

Macedonians who suffered in Greek hands

**Genocide committed against the
Macedonian people**



By Viktor Cvetanoski

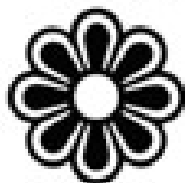
(Edited by Risto Stefov)

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BANISHING AND HELLENIZING EVERYTHING THAT WAS MACEDONIAN

With unseen terror and hate Greece eradicated everything that was Macedonian in the Aegean part of Macedonia

Fifty four years later Aleksandra Cvetanoska found her brother Giorgi in Australia. She found out that she had a brother after she had spent her childhood and younger years in dormitories in Poland, where she and the other refugee children from Shtrkovo were dropped off when she was only two and a half years old.

Dotsa Gogarevska from Sestevo never saw her mother again after she left the village. After the massive child evacuation program from the Aegean part of Macedonia in 1948, her mother passed away from worrying. Several years later the Greek military took Dotsa's father and two older sisters and imprisoned them in the Greek islands. Her two sisters now live in Greece, her older brother lives in the Czech Republic and her younger sister is with her in Poland.

"Eight years ago was the first time I met my parents since the evacuation. When I saw them it didn't feel like they were my mother and father, neither did my brother feel like he was my brother. Growing up in the children's homes I lost that feeling," said Vaska Petrovska.

When Sofia Ristovska was told that she should go and live with her parents in Poland, she wished she could stay in the refugee children's home in Romania. Fana Martinova, Lena Miliova, Milka Damovska and Ksantipa Kirova were ten year olds from Pozdivishta, Kostur Region. Before they left their village in the spring of 1948 they climbed up on the village church roof and sang the song "Goodbye mother, father, goodbye dear relatives, I'm leaving for a distant place". They never returned. After spending

years in dormitories in Romania and Poland they went to different places in the world. Lena went to Toronto, Canada, Ksantipa married a Polish man and remained in Poland, Milka went to Tashkent where her father was and Fana went to Macedonia. They didn't see each other until forty years later. Iane Bendeovski went to visit Orovo, his birthplace, but found his village completely destroyed. His house had been destroyed down to the foundation. Someone who knew the village well had to sketch a map for him so he could find it.

These are only a few episodes of the huge drama that the refugee children and their parents experienced during the Greek Civil War in Aegean Macedonia from 1946 to 1949. An experience which has continued to this day... Last year was the 60th year since this huge Balkan drama took place and was collectively remembered. Since then, there has been much research done to uncover the dramatic destinies of those children who were taken away and the reasons which caused this huge exodus. This book, published as a series of articles in the daily newspaper "Utrinski Vesnik" covers some of the details which may seem like a common account but each person's experience is a separate traumatic story.

The Macedonian people paid the highest price in the Greek Civil War. It has been estimated that between 25,000 and 30,000 children from the Aegean part of Macedonia were separated from their parents and taken to the so-called democratic Eastern European countries in the communistic block. All those children had no normal childhood; they spent the best years of their lives in children's homes, without the love of their parents. Among them were both Macedonians and Greeks but the vast majority were Macedonians. While they were away their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters stayed behind to fight in a predetermined losing war. Around the same number of children, about 30,000, mainly from the Aegean part of Macedonia were forcefully separated from their mothers by the Greek government army and Greek police and with the support of Greek Queen Frederica were taken to children's homes inside Greece and Hellenized.

When the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) organized and carried out the collection and exodus of these children ages two to fourteen,

it told the parents that the evacuation would be temporary and the children would be returned as soon as their side won the war. But the war was not won and the children did not come back, not after a year, not after ten years, not after sixty years. Only the Greek children came back... but not the Macedonians because they were not Greek.

There was no transportation provided for them so most of the children had to walk from their village to the Yugoslav border, some barefoot, over mountains and rough and frozen terrain. By the time they crossed the border their feet were frozen and bleeding.

For over half a century these children were not allowed to see their places of birth, not even for a short visit. As a result they spent their childhood and adult lives roaming the world. All attempts made to enter Greece were barred at the Greek border where they were stopped from entering by the Greek authorities. Several years ago, however, the Greek government temporarily opened its borders and allowed some to enter, but only those who had passports with Greek names and Greek places of birth. Those who had Macedonian names and a Macedonian place of birth were not allowed to enter. Those barred from entry grieved for their birthplace and waited for the Greek authorities to allow them to visit the graves of their parents and grandparents. Unfortunately most did not live long enough to once again return to the homes where they were born.

According to data provided by the CPG, after it lost the Greek Civil War, around 50,000 refugees, both Greeks and Macedonians, but mostly Macedonians, were exiled from their birthplace. Around 30,000 ended up in Yugoslavia and the rest ended up in other Eastern European countries. Around 4,000 were sent to Romania, 3,800 to Czechoslovakia, 5,479 to Poland, 3,299 to Hungary, around 3,000 to the Soviet Union and 380 to Bulgaria. But we suspect the number was higher than 50,000. According to Polish sources about 12,000 refugees were transferred to Poland alone.

Later, when relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia improved, most of the Macedonian refugees from the Eastern Block countries went to Macedonia, a smaller number remained in the former communist countries and some went to Canada, Australia and the

USA. They had to abandon their attempts to return home to their birthplaces, which became desolate because Greece refused to allow them to return.

About 40 Macedonian villages dropped off the map during the post Greek Civil War census. In other words, 40 Macedonian villages were erased off the map because all the residents were not allowed to return and reclaim their homes.

The refugee children, as they were called by the authorities everywhere, did not recognize themselves under that name. Many argued that they were not refugees because they did not leave, they were escorted out under false pretenses; with the promise that they would be returned. They were grateful to the host countries for looking after them and giving them a good education but they refused to be called “Refugee Children”. A more appropriate description would have been ‘Expelled Children’. They were “victims” not only from the Greek Civil War but also from the “Inform Bureau” when Tito and Stalin had their disagreements and from the “Cold War” being separated by the “Iron Curtain”. Their case was brought to the United Nations, where several resolutions were introduced for their return to their homes in Greece but that did not happen, not during their childhood, and for most never.

There are a couple of reasons to consider for why these children were evacuated. One, for humanitarian reasons; to save them from being killed by Greek government bombs dropped on them, and two, to ethnically cleanse the Macedonian population from Aegean Macedonia. According to the Macedonian leadership which recruited the Macedonian population to fight in the Greek Civil War, “the Macedonians were fighting for their national rights; and those who actively participated in persuading parents to allow them to give them their children, say that it was a humanitarian action to save them from being bombed. But recently, after the communists fell in Yugoslavia, new and louder voices surfaced which argued differently. They say that the Greek communists were dishonest; they lied to the Macedonian people, and behind this humanitarian action hid their nationalistic intentions to ethnically cleanse all the places where Macedonians lived.

Many were the “Macedonians who suffered in Greek hands” when their great suffering left permanent marks on them. Especially on those who, in one way or another, were directly involved in this war, but mostly on the souls of the tender aged children who were permanently separated from their parents. People who have heard their stories and opened their hearts understand why they still have open wounds and why they are still suffering. Especially those who were then small children but now have aged and have grandchildren of their own.

Many were the “Macedonians who suffered in Greek hands” who felt pain while their children grew up in foreign homes behind the closed Iron Curtain and felt nothing for their parents when they met them for the first time. They felt nothing but pain looking at them like they were strangers, not being able to even recognize their own mothers. That pain did not go away. Instead it spread like an infection which was then passed on to their children and grandchildren who also had to experience the huge Aegean drama. Their pain must be understood, acknowledged and never forgotten.

However, the Macedonian suffering in Greek hands did not start with the Greek Civil war; it dates back to the 1912, 1913 Balkan Wars and Macedonia’s invasion, occupation and partition by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. With unprecedented terror, murders and violence Greece forced out around 120,000 Macedonians from the part of Macedonia which they occupied; and never allowed them to return unless they declared themselves Greek. Those who remained in Greece were systematically assimilated and turned into instant Greeks. The Greek aim was to destroy everything that was Macedonian including the Macedonian culture and language, erasing all traces of Macedonian national identity. Even though Greece was pressured by the United Nations to recognize the Macedonian people living in Greece and even after Greece published a Macedonian elementary textbook so that the Macedonian children could learn to speak and read in their Macedonian mother tongue, Greece never delivered on its promises. Instead, Greece continued oppressing the Macedonian people and all other minorities that were not Greek. Even today Greece does not want to accept the reality that non-Greeks live in Greece and is determined to continue to enforce the same “Greater Greece”

(Megali Idea) policies. To this day Greece has refused to recognize the indigenous Macedonian identity living on Macedonian ancestral lands which Greece invaded, occupied and annexed in 1912, 1913 during the Balkan Wars.

Greece refuses to recognize that Macedonian people lived on those Macedonian lands before Greece annexed them, including great Macedonian people like Gotse Delchev and Krste Petkov Misirkov who were born and spent their childhood there. Greece refuses to recognize Damian Gruev, Hristo Tatarchev and their friends who created the Macedonian revolutionary organization TMORO (VMORO) or the Solun assassins who sacrificed themselves to show Europe that Macedonians lived in Macedonia who were not free and who were struggling for their freedom. Greece refuses to recognize that Macedonian people rose en masse during the 1903 Ilinden Uprising and fought to free themselves from the Ottomans and liberate Macedonia, their country; a country and people which Athens to this day is systematically Hellenizing.

According to Ivan Katardziev, a famous historical analyst who researched this period of Macedonia's past, "Greece has demonstrated great hatred towards the Macedonian people and everything that is Macedonian, especially during the Second Balkan War and the First World War. With its assimilation and denationalization practices Greece, with great bitterness, has involved itself in destroying and taking away everything that the Macedonian people inherited from their entire past."

According to Katardziev: "For a long time Greece has tried to increase its land base and create a 'Greater Greece' by any means possible including stepping over basic minority rights on all people who did not feel like being Greeks. But, in order to get a real and objective picture of Greece's policies regarding the rights of minorities in that country, regardless of its behaviour in certain situations and regardless of the declarations it makes to the UN bodies from time to time, we should keep in mind that the Greek foreign policy main formulation which has been systematic and permanent regardless of the political regime in power be it monarchist, republican, liberal-democratic, authoritarian and so on,

has always been to create a 'Greater Greek' state in the region with a homogenous Greek population."

Again according to Katardziev, this is what the Greek constitution said when it was written in 1882: "All inhabitants of Greece who believe in Jesus Christ are Hellenes (Greeks) which is a clear and precise definition of the 'Greater Greece' ideology which had received general national consensus in that country."

According to Dalibor Jovanovski, who researched Greece's policies regarding the Balkans in the period from 1881 to 1883, "From its inception Greece felt that Macedonia should be Greek because the existing small Greek kingdom of the time did not have enough economic resources for its existence. In other words, it needed more living space which could only be found in Macedonia which had the largest productive fields. Its territorial acquisition however had to be justified. It was at this point that Greek politicians and the Greek public in general, began to devise ways to show that Macedonia was historically Greek."

At the conclusion of the Balkan Wars Macedonia was partitioned between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Greece was given the largest piece, 51% of Macedonia. Serbia was given 39% and Bulgaria 10%. Before Macedonia was partitioned it had a population of about 2,000,000 inhabitants. Greece received the majority of them, 1,163,477 people.

Greece's genocidal policies can best be illustrated with facts and figures given by Todor Hristov Simovski in his book "Populated Places in Aegean Macedonia". According to Simovski, "Just before Macedonia was partitioned the population in the territory acquired by Greece was vastly Macedonian consisting of 326,000 Orthodox Christian and 41,000 Muslim Macedonians. There were also around 295,000 Turks, 234,000 Greeks, around 60,000 Jews, 50,000 Vlachs, 30,000 Romanians, 9,000 Albanians and so on."

According to Simovski, before the Ottomans arrived in Aegean Macedonia, the population was predominantly Macedonian. Even though many wars took place and regular devastation took place forcing people to move, the population still remained predominantly

Macedonian. The first time the Macedonian population was forced out en masse was during the Second Balkan War when the occupying Greek Army demonstrated its cruelty by burning down towns and villages and indiscriminately killing people.

Greece's "Greater Greece" policies of banishing Macedonians and other minorities from Greece's territory were sanctioned by the Great Powers. Supported by the Great Powers Greece signed two conventions for exchange of populations, one with Bulgaria on the 27th of November 1919 under its own initiative, and the second with Turkey after Greece lost the Greco-Turkish War of 1919 to 1922. During the Paris Peace Conference when the question for signing a peace agreement with Bulgaria arose, Greece submitted a Memorandum in which it asked if it could exchange the "Slav speaking" population in the Aegean part of Macedonia and Thrace with the Greek speaking population in Bulgaria. This meant, indirectly, that Greece wanted to remove the Macedonian population from its birthplace.

According to Katardziev, "Greece wanted to permanently remove the large Macedonian population from its homeland, clearly understanding that these people were not going to leave willingly. Aside from the terror tactics and reprisals used to remove them Greece needed international legitimacy and legal norms, with which it could cover up its policies of ethnic genocide."

After the two population exchange conventions were signed, the ethnic map of Aegean Macedonia changed drastically. More than 32,000 Orthodox Christian and 40,000 Muslim Macedonians were forcibly exiled to Bulgaria and Turkey, and 640,000 Turkish Christian colonists and settlers from Asia Minor were settled in Aegean Macedonia.

The population exchanges, however, did not end the Macedonian suffering in Greek hands. The forced expulsions, forced assimilations, repression, jailing, beatings and murders continued. As a result thousands of Macedonians left their homeland and immigrated to overseas countries between the two world wars. Then, after the 1946-1949 Greek Civil War ended with the defeat of DAG on whose side the Macedonians fought, around 60,000 men, women

and children who left the war zone and crossed over the Greek border, were permanently exiled. Later another 40,000 Macedonians immigrated to foreign countries. As a result Athens's plan to "get rid" of about 120,000 Macedonians was realized. According to Todor Hristov Simovski, "In spite of all the wars and Athens's systematic genocidal policies, about 250,000 Macedonians still live in Aegean Macedonia."

GREEKS BURNED DOWN 160 MACEDONIAN VILLAGES

Disturbing testimonials described by the Carnegie Commission about the cruelties perpetrated by the Greek Army against the Macedonian population

“He shot at me with his gun but missed me. I fell down and lay on the ground pretending to be dead. He then shot my mother and hit her on the chest. I heard her whisper ‘Mito, are you alive?’ as she fell down to the ground next to me. Those were her last words. Another boy came over but ran away when he saw what had happened. A soldier rode his horse after him and fired at him. He then pulled out his sword and murdered him while still riding his horse. After that I saw a girl, I knew her, her name was Kata Gosheva. She was hidden in a ravine in front of us. The soldier rode toward her but I don’t know if he killed her. A little later I ran into another soldier. He pulled out his gun and shot at me. The bullet pierced my clothes but didn’t injure me. I again fell down on the ground and pretended to be dead. He shot at me again and this time the bullet hit me in the back and came out from my chest. Still riding his horse, he then swung his sword over me and hit my hand. He injured my finger.” This is what Mito Kolev, a fourteen year old boy from the village Gavaliantsi, located near Kukush, said. It was a terrifying story which he recounted for one of the members of the Carnegie Commission. The situation was so bad that the Carnegie Endowment had to dispatch a Commission on a fact finding mission to find out what had happened after the world found out the kind of terror the Macedonian civilian population experienced during the Balkan Wars.

Mito also said, “Laying there motionless and bleeding the Greek soldier figured I was dead but I wasn’t. However I was seriously injured. I hid in a nearby cornfield and watched my village being burned down. I later ran into two people from my village and one of them loaded me onto his wagon and took me to Dojran. There we

ran into his father. He took us both to Bulgaria and placed me in a hospital in Sofia.”

After confirming Mito’s story with other witnesses, the Carnegie Endowment Commission found it credible and published it in its report. This report is proof that Greek horse troopers indiscriminately killed women and children. Mito’s tragic experience is but one of the many episodes of the drama that the Macedonian population experienced during the Second Balkan War. Here Greece carried out ethnic cleansing in the regions of Macedonia, which it had been awarded to administer in good faith. This is what the Carnegie Endowment Commission said, “The list of Bulgarian (meaning Macedonian) villages burned down by the Greek Army showed, to a certain extent, the cruelty of the disaster... Systematically and in cold blood the Greeks burned down one hundred and sixty Bulgarian (meaning Macedonian) villages and ruined at least 16,000 Bulgarian (meaning Macedonian) homes. There is no need to comment on the numbers...”

After her daughter escaped, Anastasia Pavlova, a widow, was left behind and witnessed the atrocities committed by Greek soldiers in Gevgelia. This is what she told the Carnegie Endowment Commission, “After the Bulgarians left the Greeks came. From the moment they came they started killing people on the streets. A person named Anton Bakardzi was killed in front of me. I also saw a Greek woman named Helena kill Hadzhi Tano, a rich Macedonian man. There was great panic in the city as people tried to escape. Outside the city I met several Greek soldiers holding sixteen girls whom they had arrested. All of the girls were crying, some were completely naked and covered in blood. The soldiers were preoccupied with the girls as we slipped by them to escape. When we crossed the Vardar Bridge we saw small children abandoned. One was a small girl. She was lying on the ground dead. The horse troopers were coming behind us fast and there was no time for us to help the children. There was a battle taking place in the distance. We could hear cannon fire but it was not directed at us. We ran for eight days before we reached Bulgaria. Many people died on the way. When we arrived at the border the Bulgarian soldiers gave us bread to eat. I found my daughter in Samokov. I was happy to see that she was alive and had not been dishonored...”

Anastasia Pavlova had more tragic stories which she recounted for members of the Carnegie Endowment Commission. She said, “Days before the Second Balkan War started a Greek woman who had come from Solun to the village Boinitsa asked the local priest if he wanted to declare himself Greek. After he said no several Greek officers grabbed him by his beard and beat him. There were about fifty other people who witnessed the incident. And, even though they were innocent bystanders, they were all arrested. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were beaten. After that they were forced to sign a statement declaring themselves Greek. When they refused they were all taken to Solun. When they were taken away the remaining Greek soldiers attacked and raped the local women, usually three soldiers to one woman.”

The Carnegie Endowment Commission also spoke with a Catholic man in Solun. He was witness to the horrific incidents that took place in Kukush. This is what he said, “After I ran from Kukush with several thousand other refugees from all the villages in that region, I arrived in Akangeli located near the station in Dojran. On the 6th of July, between two and three o’clock in the afternoon, Greek horse troopers arrived. There were around 300 soldiers and officers. The people, accompanied by a priest, came out to greet them carrying a white flag. About 120 people were tasked to look after the horses. Some people fled and nobody knew where they went. Many of the refugees and local women were raped that night several times. The soldiers were killing and robbing people. Only those who had money (five or more Turkish coins) to pay the soldiers were spared. Around fifty people from Akangeli were killed. I gave them my watch and six Turkish coins to save my life. Unfortunately my friends who had no money or valuable possessions were killed. They were killed in front of me. I also saw soldiers strip girls and women naked and check their clothing for money and valuables and then rape them. I saw many rapes with my own eyes. The rapes were committed publicly, sometimes in front of the women’s houses and sometimes on the streets and in the fields. I watched the village being burned down and another person being killed...” The Catholic man also said he saw about fifty dead bodies that had been killed. Some were executed by shooting and some were stabbed with bayonets.

Atanas Ivanov from Kirchevo (located near Demir Hisar), also spoke to members of the Carnegie Endowment Commission and told them the following, “The Greek soldiers arrived on the 16th of July. While my wife was packing her things I heard them ask a young woman, a relative of ours, to go inside her house and get them some bread. When I heard that I went outside looking for her. By the time I arrived at her house I found a guard with his bayonet on his gun standing in front of her house. I ran towards the house and when I got closer I saw one soldier raping her while the other one stood above her pointing his bayonet at her; the soldiers then switched places. The woman had given birth to a baby only three days earlier. Later I ran into Peno Penev who asked me if I spoke Greek. When I said yes he asked me to speak to the soldiers who were raping the women. When I went inside the yard of one of the houses I saw three women lying on the ground; they had been raped. One was injured in the leg and another in the arm. That was around three o’clock in the afternoon. There were many other women there, all of them were crying. I was overcome with fear and left the yard when I saw the village burning... I ran away around sundown. The soldiers fired at me but missed. I don’t know what happened to my wife but I know my children were safe...”

This is what the Carnegie Endowment Commission wrote in its report, “It was not possible that these people were not telling the truth. Most were from the villages, uneducated and terrified of the horrors they experienced, totally incapable for making up something like that. They were telling their stories with literal directness...”

Members of the Carnegie Endowment Commission also wanted to learn what had happened from the other side, from the Greek Government, but they only heard denials and silence. Although the Greek authorities refused to make any kind of statement against the accusations, they agreed that the entire region where the Macedonian population lived was ruined and almost all of the villages were burned down. According to the evidence however, Greeks were burning villages as they were advancing into Macedonian territory.

