this way here in Canada where they are free from the Greeks?" She looked at me with a strange look, giving me the impression that I must be naïve to be asking such a question. She then said: "Because some of them are criminals. They are criminals. They have committed crimes against our people and they need the Greeks to protect them. They are the ones pushing the Greek government to act against us. If the Greek government decides to recognize us and accept us... then what do you think will happen to them? If we want justice and we will want justice then these people will pay. They will be exposed and prosecuted... And they sure don't want that..."

I believe some Grkomani are criminals but not all. Some have interests back in Greece, some have relatives and friends back home who they want to protect... and so on... The Grkomani, even here in Canada, find themselves restricted by the same restrictions they were faced with back in Greece. Some even have interests here in Canada which they need to protect. But there are also those who have been brainwashed by Greek propaganda to think that somehow they are "different" and better than their Macedonian brethren and are following the Greek line... They called themselves "Greeks" but since the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence, they call themselves "Greek-Macedonians". They call their brethren Macedonians "Slavs".

Let me say that Greece has done a fantastic job in warping people's minds and turning brother against brother. It is not only shameful... it is sad. There is no reason for these divisions to exist and most of us don't know why we are divided. But this is how our enemies like us to be... and this is how we are. We just don't have the courage to break the spell and do something about it. And the reason for that is "loyalties"... If my parents were Grkomani do I disappoint them by accepting that I am Macedonian...?

Even families here in Canada have split up over this issue. Children in Grkomani families have been disowned by their parents because they embraced their true Macedonian identity...

INTERVIEWER – What are you doing to bridge this gap?

RISTO – Not much. Not until the entire truth is told. Once people know both sides of the story then, maybe, we can have our “reconciliation” with the Grkomani and Bugaromani. I personally want the truth to come out as soon as possible and when all the stories are told, the people can decide for themselves what they want to be. We Macedonians are a forgiving and accepting people... and there is nothing wrong with belonging to more than one culture as long as we are all included. Macedonians and Greeks can co-exist just like Macedonians and Vlachs and Macedonians and Albanians co-existed for centuries. Unfortunately the Greeks are not like that. With them there is no co-existence. And for that reason, the Macedonians have been put in an impossible position where they must fight in order to survive.

Greece has tormented the Macedonian people for more than a century. It has used every opportunity to erase them. This has been going on since 1878, when the Great Powers decided to partition Macedonia and give a piece of it to Greece.

I often refer to Greece as a ship without a rudder set off on a one way course without the ability to steer. Greece was created that way and continues to function that way to this day... Unfortunately Greece can't decide the “Macedonian Question” alone and on its own, and neither can it “stop” tormenting the Macedonian people without approval from its patrons. It would be naïve of me to think that Greece and Greece alone is doing this to the Macedonian people.

INTERVIEWER – Do you think others, outside of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania are involved?

RISTO – Yes. I explained earlier that Britain, France and Russia decided to erase Macedonia in 1878 by allowing it to be invaded,

occupied, partitioned and annexed by their protectorates Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Then, at the last minute, in 1912 Austro-Hungary stepped in and insisted on creating an Albanian state in order to block Serbia and Russia from reaching the Adriatic Sea. As I also explained, Greece was created by Britain to block Russia from reaching the Mediterranean Sea. These acts were committed by the Great Powers, who knew very well that they were destroying Macedonia. These very same Great Powers sanctioned Greece's draconian assimilation policies to eradicate everything that was Macedonian. Why would they do that if they "cared" about Macedonia and the Macedonian people?

Macedonia was partitioned by the Great Powers and can only be put back together by the Great Powers. No one expected the Republic of Macedonia to become an independent state. It was a complete surprise and a cause of problems for the Great Powers.

It was by no accident that the world was led to believe that Macedonians don't exist. Greece may have been the "front man" yelling no Macedonians exist but its patrons were right behind it, supporting it. This was done because the Great Powers do not want Macedonians to exist.

It was by no accident that "no one" investigated any of the "genocides", "atrocities" and "human rights" violations committed against the Macedonian people in Greece. And if any investigations were done, they were done for "other" reasons. I say this because "nothing" was ever done for the Macedonian people in Greece.

Find me a single book published by western authors after 1913 and before the Republic of Macedonia became independent, that show me a reference that says Macedonians exist in Greece. There isn't one. Is that because these Macedonians don't exist or is it because "someone" very powerful does not want them to exist?

Then, when the People's Republic of Macedonia became independent in 1945, it was immediately labeled an "artificial creation", created by Tito. And so was the Macedonian identity. Some western sources, quoting Greek sources, even claimed that Tito created the Macedonian identity so that he could lay claim to

“Greek-Macedonia” and that the Macedonians living in Macedonia were not Macedonians but “Slavs”. Do you think “denying the existence of Macedonians” was just a coincidence? No. These were perpetrated acts, perpetrated by the Great Powers and then propagated by Greece.

So, going back to our original question, how does one explain a people who allegedly did not exist yesterday suddenly exist today? Think of the implications this will have on history. History will have to be re-written to explain the “Macedonian phenomenon”. How is history going to explain this when, up until now, history tried to bury it? Naturally, any historian worth their salt knew the truth but chose to ignore it. This is true for western historians as well as for Macedonian historians who taught during the Yugoslav era. Now they are apologizing to their students for “lying” to them all those years.

What’s going to happen later, when the Macedonian people start to “look for justice” and would want those who abused them punished? What will happen when the genocides committed against them are investigated?

So I ask you. What path would you choose; choke the life out of Macedonia now, or allow it to live and face the consequences later? Which would you choose if you had the power to make this “problem” disappear now?

Now perhaps we can all understand why there is great “reluctance” on the part of the Great Powers to put Macedonia back on the map. Many countries, including those from the former Soviet block and from former Yugoslavia, even some which did not qualify, like Bosnia, were put on the map, but not Macedonia. Why?

Let me put the question to you another way. If the Great Powers wanted a Macedonia to surface wouldn’t they have made even the smallest effort to find a place for it in this world? Wouldn’t they have left some room in history for it? But they didn’t. They gave everything that was Macedonian to the Greeks and Bulgarians.

Now if the Macedonian people “take back” their heritage, the same heritage that was given to the Greeks and Bulgarians, what will be left for Greece and Bulgaria, particularly for Greece? Nothing!

Everything and I mean everything, the world values today has been attributed to the “Greeks”. “The Ancient Greeks did this for us and the ancient Greeks did that for us...” Where is this going to go when it turns out that the so-called “Ancient Greeks” are a 19<sup>th</sup> century concoction just like the “Modern Greeks”?

Every day in school, on television, you hear and learn of the many things the ancient Greeks “gave us” and did for us... So many things that can fill libraries... But one needs to ask “Where did this 2,500 year-old information come from?” From where was it obtained? From the “inscribed stones” in Athens? From the “goat skins” found in caves? Did the so-called “Ancient Greeks” from 2500 years ago leave us “that much” information on stones and skins? Or was this “somehow” concocted in some Western laboratory over the years just like “classical history”?