The Carnegie Endowment Commission acknowledged that Athens used brutal propaganda to ethnically cleanse the Macedonian population in the territories it occupied by referring to the Macedonian people as nonhuman wild animals. The Carnegie Endowment Commission estimated that official Athens was spreading hate toward the Macedonian population, which was confirmed by several letters the Greek soldiers had written to their relatives acquired by the Bulgarian army. In its report the Carnegie Endowment Commission quoted some of the letters as follows, “We were much more cruel to the Bulgarians (meaning to the Macedonians)...”, “Here we were burning villages and killing Bulgarians (meaning Macedonians), women and children...”, “We took prisoners and killed them, because those were our orders...”, “We had to burn villages - that was the order - to kill young people and to save only the old and the children...”, “What was done to the Bulgarians was indescribable; as well as to the Bulgarians (meaning Macedonians) from the villages. It was a massacre. There was no Bulgarian (meaning Macedonian) town or village that was not burned...”, “From the 1,200 prisoners we took in Nigrita, only forty-one ended up in prison. Everywhere we went we didn’t leave a single person alive...”, “We gouged the eyes of five Bulgarian (meaning Macedonian) prisoners while they were still alive...”, “The Greek Army burned down all the villages where there were Bulgarians (meaning Macedonians) and we massacred everyone that we found. Only God knows where this will end...”

The above are extracts from the letters the Greek soldiers sent to their families after the bloody invasion of the Macedonian villages, which they called Bulgarian, and the Macedonian people who they called Bulgarian.

EVEN THE DEAD MACEDONIANS WERE FORCED OUT

“The Cyrillic letters written on the crosses in Macedonian cemeteries were erased, bones from the graves were dug up and burned,” wrote one Englishman

“The Greeks were not only banishing the living Macedonians who they called “Bulgarians” or “Slavs” they also banished dead Macedonians all throughout (the Greek occupied part of) Macedonia. They couldn’t leave them alone even in their graves. The Greeks erased the Cyrillic letters written on the crosses in Macedonian cemeteries. They also dug up the bones from the graves and burned them.” This is what an Englishman wrote in 1928 while traveling through many places in Aegean Macedonia. He was appalled by the terror and atrocities the Greeks were committing against the Macedonian people.

Especially difficult for the Macedonian people were the years after the 1919 to 1922 Greco - Turkish war. After signing the Convention for population exchanges with Turkey, Greece imported a large Turkish Christian population of settlers and colonists from Asia Minor and settled 640,000 of them on Macedonian lands in Aegean Macedonia, which completely changed the ethnic composition of the region. Settler and colonist families were placed in Macedonian houses and given Macedonian lands forcing many Macedonians out by terror and by killing. “This was most characteristic in the regions close to the borders with one aim; to make life unbearable for the Macedonians. The Greek authorities forcefully removed Macedonians from their homes and lands in order to accommodate the settlers. Fields and even household furniture was forcibly taken from Macedonian families to accommodate the settlers,” wrote Todor Hristov Simovski in his book “Populated places in Aegean Macedonia”.

The worst terror perpetrated against the Macedonian population during those cruel years was carried out by Greek ultra nationalist organizations with the approval of the Greek government. One of the worst organizations was called the “Greek - Macedonian fist” (EEE). It was a Greek national youth organization. Other organizations included “Pavlos Melas”, the pro-fascist National-union of Greece known as the “Steel helmets” and the EMC, a secret Greek national organization.

According to Simovski special anti-terror units were created all throughout Macedonia to allegedly combat the terrorists but instead they were harassing the Macedonian population. They were arresting and murdering Macedonians en masse. One such incident took place on July 27, 1924 when 19 Macedonians were beaten and killed in the villages Trlis, Karakoi and Lovtsen. The story of this massacre ended up in European newspapers describing Greece’s cruelty perpetrated against its Slavic speaking Macedonian population.

But even though the massacre became known, no one from democratic Europe did anything to stop it or to reprimand the Greek authorities. A year later many more Macedonians were arrested in Lerin and in the surrounding region. Most of the Macedonians arrested were shot to death and the rest were jailed in the Greek prisons. Greek assimilation practices and expulsion of Macedonians from their homeland continued for decades. “The Greek nationalist method and practices were well known throughout the world. A French language magazine even published statistics in 1927 unveiling the results of the Greek terror that took place in the Aegean part of Macedonia between 1919 and 1926. According to these statistics, 104 people were murdered, 95 women were raped, from whom 26 were girls under the age of 14, 17 houses were burned, 3,464 people were arrested, 2,327 people were tortured, 1,165 families were robbed and forced out of their homes...,” wrote Katardziev in his book “Macedonia in the 20th century” published by “Kultura”.

The situation for the Macedonian people became even more unbearable under the Metaxas dictatorship. In 1934 the newspaper “Balkan Correspondence” published an article it derived from the

Metaxas regime's newspaper "Elenikon Melon" from which it concluded the following, "Macedonians, with hands and legs tied, were taken to basements in police buildings and tortured using medieval torture equipment and tactics. The EEE, the Pavlos Melas, and agents of other fascist organizations, terrorized the Macedonian population in the villages Kalenak and Visostani near Lerin and in all the Macedonian villages in Kostur Region."

"Balkan Correspondence" also wrote, "The Greek state is arresting Slavic speaking Macedonians on a daily basis. In Seres (Eastern Macedonia) it has arrested and imprisoned Macedonians for ridiculously minor offenses such as owing and not having paid debts of 60 or 100 drachmas to the state or to the agricultural bank..."

More terrifying than the physical abuse was the psychological abuse. The Greek authorities and nationalist and terrorist organizations were bent on destroying the Macedonian culture by any means possible.

According to Katardziev "The organization 'Greek-Macedonian fist', serving the Greek authorities, created an atmosphere of real hell for the Macedonian people in the Aegean part of Macedonia. In the name of "holy war", on January 27th 1926, the organization 'Greek-Macedonian fist' banned the Macedonian language from being spoken in public places, in restaurants, in gatherings, parties, dinners, weddings, etc. With this order the 'Greek-Macedonian fist' rose above the law in Greece and began to order Greek legal, administrative, military, etc., authorities to enforce its orders by not allowing people to speak any other language than Greek. The military obeyed this order and became actively involved in the actions taken to eradicate everything that was Macedonian. As a result it destroyed everything that had Cyrillic letters written on it. The Greek army also broke into churches and removed all Macedonian icons and destroyed the frescos. According to army officials, anything that did not have Greek letters written on it was not Christian. In January 1932, after inspecting the village church in the village Armensko, a Greek infantry lieutenant wrote, 'In the barrier that separated the women's part of the church from the men's part I found three small icons that did not have Greek letters written on them. I was upset over that and increasingly became more upset

when I heard the village mayor speak Bulgarian which he called Macedonian. I got very upset when he told me he was Macedonian so I hit him and told him to never speak that language again. I also told him to tell everyone in the village to never speak another language but Greek.”

In the same report the Greek lieutenant informed his superiors that Macedonians lived in all the local villages and hated everything that was Greek. At the same time the lieutenant recommended that the “best way to get rid of these people is by forcing them out of Greece...”

In a report on the denationalization of the people in Lerin Region prepared in 1931, it was assumed that the nationalization process in that region was not going as planned so it was suggested that the region should be cleansed of its teachers, priests and other officials and they should be replaced with educated Greek nationalists from the southern part of Greece to strengthen those services.

To strengthen their patriotic feelings towards the Greek state, Macedonians were ordered to paint their houses in the Greek national colors, the walls in white and the doors and windows in blue, and to display the Greek flag during every holiday.

This is what the Greek communist newspaper “Rizospastis” wrote about the hell the Macedonian people had survived, “In the old days before Macedonia came under Greek control Greeks bands were sent there to force them to change their beliefs... Today they are forcing them to show their real Greek feelings. In both cases the whip was never demobilized.”

MACEDONIANS WERE FORCED TO DRINK CASTOR OIL IF THEY SPOKE THE MACEDONIAN LANGUAGE

Macedonians were beaten and sentenced to ten years in prison because they were singing Macedonian songs

“It was mandatory for Macedonian children to go to school to learn the Greek language but they were forbidden from speaking Macedonian, their mother tongue. If a teacher caught a child speaking Macedonian in the school the teacher locked the child in the school basement for the rest of the school day. Sometimes the punishment was extended to more than one day. If a policeman caught a child speaking Macedonian that child was beaten...”

The above extract was taken from a report published by the Greek communist newspaper “Rizospastis”. The report was compiled during a visit to Kostur and Lerin at the end of 1932. This is only a small indication of the kind of terror the Greek authorities applied to assimilate the Macedonians.

According to Ivan Katardziev, “The main purpose of these Greek denationalization policies applied in the Aegean part of Macedonia by using force and terror was to stop the Macedonian people from speaking the Macedonian language in public, in school, in church, in the marketplace, etc. In addition to that the Greeks also destroyed everything that was Macedonian that would remind people of their Macedonian culture. This included erasing Cyrillic inscriptions on church icons, chiseling out Cyrillic writing off building walls, breaking gravestones, burning books, newspapers, etc.”

Also, according to Ivan Katardziev, “The Greeks soon discovered that not everyone could easily and expediently be assimilated using existing denationalization and assimilation policies. As a result the Greek authorities began to pay special attention to education. After erasing and destroying everything that could feed people’s individual and collective memory, the Greeks began to focus their effort on introducing draconian measures to stop the use of the Macedonian language everywhere, especially among the younger generations. For that purpose, in the beginning they paid special attention to properly educating the young and stopping them from speaking Macedonian. As a result new restrictions were introduced to eliminate the use of the Macedonian language everywhere inside and outside of the home. People were not allowed to speak Macedonian with their families, in the fields, in the forests, etc. People were not even allowed to speak Macedonian to their livestock; oxen, horses, mules, donkeys, chickens, sheep, goats and even dogs and cats. They had to retrain their dogs and draft animals to obey their commands in Greek... which was not an easy task.”

Anastasia Karakasidou, a Greek professor of anthropology in the USA, came to the same conclusion after conducting eight years of research in Guvezna’s (Arisos in Greek) past and present, a place located near Solun in Aegean Macedonia. Guvezna’s Macedonian inhabitants, according to Karakasidou, were completely assimilated by the Greeks. In her book “Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood” she captured many of the Greek government directives issued to the local authorities in the 1920s and 1930s which deeply impacted social relations and identity changes in the population. The most destructive directive was the restriction of use of other languages, besides Greek. In part this is what Karakasidou wrote about the Macedonian language restriction, “...especially the use of ‘Bulgarian’ (a word that was used in Greece to identify and categorize the spoken Macedonian language) was forbidden to be spoken in all public places; in stores and in the markets...”

According to Karakasidou, during the period between the wars (WW I and WW II), policemen were constantly scrutinizing the local population and punishing all those who spoke ‘Bulgarian’ (meaning Macedonian) in public places or any other language

besides Greek. This is what Karakasidou wrote, “The use of the Slavic language was successfully restricted; mainly the women who spoke that language among themselves. After children entered the schoolyard, where it was strictly forbidden to speak any other language besides Greek, a mandatory language in the whole of Greek Macedonia, the cultural and linguistic balance was destroyed. Night schools were opened in order to teach adult men and women the Greek language. This measure was probably the most successful tool for cultural assimilation. Only a small number of old women in Arisos in the 1940s still spoke the Slavic language, and according to my research from my field work, I found only one woman who still spoke the Slavic language. Some of the people from the village said that the kind of Greek she spoke sounded more like ‘Bulgarian’ than Greek. But there were words from the past that the locals used in their current vocabulary, especially expressions for family relations, that were Slavic. There was evidence of that...”

According to Karakasidou, at least in Arisos and other places where she conducted research, building Greek linguistic hegemony was relatively peaceful but the process in other places was violent. She also mentioned that inhabitants of Sohoh, located east of Langadas, were forced to drink castor oil and sent to prison for speaking other languages besides Greek. In part, this is what she wrote, “In the western part of Greek Macedonia, where Slavic authority over the local inhabitants was strong, the impact of the Greek language historically was weaker than in the communities in the central part of Greek Macedonia, like in Arisos. In Sohoh the assimilation campaign was more aggressive because there was a greater resistance against it. Young students in Sohoh were beaten if they spoke the Slavic language...”

The following is another example that Karakasidou gave regarding the kind of measures the Greek authorities took to force the Macedonian people not to speak the Macedonian language. “A man from the village Neret was summoned to court where he was accused of being caught by the police for speaking ‘an unidentified language’ (Macedonian) with other people from the village. He was also accused of singing in that language...”

Educating young people in the ‘Greek spirit’ was the easiest way for the Greeks to achieve their goal. In pursuit of that the Greek government approved 14 million drachmas to build schools and boost the educational system in the areas where Macedonians lived. In Lerin Region alone the Greeks were planning to build 80 schools, prompting the Royal Yugoslav ambassador in London to accuse Greece of intending to erase the Slavic speaking minority.

One reporter from the newspaper “Rizospastis” described the situation of the Macedonian minority in Greece as dire. He wrote, “I will not speak of the economic tyranny, which is more terrifying than in the other areas. I will only speak of the spiritual and the political oppression perpetrated against the workers in Greece and the torture endured by the Macedonian people...” The reporter also gave examples of how students were interrogated on a daily basis and forced to ‘inform’ on their parents. To ‘confess’ to their teachers that their parents ‘entertained’ armed people (partisans) in their homes and that they spoke the Slavic language... Here is what he wrote, “They obliged all people to speak Greek even in their own houses in order to assimilate them. Remarkable is that not a single woman spoke Greek. Bakos, the area manager, one of the most cruel people in the region, previously serving as a captain in the Greek army, regularly called on the teachers to find out about the ‘movement’ in the village and gave them advice on how to carry out the ‘national mission’. In other words he instructed the teachers on how they could oppress the Macedonian people with greater cruelty.”

The same journalist also underlined that the Macedonian people were more afraid of the nationalist organizations EEE and “Pavlos Melas” than they were of the Greek police. He gave an example of how a member of the EEE beat a farmer in the presence of the police because he spoke Macedonian. Macedonians in V’mbel, a village near Kostur, were beaten and sent to 10 years in prison simply because they sang Macedonian songs in the Macedonian language.

According to Katardziev the cruelty with which the Macedonian people were persecuted because they spoke the Macedonian language could not persist without consequences. As a result the Macedonian language practically became a dubious language. This

is what Katardziev wrote about that, “The Macedonian people could only speak secretly and silently. They avoided speaking in front of strangers and undesirable people. This reduced the persecutions against them but, at the same time, it fulfilled the Greek objective of silencing the Macedonian people. In other words, in the long term, it gave the Greeks an advantage in assimilating the Macedonian people.”

MACEDONIAN REFUGEES IN DANTE'S HELL

“That was terrifying! We could not eat after we saw the dreadful pictures in the camps,” concluded the UN representatives

Lucien Kramer wrote, “When we witnessed the miserable refugee situation in Bulgaria, we thought we were in one of Dante’s circles of hell. This was truly a scandal for Europe that could not be tolerated...” This was written in September 1925 and was published by an international magazine describing the refugee drama of the thousands of Macedonians terrorized in Greece before they sought shelter in Bulgaria. Even more dramatic were the statements made by Prokter and Tiksje from the International Bureau of Labor delegates from the People’s association. Prokter and Tiksje said, “We couldn’t believe what we saw with our own eyes during our visit. It was terrible! We were so disgusted we couldn’t eat or calm down from what we saw in the refugee camps.” Their statements were sent to the international organization.

Terrorized by the Greek authorities in their own homeland where they had lived for centuries, in the period from 1923 to 1928 around 33,000 Macedonians left for Bulgaria and around 10,000 left for Royal Yugoslavia. Their troubles unfortunately did not end with their leaving. On the contrary their troubles and suffering continued to follow them.

After they received their necessary documents for leaving, the Macedonian families were gathered together in large numbers and told to wait at train stations for special cargo trains to pick them up and transport them to the border. This is what Todor Hristov Simovski wrote in his book “Populated Places in the Aegean Macedonia”, “And when at last the trains arrived to pick up the people being deported and take them to the other side of the border where their troubles and their tragedies should have ended, a new kind of suffering began. They began to agonize over the uncertainty

of their future which in practice was more unbearable and harder to bear...”

More about this was written in newspaper articles in the “Ilinden” newspaper which Macedonians in Sofia published. Among other things, the Macedonian refugees and even the Bulgarian authorities responsible for transporting them to their destinations were interviewed. They recounted their experience and many said that after leaving Greece they hoped that their troubles would finally be over, especially the torture.

In his August 1924 report D. Dinev, member of the National Committee of the Macedonian Associations, wrote, “...the refugee families were arriving in Svilengrad around 1 to 1:30 past midnight. They were first disinfected and then vaccinated and after that they were taken to a camp where they stayed from three to ten days. The refugees were exhausted and many were sick. There was not a single nice word spoken by them. They were exposed to the summer sun, the wind and the rain in the open camps. They were not allowed to go inside the quarantine barracks, not even the ill or the mothers with small children...”

After arriving at the initial train station the exhausted refugees were separated and sent to different places in Bulgaria. They suffered even more during these long trips. This is what was said in a statement made on July 11, 1924, “...we met groups of refugees in several places between Burgas and Mesimvrija who were in bad condition and the authorities responsible for them looked after everything else but the people...”

The Bulgarian authorities did not take care of the refugees as they should have but left them on their own. Because of their exhaustion and hunger many were prone to all kinds of diseases. This was confirmed in a telegram that Dr. Talev sent on July 25, 1924 to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and to the National Committee in which he wrote, “I found out that all the refugees sent to Bulgaria were infected with malaria...The long trip and hunger had exhausted them. I was very sad watching them die from malaria...”

The Bulgarian authorities were not really concerned about the Macedonian refugees as was shown by the minutes of the annual National Committee, which were compiled into a report by the Macedonian Association during its meeting held at the beginning of February 1926. At that meeting it was concluded that, “The refugees arrived without clothes, hungry and exhausted. They hoped that here in Bulgaria they would be free and well looked after. There would be an end to their slavery and to their physical and mental suffering, they would be welcomed and accepted as brothers and sisters and, at least, there would be temporary places to accommodate them. But when they arrived at the train station in Svilengrad they were met by official authorities in a very unpleasant way. Their encounter immediately cooled the hopes which they had had before they left their homes. Their hopes quickly changed into hopelessness when they faced the Bulgarian reality... Instead of showing them brotherly compassion, the Bulgarian authorities were completely uninterested and totally indifferent to them. Even the local population viewed them like they were ‘aliens’ and treated them like they were ‘barbarians’, who had just been interned in Lovecko...”

The Committee concluded that the refugees were indeed infected with various diseases in the inhospitable places in Bulgaria. The report continued, “...The poor travelers were sick, hungry and in despair, ripe for diseases to harvest them. The death toll was 20 percent in Plovdiv Region and 80 percent in Rusen Region...” These poor Macedonians suffered immensely in Greece and survived the Greek terror only to die horribly in Bulgaria because of neglect. The Bulgarian authorities, who accepted them in Bulgaria as kinsmen, obviously did not provide them with the help they needed. Ironically there are Bulgarians who to this day still claim that Macedonians are Bulgarians.

The drama that these Macedonian refugees experienced did not go unnoticed by the world. In his book Andre Urbain wrote, “Accommodated temporarily in schools, train stations, cottages, tents, etc., the refugees become easy prey for diseases. They were weak from previously being tortured. Because there was a shortage of fertile land available to cultivate, many refugees were sent to the unfertile muddy lands in Burgas, a barren area infested with malaria. The death toll in that area was really staggering and terrifying.

About 69% of the refugees settled in that area died within two years...”

MANY REFUGEES IN BULGARIA TURNED TO BEGGING

Evicted Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia did not change their passports; they wanted to keep their Macedonian identity

During an interview Zdravka Iteva said, “My Grandmother died with the words, ‘At our place... in our region...’ She arrived in Bulgaria in the 1890s and died in 1973. She never accepted her home in Bulgaria, she always thought of it as temporary. My father was the same. My mother used to say, ‘Where should I go so that I can be accepted as a Macedonian?’ My father did not want to change his passport; he wanted to keep his nationality. Without a Bulgarian passport he couldn’t visit our relatives in Skopje. Many times we tried to persuade him to get a new passport but he refused every time. He often used to say, especially to my mother, ‘is there lemonade in this bottle?’ ‘Yes, that’s lemonade,’ my mother would answer. ‘And if you change the cork, will it still be lemonade?’ This was a warning to us, his children, to my brother and me that even if things change in life we were still the same... Macedonians...”

This is what Zdravka Iteva, a descendant of the Skrizovo and Bapchor refugees, remembers. After the population exchange Convention between Greece and Bulgaria was signed, her family was exiled to Pirin Macedonia. During the socialist era in Bulgaria she worked as an editor of a children’s magazine. She is now retired and lives in Sofia. Iteva survived the same drama many Macedonians in Bulgaria survived and carried that drama inside their souls. They exist in two worlds, in their past where their roots are and in the present where they live now. She speaks with great emotion when she speaks of her past, returning many years back and telling every story she remembered from her grandmother and mother, and her grandfather and father. She recounts these stories again and again as part of the life she lived in the distant past. She has opened her soul so that everyone can see and feel her drama.

“I feel an organic need to keep my connections to my past intact. I have a need to remember my relatives who lived and still live all over divided Macedonia. Those who were exiled to Bulgaria from Aegean Macedonia are descendants of brothers and sisters. Some are my grandfather’s and grandmother’s relatives. Some still live in Greece. We saw each other for the first time twenty years ago. I have a strong emotional connection with those people. I hear my grandmother’s, my grandfather’s, my mother’s, my father’s crying voices there. It’s their birthplace. Unfortunately slowly, little by little, I am beginning to feel those connections coming apart. Why? Because there is a border between us and because some people are telling me that I’m ‘this’ or ‘I’m that’...” added Iteva.

“It is an intimate thing, how someone feels,” she continued. “Those that are like me are stretched on a cross. I belong both to the past and the present. My past is connected with those people, who are Macedonians, who were Macedonians. I am Macedonian myself. At the same time I belong to this country, I was educated here, high school, university, specialization... I married a Bulgarian man. When I was getting married I didn’t ask him if he was Macedonian or Bulgarian, American or something else. Nor was he concerned if in my passport, my nationality was Macedonian. My son was born here, in Bulgaria; he was educated in the schools here. He feels Bulgarian. I have to speak to him one way and to my relatives, that visit me sometimes, another way.”

The issue to which nationality one belongs is clearly a human issue which every single person must consider for themselves. Unfortunately there are powers, especially political powers, which tend to determine ‘one’s nationality’, based on the interest of the powerful and sometimes with no regard to how the common people feel. When civilizations are created emotional attachments are ignored and all those who have political or national differences are made to suffer by the dictates of the more powerful.

Iteva especially stressed that the Macedonian language is an independent language, not a dialect of the Bulgarian language. She showed proof of that in the monograph of the village Bapchor written in the Macedonian language. According to Iteva, if the book was written in Bulgarian, it could not so strongly have expressed the

essence of life of the people who lived in that village located in the Aegean part of Macedonia. Here is what she said, “The Macedonian phrase, the accent, the vocal sound, the phonetic and lexical differences... all make a language a special language.” She was well versed in both the Macedonian and Bulgarian languages and was able to figure out that they were similar but not the same. In other words, she was able to figure out for herself that the Macedonian language was not a dialect of the Bulgarian language. Also, another thing she needed to remember was that historically the Macedonian people were living in Macedonia and spoke the same Macedonian language they speak today well before the Bulgarian tribes, a Turkic people, migrated to the Balkans.

Another interesting thing that Iteva mentioned was her association with Atanas Dalcev in 1970. Dalcev was a famous Bulgarian poet but Macedonian by origin. This was the time Bulgarian linguists looked for ‘different reasons’ to deny the Macedonian language.

This is what Iteva said, “Dalcev at the time was standing at the top of the Bulgarian ladder of poetry. He was a real gentleman. By spirit he was an aristocrat and a nobleman... There was no one to whom I could compare him. One time I went to Skopje where Gane Todorovski gave me one of his Macedonian books to take to Dalcev. I never told anyone about this. I had no idea how Dalcev’s followers would accept Todorovski’s book but facts are facts. He took the book, opened it, put his big glasses on and started reading. At one point he started reading aloud after which he said, ‘This is great; this is great poetry, real poetry...’ So I said, ‘Atanas, other people who read it are saying that this sounded like poetry written in a dialect... sounded ridiculous to them.’ He then said, ‘How is it possible that it could be great poetry when it was written in that language, the language that does not exist?’...”

Many Macedonians who lived in the Pirin part of Macedonia greatly resisted being assimilated by Bulgarian policies. As a result they experienced the same evil destiny as Iteva’s family.

By agreement between Bulgaria and Greece many Macedonian families were forced out of their homes in Aegean Macedonia after the First World War, and exiled to Bulgaria. They were forced out

from several places in Aegean Macedonia and settled in Nevrokop today's Gotse Delchev, in Gornodzumaja or Blagoevgrad, in Sv. Vrach - Sandanski and in Petrichko. For example, an entire village from Aegean Macedonia was relocated to Mosomiste. Also all inhabitants of Koprivalen have Aegean roots. These people are the descendents of grandparents who moved there about eighty years ago. The entire village is constantly reminded that they are settlers and pressured to "be careful" how they behave because they "have not always lived there". In other words if they openly show that they are Macedonians "something" might happen to them and based on how Bulgaria treats the Macedonians, one day they might be separated and relocated or vanish altogether.

After the Macedonian families were forced out of their homes in Aegean Macedonia, in accordance with the population exchange agreement, many were moved to the empty houses in which Turks and Vlachs had lived before they were evicted. The Turks left after the First World War. The Vlachs were banished by Vancho Mihailov who at the time had strong influence in Pirin Region. The village Mosomiste, mentioned above for example, was a Turkish village until 1912.

After arriving in Pirin Macedonia the exiled Macedonians experienced great hardship mainly because they were not supported with the material means for existence. In other words the Bulgarian state did not want to, or was unable to fulfill its obligations in accordance with the Agreement. The Macedonian people's vocation was mainly agriculture but Bulgaria did not have enough land to give them so that they could live properly. As a result many had to humiliate themselves and beg for money in the streets. In addition the Macedonians didn't even get the barren land that was promised to them. The Bulgarian state came to the conclusion that they "did not deserve it" and gave it to others. According to an article published by the newspaper "Eho" in 1932, "By not providing the people the land that was allocated for them there were unseen robberies committed. Most of the refugees were given only 5,000 square metres, while the powerful people, those who had committed murder, were given 20,000, 30,000, 40,000... square metres of land. The violent people were given three or four houses each of whom

then shamefully sold them. The refugees, on the other hand, were given the dilapidated houses that no one wanted.”

According to the newspaper “Eho”, “The refugees were promised to be given the land allocated for them but with various falsifications some of that land was given to the criminals associated with Vancho Mihailov’s VMRO. The same land was later sold to the refugees.”

According to the population exchange Agreement, Greece was expected to compensate the people it exiled from Aegean Macedonian for the loss of their properties. That money was expected to be given to the Bulgarian state. Some of that money was expected to be given to the refugees. Unfortunately that never happened. The refugees are still waiting for their money to this day. After the Agreement was signed two Commissions were formed, one in Greece and the other in Bulgaria. Their job was to provide value for the properties the refugees lost on both sides. Unfortunately the Commission in Greece didn’t do its job properly for the exiled Macedonians. However the Commission in Bulgaria did. It provided the right value for the lost properties that belonged to the exiles sent to Greece. This is mainly because the people exiled from Bulgaria were still in Bulgaria when their properties were assessed.

That opportunity was not given to the Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia because they had already left so their properties were valued at 50 percent of their real worth.

But that was not all. The other problem why the Macedonian exiles never saw their money was because it was kept (stolen) by the Bulgarian state. Sofia spent it to strengthen its economy that had fallen apart because of Bulgaria’s involvement in the wars. Instead of money, Bulgaria gave the exiles bonds. Years later, after the bonds matured, descendants of the exiles tried to cash them but by then the bonds were worthless. This was the money that Greece paid to correct the “injustices” it committed against the Macedonian people. Greece paid 30 million dollars not only to cover the personal property costs but also the damages it committed against the cemeteries, churches, etc., because by doing so Greece hoped to eradicate everything that was Macedonian.

PETROVSKI BECAME PETRIDIS, GUSHEVSKI - GUSIDIS

In a period of one year the Greek Government changed the names of nearly 1,000 cities, towns and villages from Macedonian to Greek

The Greek ministry of internal affairs passed a decree to Hellenize all of Aegean Macedonia even before the 1919 Paris Peace Agreement was signed. With this decree Greece eliminated all Macedonian names of cities, towns and villages. Greece's intent was to remove everything "that was poisoning and desecrating the look of its beautiful fatherland, and to remove any doubts about the 'authenticity' of the Greek nation..."

According to Todor Hristov Simovski, after its establishment as a state in 1832, Greece found itself in a very unpleasant situation because of the many non-Greek and Slavic names found on its territory. Many foreign scientists and historians came to the conclusion that the modern Greeks had no connection to the ancient Greeks. The modern Greeks were a completely different race. In fact the modern Greeks were seen as a mixture of different races and of numerous populations living in these regions. Not only in Macedonia but also in southern Greece, including the Peloponnesus, where Slavic toponyms were found to exist before Greece changed them.

This is what Simovski wrote about that in his book "Populated Places in Aegean Macedonia", "Besides the numerous historic facts that already existed, foreign scientists also began to research the toponyms in the Greek regions which caused serious arguments to develop..." According to Tashko Georgievski, this precise, clear and comprehensive research showed that the majority of the people, who lived in geographic Macedonia before they were forced out, were Macedonians.

In 1909, even before Macedonia was invaded, occupied and partitioned, Greek King George I prepared a special report in which he stressed the need for creating a special emergency Commission to prepare a plan for changing all the names of populated places and all other toponyms which were not of Greek origin. The problem with the names became even more complex for official Athens after the Balkan Wars ended. It was found that in the newly Greek occupied territories of Macedonia the Greeks were a minority. The majority of the population was mostly Macedonian with some Turks. The toponyms where Macedonians lived were Macedonian and those where the Turks lived were Turkish. According to Simovski, "It was clear that the territories that Greece annexed were not ethnically or geographically or historically Greek..." According to Georgievski's research, the population in Aegean Macedonia at the time Greece annexed it was only 10 percent Greek.

The Greek government's plans to change the toponyms in the Macedonian territories began right after the 1913 Bucharest Treaty was signed, which divided Macedonia between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Greece conducted its first census in 1919 and published a manual on how to change place names. However that process was slowed down during the 1919 to 1922 war between Greece and Turkey. As a result by 1925 only 76 place names were changed. Then, in September 1926, the Greek Government issued a new decree according to which, as proposed by the Commission for changing the names, Greece was allowed to change all "foreign and unpleasant city, town and village names...." One year after issuing the decree, 945 place names were changed in the Aegean part of Macedonia.

According to Simovski, the decree for changing place names said nothing about the population using the old names. The Greek authorities said nothing about the Greek state placing sanctions on those who still used the old names. As a result a new law was passed on November 13, 1927 prohibiting people from using the old names and those who violated the law would be penalized. The Greek authorities posted signs with the new names and with the message that anyone using the old name would be punished. On top of that anyone punished for using the old names was not allowed to appeal the punishment or complain about it. According to article 5 of the

order, “Anyone who questioned the court’s order and used the old name for the place where they are living or for the place where they were born, be it a city, town or village, whose name had already been changed, the judge has the right to punish and issue them a monetary penalty.”

According to Simovski, the Commission responsible for name changes took special care to use ‘ancient names’. For example, “Postol”, the birthplace of Krste Petkov Misirkov, was renamed to “Pela”. The names “Barbes” and “Kutlesh” in Ber Region were renamed to “Vergina”.

This is what Simovski wrote, “We cannot forget that these place name changes were forced upon the people after which came the forced changes of Macedonian surnames and given names. The Macedonian people were deprived of their individuality and were unable to recognize one another. Some people received only Greek suffixes such as “os”, “is” “ou” “poulos”, etc., but those people who had names of Slavic origin were completely changed. As a result Bozhinovski became Mpozinis, Petrovski became Petridis, Gushevski became Gousidis, Bogdanovski became Mpogdanis, Zhelkov became Zalkas, and so on.”

According to Simovski, “In addition to Hellenizing Macedonia, the Greek authorities had other plans for the Macedonian people and for the world... They wanted to deprive the Macedonian people of their individuality and of their special Macedonian ethnical character and to show the world that Macedonia was always and still is a Greek province.”

Simovski’s claims were confirmed by Anastasia Karakasidou, a Greek professor of anthropology, who was teaching in an American college.

Karakasidou did extensive research in the past of a small place called Guvezna, renamed to Asiros by the Greeks. Guvezna is located near Solun, Aegean Macedonia. This is what Karakasidou wrote in her book ‘Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood’. “According to a Guvezna teacher teaching the Greek language, ‘the newcomer’ named Garoufaldis, the name ‘Guvezna’ was changed to ‘Asiros’

because the local population was told that ‘Asiros’, according to ancient Greek history, was an ancient name which should remind them of Alexander the Great and of the Greek civilization in Macedonia... In fact, since the 1920s, many place names all throughout Greek Macedonia have undergone name changes. This trend became familiar and even procedural during Metaxas’s dictatorship in the 1930s, when a joint effort was carried out to erase all Ottoman symbols, all Slavic culture and everything that was not Greek in the region. Even families had to change their names. The surnames of Slavic origin in Asiros which still existed in the old 1918 family register in Guvezna, were no longer present in the 1950 register.

Even personal women’s names such as ‘Velika’ and ‘Dona’ were changed to Greek names. The local rich people also played an active role in this process. As godfathers during baptisms they gave newborn children Greek names. Because of their wealth they had influence over the poor people, especially over those who worked for them. The rich also sponsored national holidays and local festivals. They participated in church rituals and ceremonies and observed the Greek education of students. In other words the rich from Asiros made sure the local citizens understood that Macedonia belonged to Greece.”

Because of what she wrote in her book, Karakasidou was declared a ‘traitor’ to the Greek cause and an agent of “Skopje” by the Greeks in the regions where she did her research.

“ABECEDAR” – A PRIMER PUBLISHED TO MISLEAD EUROPE

The 1925 primer written for Macedonian children never made it to the schools

In 1925, under pressure from the League of Nations, Athens officially recognized the Macedonian identity living in Greece. As a result the Greeks published the famous “Abecedar” a primer for teaching the Macedonian children their mother tongue.

Unfortunately Athens had no intention of releasing this book in the schools. It became obvious later that this was only a trick and one of the many dirty games that Athens played in order to mislead the international organization that Greece respected the rights of its ethnic minorities, an obligation that Greece undertook in 1920 with the signing of the Sevres Agreement in France.

Let us follow the chronology of how the first Macedonian primer was conceived and then published again two years ago by the Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia and promoted in Solun.

As the story goes, in 1924, during a formal UN conference held in Geneva, a meeting was held between Hristo Kalfov, Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Nikolaos Politis, Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs. During this meeting an agreement was reached and signed requiring Greece and Bulgaria to provide equal rights to their minorities. In other words, the agreement required that Greece treat the “Bulgarian” (meaning Macedonian) minority living in Greece equally as Bulgaria treated the Greek minority in Bulgaria. This was done even though Sofia had no right to speak for the Macedonian minority living in Greece and to protect it in international agreements. This agreement however was viewed as important by the League of Nations. The Bulgarian Parliament ratified it immediately but Greece did not. The Greek Parliament refused to confirm it.

In February 1925, during a meeting, a member of the British Parliament - Lower House who believed that a great injustice had been committed against the minorities in Greece, asked if the British Government was going to undertake some measure at the League of Nations to prompt Greece to ratify the agreement with Bulgaria. A month later British Minister Austin Chamberlain made a request to the League of Nations Council to ask Greece what the status of the agreement with Bulgaria was in relation to satisfying the rights of the Slavic people, (he called the Macedonian minority Slavic) and what kind of necessary measures did Greece need to undertake towards the education and creed of that minority.

As requested Minister Chamberlain did pose the question to the Council and Greece found itself under great pressure to act, at least on paper. It had to do something for the rights of the Macedonian people. At the June 1925 League of Nations Council conference the Greek representative reported that “measures had already been undertaken and will be taken by the Greek Government as soon as, first, money was allocated by the federal budget for the support of the schools for the Slavic minority. Second, according to article 9 of the Agreement for protecting the minorities, the Greek government will prepare a special program for opening new public schools for the Slavic minority. Third, the Greek government will select and hire the necessary personnel to write and publish the school books and will pay for them. And fourth, the Greek government will allow the people to choose their own teachers and priests.”

Wanting to show Europe that Greece had “honest intentions” the Athens government published a Macedonian primer called “Abecedar” using Latin letters and based it on the Lerin - Bilola dialect. Several copies were sent to the League of Nations head office in Geneva. And, as it turned out, it ended with that. Greece did nothing to accomplish what it had promised the international community. Aside from the Greek hypocrisy regarding the primer, the book itself captured the use of the Macedonian language in everyday life, at home, in the market, in the streets, etc. But this was nothing new. According to Ivan Katardziev, the Macedonian language had been in use in Greece before. By using Greek letters many stories were written in the Macedonian language before the “abecedar” was published. This included Gianelli’s Dictionary

dating from the 16th century and Daniloviot Cetirijazicntk (Danilovs four language dictionary) written in the 19th century. The Macedonian language was also used in court documents.”

After the primer was published, the League of Nations often sent representatives to Greece to check on its progress but Athens always found different sly and tricky ways to fool them and every time managed to persuade them that the Slavic minority was doing well and enjoyed its rights. Papadopoulos, a teacher who was in charge of receiving the International Commission representatives in Voden, said it was difficult to persuade them and he had to use ‘great skills’ to prove to them that the minorities in Aegean Macedonia ‘enjoyed’ their rights. One day, he said when he had to organize a presentation for the visiting International in one of the schools, he lied to the students. He told them that the Greek Minister of Education was going to pass through Voden and that they all had to hold a Greek flag in their hand and sing Greek patriotic songs. This is what he said, “I suggested to the students that if they were asked on the street or at the train station if they knew any other language other than Greek, they should say ‘no’. This was proof for the International Commission that everyone in Voden spoke only Greek and that there was no need for the school system to teach the students any other language. This was also a great success for Greece...” This was done every time the International Commission visited Greece; be it formally or covertly. There were also cases where these representatives acted like they did not notice the ‘transparent slyness’ of their hosts.

According to Katardziev, “As usual, Greece used a double standard when it came to delivering what it promised. It always evaded its obligations when it came to delivering rights for the Macedonian people living on its territory. While skirting its international obligation, Greece did everything in its power to speed up the process of Hellenizing and assimilating the Macedonian people. Greece had two plans, an internal plan which provided funds and freedom to its federal bodies as well as to every organization responsible for Hellenizing and assimilating the Macedonian people. And an external plan through which it constantly insisted that it always fulfilled all its minority obligations.”

After Greece went through the motion of signing the agreement with Bulgaria and after convincing the world that it had delivered on its promises on minority rights based on the Greek-Bulgarian convention it signed on the voluntarily population exchange, Greece declared that there were no more “Slavs” (Macedonians) left, and that they had all immigrated to Bulgaria. Greece claimed that 101,000 Slavs left its territory and went to Bulgaria and 52,881 Greeks moved to Greece from Bulgaria, which was not true because the number of Macedonians exiled to Bulgaria was three times smaller. The actual number was 32,232.

Even though the “Abecedar” primer never reached the Macedonian children it did cause stormy reactions in the neighbouring countries, especially in Sofia. This is what Liubomir Miletik, a Bulgarian professor, said, “For some political reason the Greek government decide to call the Bulgarians in Macedonia ‘Slavs’ and not Bulgarians, by their proper name. Where did these ‘Slavs’ come from? The Greek Government used that name so that Greece could treat the Bulgarians there like some new, undefined nationality, without a literary language and without a literary tradition.”

According to Professor Ivan Simanov the “Abecedar” primer, with its language and written word, was an attempt by Greece to distance the Slavic speaking population in Macedonia from Bulgarian danger. He blames the Greek Government for publishing the primer saying that the primer would come back to Greece like a boomerang. This is what he said, “Greece wants to create a new, special literary language, in order to distance its Slavic subjects from Bulgarian influence, risking that it will feed Macedonian separatism inside its own borders which will be much more dangerous for Greece...”

The Government of Royal Yugoslavia reacted in a similar way, as was evident by a telegram in possession of an Italian ambassador. The ambassador met with his associates in Rome and told them that he had just received disturbing information from the Royal Yugoslav government regarding how the Greek authorities treat the Macedonians. According to the ambassador, the Royal Yugoslav government was troubled because the Greek authorities were treating the Macedonians badly. According to the telegram, “The

Macedonians in Greece speak the Serbian language and are expressing their ethnicity as Serbian. The Royal Yugoslav government will explore similar measures that can be used toward the citizens in the Royal Yugoslavia who speak the Greek language.”

GREEK NEWSPAPER DEFENDS THE MACEDONIANS

*Those who have not seen the cornbread and red peppers
Macedonians eat, don't know how much these enslaved people are
suffering*

“The further our automobile traveled down the fields the more suppressed Western Macedonia was. It was demoralized and stunted... The crying voices inside the villages followed us during our entire trip... The ruined houses reminded us of the miserable life these people lived.

Those who haven't seen the cornbread and the red peppers these Macedonians eat... Those who haven't seen their children dying from malaria... Those who haven't heard the paid teacher, an addicted nationalist, speaking with such contempt for the people he was given to teach... Those who haven't seen the beaten Macedonians tied to trees and puking blood... beaten to reveal where the revolutionaries are... Those who haven't noticed the Greek policemen beating women and children with the cruelty of a cannibal... Those people know nothing of how much these enslaved people are suffering.”

These terrifying extracts were taken from a report written not by a Macedonian but by a Greek journalist named Kondos who worked for the newspaper “Rizospastis”. His report, more than anything, reveals the kind of hell the Macedonian people were living in, while the Greek authorities were doing everything in their power to Hellenize them or force them out of their homes.