What will happen when the world discovers that Ancient Athens was just a “village” in comparison to Alexandria of Egypt with its grand library, schools and museum? What will happen when the world finds out Alexandria was a Macedonian and not a Greek city? What will happen when the world finds out that the Macedonians and not the Greeks translated the Bible from Hebrew to Koine, sponsored and paid for by the Ptolemais, a Macedonian royal family? Should I go on? There are thousands of such examples I can give you of things “wrongly” attributed to the Greeks, including the so-called “Greek gods”. Really? Even the gods were Greek?

I have just given you a small sample of what will happen if Macedonia comes into being. It will be a massive revolution that will shake up the academic world and not only expose its lies but will embarrass academia for turning a blind eye to this for so many years.

I am not denying that the ancient people in the Greek peninsula existed and made some contributions. All I am saying is that their story and contributions have been “greatly exaggerated”... at the

expense of the Macedonians who not only created a great empire but also greatly contributed to world civilization... much, much more than any Ancient Greeks have done. But like I said, the modern world leaders have given it all away to the Modern Greeks, a kind of people who would take away everything from you, toss you out of your home and make you feel guilty for being alive. A kind of people who don't care about anyone but themselves and who believe they are entitled to everything, even if it doesn't belong to them.

The Macedonian people also need to wake up to this and begin to understand what is happening to them and that it will take "a world revolution" to free themselves from this predicament.

INTERVIEWER – You sure paint a bleak picture for the Macedonian people, don't you?

RISTO – Yes. But I hope I am wrong. We all hope that this will "go away" one day on its own but then I am a realist. I am looking at the situation realistically. And like I said before, we can only move forward if we understand what's behind us. The things I am talking about here need to be understood by the Macedonian people. After they understand them it is mandatory that the rest of the world understands them too. This will basically level the playing field for us. Both the lies and the truth need to come out, to be told. The truth shattered the old belief that the earth was flat and the truth will shatter the Greek myth and set the Macedonian people free. I never said exposing the truth was going to be easy, but it needs to be done... and the sooner the better... our story needs to be told and heard now.

INTERVIEWER – This all sounds promising but how would you go about educating your people, never mind educating the world?

RISTO – It takes will, the will of the Macedonian people to do what is necessary... tell their story and learn about other people's stories. I have met many people who are more than willing to tell our story but are frustrated because they don't have the resources or a medium to turn to. Also, our enemies are prepared to refute anything we say and provide their own explanations. The Greeks, Bulgarians,

Serbian, Albanian and their patrons have made sure their stories have been well-publicized and it will take a revolution to undo that.

And because they have been beaten down for so long, the Macedonian people are unwilling to accept just anything, even the truth, without much convincing. So we need to do much more than what we have been doing so far to get our message out there.

We also need to go on the offensive and challenge those who deny our existence. We need to challenge them on factual matters and issues that matter to us. For example, Greece is obviously a modern creation created for the first time in 1828, so how can a new nation have historical rights that stretch beyond 1828? Once we make the point to our people to understand that Greece did not exist before 1828 then every argument and claim Greece makes can be easily challenged. We know the Greeks were created by assimilating the Vlachs, Albanians, Turks, Macedonians and other ethnicities that existed in that region before Greece became a country. So Greece's "real" history lies in the history of the Vlachs, Albanians, Turks, Macedonians and others. But according to history the Vlachs and Albanians arrived on the Greek peninsula sometime during the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The Turks arrived much later, so where do the Greeks get the idea that Macedonia belongs to them and not to the Macedonian people?

It is arguments such as these that our people, especially our politicians, must know and employ, no matter how ridiculous they sound, in order to bring the Greeks back to reality. And the reason such arguments are not used is because our people either don't know "real" Greek history or don't have the courage to stand up to the Greeks. But problems such as these can easily be remedied... with time... and with much effort. I know arguments such as these may sound completely ridiculous in view of the modern image of Greece, but the truth is the truth. They are no more ridiculous than the Greeks telling the world they are the "descendants of the Ancient Greeks", and that Macedonia belongs to them because of that.

As for educating the world, like I said before, we need to take the initiative and tell "our story" the way it happened, the way we

experienced it, the way we see it, instead of reacting to Greek provocations and issues that are of no value to us.

INTERVIEWER – Thank you Risto for your time and for your thoughts.

RISTO – I also want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you some of the issues that are near and dear to me.

*Analysis of historical  
events in Greek  
occupied Macedonia  
Part 3*



**An interview with Risto Stefov**

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Macedonia  
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Part 3

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INTERVIEWER – In this interview I would like to ask you some questions about your family and verify some of the things your dad and uncle had said to me in their interviews.

Was your grandfather Risto involved in the Ilinden Uprising? I remember seeing a photo on someone's wall. What can you tell me about his life in the village?

RISTO – My grandfather Risto was not involved in the Ilinden Uprising because, from what my father had told me, he was not in Macedonia. He was on pechalba (migrant work) but I don't know where and for how long. He purchased a rifle and wanted to return but the borders were shut and he could not come back in time. He did come back later and brought the rifle with him and gave it to his oldest son Lazo who then used it during the German-Italian-Bulgarian occupation when he was a partisan for a brief period of time before he died in 1943.

Here is Risto's story in brief:

Risto was the second child of File and Stamenia. He was born in 1883 in the village Oshchima and died in 1951 in Zgorzelec, Poland. As a youth, Risto received no education and remained illiterate for a large part of his life. Risto's mother tongue was Macedonian but he also spoke some Turkish, then the administrative language in Macedonia (before 1912).

During his youth, Risto learned some skills which he later applied to make a living. The more prominent included house painting, bricklaying and masonry work. He was also a capable woodworker, lumberjack and carpenter.

During his adult life, Risto was a pechalbar (migrant worker) and traveled from place to place looking for work. He traveled to Prespa, Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Central Greece and Canada. One specific trip to Bulgaria became very important for him. Due to severe weather he was stranded where he worked and could not depart for home. During his stay, he attended school and learned the Cyrillic alphabet enabling him to read the Macedonian language. On another occasion, while working in Turkey (Anatolia), Risto lost his

Uncle Kale in a construction accident. Kale fell off the roof of the building where they were working and died.

While seeking work on long journeys the cost of travel was high. To offset some of the cost, Risto and his traveling companions begged for food while traveling from village to village.

Risto did not speak Greek and, while traveling to central Greece, depended on his first cousin Tase and other co-workers, who spoke a little Greek, to seek directions and acquire work contracts.

Risto traveled to Canada three times. He worked in tanneries, restaurants, and laid cobblestone in the streets of Toronto. On one occasion when Risto came back from Canada, an entourage of people from Oshchima came to greet him as he entered the village. There in front of him stood his wife Sofia with two young girls of the same age in her arms. She said, "You've been away so long I bet you can't recognize your own daughter". Risto, in a clever response said, "Put the girls down and the one that comes to me is my daughter." Sure enough Dafina rushed to him, proving him right.

With the money earned, in 1922 Risto built a house in Oshchima on the ruins of the Iofkova house. As payment for the plot Risto offered Bosilka Iofkova and her daughter, Sofia, free room and board for life. To expand his farmland, Risto purchased land from Tase who moved to Lerin and no longer needed the property. Risto gave some of the land to his older brother Vasil.

There is a tale told by Oshchimians about Risto's money. After returning from Canada, Risto converted his earned wealth from gold into Greek currency to purchase building materials for his house. Unfortunately, at the same time war broke out and the country's currency lost its value. Tragically, Risto lost his wealth. It has been rumoured that his wife Sofia cursed him for leaving her alone to bear the burden of looking after the children and the farm. There is also a rumour that Risto did not convert his gold to cash but instead buried it somewhere in Oshchima, never to be found. These, however, are only rumours?

For years, Risto traveled to Prespa and Albania to work as a painter, bricklayer, plasterer and, occasionally, as a carpenter. According to some of his clients, Risto was the best chimney builder in the land.

From 1920 to 1922, Risto was drafted by the Greek army and served as a border guard at the Albanian-Greek border. In 1948, during the Greek civil war, he was drafted by the Partisans to build bunkers.

In 1949 Risto, along with many other civil war refugees, left home for the last time and never returned. Accompanied by his wife Sofia and son Alexander, Risto on August 10, 1949 left for Albania. From there he was sent to Poland, where he later was reunited with his daughter Sevda. While in Poland, Risto became very ill and disabled, dependent on his wife and daughter to look after his daily needs. In 1951 he fell from a window and died. Risto's body was buried in Poland where it remains to this day.

According to those who knew him in person, Risto was a gentleman well respected by all. He was a hard worker and an honest man.

There is one peculiarity about Risto's family worth mentioning. Many Oshchimians claim that the family was continuously involved in arguments and that the children were loud and rude. These "facts", however, must be corrected and the truth be told. The children were loud, but they were not arguing or being rude. Sofia their mother, in early childhood had contracted polio which left her deaf and unable to hear normal speech. To keep her in conversations, family members had to speak loudly. Growing up under these conditions seemed normal for the children, inside or outside the home. To this day, Risto's children are still loud and the peculiarity continued with the next generation.

INTERVIEWER – What do you know about Risto's wife Sofia and her family?

RISTO – Risto was first married to Kita Popovska from Oshchima, who tragically died from tuberculosis, along with Risto's first daughter Zoia. Risto later married Sofia Badzhovska from the village Labanitsa Kostur Region.

As I mentioned in his story, Risto worked in various places during his life, and one of those places was the village Labanitsa. He was widowed when he met Sofia, who was ten years younger than him, but because she was deaf and her prospects of marriage were slim she decided to marry him. Of course in those days permission had to be obtained from Sofia's family which Risto had to seek from Sofia's father. When everything was worked out, Sofia came to live with Risto in Oshchima. Other than that, I don't know much about Sofia's family.

INTERVIEWER – How did Risto die and what was his life like in Yugoslavia?

RISTO – As I mentioned in his story my grandfather Risto died in Poland. He was never in Yugoslavia. He left his village Oshchima as a war refugee in 1949 and went on foot to Albania. From there he was sent to Poland where he died in 1951.

INTERVIEWER – Your dad Nikola was interesting, he showed me his woodwork, his library and his Che Guevara poster and we had a laugh. Was he a leftie all his life?

RISTO – My father did some woodwork and did have a library of Macedonian, Greek and Bulgarian books but he did not have a poster of Che Guevara. He may have had a small picture of Che Guevara in one of his books but not a poster. I donated all his books to the Canadian Macedonian Historical Society here in Toronto and found no such poster.

And no, my father was not a "leftie". He spoke a great deal about the communists, particularly about the Communist Party of Greece, because it had influence on the Macedonian people, but I don't believe he was a "practicing" communist. Let me put it to you this way, he was never a member of the Communist Party and had not joined any communist party organizations or practiced communism in any shape or form. He was a villager with a grade three education, a land owner and, to a very small extent, a practicing capitalist. Before he left for Canada he owned a number of land plots in Oshchima and a medium size herd of sheep. He lived a simple conservative life.

He only supported the communists during the war years and only because the Communist Party of Greece was the only party in Greece that showed any interest in the Macedonian people. And from what I have learned from my own research, its interest was not to help the Macedonian people but rather to involve them in its messy war. It promised to recognize the Macedonian people as “Macedonians” with equal rights as the Greek people, which did not happen! And since then, to this day, the CPG has insisted that Macedonians don’t exist. So, my father was not only “not a leftie” but he had no reason or incentive to be a “leftie”.

INTERVIEWER – What kind of work did your father do in Canada?

RISTO – When my father arrived in Canada he briefly worked in a restaurant doing various jobs in the kitchen and afterwards got a job in a car parts manufacturing factory where he operated a punch press making bumpers for cars and trucks. He retired from that job.

INTERVIEWER – What was it like growing up with him as your dad? Was he bitter about the time he served in the Greek islands? How did these experiences affect him?

RISTO – He often spoke to me about it in bits and pieces, that is, about his personal experiences in the Greek island prisons. I found out more about his experiences from films and books which showed a more complete picture of what was done to prisoners there. One thing that he regretted was not knowing why he was sent to prison. He died without knowing what he had done wrong to deserve being sent to prison for five years. His time in prison did affect him, not because he lost five years of his young life, age 19 to 24, but also because he was tortured and abused in ways we can’t even imagine today. But, he wasn’t bitter about it. He accepted it like it was his fate. Why? I don’t know.

In my own research I did find out why he was sent to prison but it was too late for him. He had died by then.

As I said in one of our previous interviews, my father Nikola was forcibly taken from his village, along with a number of other men,

on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1947 and sent to the Greek island prison camps. He was kept in prison until January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the day he arrived back in Oshchima.

On several occasions I asked my father what he had done and why he was sent to prison but until the day he died he did not know, because no one would tell him. All he knew was what his jailers told him, “that he was a danger to the Greek state”.

Later, as I began to research the so-called Greek Civil War, I found out that my father was a victim of American policies in Greece. He was a victim of Lieutenant General James A. Van Fleet’s military tactics.

On March 1, 1947, U.S. President Harry Truman announced the decision to proclaim the “Truman Doctrine” for engaging the U.S. in Greece. Greece was granted credit and advanced military equipment to equip its government army. At the same time Van Fleet, an American General anti-guerrilla specialist, was made available to the Greek government.

With Van Fleet’s strategy and tactics applied in the last battles fought in the Vicho and Gramos battlefields, DAG was defeated and ejected outside of Greece.

So what exactly was Van Fleet’s strategy and how did it involve my father... and he didn’t know about it?

Van Fleet was familiar with the concept of how to starve a guerrilla army. In order to do that, he said, you will have to rob it of the ability to feed itself and the ability to recruit new fighters.