“Rizospastis” was a Greek communist newspaper which at times wrote stories about the Macedonian people. Sometimes its journalists had no dilemma revealing that a Macedonian national identity existed in Greece. (Genuinely or not), for at least one reporter the Macedonians were not Greeks, or Bulgarians, or

Serbian. In one of his reports Kondos, the “Rizospastis” reporter who visited Lerin and Kostur Regions, wrote that those who claim that the people living in Aegean Macedonia are Greeks and those living in Pirin Macedonia are Bulgarians are wrong. This is what Kondos wrote, “It isn’t true. Greeks, Serbians or Bulgarians don’t exist in Macedonia under Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Only Macedonians exist. All one has to do is pay one visit to the mountain villages in Macedonia (Kostur, Lerin) and you will discover that. No one needs to tell you, you will know for yourself from their customs and their nature, which are totally not Greek or Serbian... We are not dealing with Greeks, Serbians or Bulgarians in Macedonia, we are dealing with Macedonians, with Macedonian people who aside from all the punches, aside from all the tyranny, still keep their economic and national existence as a unique culture.”

One time “Rizospastis” wrote a story about three Macedonian men who killed a Greek nationalist (Grkoman) spy in their village who constantly harassed the women. As a result all three were sentenced to death. When the verdict was read for one of them the judge said that he was from Lerin but was not Greek because he was born in Sofia. To that the man loudly replied, “Yes I was born in Sofia but I’m not Bulgarian or Greek, I’m Macedonian!”

“Rizospastis” sometimes wrote stories about the “unprecedented exploitation” the Macedonian people experienced. In 1931 in Kostur Region for example, 13 Macedonian children were jailed because they sold some wood they had collected from the forest. As a result the prosecutor accused them of “selling the wood for too high a price”. He didn’t care that the children had no shoes and had to eat cornbread and peppers. According to the prosecutor they were doing well and didn’t need money for that.

“Rizospastis” also wrote a story about Greek nationalist organizations “selling” Macedonian women like they were market commodities. An example of that was the sale of a Macedonian girl from Rupishta, sold in Lerin for 3,000 drachmas. The buyer gave the seller 1,000 drachmas in cash and the rest in bonds. On the receipt it was written that the buyer had bought a sheep.

According to “Rizospastis” there were Greek army units operating around the Lerin Region villages stationed there to combat bandits but instead they terrorized the Macedonian civilian population. It was reported that a Greek military unit consisting of 40 soldiers had surrounded the village Gornichevo during which time it caught only one bandit. He was a VMRO member belonging to Vancho Mihajlov’s band. But in its pursuit of the bandit the unit punished the innocent civilian population. The soldiers beat and tortured people to extract information from them. It was also reported that these Greek military units attacked and robbed the villages Setina, Zabrdeni and Krusoradi. On top of that if anyone from these villages protested, the Greek authorities allowed the units to execute them. According to “Rizospastis” four Macedonian people from the village Vrben were taken to Lerin and for no reason were beaten to madness. Apparently they were beaten because the authorities had found a bomb at the train station. It was later confirmed that the bomb had been left there from the First World War.

Most terrifying for the Macedonian population were the days around the national elections. During that time extra pressure was placed on the people by the nationalist parties. These parties terrorized the people to vote for them. They threatened to burn down their houses if they didn’t vote for them. During Venizelos’s time an eviction list was prepared to evict 800 Macedonian families. After the people refused to leave their eviction was postponed until after the election. After the election another 200 families were added to the list and a total of 1,000 Macedonian families were forced out because they supposedly were members of a United Macedonian Organization.

Because of hard economic conditions most young Macedonians left their home and went overseas. According to “Rizospastis”, “Thousands of young men from Lerin Region emigrated... They are all now living and working in Australia, North and South America, Australia and even New Zealand. They sound optimistic in the letters they send home but at the same time they are nostalgic for Macedonia, they yearn for their birthplaces and say they will return and fight to liberate them...” At the same time “Rizospastis” also gave several examples of how the Macedonian population was forced to migrate. In one instance a person using a saber occupied the only water pump in the village and refused to provide water to

the poor people. A rich family in Patele sent hundreds of villagers to the prisons on the deserted Greek islands. A man call Partsinas carried a gun and on a daily basis terrorized the poor population in Gornichevo...

According to an article “Rizospastis” published in September 1934, Greek authorities interned two Macedonian men in a Crete prison. The men were from Lesnitsa, a village located in Seres Region. The reason for their internment; they had sung a Macedonian song during a wedding. Also according to “Rizospastis” Macedonian recruits in the Greek army were exposed to great terror because they spoke Macedonian. They were tortured terribly during exercises and were forced to work. They were also confined and locked up for the smallest infractions.

“Rizospastis” published several letters written by Macedonians describing their torture in the hands of the Greek authorities. One man who left his home and went to work overseas wrote that somewhere in Lerin Region there was a “black book” with thousands of names of Macedonians. The Greek authorities would not allow these people to return home even though they had left their homeland legally and went to work overseas and other places legally. This is what “Rizospastis” wrote about that, “Most Macedonians who legally left Greece and went to work outside of Greece were not allowed to return. When they went to the Greek consulates to prepare their return documents the consuls told them ‘no fatherland exists for you, for your families or for anyone else of your kind because you are all communists’...”

A Macedonian man named Lambros Imanuil from Kosinets, Kostur Region, while jailed in the Greek island Anafi, in part, wrote the following letter to “Rizospastis”, “Before I was banished to Anafi I had a store in my village Kosinets on which I hung a sign that read ‘The store of Kosinets’. I had placed that sign there in 1903 before the Greek authorities changed the name of my village. One day the police chief from D’mbeni came to my store and told me to change the name on the sign and put another name; a name that I liked. I wrote the name ‘Malimadi’ in honour of Mount Malimadi. Unfortunately the police chief didn’t like that and a few days later he sent four policemen to visit me. I was 65 years old at the time.

The policemen grabbed me by my arms and legs and took me to Kostur. They refused to let me say goodbye to my wife, see my grandchildren, change my clothes or take clothes with me. After that the Greek authorities sent me to a deserted island concentration camp where I was jailed and treated worse than a criminal. I have been speaking Greek for over 24 years, I have educated my children in the Greek language, I have been going to the Greek church and listening to the priest preaching in Greek, and have obeyed the law all my life, I have done everything the Greek authorities have asked of me and I have remained quiet all my life. What else can I do to avoid being punished?”

BRITISH OFFICER CONFIRMS MACEDONIANS LIVE IN GREECE

“The people that live in Lerin and Kostur Regions are not Greeks or Bulgarians, they are Macedonians,” said Captain Patrick Hutchison Evans.

The people that live in Lerin and Kostur Regions are not Greeks, Bulgarians or Serbians; they are Macedonians. This is what Captain Patrick Hutchison Evans, a British communications officer, concluded when he served in the region for nine months from March to October 1944. He came to this conclusion from personal experience and from having met and spoken to Macedonians. He wrote down his observations in a report that he sent to his Foreign Office through the British Embassy in Athens.

This is what Captain Patrick Hutchison Evans wrote about the Macedonians in Lerin Region in 1944. “One fact about the area which is the subject of my observation, an unspoken fact, rarely understood by an Englishman, even one who knows Greece, doesn’t know much about the northern part of Greece because Englishmen seldom go there. The Greeks also don’t know much about it for a couple of reasons. First they don’t want to know. It is in their interest to believe that all the places marked as “Greek” on the map are or have to be Greek by sympathy or by any other means. The Greeks by nature don’t want to admit that a great part of the people in Macedonia in Greece have as many good reasons to consider themselves Macedonians as the Greeks consider themselves Greeks. That however is an unsatisfying motive, a kind of fraud, which is an inseparable part of the Great Idea (Megali Idea). The second reason is, or at least I was told so, that after Greece liberated the Slav speaking region from the Turks, beside the people being different, the Greek governments agreed to support this lie, leaving the impression among its own people and in the world that there is no

Slav minority in Greece. If a foreigner that is not familiar with Greece visited the area around Florina (Lerin) and after forming his or her own opinion of the country in general, the conclusion would be that the Greeks are the minority.”

According to Captain Evans, the region is inhabited mostly by a Slavic speaking population. The language in the homes and in the fields, the village roads, in the market is Macedonian, a Slavic language. This is what Evans wrote in the classified report he sent to the Foreign Office, “Many of the women, especially the older ones, and many of the older men and almost all of the children born around 1939 and later don’t know Greek at all. Even those that speak Greek want to speak more Macedonian when they can. A foreigner who will say “good morning” in the Greek language will get the same reply, but if the same is said in the Macedonian language, he or she will receive many phrases of welcome. The place names written on the map are Greek: Kalitheia, Trigonon, Throsopi and so on, but the names that are used, even though written on the map with very small letters and in brackets, if they are even written at all, are: Rudari, Oshchima, Belkamen - Slavic names.”

According to Captain Evans the people from that area think of the Greek language as almost foreign and treat the Greeks as foreigners. The obvious fact is that the area is naturally Slavic and not Greek. This is what Captain Evans wrote, “It is also important to stress that the inhabitants are not Greeks, are not Bulgarians or Serbians, or Croatians. They are Macedonians. For this here I cannot dogmatize, because I don’t know the history and especially the ethnology of the Macedonians. The Greeks always call them Bulgarians and therefore they criticize them, only EAM/ELAS, which showed a bit of wisdom called these people ‘Slavo-Macedonians’. If they are Bulgarians, spread in four different countries, from which one is Bulgaria, why then would they consider themselves a separate entity and most of them declare themselves as ‘Macedonians’. Those that consider themselves Bulgarian in any case are confirmed.”

Captain Evans was well aware and admitted that Bulgarian propaganda did exist in the Aegean part of Macedonia and was disseminated by Andon Kalchev and Minela Gelev. Kalchev worked as an assistant at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sofia and served as a

reserve officer in the Bulgarian army. During the Second World War Gelev served as the main agent for the Bulgarian Government and as an associate of the Germans and the Italians. This is what Captain Evans said, “The Macedonian idea could also be something artificial as a result of the propaganda. But it doesn’t seem so. It seems very objective that the Macedonians consider themselves as a separate entity, although they are in small number and subject to sharing...”

Captain Evans believed that Macedonian patriotism was not artificial, but natural, spontaneous and with deeply inserted feeling that began during childhood, like any other patriotism. This is what Captain Evans said, “It seems to me that this is a historic mistake or a lapse in history (I repeat, I don’t know anything about Macedonian history) for the nonexistence of an independent Macedonian state. In a longer period of their history the Macedonian people were an overpowered people, more than any one of their neighbors. The Macedonian people lost their cleverness and initiative and remained behindhand. They were freed from the Turks but they never freed themselves from their European lords. When nations were being created and when each was reinforced and strengthened, the Macedonians were not brave enough and were not united to do the same. Now when it looks like they are ready to take a serious step toward national unity, it’s too late. The fact that great conditions for an independent Macedonia sometimes existed, it doesn’t mean that the case is the same today.”

This is what Captain Evans wrote in his report, “The problem with the existence of the Slavic minority in Greece cannot be solved completely, but it can be reduced. ‘If the Greeks give the Macedonians what they ask - freedom to speak their mother tongue and a better life - they will be willing to remain Greek citizens...’”

The British Embassy in Athens found Captain Evans’s report very informative and dispatched it to the British Foreign Office. This, among other things, was said in the dispatch, “The basic impression that came out of Evans’s report was that an unexpected strong Slavic-Macedonian presence, which is not Greek according to customs, religion and language, was found in the area. Because of the unkind and irreparable relation it has with almost every Greek in the territory, including the local EAM leadership, it remains

dissatisfied. Captain Evans believes that if the population is treated with some respect, with less cruelty and if its customs and language are not forbidden, as was the case in the past, before the Metaxas years, this behindhand mountain population could reconcile its differences with the Greek administration.” The British Embassy in Athens also felt that the Macedonian population in this area was suspicious of the British. It wrote, “The Slavic-speaking population in the villages associates the British with the Greek King and with Metaxas and the repressive measures he took against them...”

In the same dispatch which accompanied Captain Evans’s report it was written that ‘the western-Macedonian Slavic population’ was much larger than that shown by the official Greek statistics and that the local Slavic political movement didn’t work for Bulgarian interests but for an independent Macedonia. Also the Macedonian population in Greece did not see itself as separate from the Macedonian populations in the other parts of Macedonia. The Macedonian population inside Greece feels that it belongs with the other Macedonian population living in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia which are only separated by artificial borders. A large Slavic population such as this would be more difficult to transfer than originally believed and would be an obstacle for Greece. There is no reason to not believe the author’s report. It is accurate, free and fair...

WALKING ON ICE AND SNOW IN THE NIGHT

Around 500 children from Kostur Region along with their designated “mothers” leading them fled their homes as Greek Government planes attacked them. Four children were killed

“On March 26th, 1948, forty children accompanied by two women, designated as ‘mothers’ responsible for looking after them fled their village the moment Greek government soldiers entered the village and took 13 children that belonged to parents who had joined DAG (Democratic Army of Greece). Many women and children hid to avoid being abducted or bombed by the Greek forces. It was winter, and the children and mothers had to travel in snow at night and hide during the day,” said Lena Suleva.

When they were passing by the village Trnovo two government planes fired at them from above with their machine guns but lucky for them no one was hurt. Later they joined another group of around 400 children also lead by a few mothers. They were all from Kostur Region. According to the mothers of the second group, the children were attacked several times by Greek government airplanes and during the attacks four children were killed. More fleeing children led by mothers, connected with this group near the village Mavrochori. Eventually the mothers and children from the four villages (Dolno Kotori, Legem, Turija and Tren) came together in a single group.

The above information was dramatically narrated by Lena Sulevska from the village Gorno Kotori, located in Lerin Region. According to Sulevska, it took eight days and nights for the children to travel from their respective villages to reach the villages Dolno Dupeni and Liuboino, located in Prespa Region on the other side of the Greek border in Yugoslavia. Their dreadful story, and that of the 28,000 children exiled from Aegean Macedonia in 1948 has been captured and told by Misho Kitanovski and Georgi Donevski in their book “Refugee Children from Aegean Macedonia in Yugoslavia”.

According to Sulevska there were around 20 women (designated mothers) and 500 children who traveled north on foot and only at night. Sulevska said, "We were carrying three children each the entire way, one in each arm and one on our back. We were blown by a strong wind and pelted by snow all the way from the village Konomladi (Kolomnati). We had to massage the children's feet so that they didn't freeze." Sulevska was responsible for looking after 25 children.

When they arrived at the village Shtrkovo they decided to rest. Unfortunately they were spotted by the Greek government aviation and the entire village was attacked by airplanes. All the children and the entire village population had to flee to the mountains where they spent the rest of the day. "The children were crying from fear and from being cold. We were forced to start fires. But when the airplanes came back we had to quickly put them out. We threw our clothes and the children threw rocks on it until it was out," said Sulevska.

After that they didn't dare light any more fires for fear that the airplanes would come back and attack them again. During the night they continued to travel and two days later they arrived in the village German where they spent the next day. The next night, without their knowledge, they crossed the Greek-Yugoslav border and ended up in Yugoslavia. At sunrise they were met by a number of women from the Yugoslavian Red Cross. When these women saw the condition these children were in; starving and without warm clothes, they all began to cry. After the children were fed they were taken to Bitola.

According to Sulevska, "The ordeal during our travel in cold weather left visible marks on the children. Even after arriving in Bitola they kept crying aloud, the same as they did during the trip. Most were also vomiting. The mothers were no better. In addition to the usual pains they also had to endure sore arms, chests and backs. Our arms and backs were black and blue with bruises. The children were dirty and had not been washed during the entire trip. Their journey was more than 100 kilometers long and lasted eight days. The children's eyes were bloodshot and their clothes were torn to pieces."

Elena Eftova from the village Turie, Lerin Region, told a similar story. She and the other mothers left their village with 114 children. This is what Eftova said, “The monarcho- fascists bombed the village with cannons. Six houses were completely ruined and 34 badly damaged. The monarcho-fascists then invaded the village and robbed it. They also took about 500 sheep. We watched all this from above. We were hidden in the mountains. And because they didn’t find any partisans in the village the monarcho-fascists took their anger out on the civilian population. They beat everyone they came across. During the bombing before we left, Lefteria Doneva, a ten year old child, was wounded on the chest and stomach. She was badly injured so we took her to the basement of her home where it was safer. After the bombing ended we went back and took the girl with us, unfortunately she died on the way. We buried her near the village Rula. The girl’s mother came with us, and after her daughter died she stayed with us. Later we lost contact and now I don’t know where she is...”

Vasilka Delova together with two other women and a girl from the village Lagen took 71 children and left. This is what Delova said, “We hid in the ditches outside our village when the Greek government army attacked. We then went back to the village, took provisions and left. When we arrived near the village Konomladi, we connected with another big group and together we left for Yugoslavia. Five months later, while living in children’s homes, I remember the children still being in fear from what they had experienced during the attack of our village. They still remembered the difficulties and the suffering they experienced when we left. In other words they still felt the hell of that war...”

After her husband was killed, Jordana Jantsova, from the village Trsie, Lerin Region, was left alone with her five children. Worrying that she might also be killed she took her children and fled across the border to Yugoslavia. This is what Jantsova said, “The moment I said I was leaving for Yugoslavia many of the mothers in the village gave me their children and asked me to save them from the terrifying bombardment that was being carried out by American, English and Greek airplanes...”

This is what Stoja Jankovska, another mother responsible for looking after children, had to say, “March 24, 1948 was a dark day for all of us. The separation drama started in the evening of that day. We gathered around 100 children in the schoolyard of my village Rudari and separated them in four groups of 25. I was responsible for one group. Among the children were my two younger brothers Vasil and Goche. We loaded them into oxen pulled carts and left. The children’s mothers ran after us yelling their final goodbyes. One mother yelled ‘dearest Sandra, remember me, don’t forget your mother...’ Another yelled ‘...my dearest Hrisula don’t cry. You will be back soon...’ Yet another yelled ‘Kosta my son, take care of yourself’...” This was the first evacuation during which around 500 children were moved to Yugoslavia.

This is what Jankovska also said, “We arrived in the village German around midnight on March 25th. The next morning we were escorted to the Bela Voda Greek-Yugoslav border. There we met other groups of children from the villages German, Medovo, Rabin, Shtrkovo and other villages. The children were hiding from Greek airplanes. During our stay three people from the resistance movement leadership came and brought us bread and cheese. This also was the furthest that mothers who accompanied their children on this trip were allowed to go. After sunset when there were no more ‘black birds’ (airplanes) in the sky trying to find us, we started walking towards the border, towards our freedom. When we came to a wide open space, we gathered all the children in one place and allowed them to sleep. We covered them with what we had and put branches on top of them. After that I and a number of other leaders from the group went looking for our contacts responsible for escorting us across the border...

After all the groups crossed the Greek-Yugoslav border we arrived in Dolno Dupeni and Liuboino. From there we were transported to Brailovo by trucks and loaded on train cars destined for Skopje. In Skopje the authorities organized a warm and pleasant welcome for us on the platform of the old train station. Here they welcomed the children from Aegean Macedonia. Women from the Red Cross wearing white uniforms and women from the AFZ (anti-fascist women association) leadership gave out candies. Some children had never tasted candy before. What a joy it was! My little ones didn’t

know that the candy needed to be unwrapped before it was eaten... But, even though living and working conditions were great for the children, and despite the best care the children received, when they grew up a bit they still cried for their families, constantly asking for their mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters.

Later, when it was decided that families should be reunited, we looked for the children's parents, through embassies and consular offices, through the Red Cross and by asking around. We wrote many letters and received some replies. Finally the children started making contact with their mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters..."

GIRLS SANG THE SADDEST SONG

Fana, Lena, Milka and Ksantipa climbed up on the village church steeple and sang the song “Goodbye mother, father, goodbye dear relatives...”

In the summer of 1944, Fana Martinova, Lena Miljova, Milka Damovska and Ksantipa Kirova from the village Pozdivishta, Kostur Region, climbed up on the village church steeple and sang the song “Goodbye mother, father, goodbye dear relatives, I’m leaving for a distant place.” Their mothers gathered together in the village square and cried as they listened. This is what Martinova said about that, “We were friends around ten years old. We first walked around the village, and then ran through the meadows and at the end we climbed on the highest point of the village church steeple from where we could see the entire village.” Martinova was one of the thirty thousand Macedonian children that left their homeland in Greece and were never allowed to return.

Sixty years later she still could not explain or understand why those girls sang that song. When they came down from the steeple their relatives hugged and consoled them. Martinova still remembers what her aunt said to her, “You will leave, but you will come back, this damned war will be over. You shouldn’t be worried; you will go to school wherever you go.” This is what Martinova said about that, “Everywhere we went people said to us you will go to school and then come back. It was true that we all went to school and finished different studies but we never came back. Not when the war was over, not two years later, not five years later, and not even forty years later. The Greeks passed a law that did not allow us to go back because we are Macedonians...”

After spending years in the children’s homes in Romania and Poland, instead of going back home (because the Greek authorities would not allow them), Fana, Lena, Milka and Ksantipa, went to different sides of the world. Lena went to Toronto, Canada, Ksantipa married a Polish man and remained in Poland, Milka went to live

with her father in Tashkent, USSR, and Fana went to the Republic of Macedonia. They met again in 1988 in Skopje at the first child refugee meeting.