Most of the food and recruits that supplied the partisan army came from the Macedonian mountain villages.

To stop the food supply all residents from the small villages were removed and placed in towns and large villages. These places were guarded by the Greek army and the Greek police. Curfews and restrictions of movement were then placed so no one could move

without authorization. This cut off most of the food supply to the partisans.

To stop the partisans from recruiting new fighters, the Greek government arrested basically every man, capable of carrying a gun, who was not loyal to the Greek government or was affiliated with the partisan movement. All these people were sent to the Greek island prison camps.

My father was affiliated with the partisan movement. All his brothers and sisters were partisans and fighting in the war. He was the only young person left home to look after the farm and his aging mother and father, so he became a target of Van Fleet's strategy.

So, to starve the partisans out, Van Fleet basically emptied all the small villages of their population and arrested every man who might be a potential partisan.

The people from the small villages were moved to the large ones because the Greeks didn't have enough policemen to send to every village. The move, of course, was done by force.

All the villagers were moved. They moved them into already occupied houses and told the people that they had to share the space and the food. Then the Greeks went looking for and hunted down partisans who were on the move.

The civilian people had limited mobility and curfews were in effect, even in the large villages where the people were guarded by the police.

INTERVIEWER – You are doing a lot of work for the Macedonian cause online. How much of this do you think was instilled in you from hearing your father's stories and those of others from Oshchima?

RISTO – I was twelve years old when my father left Oshchima for Canada and all I knew by then was that we were not Greeks, and that we were Macedonians, something that had to be kept a secret. My parents told me that we were not Greeks in order to shut me up

from singing Greek patriotic songs about the so-called Greek heroes who fought in the so-called Greek struggle in Macedonia. Those so-called “Greek heroes” were the “cut throats” that terrorized the Macedonian population and killed a lot of Macedonian people in order to make Macedonia Greek.

It was after we immigrated to Canada that I began to discover the wider picture of who we were and what was done to us over the ages. Most Macedonians, who were aware of the various struggles and conflicts in which we had been involved, were able to tell me what happened and who did what to whom... but very few to none could tell me “WHY” these things were done to us. That I found out on my own, through a great deal of research.

What I discovered I published on the internet in various forums. After that I began to develop a growing list of readers who demanded more and more information. Of course I didn’t know any more than what I had learned from reading books and from what the old people had told me, but that seemed to resonate with my readers.

I had to learn to read Macedonian in order to read Macedonian books and access the Macedonian archives, initially for my own interest, and later to translate material for my readers. Eventually I began to translate entire books.

INTERVIEWER – Some parents chose not to tell their children about what happened to them in the war as a way of shielding them and preventing them from inheriting traumatic memories. Do you think it’s a good idea to do that – just forget after immigration?

RISTO – No! Absolutely not! In my opinion it would be a crime to hide the truth from those who are most important to you. Children can’t and won’t inherit traumatic memories from a bygone era that they themselves did not experience. But they can certainly appreciate it... or not... If they know the truth of what their parents have gone through... then it would be their choice to do what they want with that knowledge...

Ask yourself this; is it a good idea for the Jews not to tell their children about what happened to them during the Nazi occupation? I

don't think that you will find a single Jew who will agree with hiding that information, especially from their own family.

One way or another the children or grandchildren will find out from other people... that is about what happened to their parents or ancestors and they may find themselves in precarious situations. Like a Jew, for example, who did not know what happened to the Jews, showing sympathy for the neo-Nazis...

How would a child or descendant who had supported the Nazis feel if they discovered their parents or ancestors were gassed to death by the Nazis... and their parents neglected to tell them that?

I am of the opinion that parents should not keep big secrets from their children. Those secrets one day will come out.

INTERVIEWER – What drives you to find Macedonian stories and translate and publish them?

RISTO – Basically growing up in a western society, I was under the belief that the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia had no books and the books written by Macedonian authors were not worth the paper they were written on. This, by the way, is a belief of many people here in Canada. The credentials and experiences acquired in non-western countries are not recognized in Canada because of that. Doctors, dentists, engineers... etc... are required to have a Canadian education or “Canadian experience” to be considered for employment because many people here believe that somehow “we have higher standards here”. But that's not always true.

I did not find the true value of Macedonian books until I started reading them for myself. Let me put it another way. I was left with no choice but to turn to Macedonian books to find out things about us Macedonians. I knew that the Macedonian people had a Macedonian national uprising against the Ottomans in 1903, they participated in driving the Ottomans out of Macedonia in 1912, they fought in the Albanian front against Fascist Italy, they fought in the Greek Civil War, they were evicted from their homeland... etc. But none of this was recorded in western books.

These were experiences in which even my own family had taken place. Yet, I could not find a single book in western libraries that mentioned anything about that. Was it because we do not exist? Westerners, including countries like Greece and Bulgaria, which occupy Macedonian territories today, say “YES! MACEDONIANS DO NOT EXIST!” So, which is it? Do we not exist or not? Who should I believe, my own people or strangers who don’t care if we live or die... and only care about their own interests?

So, now you can see why I turned to Macedonian books. I consider myself lucky to have learned to speak and read Macedonian but most Macedonians born in Greece, now living in the Diaspora, and their descendants, can neither speak nor read in the Macedonian language, even though they consider themselves staunch Macedonians. I translate the books for them. This, I hope answered your question.

I should also mention at this point that the reason why Macedonians born in Greece cannot speak or read Macedonian is because the Greek state has banned and made the Macedonian language illegal. The Macedonian language in Greece has been banned since Greece occupied Macedonian territories in 1912, 1913 and made it illegal to speak in 1938.

INTERVIEWER – A Greek academic wrote in an academic paper that you promote “irredentism” on the internet. Can I get your response on that?

RISTO – You can call it what you want... Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. It may be “irredentism” that I am promoting to the Greeks; but it is human rights that I am promoting to the Macedonians...

But the academic is not far from the mark. After all “irredentism” is “nationalism advocating for the regaining of a culturally or historically related region”, in my case Greek occupied Macedonia, “now under foreign rule”.

Let us face the facts: the Macedonian territories which I call home have been occupied by Greece since 1912, 1913 when Greece

invaded Macedonia, occupied it, partitioned a large chunk of it (51%) and annexed it for itself. Then it did everything in its power to destroy everything that was Macedonian, including its people. After that it made every effort to assimilate the Macedonian people into the Greek fold. Those who refused to be assimilated it exiled, jailed, tortured and downright murdered. It then changed all the people's names from Macedonian to Greek, renamed every place name from Macedonian to Greek and erased every trace of everything that was Macedonian. On top of that it banned the Macedonian language and made it illegal to be spoken... even by people who could speak no other language. And if by asking to have a small semblance of what was once mine, like to be able to speak my own mother tongue in my own homeland, is "irredentism" then I am an "irredentist"!

INTERVIEWER – I was afraid to meet your Uncle Vasil because I had heard so many stories about him; that he killed a Pontian (a Christian Turk colonist settled in Greek occupied Macedonia by the Greek state) in Mikrolimni in the first communist attack against the Greek police. Was he that high ranked in DAG and then in Tashkent?

RISTO – This is news to me. I have known my Uncle Vasil for almost my entire life and I have never heard him say such an outrageous thing.

Here is my Uncle Vasil's story:

Vasil, son of Risto and Sofia was born in the village Oshchima on August 15th, 1925 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada (he is now deceased). Vasil attended school up to grade 6 and was proud to say he graduated with a mark of 90%.

After completing grade school, Vasil went to work on the family homestead on a full time basis. After the death of his brother Lazo, Vasil being the eldest male living at home assumed responsibility for most household activities. His father Risto worked outside Oshchima, sometimes abroad, and was unavailable for household duties for most of the year. Yields from the land were not sufficient to support a family of twelve so Risto had no choice but to seek

employment elsewhere. Before Lazo's death, on many occasions, Vasil assisted his father with his projects. This included many trips to Prespa and Albania, which sometimes lasted for months.

With the outbreak of the Greek–Italian war in 1940, like many young men, Vasil found himself in the middle of a brewing controversy. At that time the Greek communist party was growing in strength and recruiting young Macedonian men and women into their ranks with promises of freedom, human rights, and equality for all Macedonians. Organizers frequently came calling on the young to join. In 1943 Vasil, along with other idealists from Oshchima, signed up and became a party member. In June of 1944 Vasil was drafted by the Partisan police force and sent to Lagen near Vicho where he served as a police officer from July to September. When his service ended, Vasil joined the youth group and was allowed to go home provided he returned to service on short notice. His leave lasted until March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1947 when Vasil was recalled to fight in the Greek civil war. He, along with about five thousand Partisans, was trained, armed, and sent to serve at various posts between Vicho and Gramos. After two years as a courier Vasil achieved the rank of second lieutenant. During his career as a Partisan, Vasil saw much action and experienced pain and suffering. One time after a bomb exploded Vasil was knocked unconscious. Thinking that he was dead, his comrades, hurrying to avoid capture, buried him by piling stones on his body. Hours later, Vasil awakened traumatized and confused, dug himself out of the rock pile and went wandering the countryside. The trauma had left him with short-term memory loss, which took hours before he was able to comprehend his predicament. He recalls his chest being bruised and having severe pain and difficulty breathing. His chest trauma subsequently re-occurred for six years, each year on the anniversary of the episode.

After his recovery, Vasil was assigned to lighter duties delivering information between commands. This lasted until mid 1948 when once again fate dealt him a different hand. It was a rainy, fog filled morning when Vasil was ordered to deliver mail to a nearby battalion. On his way he ran into enemy fire and was almost hit by mortar. He was not directly hit but a spray of rock and sand lightly injured his leg and temporarily blinded his eyes. Under the cover of fog, however, Vasil was able to slip out and escape enemy detection.

He arrived at his destination intact and successfully completed his mission. But as luck would have it, a battle was brewing and men were needed to fight. In spite of his injuries and inability to see properly, the local commander detained Vasil and ordered him to take part in the fight. This was an important fight defending a strategic position. The men were given strict orders to hold onto it no matter what happened. Soon the enemy engaged them and the battle lasted until dusk. When it was over, eight out of the fifty-six Partisans who took part were killed. Vasil was wounded in the back, but the enemy advance was repelled.

Vasil was taken to a nearby field hospital and had his wounds looked after. His recovery, however, was brief and prematurely interrupted by a courier who delivered orders to evacuate. Because the Bourandari (Royal Greek forces) were fast approaching and the hospital staff needed time to evacuate, all available able hands, including the wounded, were ordered to fight and stall the advance. Vasil remembers it was a fierce battle. The Partisans fought with mere guns against the onslaught of mortar and machine gun fire.

Being unprepared the Partisans ran out of ammunition. Those able to move escaped while the rest fought to the end. Only five made it out alive. During his retreat, Vasil spotted a supply man in the distance, but before he could get to him, a mortar fell killing him and his mule. Vasil picked up what he needed and continued his retreat. He was on the run when a Bourandar, hiding behind a rock, fired at him. It was a loud burst of machine gun fire. Vasil with his automatic rifle in one hand and gear in the other ran into the woods for cover. He realized that his diversion would take him away from his destination, but what choice did he have? His escape route was in the open and dangerous. As he contemplated his predicament, Vasil heard a woman's voice in the distance crying out for help. The woman called out in Macedonian, then in Greek. It appeared that she was wounded and could not move. He quickly went to her aid and as their conversation ensued, he found out she was from Nestram, a Macedonian village. He picked her up, put her over his shoulder and carried her through the woods. His effort, however, was in vain as a mortar fell in close proximity instantly killing the woman with a severe blow to the head. Vasil was devastated, dropped the woman's body and ran. Unable to properly see, he lost his bearings and did

not know where he was. He realized he had left the woods when he heard the dreaded roar of a fighter plane overhead and watched the dust ripples of bullets running by. He ran as fast as he could, watching the ripples come and go again and again as fire from the sky rained down on him. It seemed like an eternity as the two planes circled around from above again and again, mocking him and playing with his life. Finally he was in the safety of the woods. He was still running when he encountered the cliff of a sinkhole and almost fell into it. It was one of those phenomena that naturally occur in nature due to years of limestone erosion. Vasil was lucky he stopped in time. He paused for a moment looking down when he heard a man's voice softly muttering something to him. The words were Greek and beckoned him to come closer with promises of ending his misery forever. He slowly looked up in the direction of the voice, coming from the other side of the cliff. As Vasil's sore eyes began to focus he saw a man and recognized his uniform, that of a Bourandar officer. During his ordeal Vasil must have somehow circled back and was now in the hands of the enemy. Too many things had happened that day and Vasil was in no mood for mockery as he opened fire. He doesn't remember how his rifle got into his hands, but he was grateful it was there. He thinks it came off his shoulder during his abrupt encounter with the sinkhole. Figuring him for a deserter, the unexpected burst of automatic fire surprised the enemy. As Vasil continued to fire, fearing an ambush, the Bourandari quickly retreated.