Martinova, together with 9 designated mothers and 166 children from her village Pozdavishta, left home during the summer of 1948. She was joined by her brothers Vasil, fifteen years old, and Tashko, twelve. The night before they left the entire family got together for dinner. The church bell rang one hour after midnight signaling to them that it was time to go.

This is what Martinova said about that, “We were nine in our family. Three children left, and my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, my father and my two sisters remained at home. Everyone was mobilized in the war effort, even my oldest sister Kiritsa who had just given birth and was breastfeeding. She was in the group that knitted sweaters and socks for the Partisans. My other sister was only 17. Her job was to transport weapons and ammunition from the Prespa villages to the battlefields in Vicho and Gramos. That was a very dangerous task. The girls carried the bombs around their waists, cartridges around their shoulders while leading teams of horses and donkeys loaded with weapons and munitions through dangerous mountain paths during the dark. If there was any kind of ambush, they most likely would have all been killed. My mother told me that one time while they were cooking food for the Partisans a grenade landed and exploded inside the cauldron. There was also the danger of being bombed from above but when they heard airplanes flying they quickly hid away from the big cauldron which was resting over the open visible smoking fire. Even though he was old, my grandfather Trpo also participated in the war effort. Whenever there was war in Macedonia he was always there to fight for his country. He even came back from America to participate in the Ilinden Uprising. His motto was an independent Macedonia. During the Greek Civil War he donated his entire herd of sheep to the Partisans...”

According to Martinova, after the children left their village they traveled only at night. The older ones walked and the little ones rode on ox carts. Long before they crossed the Greek-Yugoslav border they stopped in a forest for some rest. There they met Lazo, a

teacher, who informed them that from there on the children had to be separated. This is what he said, “Starting tomorrow we will separate you into smaller groups because it is dangerous for you to travel as one big group while you are being pursued by the airplanes from above. I bring you greetings from your parents and some advice. They all told me to tell you that you must study hard and listen to your teachers and counselors. We will send over Macedonian teachers for you at your new homes. They will teach you the Macedonian language, because all of you are Macedonians, and don’t forget that.”

During the trip little Martinova couldn’t sleep for two days. On the third day she fell down and went to asleep. No one noticed until the mothers took attendance. Missing were also her brother and four year old Dantse. Dantse was found hugging a tree and crying for her mother. Her brother was found playing with Martinova’s dog. This is what Martinova said about that, “They used the dog to track me down. When the dog found me it became extremely excited like it knew I was missing. It placed its front legs on my shoulders and its head on my chest. Oh my God how sad that was... I could never forget that moment,” Martinova said and began to cry.

She also said that she could never forget little Nume. He was very sick. And even though he was only a child he spoke like a grown man. Because he was very sick he couldn’t walk and had to be carried on a makeshift blanket stretcher carried by four women. He constantly kept saying to them, “I’m sick, leave me here to die, I have two other brothers, who will live instead of me...” When the group arrived in Romania he was hospitalized and managed to recover in a short time. After that he went to school and eventually graduated as a doctor, a specialist. His brothers joined DAG, the Partisan army, and were both killed fighting.

Here is Dedo (grandfather) Lambro’s terrifying story. Because he was very old Dedo Lambro was left at home with his three very young grandchildren. When the time came for all the children to leave, to avoid being killed by Greek bombs, he took his grandchildren and placed them in bushels, loaded the bushels on his horse and took them to the designated mothers to take them away. This is what Dedo Lambro said to the women, “My son is in prison;

my daughter in law was a Partisan but died from typhus in the village German. Please take good care of my grandchildren. Take them wherever you take the other children. My grandchildren also need to go...”

After the children arrived in the village Dolno Dupeni in Prespa, on the other side of the Greek border, some were accommodated by local families and a large number were placed in one big hall. A few days later they were all loaded on trucks and transported to Bitola. In Bitola they were loaded on train cars and several days later were taken to Romania. Martinova stayed in Romania until 1955 and from there she went to Skopje.

Martinova and her family experienced the same trials and tribulations most of the Macedonian families from Aegean Macedonia experienced; now spread all around the world. After the war (Greek Civil War) ended only her grandmother Pena remained in their house. She waited for years hoping that “someone” would come back home. This is what Martinova said, “Before we left our home we the children used to draw our palms on the walls and doors of our house. From what my sister had told me, instead of praying in front of an icon, our grandmother prayed in front of our small palms and constantly repeated, ‘The war is over, why are my grandchildren not here?’ My grandfather fled with the refugees during the mass exodus and ended up in Albania. From there he boarded a ship that took him to Poland. We all hoped that one day he would go home and take my grandmother with him. Sadly they never saw each other again. The Greeks did not allow him to return. My grandmother died alone at the doorstep of our house in 1950. My grandfather left Poland and went to the Republic of Macedonia and from there to Australia to live with his daughter. He lived a long life and died when he was 107 years old. Because he was an invalid he received a pension from the Republic of Macedonia.

After the war ended, Martinova’s mother and younger sister fled Greece illegally and went to the Republic of Macedonia. They had to crawl many kilometers to avoid being caught. The Yugoslav border guards did not cause them any trouble. But if the Greeks had caught them, they would have been shot on the spot. Martinova’s father also fled Greece illegally and went to the Republic of

Macedonia. Her older sister couldn't go with him because she had a small baby. She stayed at her husband's house. Her husband was killed during the war. His father searched the battlefields looking for his body but didn't find it. Martinova's brother Vasil was among the 1,500 children recruited by the Greek Communists from the children's homes in Eastern Europe and sent back to Greece to fight in the Greek Civil War. Eventually he ended up in Poland where he died under mysterious circumstances. Officially he was killed in a car accident, but most likely he was killed by the Greeks because of his pro-Macedonian orientation.

Martinova can't understand the Greek Government's attitude towards the Macedonian people. She feels sad for those Macedonians forced out of their homes and exiled during the war. And like she says, "Greece does not allow our people to return and see the places where they were born and spent their childhood..." In her book she wrote, "We too are children of mother earth... in which she conveyed the intimate drama of a child refugee, now a seventy-year old man, who will always remember the beech tree under which mothers were hugging their children for the last time. "Is that beech tree still there?" he asked, but no one seemed to know because no one was allowed to go back to Greece. When he arrived at the Yugoslav-Greek border the Greek border guard told him, "You can't enter Greece because you are not Greek!" "I never saw my mother again," he said. "She died in Vicho digging trenches..." His mother was one of nine women from Kostur Region captured by the Greek soldiers, killed on the spot and tossed in the ditches they were digging.

Martinova completed her degree in literature and acquired a PhD in history. She researched the Romanian archives where she obtained most of her documents about the Macedonian refugee children.

TERROR FROM THE WAR FOLLOWED THE CHILDREN IN THEIR DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The children's homes in Poland accommodated 3,590 children from the Aegean part of Macedonia

“The Greek Civil War left its own marks on the refugee children. Whenever they heard the sound of a flying airplane they ducked for cover and jumped into a ditch. When they heard an airplane in the night while sleeping they cried in fear, grabbed their clothes and hid under their beds. When they saw a tractor, at first they would be surprised but then they would run away crying. Many had tormenting nightmares while sleeping, dreaming of Greek fascist soldiers coming after them with revolvers and knives. They came up the stairs or through the windows to stomp on them. Many left their bedrooms at night not realizing they were having a nightmare...”

This is what Vaclav Kopcinski M.A., pedagogue and director of the Federal Boarding Education Center in Londek - Zdruj, said in his report about the drama the refugee children experienced during their first several months after arriving in Poland. The report and some other documents about the refugee children in Poland were published in both Polish and Macedonian. The documents were given to the Federal Archive in Macedonia and to the Director of the Federal Archives in Poland. They were prepared by Petre Nakovski, PhD, who said the Macedonian people from the Aegean part of Macedonia who were disrespected in their own country (Greece), were well respected in Poland. They received full respect in all attributes of human existence from the Polish people.

Kopcinski reported that the children were in a constant state of psychological rigidity and even the noise of a tractor or the noise of an airplane could set them off. “We deduced that they acted like they were prisoners in custody. They were constantly feeling tense and closed up inside themselves,” he said.

“They deduced the same. They told us they were nervous and had automatic reactions like those of a robot. They painted a collective portrait of small children separated from their parents and taken to another country,” he added.

Kopcinski underlined that the entire group of children together with the Macedonian adult personnel were psychologically broken. In the beginning they were not in a friendly mood. This is what Kopcinski said, “The phobias, the collective hallucinations, the general distrust, the doubts and similar reactions, are telling us that the entire group has suffered a lot, it was taken away from death, it was saved, but feared the future. It was not sure what was going to happen the next day. Their terrifying past was leading them to an even darker future...” Kopcinski and his staff made huge efforts to normalize the children’s psychological condition.

The Greek and Macedonian administration together with the teaching staff immediately began to adopt new and better measures towards the children in their new surroundings. Improvements in the children were observed about a month after the new program was implemented. This is what Kopcinski said about that, “When Rumeliotis, Olga Popovska and the teachers dropped their distrust, doubts and dishonesty and adopted openness, honesty, satisfaction and appreciation, the cover of the post war leftovers in the school age children began to crack. Their hearts started to open.” Kopcinski was obviously determined to reduce the war traumas for the 3,590 children under his care.

According to Kopcinski, “The staff’s cooperation and dedication on all sides, together with a tolerant attitude from the counselors we were able to remove the children’s mistrust and begin the healing process. In this way the children were on their way to recovering psychologically. Unfortunately it was not the same with the older Macedonian women (the so called mothers). They remained as they

were deep inside, they were still spreading pessimism. Even though they were working here their thoughts were still in the Macedonian mountains. They were worried about events back home and as a result, were blocking our efforts to help them.”

According to Kopcinski if the mothers were removed from the children they would fit better in their new surroundings. This is what Kopcinski said, “They are eager to learn, they want to work, they like to compete with each other, and they want to help the Polish population. They like to be normal and healthy people... Our boarding children generally don’t differ from the Polish children in the rural areas. They are brave and bright children they know how to spell out their needs and stand up for their rights...”

According to Petre Nakovski, who for many years conducted research on the refugee children in Poland, every new period brought new findings, new attitudes and new characteristics but what is written down will remain permanent. This is what Nakovski said, “I am only repeating what was said and that is one side (the Greek people), the democratic side, erased all Macedonian names and surnames in an attempt to erase everything that is Macedonian and connected with Macedonia. The other side, the Polish people, existing in a totalitarian system, not only insisted but persistently fought for the Macedonian names, the Macedonian surnames, the Macedonian language, the Macedonian alphabet, the Macedonian songs, for the Macedonian traditional songs, and for Macedonian customs.

Nakovski was a refugee child himself sent to Poland in 1948. In his works he highlighted the trauma the Macedonian people experienced during the Greek Civil War and after, especially their exodus to Albania in 1949 when a massive number of them were forced out of their homes and permanently exiled. This is what Nakovski said about that, “The exodus was massive, well planned and organized with perfect timing. Even before the refugees were evicted, even before they left their homes, the Communist Party of Greece and the Provisional Government of Greece made arrangements with Eastern European Countries to house and accommodate them...”

The Greek Communist Party leadership promised the people that the child evacuation program would be temporary and as soon as the conditions were “right” in Greece the children would be returned. That, however, was never done because the promises they made were only illusions. This is what Nakovski said, “The Macedonian people paid the ultimate price with DAG’s defeat and with the mass exodus. Not only were the refugees not allowed to return but tragically many people were also killed. Fathers, mothers, sons and daughters were left dead on the battlefields in the Macedonians mountains. Hundreds of villages were ruined, houses destroyed and families broken apart without the chance of getting together again and returning to their birthplace.” Nakovski also added that the refugees were not just driven out they were politically broken, separated and sent to different countries. They experienced circumstances where their life and biological existence was in danger, uncertain of their destiny and the destiny of their close ones. What happened to them was a forced exodus to foreign countries which not only traumatized them psychologically and left them with negative experiences; they left them in new living conditions (culture, language, customs...) which they had to overcome on their own.

The Macedonian people were never allowed to return to their birthplaces. Their defeat during the Greek Civil War will forever remain in their collective memories. The Greek Civil War for them was a war of permanent eradication...The Greek state with its many laws and acts, took away all rights from the Macedonian people. They lost their homes, properties and even their Greek citizenships. In the beginning of the 1980’s Greece voted for another humiliating act, according to which only those who signed a statement declaring that they were “Greek by origin” would be allowed to return. In other words, only those who were “Greek by genus” were allowed back into Greece. Worse than that was the fact that the Greek Communist Party, which got them involved in the Greek Civil War, got them to fight for the communists and promised them all kinds of rights before it exiled them, abandoning them altogether. Instead of defending them, the Communists declined their existence as Macedonians.” Nakovski also pointed out that there was not a single Greek author, who wrote about the refugee children, ever mentioning that the vast majority of the refugee children taken to the

Eastern European countries were Macedonian. According to Nakovski, the Greek communists also insisted that the Polish authorities erase everything that was mentioned as Macedonian including in their documents dealing with the Macedonian refugees in Poland.

According to Nakovski, “The left oriented authorities in Greece were as much responsible for the ‘Macedonian exodus’ from Greece as were the right oriented authorities.” Nakovski’s advice is that regardless of what happened, there should be some effort on the part of the Republic of Macedonia to get closer to Greece. Here is what Nakovski said, “I don’t like the pain and trauma I experienced as a child refugee. And I don’t want it to be passed on to the next generation of my family. We should teach our children and grandchildren not to hate anyone, not even those who harmed us in the past...”

POLAND ACCEPTED THE REFUGEES WITH HEART AND SOUL

*Following the Greek Civil War, around 12,000 refugees from
Aegean Macedonia arrived in Poland*

The following in part, is what Dr. Vladislav Barcikovski wrote in his book “The Greek Hospital on the Island Volin” describing the injured Partisans who arrived in Poland by ship after their defeat in the Greek Civil War:

“The newcomers looked strange. From their dress half were civilians and the other half were soldiers. The soldiers wore American looking hats. They were dirty, had long hair and looked neglected and sad. They mostly kept quiet and to themselves. They left the impression that they were in shock and insecure. The children kept looking at them with eagerness. One child kept touching their military emblems. The soldiers who were seriously wounded wore bloody and dirty makeshift bandages made of cloth. Under them were visible festering wounds. It would appear they were not taken care of on the ship during their voyage here. Their dressings didn’t appear to have been changed. They either didn’t know how to or had no dressings available to change them. Some soldiers had terribly deformed arms and legs and tried to hide them from us. Since we didn’t speak their language our staff could only gesture their sympathy for the newcomers. The badly injured soldiers and those with amputated legs were carried by hand to the vehicles that waited for them. One of those soldiers was weeping but not from the pain, but from the excitement of being looked after with motherly care. In order to show their appreciation some soldiers caressed the eagle emblems on the hats of the Polish soldiers. We not only wanted to help them but also to do it with our hearts and souls. It seems they very much needed that from us. It was visibly obvious that generally these poor people had lived through terror. They arrived tired, weak and sick, mostly from their long-lasting ordeal and suffering. Their badly set broken arms and

legs continuously caused them pain. Most of them had high temperatures. Some of those that were very sick were unable to enjoy the happiness from arriving to this desired destination. But, generally taken, they were trying not to show their pain. Only a few were showing distrust and avoiding being touched by us who seemed to be strangers to them.

Some of the soldiers refused to surrender their weapons, even after it was explained to them that we were going to secure them in a safe place. Only a few of the soldiers refused to eat. Most stuck out their hands when we offered them a sandwich, and there were plenty of sandwiches. They pointed to the bread and gestured if they could have more. Later they said they were surprised by the large amount of fresh bread they were given. Many said that during the fighting they often dreamed of having bread. Here they had an unlimited supply of it. Our crew on the ship was more than happy to fulfill their wishes. They remembered that for their entire lives. Those who were starving before the voyage ate as much as they could but not without consequences. In addition to the sea-sickness they experienced they had bouts of diarrhea. That exhausted them even more. The 500 or so soldiers that arrived on the ship were loaded on a train and sent to Szczecin. Many were exhausted.

The Macedonians in the group seemed to be more open and understanding than the Greeks. They told us they live in Greece and their language is Slavic. They complained about the Greek nationalists who in Greece disrespect their Macedonian national identity. There are hostilities between the Greek and Macedonian Partisans. The Macedonians are very patriotic and ethnically unique...

The Macedonians in Greece are not happy with being among the Greeks... The Macedonians have their own national ambitions. In confidence they told us that they want all Macedonians to reunite including those in Greece, as well as those in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, where they have a relatively large autonomy. In our conversations with the Greeks many times we noticed that they have ill feelings towards the Macedonians, which should be solved...

The newcomers were given a brief medical examination on the first day of their arrival. On the second day, after they were accommodated in their new quarters, the doctors started examining them in more detail. They had no serious illnesses outside of rashes and diarrhea. There were newborns and hundred year old men and women among them. Everyone without exception was dressed in tattered clothes and, instead of wearing shoes they were either barefoot, wore torn sandals or wore old rubber boots tied up with rope. The women covered their heads and half of their faces with black head kerchiefs so it was impossible to see if they were young or old. Many had their bodies tied with ropes and it was very hard to free them out of those. Generally speaking they were all pleased to take off the tattered clothing and to have a bath. But there were also those, mainly women, that didn't want to be naked, arguing that they had never bathed uncovered before. They looked different after they had a bath. After that we could see who was young, middle aged and old. However they all looked much older than they were...

All of the newcomers held themselves in dignity and did not complain. They tried to smile back at their hosts when they noticed excitement on their faces. They trusted the doctors and nurses and were grateful for their help and did what they asked them to do. They were happy that they had arrived in a Slavic speaking country and emphasized that as Macedonians they were also Slavic speakers and in close kinship with the Polish people. They were happy to stay among their Slav brothers and sisters until the Democratic Army of Greece won the war and turned Greece into a free country so that they could then return to their homes.

They hung on to the keys of their houses in Greece when they undressed being careful not to lose them..."

The first group consisting of 750 injured people came in July 1949. They traveled by ship from Drach through Gibraltar to Poland. Later another group, consisting of 1,250 injured soldiers and around 9,000 civilians also arrived by ship. They were a mixed group of Macedonians and Greeks.

The Polish people accepted them with open arms. Boleslav Bjerut, First secretary of CK and PORP, instructed his people hosting the

newcomers to not only help them professionally with everything they need but to do it with kindness and heart. The approach that the Polish authorities took helped the refugees heal their wounds faster and overcome their psychological trauma easier.

The Macedonian people are very grateful to the Polish people for their help and for never questioning their Macedonian national integrity.

In his introductory comments in his documents about the Macedonian refugees in Poland, Professor Vladislav Stempnjak, PhD, highly praised the Polish teachers and analysts for their high professionalism. They promoted the Macedonian language and did everything in their power to make sure the Macedonian and Greek children did not lose their national identity.

“The Macedonians are a people and Macedonia is a country in every respect. It has been this way before and it is still this way now. Unfortunately the Macedonian national identity, language and even the right to use the name Macedonia is being disputed by some. However, that is not the case with Poland. Not in the past and not even now has there been any indication of doubt regarding Poland’s recognition of the existence of the Macedonian people and their language. Poland as a country, and its people who work on Balkan issues, have always recognized the Macedonian national identity. The research conducted by Polish linguists has always referred to the Macedonian language as a distinct language...” wrote Professor Vladislav Stempnjak.

OVER 2,000 CHILDREN WERE SENT TO THE FRONTLINE

“I watched my father’s execution when he was shot by his co-fighters,” said Alekso Chachanovski, recruited as a DAG fighter at age 15

This is what Alekso Chachanovski said, “When we were told that we were leaving Romania and returning to our homeland to join DAG, we were proud and happy. We were finally going to return to our birthplace and see our parents, families and friends and, at the same time, fight for the freedom of our people. I never thought that I was going back to see my father’s execution by firing squad. That was the last thing on my mind. My father was executed by his DAG co-fighters because he came looking for us, for his own children, in the Eastern European countries...” Alekso Chachanovski was born in the village Zhelevo, one of the 1,500 Macedonian child refugees recruited from the boarding houses in Eastern Europe and sent back to Greece to fight on DAG’s side against the Greek government army during the Greek Civil War.

According to Chachanovski, “At the end of 1948, the taller children from the Sinaja children’s home were transferred to Tulgesh. At that point it became clear to us that the older refugee children from the children’s homes were being recruited to fight for DAG. Then, in the beginning of 1949, a group of 375 children from the Tulgesh children’s home were sent to the city Arad. An army unit was formed there. We did military exercises every day. We stayed in Arad for 30 days. We were given uniforms and military equipment that included a backpack, a flashlight, a knife, a first-aid kit and some other things. After that we were sent through Bucharest to Berkovica in Bulgaria, where many other children had gathered. Some of the shorter and younger children were sent back to where they had come from; the rest carried on and arrived at the military polygon in the villages Rudari and Shtrkovo, in Prespa, Aegean Macedonia where they resumed doing military exercises. Seven

children escaped and fled to the Republic of Macedonia.”
Chachanovski fell ill after surviving the trauma of watching his father being executed.