Vasil tired, wounded, and hungry made it back to Breznitsa where he came upon a stream of water. Being thirsty and watching the water trickle down the stream made him want a drink badly. Vasil knew that in his condition he couldn't have any water, he had seen wounded die after drinking water. Vasil succumbed to his thirst and had only a sip. After that, he reported to local command and asked them for transportation to the hospital. He was refused, as there were too many other priorities. Vasil left, disappointed, and spent two days in Rula (Ano Rulski) before walking to Preol where he, along with one hundred and fifty other wounded, boarded two trucks destined for the Yugoslav border. The first truck was allowed entry but the second was refused and turned back. Vasil made it in and was taken to a hospital in Koutlanovo to recuperate. After fifteen days of hospitalization and daily baths in the thermal springs, Vasil

fully recovered from his wounds. It was now time to leave so Vasil, along with sixty others, was ordered to report to Pozdivishcha for re-assignment. Vasil was re-assigned to the fourteenth brigade at the village Kazani in Kostur. His new commander was an old acquaintance who recognized Vasil from a previous meeting they had had in 1945 at the village Papratsko. Vasil was campaigning there for the Partisans when he met the man for the first time. The new boss gave Vasil command of twenty men and put him in charge of guarding Kolomnati. Vasil remembers this day well, as he ordered his men to take up position inside a patch of tall ferns, behind some stones. It was the same day that Georgi Boglev from Oshchima was captured. With four machine guns on standby, the men hid in the ferns and kept silent for most of the day. This went on from dawn until about four in the afternoon when a guard noticed movement from the direction of Bapchor. It was a band of Bourandari coming. Vasil ordered his men to take their position and hold their fire. After a brief firefight, feeling the sting of the ambush, the Bourandari retreated. In other parts of the battle, however, Partisan units did not fare as well and many men and women lost their lives during the fight. When it was over, all able bodies, including the lightly wounded, were ordered to retreat and regroup. At the new camp, combatants were separated according to education and technical skills with military equipment. The more educated were made officers and given command positions regardless of their combat experience. The rest were assigned to lower ranks. Having over two years of combat experience and being a trusted courier, Vasil was not happy with his demotion into the lower ranks. He complained to the commanding officer and asked for his rank to be reinstated. The officer was unmoved by his plea and ordered him to either pick a weapon and stay where he was, or leave and join another command.

Vasil chose to stay and took his case to the battalion commander. The top boss heard Vasil's case and gave him command of a guard unit comprised of three men and a woman. After spending ten days at camp, Vasil's unit was sent on assignment to guard a work crew of sixteen women and several mules, responsible for picking grapes and apples. When they arrived at their destination, the group encountered several rotting human skulls propped up on wooden stakes. The heads belonged to the guards of a previous work crew

ambushed by the Bourandari. Hesitantly, the crew began picking grapes while the guards, certain of an impending ambush, took up defensive positions. True to expectation, before they were finished, several shots rang out sending everyone for cover. The Bourandari came back with high hopes, but the guards fought fiercely and repelled the attack. The crew, fearing for their lives, fled the scene. Vasil, along with the other guards, assembled the mules along with the grapes and left for Posdivishcha to pick apples. There, to their surprise, they found the missing crew hiding inside the village. In spite of their desertion, no charges were laid against members of the crew. When Vasil returned to camp he heard from the news wire that his skirmish left one Bourandar dead and one wounded.

After that assignment Vasil was transferred to a battalion near the village Boukovik to prepare for battle. The frontline was ordered to penetrate a triple barrier of barbed wire, laced with activated grenades. When they reached their target, a man experienced in mine removal breached the first and second barriers but discovered a land mine and could not penetrate the last barrier. As a result, the advance was halted and the combatants refused to continue until the area was de-mined. The unit commander disagreed with the assessment and called the men cowards for not proceeding. In spite of the danger he went forward to show them how it was done. Unfortunately, he stepped on a mine and was blown up. The force of the explosion shook the fence and triggered activated grenades causing them to explode. As the startled men retreated in panic, Vasil remembers taking a glimpse of a dying woman lying on the ground with a large hole in her back. After the danger passed, Vasil felt severe pains in his head. A quick examination revealed wounds to his head, leg, and hand. Vasil walked back to command and was taken to a nearby field hospital. He lost a lot of blood and went into shock before he passed out. Next he remembers hearing a voice and opening his eyes to bright sunlight. It was almost noon the next day and he had slept through the night. The voice that woke him was that of an old man whom Vasil knew. The old man advised Vasil to leave at once because the Greek forces were advancing quickly and his life was in danger. The field hospital was evacuated in the dark the night before and the camp was abandoned. Vasil was unable to walk on his own so he asked the man to fashion him a crutch from a tree branch. Before he could get too far, however, the Bourandari

arrived and started shooting. Vasil made an effort to hide but was spotted. The next thing he remembers was a sharp pain in his leg and rolling down a steep hill. He was wounded in the same leg again. One of the Bourandars went looking but would not risk going down the hill so he abandoned the search. Vasil passed out and when he came to he remembers feeling very cold, fists clasped tight, and teeth clenched. He had fallen into a sandy pit and was now trapped. He was lucky, however, because soon after the Bourandari left a deliveryman came by and found him. Vasil convinced the man to take him to the hospital. He went to another camp by mule and from there to Posdivishcha by horse. On their way the men heard the roar of a bomber which sent them scurrying. Vasil urged the man to run for cover while he slumped off the horse and rolled into an irrigation ditch. The horse took off down river and disappeared. The water was running fast and felt cold as Vasil submerged himself out of sight when a bomb fell nearby, temporarily rendering him deaf.

When the danger was over, unable to walk, he pulled himself out of the ditch and waited. Another man came by and helped Vasil to his feet. Fearing more encounters from above, Vasil asked the man to help him hide in a nearby garden, close to the river. The garden was fenced in and its foliage provided good cover. Soon after, the first man came back with the horse but refused to go any further because he felt it was too dangerous. He helped Vasil mount the horse and left. Vasil's latest wound was high up on his leg impairing his riding and causing him severe pain. Having no other choice, Vasil rode to Posdivishcha.

The doctor there examined him and recommended that he be taken to the hospital at Kolomnati. Vasil was very hungry and asked for some food. Given a choice he asked for fried red peppers. While riding through Posdivishcha, he had noticed a bunch of red peppers hanging on the windowsill of a house. As his hunger grew, the image of peppers remained in his mind. The good people of Posdivishcha obliged and fried some peppers with feta cheese for him. When he finished his meal, he was put on a stretcher and carried by a team of six field medics from Posdivishcha to the field hospital in Kolomnati. From their conversations, Vasil concluded that all the women were Macedonian. Two pairs of women carried the stretcher and the third pair was relief. Vasil was a big man, over

six feet tall, a burden for four women to carry at the best of times. For most of the trip, he kept to himself as the women conversed and complained about his weight. Their tranquility, however, was broken when the roar of a bomber came from above.

Suddenly, Vasil was dropped to the ground flat on his back in the middle of the road as the women scurried for cover. When the danger passed, the women came back and asked Vasil if he was all right. Vasil did not appreciate how he had been treated and kept to himself saying nothing. Thinking that he was Greek and didn't understand Macedonian, the women continued their chat and complaint until they reached the bottom of a hill. They were already tired and now had to carry him uphill on narrow footpaths. Being upset, they started the climb with Vasil upside down, his head lower than his feet. The constant jolting and blood pressure from being carried that way caused Vasil severe pain and headaches. The women were struggling as they continued the climb. One of them suggested that they toss Vasil down a ravine and leave him there to die. Surely he was not worth the effort? Another objected and scolded the first for having such thoughts. "What if he was your husband or brother, would you still do that?" she asked. Vasil was in too much pain to listen to the moral dilemma or care about what happened to him. When they finally arrived, a familiar face greeted Vasil. It was Rina Bogleva from Oshchima. Rina told Vasil that his sister Sevda was also there. When Vasil asked for her, Rina ran through the camp looking for her to give her the news. Hearing that her brother was in the camp, Sevda, was thrilled and ran back as quickly as possible asking people on the way, "Where is my brother, where is my brother?"

One of the women who carried Vasil heard her and answered, "Here is your brother you silly woman, you call everyone your brother." But after a hug, tears, and a long conversation in Macedonian, the woman was convinced Vasil was Sevda's real brother and the women apologized for their behaviour. While in the hospital, Sevda cared for Vasil until his wounds healed.

Vasil was summoned to Gramos once again and from there (after the defeat of the Partisans) he left for Albania (Bureli camp) to escape capture. In his career as a Partisan, Vasil experienced much combat

and was wounded four times, with twelve entry wounds. It was August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1949 when Vasil saw his homeland for the last time. With an uncertain future he boarded the ship, Vladivostok, at the port of Durresi in Albania and headed for Russia. From there he was sent via train to Tashkent in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1950 Vasil married Sofia from the village Trnava. Vasil met Sofia for the first time in 1948 at Gramos and again in Albania. Sofia was also drafted by the Partisans and served from 1947 to 1949. Initially she was sent to Gramos for training and was taught to use a rifle. After that she was sent to school to train for communications (telephone). Then she was sent on combat missions first to Voden and later to Lerin where she fought the final battle of the civil war. Sofia also escaped to Albania to avoid capture and was sent to Tashkent.

In Tashkent, Vasil and Sofia found jobs in a textile factory where Vasil worked as a cotton loader and Sofia as a painter of cotton combine equipment. In 1951, Vasil was accepted into the military academy and after 38 months, graduated as an artillery officer equivalent to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. After graduation in 1953, Vasil went back to work in the textile factory for another year and a half. For the next eleven years before coming to Toronto, Vasil worked as an insulation worker, producing roofing shingles, and insulating hot water pipes and boilers.

Sofia continued to work in the textile factory until the birth of her first son Vasia in 1952. She spent the next five years at home with Vasia. After that, she worked in construction for a while and later in a leather factory assembling wallets and purses. Her second son Alexander was born in 1962.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1965 Vasil, Sofia, Vasia, and Alexander permanently left Tashkent, destined for Toronto, Canada, which remains their home today.

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As you can see, my Uncle Vasil was an ordinary man, and not a murderer. He fought for the rights of the Macedonian people like

tens of thousands of others like him... And as a result was permanently exiled from his homeland and place of birth by the Greek state.

INTERVIEWER – I love Vasil’s library under the stairs with volumes on Stalin, Marx, Lenin. Was he dedicated to the communist cause?

RISTO – No! Like my father and thousands of other Macedonians like them, my Uncle Vasil was sold on the idea that the CPG and their Marxists ideas were going to solve our Macedonians problems with Greece... But, as you know, that never happened! If he was so “dedicated” to the communist cause he would have stayed in Tashkent or in Moscow for that matter! In other words, he would not have come to Canada! And NO he was not a communist!

Both my father and my uncle had umpteen books on all sorts of subjects, mainly on history, but from your questions, I see that you are only interested to know if they were “dedicated” communists or not. Why is that? Non-communists can be Macedonians!

INTERVIEWER – What about figures like Gotse Delchev and others of his era, what importance do they have today in the Macedonian community?

RISTO – Delchev and the other leaders of the 1903 Macedonian national uprising against the Ottoman occupation led the way towards the formation of a united Macedonian state and laid the foundation of which we are building on today.

Here is Delchev’s story:

Gotse Delchev (1872-1903)

Gotse Delchev, the son of Macedonian patriots Nikola and Sultana Delchev, was born on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1872 in Kukush, a town 35 km north of Solun in now Greek occupied Macedonia. His parents had been instrumental in raising rebellions directed against the Patriarchate (Greeks) and had been active in the Razlog and Kreshna uprisings in 1878.

Gotse completed his elementary education in Kukush, then attended high school in Solun where he studied literature and social studies. He then entered the Sofia Military Academy in July 1891 where he furthered his knowledge in military and scientific discipline. He was expelled from the Academy for his social tendencies and returned to Macedonia in 1894.

He was always keen to learn and kept up with Macedonian national affairs. He played an active role in the political clubs of Solun and Sofia and kept in close contact with others like himself, especially the socialists. They greatly contributed to Gotse's involvement in IMRO and helped shape the course of the Macedonian national liberation movement. The years 1894 to 1903 represented the final revolutionary stage of Gotse's short life. His career as a teacher took him to Novo Selo (near Shtip) and Bansko from 1894 to 1896. Later he became involved with the revolutionary cause, preparing the Macedonian people for the armed uprising. While teaching in Novo Selo he met Damian Gruev the leader of the IMRO central committee. The two men shared similar ideals and became close friends. In 1895 Gruev convinced Delchev to join IMRO. It wasn't too long afterwards that Delchev became IMRO's undisputed leader.

Gotse was a realist as well as an idealist who loved people, hated tyranny and saw the world as a place of many cultures living together in peace. The international and cosmopolitan views of Delchev were far ahead of his time and could be summarized in his proverbial sentence: "I understand the world solely as a field for cultural competition among nations".

As a realist Gotse knew that in order for a revolution to be successful it had to be a "moral revolution" of the mind, heart and soul of an enslaved people. They needed to feel like people with rights and freedoms, not like slaves. With that in mind Gotse set out to build a revolutionary conscience in the Macedonian population, thus setting the revolutionary wheels in motion.

The inclusion of rural areas into the organizational districts contributed to the expansion of the organization and the increase in its membership, while providing the essential prerequisites for the

formation of the military power of the organization, and had Gotse Delchev as its military advisor.

The primary question regarding the timing of the uprising in Macedonia implicated an apparent discordance among the representatives at the Solun Conference in 1903, with Delchev opposing the uprising as premature. Since then he tried to oppose an early uprising. He met with Gruev in Solun and convinced him to delay at least long enough to get organized and prepare for it. He would have had a chance to speak to the entire leadership during the Smilevo Conference, scheduled to start on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1903, but he never made it.

Delchev was killed on May 4, 1903 near the village Banitsa, Seres Region, now in Greek occupied Macedonia, in a skirmish with Turkish forces. Delchev's remains were transferred to Bulgaria in 1923. Then, after the Second World War, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1946, they were transferred to the People's Republic of Macedonia. The following day they were enshrined in a marble sarcophagus, which to this day is displayed in the yard of the Sveti Spas (Holy Saviour) Church in Skopje.

Delchev will be remembered as the undisputed leader, strategist, ideologue and diplomat of the original IMRO. He was a man who almost single-handedly sowed the seeds of resistance amongst the Macedonian peasantry, through foresight, popularity, tactical skill and enormous enthusiasm.