Historian Risto Kiriazoski, PhD, a participant in the Greek Civil War, and a researcher of its effects on the Macedonian people who experienced it, said that the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), in its pointless effort, evacuated the children not as a humanitarian gesture to save them but to solve its problem of reserves for DAG. In other words, the CPG saved the children in order to later use them as fighters. And it did. This is what Kiriazoski wrote, “In April-May 1949, DAG General Staff and the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece decided to recruit new fighters from the children that were evacuated in the Eastern European countries. Special representatives were sent on location with corresponding orders and directives to ‘convince’ the children through propaganda and pressure to join DAG. The children were recruited not according to age, but according to height. As a result, children aged 12 to 15 were recruited. After the children arrived in the free territory (a Partisan controlled area) the children were trained in the village Sktrkovo, in Lerin Region, where DAG had organized a training centre, and sent to the front lines to fight.”

Sokrat Panovski and Ilia Lafazanovski at the time were refugee children in the children’s homes in Romania and witnessed the events that took place. They said, “The visitors carried a notebook with them and went around and wrote the names of the children they wanted to recruit. The political propaganda to motivate the children to fight in the war was propagated on a daily basis by the Greek directors running the children’s homes. The first mobilization in Romania was completed in August 1948, during which 125 children were recruited. The second mobilization was completed in February 1948, in the Tulgesh children’s home during which 375 children were recruited. Those children were over 14 years old and included 5 girls.”

According to Kiriazoski, “...not a single child from a Greek ethnic background was recruited. That means that the Macedonian children were used as ‘cannon fodder’...”

This is what, in part, Paskal Mitrevski, leader of NOF (National Liberation Front), wrote to the CPG Politburo about the irresponsible attitude towards the Macedonian children of one particular Greek staffer in Tulgesh, "...his name is Timios. His attitude can be characterized as nowhere near good. He puts intolerable psychological pressure on the children and at the same time creates a difficult atmosphere. Here is what the children said to Malio, a member of NOF, when he was sent to visit them, 'Timios assembles the children in the children's home and, with a violent and unacceptable manner, yells at them and demands that they go down there and fight. He tells them that those who refuse to go will carry the stamp of a cross on their forehead, to differentiate them from the others, to let everyone know that they are bad people and should be labeled as such'..."

After finding out that children were being recruited, some "mothers", the women responsible for caring for them, complained to the directors about the recruitment but were completely ignored. Then, when the time came for the children to leave, these women went them. One of those women was Sofia Tambovska-Kovachevska. This is what she said, "In March 1949, a Greek person named Papathanasiou arrived at the children's home. He said that he had orders from DAG to recruit children aged between 14 and 16. We were strongly against that. We explained that the children were too young and this was done without permission from their parents. Given the fact that our children were well looked after and had good teachers, Kika, a woman from my village and I decided to sign up as volunteers to fight for DAG. We volunteered because we wanted to accompany the mobilized group of children and join DAG with them. We felt that the children fighting in DAG would need us more than the children in these homes. We also wanted to inform their parents of the new situation..."

According to Panovski and Lafazanovski, the total number of people recruited from the children's homes was more than 1,500. According to Petre Nakovski, that number was around 2,000. At the same time Nakovski emphasized that the Polish government was the only government which did not allow children to be recruited from its children's homes.

According to Panovski and Lafazanovski, “It was nostalgia for their homeland, a desire to be with their families during these hard times, as well as enthusiasm to fight that drove the barely tainted children to sacrifice themselves for CPG interests and for Greek interests in general. In this way Greece could homogenize its nation without using elements of physical torture to force out the Macedonians from their birthplaces...” Panovski and Lafazanovski also pointed out that of the 6 children from Zagorichani that were recruited from the children’s home in “Tulgesh” to fight for DAG, 5 were killed during their first day of battle. Most of the 11 children mobilized from Zhelevo were killed during the first days and of the 9 children mobilized from Bapchor 2 were killed.

Even Greek sources confirmed that it was an unequal fight where barely trained children were fighting a ten times larger and better equipped Greek army force. This is what Joanis S. Koliopoulou wrote in his book “The Macedonian Issue in the period of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) in the Western Part of Macedonia”, published in 1995, “Fifteen year old, Boris Uzounous (Uzunov) from the village Dolno Kotori (Kato Idrousa), located near Lerin, was one of those children that was evacuated. Together with other children from his village and from the surrounding area, in May 1948, he found himself in Yugoslavia. In July the same year DAG mobilized his mother with the promise that they would let her visit her son in Sinaia, Romania. But then I met him carrying a long German gun over his shoulder on Mount Malimadi. I also met his mother in the same area. She was sent there to reinforce the battle lines. Later, from the information she gathered, she found out that her son Boris was killed in a very difficult battle near where she was fighting ...”

According to Kiriazovski, “The CPG’s and DAG’s decision to sent children into battle caused a great disappointment and sharp disapproval from parents...”

On May 18, 1949, 33 mothers from the village Konomladi, near Kostur, whose children were evacuated, sent a stern protest to DAG General Staff demanding that all the recruited children be returned either to the children’s homes or to their parents. This is what Kiriazovski wrote, “On May 22, 1949, under great pressure from

parents and from the public in general, the CPG stopped the mobilization of children younger than 15, and the already mobilized children under that age were returned back to the children's homes. However, the order was not completely fulfilled. Most of the already mobilized children were thrown into battle untrained and were killed. In one tragic case, 130 children on their way to Thessaly were ambushed in Hasi and all of them were killed by the Greek government army..."

FRIGHTENED MOTHERS LOOKED FOR THEIR CHILDREN

'You mobilized everyone?' yelled one mother at the gathering in Orovnik, when mothers found out their children who were supposed to be saved were recruited and mobilized

This is what Trpe Karcinski, one of the recruited child refugee boys, said, "One evening as it was getting dark our fully armed and barely trained unit was marching towards Orovnik. On our way there we became the centre of attention as we passed by a number of civilians going home after working in the fields. The people admired our new and clean uniforms and especially us who were the youngest Partisans they had seen. Then, I noticed one of the women, a mother, recognized her son among us. She immediately started yelling very loud. She said, 'people, people our children... they are our children...!' There was a lot of confusion among the people. Many of us turned our attention to the civilians. Some flew off the line as they saw their mothers. Then the rest left the formation and started looking for their parents. They kept yelling their names. It seemed like we had all lost our minds. It was getting dark. Mothers were yelling the names of their children and the children were yelling the names of their parents. It was chaos and no one was thinking about the formation or the march. I was alone watching the terrifying picture unfold in front of my eyes. I felt like I was an orphan. I didn't find anyone from my family. As I began to cry wondering where my mother was, I heard a familiar voice coming from behind me. 'I see you are also here' it said. It was my Grandfather Dirnko Demirev - Agata from our village. He came closer and said, "Hey you, little one, it looks like your rifle is bigger than you... That's a big backpack... I bet it's heavier than you... Have you come back to liberate Macedonia?" After that, my grandfather told me that my two uncles were killed in battle. He didn't know where my father and mother were. All he knew was that they were fighting for DAG. This encounter terrified the mothers of all the children. These mothers thought that their children were

saved from the war. They sent them to the socialistic countries to save them, not to turn them into soldiers...”

The planned meeting in Orovnik, which was supposed to be a gathering to draft a telegram asking for support from the World Congress for Peace, held in Prague, turned into a protest. The people began to shout at the organizers. One person yelled, “Was it not enough that you mobilized every living adult, you also had to bring back and mobilize our children? The only things that are alive in my house that are not mobilized are the rats. You turned our villages into desolate places. Send our children back to the peoples republics!” People were grief stricken and angry. Those responsible in the CPG, NOF and AFZ (Women’s Antifascist Front) had no answers. All mothers demanded that their children be saved.

Karcinski continued, “What I found out from my grandfather made me very sad. I cried uncontrollably. My tears kept pouring out from the depths of my eyes. No one judged me because of that, even though I was a Partisan and carrying a gun. It took a year after we became refugee children for us to become aware of our tragedy and the hell our people in the Aegean part of Macedonia, were pushed into...”

Karcinski carried a notepad and a pencil with him everywhere he went and documented everything he witnessed and experienced to hell and back. His dramatic life story was documented by Socrat Panovski and Ilia Lafazanovski in their book “The Persecution that Lasts”.

According to Karcinski, in December 1948, the children’s home in Tulgesh was visited by Petros Kokalis, a member of the CPG Central Committee. During his propaganda campaign Kokalis demanded that a massive number of volunteers join the Democratic Army of Greece. His propaganda was disseminated through Timios, the director of the Tulgesh children’s home. Timios often gave speeches to the children during which he promoted patriotic feelings towards their homeland prompting the children to join DAG massively and voluntarily. On Timios’s insistence 375 children between the ages 14 and 16 signed up. There were also 15 girls among them. Their basic motivation for volunteering was nostalgia

for their homeland, for returning to their birthplaces. The signup consisted of writing down on a piece of paper their full name, date of birth and place of birth and the words 'I voluntarily sign to join DAG'. On March 6, 1949, the last group of children was loaded on trucks, and through Yugoslavia, sent to the military polygon near the villages Rudari and Strkovo. There the children were given 23 days of basic training which consisted of how to aim and shoot a gun and how to throw a hand grenade. After that military combat units were formed similar to those of DAG.

This is what Karcinski wrote, "We had orders, without warning, to shoot at anybody or anything that moved. Later we found out that the people we were ordered to shoot were Macedonian fighters and civilians running away from their homes and fleeing to the Republic of Macedonia. Many were searching for their children on the Yugoslav side of the border. So, we were ordered to shoot our own parents and relatives fleeing across the border to the Republic of Macedonia. My friend Alekso Chachanovski's father from Zhelevo was among those fleeing. He was caught and executed. He was murdered in front of his son. Poor Alekso had to witness that. He was never the same after that. Our friends in a previous group were also sent to join DAG at the front lines on Gramos, Alevitsa, Siniak, Vicho and Malimadi. From those who arrived there 60 were sent to the war front. Most were killed during the first battles. Some were captured. The tragedies that took place, especially with our friends, were very difficult to forget. Three boys recruited to plant mines were killed during training. One of the mines exploded and killed them. One boy died attempting to unblock his machine gun."

Karcinski continued, "One day a Greek from the political commissary came over to our unit and asked, 'Is there anyone here that wants to stay with DAG?' Two said yes. They were Vasil Martinovski and Gorgi the courier who worked in the training centre. If this question was asked a few days earlier we all would have volunteered. But after we heard what happened at the gathering in Orovnik, we lost our desire to fight. There was total silence. In the silence we could hear cannon fire in the distance. We looked as innocent as lambs before the Easter slaughter in front of a butcher shop. We were very young but we felt the cruelty of the Greek Civil War. Finally the Commissar broke the silence with the words, 'Hand

over your weapons! We will take you back to Romania so that you can eat your marmalade.’ The man was so angry he left without even saying goodbye...”

Unfortunately this did not end the sufferings of the refugee children. The next day the same trucks that took the children before, came back and for the second time, they took them away from their homeland. When they crossed the Greek-Albanian border all the children, with a single voice, sang the song, “We too are children of mother earth and have the right to live...”

Karcinski continued, “When the children spent time in Albania they were exposed to a lot of hunger. We were practically starving. Some days later they took us to Tirana airport and sent us to Belgrade. The Yugoslavs offered for us to stay in Yugoslavia but we didn’t want to. So from there the Yugoslavs flew us through Budapest to Poland, where we arrived on August 2, 1949. We were accommodated in a monastery near Warsaw. Then, after they vaccinated us and we had our medical examinations, we were put on a train and sent to a summer resort. We arrived at the Solice Zdui summer resort on August 6, 1949, and were accommodated in a villa. There we were under constant medical observation and had regular medical examinations. Then, after several days of rest, we again began to feel like we were alive. We looked like living skeletons, skin and bones. We finally came back from hell...”

According to Karcinski, “Poland did everything in its power to make our young lives better. It helped us with our education and we were all educated... Unfortunately, deep inside of us, deep inside our souls, we still craved to go home to our birthplaces... we craved something called nostalgia.”

WOMEN MASSIVELY INVOLVED IN THE WAR EFFORT

Hidden behind the action for saving the children was the intention for securing new fighters

According to historian Risto Kiriazovski the child evacuation program began at the end of February and beginning of March 1948, and lasted until June of the same year. There is no doubt that the children were taken away from the ravages of the Greek Civil War and sent to the socialist countries to be saved. However the fact that they were taken away from their birthplaces and never allowed to return is an act of ethnic cleansing.

One of the essential reasons for evacuating the children was to create conditions for solving DAG's reserve problem and for recruiting new soldiers. Freeing their parents from taking care of the children enabled DAG to mobilize the entire population for the coming difficult and decisive battles in Western Aegean Macedonia. And that is exactly what was done. After the children were evacuated, DAG carried out full mobilization of those people who had not yet joined DAG or DAG's reserve units. In the summer of 1948, during the massive offensive on Gramos, the entire free (DAG controlled) territory was transformed into workshops, where the unarmed population, those people who were unable to carry weapons, worked for DAG's needs. Units of women were created to transport the injured, to supply DAG with weapons and munitions, to dig trenches, bake bread, fish in Lake Prespa and so on.

According to Kiriazovski who personally participated in the Greek Civil War, the CPG leadership sold the idea for evacuating the children, not as a solution to DAG's reserve problems, but as a humanitarian gesture to save the children from the ravages of the Greek Civil War. A wide political program was initiated in order to persuade parents to accept the idea of evacuating their children. The

evacuation was initiated as a result of a written request from parents, and children were evacuated with their permission.

According to Buchkova, the humanitarian motive was not the only motive for the evacuation. This is what Fana Buchkova, a child refugee herself, wrote in her book “We Are Children of Mother Earth Too...”, “We should accept that as a fact, but not as the only motive, because later events point to other reasons. There is another motive and that is the DAG reserve problem which the CPG leadership had not managed to solve...”

According to Buchkova, “Greek nationalists were looking for yet another chance to ethnically cleanse Macedonia of its Macedonian population. Evidence of this can be found in various Greek newspapers. For example the republican weekly newspaper ‘Elefteros’, in January 1946, wrote, ‘The Slav-Macedonians should disappear from here.’ ‘It is essential that they be sent away to any other neighbouring country.’ Greek newspapers consistently published articles about the need to ‘exterminate’ the Macedonian population. And it wasn’t only the newspapers. Every time patrols made their way into the Macedonian villages, they made sure to spread slogans that promoted ‘murder’, ‘forcible evictions etc., so that when the Greek King came to visit these villages he would not find a trace of Macedonians. Those slogans unfortunately were turned into action...”

According to Evdokia Foteva-Vera, who herself was a DAG Partisan, fought in the Greek Civil War and was directly involved in the child evacuation program, “The children were at all times exposed to terror and the danger of being bombed. This was not a good environment for being brought up and educated. In addition to those dangers the children were also exposed to hunger and many diseases. Because of those circumstances, the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece, the CPG, NOF and AFZH turned to the free socialist republics for help to look after our underage children aged 14 and under...” This was emphasized in Misho Kitanovski and Georgi Donevski’s the book “The Refugee Children from the Aegean Part of Macedonia in Yugoslavia”. According to Evdokia Foteva-Vera, most of the Greek Civil War was fought in places populated mainly by Macedonians and because

of that most of the children evacuated were from Macedonian families.

This is what Evdokia Foteva-Vera wrote, “The way for mothers to save their children from the cruelty of the Greek Civil War, from the hands of the monarch-fascists, and from being bombed by American airplanes, was to appeal to the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece to take them and send them out of the war zone. And for that reason mothers willingly gave their children to be evacuated. This way mothers were assured that their children would be safe and have a happier future. A mother’s pain cannot be estimated when she is separated from her child, but in the name of safety, this time she chose what the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece offered her...”

According to Evdokia Foteva-Vera, the regional NOF organizations coordinated and implemented the child evacuation program in every village in the war zone. The people were assured that every measure possible would be taken to safeguard the children. The lists of children to be evacuated were prepared by NOF and AFZH. This is what Evdokia Foteva-Vera wrote, “One woman was assigned to look after and take care of ten children. A teacher was assigned to teach 20-25 children. The teachers had to belong to a Partisan family, a family that had a member of the family killed in the war, or people that were invalids... When I personally suggested to Malina Raleva from the village D’mbeni, who had four children to be evacuated, to go with them, she said, ‘No, I can’t possibly leave my friends, my sister and my brother here to fight alone. I know my children will be safe, I completely trust the people who will look after them. I can contribute more to our war effort if I stay here’...”

According to Katerina Mirchevska, “One reason for saving the children from the terrors of the war was humanitarian but also connected with how the war was going to take shape...” Mirchevska quoted a statement given by Urania Jurukova, an activist and participant in the war, who said, ‘Great battles were being fought in the beginning of 1948 and the villages around Vicho, Malimadi, Bigla and Gramos were heavily bombarded. The greatest victims of those bombardments were children and old people... A teacher named Fotini Zagrovska from the village P’pli told us that when the

airplanes came the children ran away from the school to hide. As a result they were injured and some killed. After that we started teaching during the night. We needed to evacuate the children in order to save them. We had already sacrificed some in the villages Zagorichani, Konomladi, Grache, Stensko, etc...”

According to Mircevska, “The other reason for evacuating the children was connected with DAG’s plans to increase its number of fighters. The CPG and DAG leaderships decided that the number of fighters should be increased from 24,000 to 60,000 - 65,000. This was possible only after the children were evacuated and their parents, primarily their mothers, were free to be mobilized in the war effort. This was confirmed by the fact that all men and women were mobilized after the child evacuation...”

Petre Nakovski shared the same opinion. Evacuating the children had a humanitarian character, but there were hidden aims behind this action. This is what Nakovski wrote, “First, after the children left, parents were mobilized as fighters or to serve DAG’s other needs such as transporting arms and ammunition to the battlefields, evacuating injured soldiers from the field, digging trenches, building bunkers, etc. Second, safe and secure, the children would grow up and become future reserves for supplying the Democratic Army of Greece with soldiers. This was evident by the fact that DAG mobilized some of these children during the second half of 1948 and in March of 1949, when 2,000 children aged 14, 15 and 16 were returned to Greece to fight. Only Poland refused to allow the children to be mobilized, or the adults who came with the children. Third, by evacuating the children the CPG and DAG hoped to raise the fighting spirit and morale of the fighters, aware that their children, brothers and sisters were safe and away from the war zone...”

GREEK QUEEN HELLENIZED 30,000 MACEDONIAN CHILDREN

Greek queen Frederica collected Macedonian children from the villages by force while the war was still going on

Parallel with the action taken by the Democratic Army of Greece to collect Macedonian children en masse and send them to the socialist countries, the Greek authorities, under the protection of Queen Frederika, were taking similar actions. The Greek military and police invaded Macedonian villages and took children from their mothers by force under the motto “save the children from the communists...”

This is what Vera Foteva, one of the Macedonian leaders who fought in the Greek Civil War, said, “After DAG lost the battles in Vicho and Gramos in 1947-1948, the Greek Army began to abduct young children. This action was initiated by the Greek monarcho-fascist government and was organized and carried out by Greek Queen Frederika, which the people called ‘Friki-terror’. Publicly Frederika said she was concerned for the children. But in reality she was going around the villages and abducting children by force, taking them out of the hands of their mothers and turning them into ‘janissaries’...” Vera was quoted by Misho Kitanoski and Georgi Donevski in their book “The Refugee Children from the Aegean Part of Macedonia in Yugoslavia”.

According to Vera Foteva, “When the monarch-fascist army was approaching the village Zagorichani, near Kostur, intending to collect children by force, the Macedonian villagers hid their children in their outdoor ovens and later at night they transferred them to the free territory. And because the monarcho-fascists could not find any children they murdered 17 women in nearby villages and threw their dead bodies into Lake Kostur.

According to Vera Foteva, “Mothers in general did everything in their power to stop the Greek army from taking their children, and because of that they were mistreated, whipped, beaten and jailed.” This is what was said in “Mahitria”, a Provisional Democratic Government of Greece hearing on November 16, 1948, regarding the case of the women from the village Zupanista, near Kostur, who had gathered together to testify about their children being taken away by Queen Frederika:

“The Macedonian women were jailed because they refused to allow their children to be taken away by Frederika. Because of that, even women in their late pregnancies were sent to prison. Many babies were born in prison. The women experienced extreme terror...”

Katerina Mirchevska, who used several Greek sources in her book said that, “The initiative to collect children came directly from Queen Frederika herself. She was the wife of the King who took the Greek throne after his brother’s death in 1947. She came up with the ideas after she visited the women’s prison at ‘Themistokle’ Street in Athens. There she found women accused of being communists serving their prison terms together with their children. Some of these women were sentenced to death so she took their children from them to save them. She continued this practice for a while before she made it official in the period from June 1947 to August 1949, to when DAG was defeated. In total she managed to collect more than 30,000 children from the villages in the Aegean part of Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus, Thessaly and Old Greece, and placed them in her boarding houses and children’s homes especially prepared for them...”

Mirchevska believes that DAG’s program to collect the children was a kind of counter weight to the Greek Government project carried out by Queen Frederika who took primarily Macedonian children by force, which were later brought up and educated in the great Greek (Megali Idea) national spirit. This is what Mirchevska said, “The purpose of this project according to Queen Frederika was ‘to save our children from the Northern provinces and not to allow them to be taken outside the Greek borders and educated as enemies of Greece’...”

Mirchevska believes that DAG's "child evacuation program" was used by the Greek government as a powerful propaganda tool against the communists. The Greek government called its program "pedomazoma" (in Greek, pedi=child, mazoma=collect), which sounded more humanitarian than its counterpart "evacuation of children".

This is what Mirchevska wrote, "The action called 'humanitarian' was everything but humanitarian. On the contrary, the Greek government, the Greek police, the Greek army and the Greek units of the so-called Mai, were breaking into people's homes in the villages and taking children away from their mothers by force. These were mainly Macedonian children. After they were taken the children were temporarily accommodated in the nearest gathering centres and later transferred to the children's homes. In a single month 50 children's homes, popularly called Queen Frederika's homes and boarding-schools, were built in Greece. Most were located in and around Athens where 20,000 children were accommodated..."

According to Mirchevska, "The most effective method used to educate the children consisted of forbidding any kind of contact with their families. Children were not allowed to have visitors or write letters. The educational process and components of the learning curriculum were carried out according to a strictly predetermined daily plan with activities which the children undertook in the children's homes and boarding schools. The children were not allowed to have watches or calendars. Their daily activities were regulated by a bell. The children were dressed in Greek uniforms and always walked marching, even when they were going to cinemas or walking in the parks..."

According to Mirchevska, who studied Greek sources to obtain this information, "The methods for educating the children were dictated by Queen Frederika herself who was new to Greece. She was German and came from Duke Ernesto August's German royal family. Together with her brothers, Prince Heinrich and Prince Christian, Frederika grew up and was educated in the spirit of the

German Nazi youth. She used the same ideology and methods to educate the Macedonian children in her children's homes..."

According to Socrat Panovski, "While most of the children that were evacuated to the socialist countries finished different courses in the schools and universities, the children in Frederika's camp received only primary education. Not one of them continued their education beyond primary school. According to Greek historian Dimitris Servos, 'The American mission which at the time was helping Greece, the same mission which helped Greece collect the children, later mediated a program that allowed rich American and Greek families without children to adopt these children for large amounts of money. In the beginning these rich families paid anywhere from 4,000 to 5,000 dollars per child, but later the price rose to 10,000 dollars per child'..."

Using Queen Frederika's own memoirs as a source, Risto Kiriazovski wrote, "The collection of children on the Greek government side started right after the Royal Voluntary Association was established in July 1947. The planned mass collection started in March 1948, when the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece (the Partisan side) began its child evacuation program. The collection of children on the Greek government side, personally managed by Queen Frederika, also involved the Greek army, the local Greek authorities, the Greek police, as well Greek educational and other organizations. The plan was to collect from 10,000 to 12,000 children. In March alone 6,000 children were collected. With support from the American mission and the UN Special Committee for the Balkans, at the beginning of March 1948, the Greek government announced that all preparations were made to collect 14,000 children from the Aegean part of Macedonia and the Peloponnesus..."

According to statements made by Queen Frederika, 24,000 children were collected. According to other sources, 14,494 children were collected from the Aegean part of Macedonia alone. In total the Greek state built 54 children's homes in Solun, Leros, and Kifisia. These were only a few places in Greece where Macedonian children experienced brutal denationalization and assimilation under Queen Frederika's watch...

SISTER FOUND BROTHER

54 YEARS LATER

Sandra Tsvetanoska found her brother Giorgi after she grew up in the refugee children's homes in Poland

Sandra Tsvetanoska from Skopje found her brother Giorgi in Australia 54 years later; after they were separated and she ended up in the children's homes in Poland. She had a photograph of him. Her brother Giorgi recognized himself when he saw the photograph. Sandra Tsvetanoska's daughter had given the photograph to the Macedonian newspaper "Today" to publish it. Giorgi immediately made inquiries and found out that Sandra was living in Skopje. He immediately contacted her to let her know that he was still alive and well, living in Australia and was eager to see her again.

Little Sandra was only 2.5 years old when she was evacuated with the refugee children from her village Shtrkovo, located near Lerin, and taken to Poland and placed in the refugee children's home in Scecín where she remained until she was 19 years old. When she left the children's home she started working as a hair dresser. When families from the Aegean part of Macedonia began to reunite, mothers and fathers started looking for their children everywhere. Unfortunately no one was looking for Sandra. The only relative that she knew she had that was alive was her uncle. He asked her to come to Skopje and live with him and his five children.

This is what Sandra said when she heard from her brother, "My heart hurt. I grew up in children's homes without a mother's love. And now after all those years when I heard my brother's voice I felt real love." Sandra told her story on the Macedonian radio program "Three Times Son-in-Law" in Melbourne when she went to visit her brother.

Sandra continued, "My psychological wounds that pained me all those years while I was living alone began to heal a little when I got married and had my own family, when my son and daughter were born. But those wounds could never heal completely, because I did

not know the fate of my mother and brother. When I left Poland and went to Skopje, I stopped looking for them because I was afraid that this would open new wounds and I would not be able to bear them. At the same time I was angry and disappointed because my parents had left me alone. I was in Poland and the entire time they never looked for me, or asked if I was even alive. But my daughter Lidia didn't think like me. She said to me, 'You certainly have not fallen from Mars and have no one; you have a family and you should be able to find out more about it'..." This is what Sandra told us when we were speaking with her three years after she met her brother, which obviously very much touched her delicate soul. The main factor which led Sandra to her brother in Melbourne was his photograph taken in Skopje when he was a small boy. She got the photograph from a cousin of hers from her mother's brother's side. Many years ago her uncle had mentioned that they had a photograph of her brother Giorgi, but did not give it to her until much later.

This is what Sandra's daughter Lidia said about that, "The first thing that I thought of was sending the photograph to Australia. I told myself most of the people from the Aegean part of Macedonia went to Australia. I turned to the Agency for Emigration and they helped me get in touch with Ico Naidovski, editor of the Macedonian radio-program. I sent him the photograph and he had it published in the Macedonian newspapers with an explanation that 'a sister is looking for her brother', and 'their mother's name was Tsveta'..."

While Giorgi was getting his hair cut, Boris his barber told him about the story he was reading in the newspaper where 'a sister from Macedonia was looking for her brother' and at the same time Boris showed him the photograph. When Giorgi saw the photograph he recognized himself and yelled, "That's me!" "I was certain of that," Giorgi said, "because my mother gave me the same photograph a year ago. I ran home and brought it back to the barber shop and compared the two. I had no doubt that the little boy was me..."

Giorgi cried when he found out that he had a sister in Skopje. He said that his mother never told him he had a sister. He couldn't understand why his mother kept that a secret from him. When he pressed her, his mother began to cry and told him he had not one but two sisters. She told him that during the Greek Civil War the

Partisans took his oldest sister Sandra and told her that they would bring her back in a couple of weeks. But she was never brought back... His mother told him that his father took Slobodanka, his other sister, with him and fled to Yugoslavia sometime after the war ended. She also told him that she too fled Greece and went to Yugoslavia in 1952. She and Giorgi ended up in Trst. Two years later they immigrated to Australia and since then she never had any contact with Macedonia.

This is what Giorgi said on the Macedonian radio in Melbourne when he was telling his story, "When I heard Sandra's voice I felt a jab in my heart. It was painful for me because for 50 years no one had told me I had sisters. I feel sad that I didn't grow up with them..."

This is what Sandra's daughter Lidia said about her uncle Giorgi, "When he called us on the telephone, he was extremely excited; he cried a lot. He explained that no one in his entire life had told him that he had sisters. He insisted that we see each other as soon as possible. We got our visas and I, together with my mother, went to Melbourne Australia where we finally met him and my grandmother..."

This is what Sandra said about the meeting, "I don't have words to describe our meeting. When I hugged my brother I felt warm all over. At the same time I felt pain in my heart because my mother had abandoned me. How could she forget her own children? I can't understand how she could not tell her own son that he had sisters and that he was born in Macedonia. I still have a big lump about that in my chest. Even today I still feel the exhaustion from meeting my brother and mother. When I came back from Australia I was admitted to the hospital where I spent 20 days recovering..."

Sandra continued, "I have a wonderful brother, but I can't say the same about my mother. I didn't speak to her while we were visiting because she forgot about me and my sister Slobodanka. She had no explanation as to why she had left her children. When I asked her about it, she looked down at the ground and never looked me in the eyes. She was probably ashamed of what she had done. She cried and swore that she was looking for us, and that she was missing us;

that she was ashamed of her decision, but I didn't trust her tears because, if she wanted to, she could have found us. Over the years I aged. I am now 63 years old, and there is the question if I will ever see Gorgi again; if we will have a chance to live together as brother and sister, like a normal family..."

The story Sandra told us about herself and her family is a typical tragic Aegean story. This is what we found out after doing our own research. After the Greek Civil War ended Sandra's mother Tsveta fled to Bitola. Sandra's father Vasil and her sister Slobodanka ended up in Belgrade. By that time Sandra had already been evacuated with the refugee children and was living in a children's home in Poland. Sometime later, Sandra's mother and father found each other and continued to live together in Yugoslavia. Then their son Giorgi was born and baptized in a church in Skopje. Later Sandra's mother left her father and married another man, a Macedonian from the Pirin part of Macedonia. She left Yugoslavia with this man and first went to Italy and from there to Australia. Sandra's father and sister also immigrated to Australia and ended up in Perth. Her father did not know that Giorgi was in Melbourne, Australia.

Sandra continued, "From the earliest days my father had told my sister Slobodanka that she had a brother and sister. I saw her about thirty years later. She came to my place in Skopje on vacation. Before his death, my father had told her that we had to find Giorgi..."

We don't know why Tsveta, Sandra's mother, left her husband during that difficult period. She never told anyone the truth nor did Vasil, Sandra's father. We have no explanation why they separated. We also don't know why Tsveta abandoned her daughters and never asked for them again. There are several different explanations but they are only speculation. Lidia, Sandra's daughter, believes that the most plausible explanation is the one she heard in Australia. Tsveta's second husband abandoned his four children. It is most likely they both decided to forget about their previous children and not talk about them to anyone.

Sandra and Giorgi's touching story about meeting each other after being separated for 54 years was broadcast on the Macedonian

radio-program in Melbourne and heard all over Australia, Macedonia and the world. Their story was also broadcast on the Australian national television Channel 7. According to Lidia, her uncle and journalist Ico Naidovski were most instrumental in finding Sandra's brother Giorgi. Ico Naidovski also provided guarantees for Sandra and Lidia to get the Australian visas for their visit.

TITO INTENSELY PRESSURED BY BRITISH

During the Inform Bureau time the British forced Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia to stop supporting DAG

Tito secretly promised his friend Sir Fitzroy MacLean, Chief of the British Mission in Yugoslavia during World War II, that he would stop supporting the democratic powers (DAG) during the Greek Civil War. This promise was kept secret and no one was allowed to speak about it because it could have damaged Tito's reputation. This secret was later revealed when the British documents referring to the Macedonian and Yugoslav-Greek relations were published by the Republic of Macedonia's Federal Archives.

This is what Charles Pick, British Ambassador in Belgrade, wrote in a telegram to the Foreign office, "In the beginning of May 1949, MacLean visited Belgrade and had a discussion with Tito after which Tito stopped helping the insurgents in Greece. At the same time he said that he would not refuse asylum to political refugees that were already in Yugoslavia. Tito also promised that in future he would not allow insurgents that entered Yugoslavia to return to Greece and fight, nor would they be given any other kind of help. At the same time Tito requested that his promise be kept a secret at any price because if it was exposed it would cause a great number of problems..."

Pick continued, "MacLean assured me that Tito's promise sounded genuine and honest. For him it was most important that the insurgents not regroup and enter Yugoslavia. We can assume that Tito, most likely, told his old friend MacLean the truth and it is very much desirable that we keep that to ourselves. Because of that, we request that this good news be treated as highly confidential and personal..."

In the period when Tito kept saying "no" to Stalin, Yugoslavia was blocked from all sides. Yugoslavia's economic difficulties could only be overcome with help from the West. But in order to help

Yugoslavia, the USA and Great Britain placed some conditions. One of those conditions was that Yugoslavia close the border with Greece.

This is what Sir Geoffrey Arnold Wallinger, Foreign Office Chief in the United States Embassy in London wrote, “The solution to the problem connected with Greece, I suppose, depends on Tito alone. If he wants to see the ‘situation’ in Greece calm down, there are several steps that he should take in that direction - here are some examples: He can turn off the radio station that Markos is using, which is situated on Yugoslav territory. He can return the child refugees that are now in Yugoslavia to Greece by negotiating through diplomatic channels. He can stop the Greek insurrection recruits from being trained on Yugoslav territory. He can reopen communications between Skopje and Thessalonica (Solun). He can close the Greek - Yugoslav border which he has opened to insurgents. Tito can prove his honesty and assurances by taking any one of these actions!”

Soon after that Tito began to fulfill the promises he made to the British. On July 10, 1949 Tito gave his famous speech in Pula during which he attacked the Greek government for allowing the “monarcho-fascists” to create constant incidents at the Yugoslav-Greek border. During the same speech Tito also criticized the Democratic Army of Greece for allowing itself to get involved in events that most likely would have fatal consequences for the Greek liberation movement...

At the same time Tito emphasized that Yugoslavia would have to close the border completely in order to protect the lives of the working people in that region. This is what Tito added, “We certainly shouldn’t show any kind of regret or any kind of weakness, but strength because we defend our own country and we have to protect the peaceful build up of socialism in our country and we will defend that from everyone....”

According to Liljana Panovska and Todor Cepreganov who analyzed the documents from the National Archive of Great Britain, “The British were prepared to support Tito economically in return for Tito withdrawing some of his support to the Greek insurgents. In

other words, like one diplomatic representative from the Foreign Office suggested, ‘...if (Tito) still wants to receive our economic support, it will be in his interest to give us some support in return...The easiest thing that he can do for us, without losing his reputation inside his country, is to withdraw unnoticeably his support for the Greek insurgents...’

According to Panovska and Cepreganov, Yugoslavia used every possible means to convince its western allies to change their policies towards Greek-Yugoslav relations, so that “... Tito could not only be able to do what he promised MacLean, but also fulfill the promises he made to the American Ambassador through Kardeli...” stressing that “...everything is different now. ...we don’t have friends there (among the insurgents)”. With that statement Tito assured the British that there were no doubts that “the Macedonian Question for the time being was frozen...”

After the Democratic Army of Greece was defeated, Great Britain started a diplomatic offensive to normalize relations between Greece and Yugoslavia. According to Panovska and Cepreganov, “Many politicians from all interested sides were involved in the process. Many issues and problems were placed on the table and long uncomfortable discussions began to take place. Among them was the Macedonian Question with regards to the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia as well as the refugee children. And as usual, no Macedonians were present at the table where discussions were taking place and decisions made concerning them. So, in the end, it was “take it or leave it” for the Macedonians. Also, as usual, the Macedonians were silent observers and were forced to accept what was decided for them by the so-called higher authorities. In other words, the federal interests of Yugoslavia were more important and had higher priority over the fate of the Macedonians in Greece. The Macedonians in Greece were ‘sacrificed’ to normalize relations between Yugoslavia and Greece...”

There are several British documents which show that Tito “sold out” the Macedonians in Greece in order to normalize relations with Greece. Here is what was written in one of them, “The Yugoslav Government, said Tito, doesn’t have pretensions toward Greece and has no interest in getting involved in the internal affairs of Greece.

Tito doesn't think that the issue of the Macedonian minority in Greece will be in the way of Greece and Yugoslavia rebuilding good relations between them; nor does he think that the issue with the Greek children will represent an obstacle. The Yugoslav Government is ready to do everything in its power to solve the issue with the children; which is more complicated than it looks..."

The British, through their diplomatic channels, constantly pressured Tito and Edward Kardeli, his Minister of Foreign Affairs. They even insisted that no pro-Macedonian oriented persons be present at their discussions. And as noted in one of the documents there was a scandal caused by Svetozar Vukmanovich-Tempo and Vladimir Dedier, two Yugoslav politicians. This was on August 19, 1959 when Charles Pick, then Ambassador of Great Britain, informed the Foreign Office that there was a meeting between Ernest Davies, Federal Vice-Secretary of Parliament and Edward Kardeli, but their discussions ended unsuccessfully because Tempo and Dedier showed up. The negotiations were interrupted because those two arrived and stayed for dinner. And when they said something in favour of the Macedonians in Greece, the British Ambassador stopped talking and became agitated and distrustful of Kardeli.

In another telegram, which he sent the next day, Charles Pick give his opinion on Tempo and Dedier emphasizing that he was unpleasantly surprised with Tempo and Dedier showing up. This is what Pick wrote, "I don't doubt that Kardeli has the right to choose the people present for these discussions but his present choice, honestly, was undesirable. Tempo is a Macedonian fanatic and it is believed that Dedier, right or not, is strongly anti-British oriented..." In his defense after the scandal, Kardeli said that he did not want Tempo and Dedier to participate in the discussions, and that he had only invited them to dinner. At the same time, he suggested that the discussions continue in Bled, in a more intimate atmosphere.

FRANTIC ATTEMPTS TO SWIM ACROSS LAKE PRESPA

Even though she did not know how to swim, Partisan Lefka Ivanova dove into the deep water to flee the war and save herself in the Republic of Macedonia

In the confusion during the retreat after the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) was defeated in the Greek Civil War, Lefka Ivanova, a DAG Partisan, tried to keep in step with the rest of the fleeing fighters. Unfortunately, because of a foot injury that had not healed she fell behind. By dawn she had become separated from her unit but continued fleeing alone, heading west towards the border. Confused, alone and frightened she decided to try and swim to the Yugoslav border, which she was able to see on the other side of Lake Prespa. She had family in Yugoslavia, two uncles; her mother's brothers. It was a strange and desperate move on her part because the lake was deep and she could not swim. When she jumped into the water an enemy soldier hiding in the reeds fired his machine gun at her and hit her in the right arm. The bullet broke her bone and left her arm hanging down and useless. Realizing that she could drown if she continued, she turned back and began to climb up a hill, expecting to be killed. When she came out of the water she grabbed her injured arm and held it. The enemy soldiers saw that. One of the soldiers went over to her and, in a gentle tone of voice, asked her if she could move her arm. She said yes even though she could not move it. The kindness of the soldier surprised her. She was trained to expect very cruel treatment from the enemy. This was one of the more dramatic scenes from Lefka Ivanova's young life as a Partisan who now lives in Australia. The story was told by her son Pando Kosev.

According to her son Pando Kosev, from there she was sent to a hospital where a doctor took care of her injuries. She ran into several other Partisans in the hospital who were now prisoners. She knew some of them from the mountains where she spent a lot of time in

the camps and in battles. Because of her serious injuries, she was sent to a larger hospital in Solun where she spent four months recovering.

Lefka Ivanova was born in 1932 in the village Krchishta, located near Kostur. She was the middle of three daughters. Her parents' names were Donka and Lambro. Her Greek name was Eleftheria Ioanou, and her village was called Polianemon in Greek. Her father left the village in 1937 and went to work in Australia as a migrant worker, which was the usual practice for those of his generation. Her mother died in 1947 at the young age of 37. At 15 years old Lefka and her two sisters, Olga and Alik, went to live with their grandmother. Lefka's mother and two brothers were active members of the resistance movement during the German occupation and during the first years of the Greek Civil War.

According to her son Pando, Lefka's story begins in October 1947 when one afternoon all the men and women in her village aged 18 and over who were of military age were gathered together and recruited by DAG to serve as Partisans. Most of these young recruits were immediately taken and sent to the mountain camps. Unfortunately DAG was not satisfied with the current number of recruits from this village so one night several weeks later two Partisans visited Lefka's family while they were hiding near the river with other families. They were hiding there not to avoid the draft but to avoid the falling bombs and artillery shells being dropped on them by the Greek government, which was constantly shelling the "disloyal" Kostur villages.

Lefka was taken from there and sent to DAG field command headquarters located on Mount Gramos where she met a lot of people from her village that were previously recruited. After that she spent two months in military training, being trained in guerrilla warfare tactics. Many of the people from her village begged the authorities to let her go home because she was too young to be a fighter but were unsuccessful. In the end she was sent to serve in an active DAG unit. At the end of her training, Lefka's unit was sent to the front line in the southern parts of Kostur Region. Not understanding the risks of engaging a stronger and well-armed opponent, Lefka found herself overwhelmed by the noise, confusion

and terrors of war. During one of her first battles when her unit was dispatched to ambush a unit of the Greek government army, Lefka received a serious injury on her head from an exploding hand grenade thrown at her by the enemy.

Lefka was bleeding profusely from her injury and kept losing consciousness. She was carried back behind the battle lines by her co-fighters and spent the next three months in a field hospital hidden deep in the woods of Mount Gramos. The hospital was full of seriously injured young Partisans, both boys and girls, treated by doctors and volunteers. Most were sent home to recover but because of the heavy losses and shortage of recruits, most were sent back to the front lines before they had fully recovered. In order to prevent an infection Lefka shaved her head and because of her youthful looks and wearing a uniform she was often mistaken for a boy. She was only 15 years old.