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INTERVIEWER – Has the Alexander the Great debate and ownership of ancient Macedonia as an emblem of identity distorted history?

RISTO – No! Not for me! Clearly Macedonia belongs to the Macedonian people, to those who were born in Macedonia and were there for many generations and not to those who invaded, occupied

and annexed Macedonia for themselves or to the colonists deposited there subsequent to Macedonia's annexation.

Alexander the Great was a Macedonian king but he was also a self-imposed king on many other peoples and because of that Alexander could be considered as the king of many of the ancient people... However, no one, except for the Greeks, has laid claim to him or considered him to be their king... Not the Turks, Egyptians, Syrians, Afghanis, Iraqis, Iranians, Indians, and so on...

In any case, it is the Greeks who want to claim ownership to the past and to Macedonia's history. It is the Greeks who have distorted ancient history by making outrageous claims that it exclusively belongs to them... and they exclusively are the "descendants of both the ancients Greeks...and now the ancient Macedonians..." leaving no room for the existence of others.

What is more outrageous is that the Turkish Christian colonists and settlers deposited in Greek occupied Macedonia after the 1920's are now the "real Macedonians" and descendents of the ancient Macedonians... while we the indigenous Macedonians are the "newcomer" Slavs who came to Macedonia around 600 AD. And Alexander is their king and not ours?

INTERVIEWER – The first President of Macedonia after the fall of Yugoslavia said they had nothing to do with Ancient Macedonia but were descended from Slavs. What has changed?

RISTO – Gligorov was right. We are descendents of the Slavs. You asked me this question before and I explained to you that the people who today we call Slavs, were the first Europeans. The Slavs, by their many ancient names, were the oldest strata of people in Europe. You should read the books "The Making of the Slavs" by Florin Curta from the University of Florida and the "VENETI First Builders of European Community" by Jožko Šavli, Matej Bor and Ivan Tomažič. These authors have a different view of who the people the west calls "Slavs" are. But, unfortunately the view and understanding of the real Slavs is skewed by our so-called "western science" which has false beliefs about them. For more information on this see your notes of our previous two interviews.

But let me be straight with you, Gligorov was a politician and his concern was less with what our relationship was with the ancient Macedonians and more with our survival as Macedonians today. Gligorov said what he had to say, and I personally know this for a fact. He wanted to “save” Macedonia from the Greek onslaught in a critical period of time. The Greeks were looking for every opportunity to nail us Macedonians to the cross because at that time they had the upper hand on history with the lies they spread about us for over a century, but Gligorov did not give them that opportunity. Gligorov backed off and did not fall into the Greek trap. He did this because he was a shrewd politician and the lives of his people and the survival of his country was more important to him than who was who in ancient times.

But what the Greeks are doing is both shameful and sad because Macedonia and the Macedonian heritage belongs to the Macedonian people and not to the Greeks, who we consider occupiers of Macedonia. Even a person that knows nothing of our situation will tell you that! But, then as we all know, might is always right and when you have the might you dictate what is right. Gligorov knew that very well and that is why he chose to be “wrong”... in order for us to survive. I know many Macedonians who feel that Gligorov was a traitor for saying what he said, but then they need to ask themselves: “What would have been better: to put Macedonia in jeopardy by sticking to his principles or to back down and risk being called a traitor while saving Macedonia? He chose the later... putting the safety of his people ahead of his own reputation and principles...

What the Greeks are doing to the Macedonians is truly sick because we the Macedonians are the victims here, and while we are fighting for our survival as a nation, the Greeks seem to enjoy seeing us suffer...

Here is Gligorov’s story in brief:

Kiro Gligorov (1917-2012)

Kiro Gligorov was born on May 3, 1917, in Shtip, Kingdom of Serbia (then controlled by the Kingdom of Bulgaria) and died on January 1, 2012 (aged 94) in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. He was a Macedonian and belonged to the political party Socijal Demokratski Sojuz na Makedonija (SDSM). He was an Atheist.

Kiro Gligorov was the first President of the Republic of Macedonia, serving from 1991 to 1999. He held various high positions in the political establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including as Secretary of State for Finance in the Federal Executive Council, a member of the Yugoslav Presidency, as well as President of the Assembly of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from May 15, 1974 to May 15, 1978.

Gligorov graduated from the University of Belgrade's Law School and was a participant in the National Liberation War of the ethnic Macedonians from 1941 as a secretary of the Initiative committee for the organization of the Antifascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) and a finance commissioner in the Presidium of ASNOM.

After achieving parliamentary democracy in the Republic of Macedonia in 1990, he became the first democratically elected president of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia on January 27, 1991. On April 16, 1991, the parliament adopted the constitutional amendment for removing the "Socialist" adjective from the official name of the country and, on June 7 the same year, the new name Republic of Macedonia was officially established, hence Gligorov continued his presidency as the President of the Republic of Macedonia.

He served for two terms, from January 27, 1991 to November 19, 1999. He was re-elected for his second term in office on November 19, 1994. He led his country to independence proclaimed after the referendum held on September 8, 1991, and tried to keep it out of the Yugoslav wars, a task made difficult by disputes with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria and Greece who all faced separate issues with the Republic of Macedonia.

On October 3, 1995, Gligorov became a target of a car bomb assassination attempt in Skopje. While en route from his residence to his office, the vehicle carrying Gligorov was blown up by an explosion from a parked vehicle, killing his driver and injuring several passers-by. Gligorov was seriously injured above his right eye and was immediately conveyed to the hospital.

Since the incident there have been no suspects brought to book and no progress has been made in the investigation of the case. However, there have been short-lived speculations as to who could be the culprits. Shortly after the bombing, the Minister of Internal Affairs Ljubomir Frchkovski publicly claimed that “a powerful multinational company from a neighbouring country” was behind the assassination attempt, with the Macedonian media pointing at the Bulgarian Multigroup and the Yugoslav KOS as possible suspects. During a meeting between Multigroup head Iliya Pavlov and Gligorov in Ohrid, Pavlov assured Gligorov that his organization was not involved. All investigations were futile.

Gligorov was incapacitated until November 17, 1995. He was permanently blind in one eye as a result. Stojan Andov was acting president during Gligorov’s recuperation.

Gligorov died in the early hours of January 1, 2012, in his sleep. It is known that his request was that the funeral be private with only his closest family in attendance. He was buried in Butel Municipality, Skopje.

Kiro was the father of Vladimir Gligorov, a re-founder of the Serbian Democratic Party.

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One more thing! Of all the questions you could have asked relating to Macedonia and the Macedonian identity, why did you have to ask "what Gligorov had said". Why not ask a question about what millions of other patriotic Macedonians have said? You claim to be Macedonian, and I know by DNA you are three-quarters Macedonian and perhaps one-quarter Albanian, but, judging by your questions, you seem to lean towards the Greek side. Is that true?