Before she had fully recovered, Lefka was placed on guard duty all over the Gramos mountain range. Her job was to report on enemy movements. At that time the Partisans were concerned about being attacked by the enemy that was based at the foot of Mount Gramos. One night when she was on duty she was spotted by the enemy and fired at with artillery fire. A shell fell near her and a piece of shrapnel injured her leg, damaging a joint. She was again taken from the front line but this time was sent over the Albanian border to Korcha where she spent four months in a hospital receiving medical treatment for her seriously damaged foot. Later she found out that the shrapnel had seriously damaged her nerves and partially paralyzed her leg, an injury that stayed with her until she had reconstructive surgery in Australia 40 years later, which allowed her to again walk without pain.

Sometime in May 1950, while living in Kostur Region, Lefka was contacted by her father from Australia asking her to join him in Perth. At the time her two sisters, one living in Yugoslavia and the other in Poland, had learned that Lefka had survived the war and was still alive. Lefka's father made arrangements from his side to have all of his daughters join him in Australia. When Lefka went to Kostur to make her travel arrangements she met a 22 year old young man who had just returned from Athens where he had delivered his

documents for getting a passport. His father was also living in Perth and was trying to help his family join him. His family was from the village Visheni in Kostur Region. The young man wanted to leave his village in 1947 to join his father in Australia but his passport was confiscated by the Greek authorities and he was recruited to serve in the Greek government army. But when the Greek Civil War ended he was able to leave and go to Australia.

A few weeks after they met both left for Perth, a place unknown to them. When they arrived they found out that their fathers were friends. Their parents were active in Macedonian affairs even before a Macedonian community was organized in Western Australia. In May 1953, Lefka Ivanova married Grigori Kosev, the man she had met in Kostur. They now have two children and five grandchildren.

THE COMMUNISTS WERE CONSTANTLY DIVIDING THE MACEDONIAN PEOPLE

*Aleksandar Popovski protected CPG General Secretary Zahariadis
and the DAG generals in Tashkent*

During the Greek Civil War Aleksandar Popovski, from the village Dolno Kotur, joined the youth resistance movement because he believed that the Macedonian people could obtain their rights in Greece through struggle. This is what Popovski said, “When I was a child my grandfather taught me to love Macedonia. He had four brothers and all of them were revolutionaries. One was a revolutionary leader...” Popovski was 17 years old when he joined the Partisans and was deployed in an elite youth squad which participated in all sorts of battles.

Popovski continued, “The Greek authorities arrested my father in 1946 and wanted to execute him by firing squad. But before they could he escaped from prison and fled across the Greek border into Yugoslavia. Because of that the Greeks came after me and my mother. I was arrested and tied up. They tortured me for three days to tell them if my father had guns and where he had hidden them. They threatened to execute me by firing squad, throw me out of a window, etc. if I didn’t tell them. I was only 14 years old at the time. In March 1947, when I first joined the Partisans I was assigned to courier duty and starting March 1948 I fought with a gun in my hands...”

Popovski participated in one of the largest and longest lasting battles in Gramos. It started on July 17 and ended on August 21. This is what Popovski said, “A lot of blood was shed in that battle. There were cases when one and the same hill was lost and recaptured five times. In the end only four out of thirty soldiers from my youth squad survived. We were all Macedonian, only the officers were

Greek. On August 21st when the entire Partisan force fighting on that mountain was surrounded from all sides, it was my elite youth squad that broke through the encirclement on one of the hills. This allowed DAG to retreat and regroup on Mount Vicho and 74 days later fought another epic battle...”

Young Aleksandar Popovski was seriously injured on September 24 which had consequences for him to this day. He can't hear well and can't see from one eye. After he was treated in Albania he went back and fought in Giorgi Peikov's squad. Giorgi Peikov was a legendary Macedonian fighter who could not get a higher rank than captain because he was Macedonian. This is what Popovski said, “No matter how smart or good we were, we Macedonians could only achieve low ranks. The higher ranks were given to the Greeks. Even though we fought together with them they always put us down. To insult us they usually called us ‘Bulgarians’ in a derogatory way...”

This is what Popovski said about the Lerin battle, “We waited a very long time for our orders to attack. In the meantime we allowed the Greek government to take its positions all around the city. In the end around 700 people were killed. We survived a great catastrophe because we were betrayed. We had 5,000 Partisans and the Greeks had 20,000 soldiers who caught us in an ambush. I remember that day well. It was my 17th birthday. We Macedonians demonstrated great heroism and fought with heart and soul. Then when we heard Nikos Zahariadis, CPG General Secretary, say, ‘We will not only give the Macedonians their autonomy but we will also give them the right to self-determination...’ At that moment I should have realized that Zahariadis wanted to exterminate us all because with those words, we were set on fire. We began to fiercely attack our opponent's positions and were being killed en masse...”

Popovski was a great fighter and his name often appeared in the left wing newspapers. As a result he was hated by the opposition, including the Greek government army which wanted him in its hands by any means possible. Being unable to find him the Greek authorities arrested his mother and sentenced her to 17 years in prison. Then one day the Greek government army received information that Popovski had been killed in battle. To confirm that the Greek government authorities consulted with his second cousin

who had fought for the Greek government army. His second cousin told the authorities that he was convinced that Aleksandar had been murdered and with that information the cousin went to the prison to persuade the authorities to release his mother, and they did. Unfortunately his mother now believed that Aleksandar was dead. When he came back from Russia nine years later, his mother could not believe that her own son stood before her. His father didn't recognize him either. They both said that it was not him. He was someone else...

Popovski was sure that the Greek communists were not honest with the Macedonians and the Macedonian struggle. This is what Popovski said, "While we were fighting and even later I trusted them. But in 1988 Florakis, CPG General Secretary, publicly said in Solun that the Macedonian Question did not exist for the Communist Party of Greece and that anyone who supported such a question was an enemy of the Greek people. After that I was certain that we were sacrificed for other people's interests..."

Aleksandar Popovski spent several years in Tashkent with a gun in his hands protecting the CPG leaders and the DAG generals who left Greece after DAG was defeated. This is what Popovski said, "We were all armed when we were there. Their slogan was, 'We have guns and we are ready to fight when our fatherland calls...'" Popovski spent 9 years in Tashkent where he educated himself at the military academy.

Popovski continued, "My family was in four different countries. My mother with one of my sisters stayed in Greece. After the war, my father's brother took my other sister with him to Australia. My father and my younger sister went to Leskovac. Then when Greece began to allow Macedonians to leave Greece willingly and move out of the country, provided they signed a document promising that they would never come back, my mother and father found each other and in 1954 went to live in the Republic of Macedonia. They settled in Bistritsa. One of my sisters still lives in Belgrade. Later my younger sister left Leskovac and went to live in Australia. In 1988, 40 years later, I caught up with my oldest sister Katerina. She invited me to her wedding. Our meeting was both happy and sad. I was able to hold my tears but I wasn't when I watched the video tape of our

meeting. I cried like a small child...” Popovski, as a leader of the Association of the People from the Aegean part of Macedonia, was instrumental in organizing the well known Bitola meetings in Trnovo.

Popovski’s wife Vasilka was also a Partisan and she too believed in the struggle in which they participated. But now she feels very sad and has painful emotions every time she talks about those days. When she talks about her experiences she feels like she is pouring salt on an open wound. This is what Vasilka said, “I was only 16 years old when I was recruited by the Partisans. I was wounded twice in battle. Both times I was sent to Albania to be treated. My father, my brother and my father’s brother were Partisans. We were two sisters and three brothers in my family. My two younger brothers and my sister were evacuated with the refugee children. Only my mother and I remained at home. Later we were transferred to a camp in Albania. Then the communists came and suggested we join the Partisans. All of us who were 16 years or older signed up voluntarily. I wasn’t even 16 then but I signed up anyway. My mother tried to stop me but I didn’t listen to her. We all participated in the battles on Mount Gramos. We fought heroically for days, we were hungry and thirsty but we survived because we believed we could win...”

After her last injury Valiska was sent to the hospital in Elbasan and from there to the USSR. She was sent to school in the USSR. This is what Vasilka said, “It was October 15, 1949 when we left Albania on a cargo ship and were illegally sent to the Soviet Union. We were loaded on the lower floors. Wheat and corn was loaded on the upper floors. That was a very difficult trip. A big storm caught us in the Black Sea and many of us got seasick. We were welcomed in Batumi with baskets of food. Then we bathed and were given a change of clothing. They also took us to a cinema...”

After the Partisans rested, they were loaded on a train and, after crossing several deserts, arrived in the eastern part of the USSR. From there they were taken over the Caspian Sea to their final destination, Bekovac, Uzbekistan. This is what Vasilka said, “We continued to live like soldiers. I had no idea where my family was and they had no idea where I was. The only thing I knew was that

my father was in Yugoslavia. I received his first letter in 1953. Through the Red Cross, I later found out that my two brothers and my sister were in a children's home in Czechoslovakia and my mother and my father's brother's wife were in Hungary. My oldest brother Giorgi, whom I saw only once, had died. None of us knew where he was buried. We didn't even know that he was dead. We had no confirmation that he was dead. We hoped for a long time that he was alive. It took us 10 years to find each other in different parts of the world..."

We asked Vasilka if she and Aleksandar were in love when they met as Partisans. This is what she said, "No, we were only children then, our love was born in Bekovac. I didn't want to marry him because I wanted to finish my studies. I was studying at the Music Academy but Aleksandar was persistent. Our daughter was born in Bekovac and we named her Mirka in honour of our national hero Mirka Ginova..."

SHE SACRIFICED HER MARRIAGE TO RAISE OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

When Mihali asked his wife Leta Delianova to come and live with him in Australia, she asked him if she could bring three other children in addition to their own daughters

Long after the Greek Civil War ended the people from the Aegean part of Macedonia in Greece, who were exiled, separated and spread out all over the world, began to look for their families. One of those people was Mihali Delianov who found himself in Australia after the war. Mihali had a wife named Leta and two daughters named Dosta and Lozana who at the time were living in Skopje.

Unbeknownst to Mihali, his wife Leta at the time was also looking after Mihali's brother's children. When Mihali asked Leta and his daughters to come to Australia to live with him she wrote and asked him if she could also bring his brother's two daughters and his sister's daughter with her. There was no one else she could find who would look after them. His answer was a flat "no" but he did have a counter offer. He wrote, "...you can stay there, if you want to..." Everything ended with that. Leta remained in Skopje. Mihali led his own life in Australia, remarried and ended his connection with his first wife and daughters. He never told his children from his second marriage that they had two sisters in Macedonia.

But as destiny would have it, in the end things did not go the way they were planned. Two years ago the telephone rang in Dosta Donevska's house. Dosta Donevska was Mihali's older daughter who was also a singer in the famous group "Bapchorki". A woman called and was speaking English. Dosta understood only two words, her name and the name of her sister Lozana. This is what Dosta said, "I told her that I do not speak English. She asked me if I spoke Russian or Greek. I said no and asked her if she spoke Macedonian, but after she said no I went and got my daughter Snezhana, who was

then living next door to me, and put her on the phone. She spoke English. From the conversation my daughter had with the woman I had a strong feeling that this was my sister Sarina from my father's second marriage..."

This is what Snezhana said, "A little later I called the woman back and, as it later turned out, she was my aunt, Sarina. She was born in 1957 and was one year younger than me. Two years ago Sarina began looking for Dosta and Lozana. After her father died she read his will and found two names she did not recognize. They were Dosta and Lozana Delianov. They had the same surnames as Sarina and he had left 5,000 dollars for each. Sarina immediately began to look for them so that she could give them their money. She figured that they must be distant relatives. While she was looking for them, someone told her that one of the women sang in the group "Bapchorki". Sarina tried searching for her on the internet and ran into Dimitri Buzharovski's website where she found Dosta and Lozana's telephone numbers..."

Snezhana continued, "During our first conversation on the telephone we agreed to communicate by e-mail. Later, after my mother mentioned that Sarina could be her sister, I realized that Sarina didn't know that my mother and my aunt were her sisters. Sarina probably figured they were distant cousins. I decided to write her and let her know. This is what I wrote, '...What I am about to tell you may shock you... it maybe difficult to accept... but you should know the truth that Dosta and Lozana are your sisters. It is not important what happened in the past, the money is not important... what is most important is that, after so many years, you have found your sisters...' I also told her how her father had left to work in Australia, leaving his wife and two daughters behind ..."

A couple of weeks later, Sarina wrote Snezhana and told her that she had been deeply affected by the news and needed some time to process it. But in general she was very pleased that she had two sisters. In her next e-mail Snezhana invited Sarina to come to Macedonia to visit with them. Not long after that, Sarina arrived in Skopje and was very happy to see Dosta and Lozana. They took her to all of their relatives. This is what Snezhana said, "Sarina was shocked when she found out that she not only had two sisters in

Macedonia but many cousins and all kinds of other relatives. I remember her saying, ‘Snezhana, when my father died, I said to my brother that after our mother dies we will be all alone in this world because we don’t have any relatives...’ She then mentioned the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and said, ‘This is my big Macedonian family’. It was very difficult for her. She couldn’t understand why her father had never told her that she had two sisters. She said that many times. When she returned to Australia she immediately went on vacation in Bali, but instead of enjoying herself she cried the entire time not knowing why her father had kept her sisters a secret from her...”

This is what Dosta said, “Last year Sarina came back to Macedonia and started to tear down the wall of alienation that her father Mihali had erected between his daughters, which lasted for half a century. Sarina wanted to see Bapchor, her father’s birthplace. All three of us went together. While Sarina was there she kept saying, ‘It’s very difficult for me to accept that you grew up without a father. I feel guilty, I feel like I stole your father from you’...”

Dosta continued, “Our father Mihali went to Australia in 1937 to work as a migrant worker. I was only 2 years old and my mother was pregnant with Lozana when he left. He was in Australia all during the Greek Civil War and only started looking for us after it ended. He found us in the 1950s. He wrote telling us that he wanted to bring us to Melbourne... But, in addition to us, my mother was raising three more girls, two from Mihali’s brother. Their mother, Mihali’s brother’s wife, had died during the war and their father, who was a Partisan, left for Russia, remarried and never asked to take his daughters with him. The other girl belonged to Mihali’s sister. I don’t know why my father didn’t agree to bring us all to Australia. The three girls were more his family than mine. They were his brother’s and sister’s children...”

Soon after he abandoned his wife, Mihali married an Italian woman. He never told his son and daughter who were born in Australia that they had sisters in Macedonia. When his daughter Lozana went to visit him in Australia for three months, he introduced her as a cousin, and told her not to tell his children that she was their sister.

He told her that if she did tell them, people would find out and would not respect him.

So Leta Delianova had to raise five children on her own. She had them educated and married. They all called her “mother”. Mihali ignored his family in Macedonia all that time and only remembered his daughters Dosta and Lozana when they got married. He wrote to them and sent them some money after they were married. He wrote, “I will never forget you,” but he did not behave that way.

This is what Mihali’s daughter Dosta Donevska said, “I was on tour in Australia with the group “Bapchorki” in which my mother sang. When we got there I asked our organizers to contact Mihali and tell him that I wanted to see him. One of our organizers called him and told him that his daughter was here and wanted to see him. When I met him he showed no emotion, not like a father should when he sees his grown up daughter for the first time since she was a baby. He stood there in front of me like I was a stranger. He didn’t ask how my mother or my sister Lozana were, or if I was married or not. The same day we met he decided to come to the concert in the evening. During the break one of the organizers told me that there was a man looking for me who wanted to see me. It was my father. I went and met with him again. This time he started crying like a child. He hugged and kissed me. I think it was the Macedonian national dress the women singers were wearing and the songs they were singing that must have reminded him of the days when he was young and living in Bapchor...”

The wall that Mihali had erected between himself and his daughters also affected his granddaughter Snezhana, especially when she went to visit other relatives in Australia. This is what Snezhana said, “I wanted to see him. I had this impression that he had built a high barrier between his life in Bapchor and his life in Australia. It seemed like he simply wanted to forget his previous life. He even avoided contact with the Macedonian communities there. It felt like he was hiding from everyone, even from me. It was especially hard for me because my grandmother, his first wife, had recently died. I asked him if he knew that she had died. He didn’t react at all...”

This is what Dosta said, “My mother didn’t blame him for anything. She never said a single bad word about him. She blamed the war and the bad times for what had happened. She was only married to him for two years when he left. She didn’t remarry. She sacrificed herself not only for her own children but for the children of his brother and sister...”

WALKING ON ICE OVER THE MOUNTAIN IN BARE FEET

Friendship between Vaska Petrovska, a Macedonian, and Vasiliki Damianidis, a Greek, lasted more than half a century

Vaska Petrovska, a Macedonian woman, and Vasiliki Damianidis, a Greek woman, both child refugees, had a unique friendship which lasted more than half a century. It started during difficult times when both spent eight years in children's homes before they were reunited with their parents. Vaska remembered the exact date when they met for the first time. It was August 13, 1956. They were traveling together going to Nove Gradi, Czechoslovakia where their parents were waiting for them. This is what Vaska said, "We were together on the train the entire time. When we arrived, the two of us and all the children traveling with us were sent to an old folks home. This was one of the homes where Macedonian refugees were sent after DAG was defeated in the Greek Civil War. Since then Vasiliki and I became inseparable. We went to school together to learn to speak the Czech language..."

From all of the children in that home, only Vaska and Vasiliki went to medical school while the others were learning handicrafts, sewing, bricklaying, house painting, etc. As for their friendship; a Macedonian and a Greek being friends? Vaska believed it was not acceptable to everyone. This is what Vaska said, "Our friendship disturbed some of the Greeks so they tried to separate us. I will give you an example of how much the Greeks disliked the Macedonians. Even though our parents fought together on one side during the Greek Civil War, when Vasiliki and I were accepted into medical school Vasiliki was given a medical textbook and I wasn't. Our instructor was Greek. One day when he was absent a substitute instructor was sent to teach. When he asked us to take out our textbooks I told him I didn't have one. He insisted that everyone was issued a book and wanted to know why I wasn't given one. He then

went and looked through the drawers of the teacher's desk and found a book. He said this is your book and gave it to me..."

After Vaska and Vasiliki finished school in 1961, Vasiliki got married and they separated. This is what Vaska said, "I lost track of her for forty years. I had no idea where she was. Then, in 2001 she ran into my brother and asked him for my phone number. She called me and several months later she came to Skopje to see me. I went to the airport to meet her. We did not recognize each other. We had both changed physically. We were old but our friendship remained the same, it didn't change. The next year my husband and I went to visit her in Volos, Greece. She then visited us. We frequently talk on the telephone. The first words she says are, 'Hello my friend,' and I know who it is. We will see each other again this year..."

The issue that Greece has with the name Macedonia has not been a problem for Vasiliki and her husband, because they both know to which nationality the name belongs. This is what Vaska said, "For her I'm Macedonian, and for me she is Greek. I feel sorry that she has forgotten how to speak Macedonian. She understands everything but can't reply. Because of that, when we are together, we speak Czech to each other.

Today Vaska Petrovska lives with her husband Ahil in Butel, Skopje but the road she took to get there was long, difficult and traumatic. She was only seven years old when all the children from her village D'mbeni were gathered together in the village church and told that they were going across the border where they would be given a lot of candy. This is what Vaska said, "I grabbed my mother by her skirt and told her that I wanted to go. They knew where we were going but we, the children, didn't. And so we left near the end of March. I remember how I was dressed. My mother knitted a dress for me, it was turquoise in colour. She also knitted a hat for me from the same yarn. My parents also bought me a new pair of white rubber boots from Kostur. My mother gave me a little bag full of bread for the trip. My mother took our donkey and came with us. My sister Toma, who was ten years older than me, my grandmother and grandfather stayed home. My oldest sister Evgenia had already joined the Partisans and was fighting. My father had to look after our sheep outside the village. When we climbed up the mountain the

ground was frozen and covered in snow. We all got wet. My mother accompanied us to the village Rula before she turned back. I know she hugged me and cried but for some reason I don't remember it. I later found out that when she was going back, she found one of my boots. I had lost it. She was really worried about me when she found it. I walked with one bare foot on ice and snow but I can't remember any of it..."

Vaska does not remember how they crossed the border or how they arrived in Bitola. She was supposed to go with her brother to Czechoslovakia but in the chaos she got lost and continued with the children that got off the train in Belgrade. Her brother ended up in Czechoslovakia. The first thing they did in Belgrade was cut the children's hair, bathed them and then drenched them in pesticide to kill the lice. All of them had lice. From there they were transported to Bela Tsrkva.

Vaska's family was spread all around the world. Evgenia, her Partisan sister, at the end of the Greek Civil War married a Greek; she got pregnant and was sent to Albania to give birth. This is what Vaska said, "My sister Evgenia told me that she and her child were sent from Albania to Russia on a cargo ship, in which she experienced a lot of hardship. They were traveling illegally during the time of the Inform-biro (when Stalin and Tito were feuding), when Yugoslavia had closed the border. Around twenty women with small children were placed on a cargo ship carrying cattle. Each time the ship crossed a checkpoint they had to hide on the lower decks. They were told to keep silent and hold their children's mouths so that they didn't cry. When Evgenia arrived in Uzbekistan she had nothing and existed in great poverty..."

Evgenia now lives in Athens with her husband and they have three children. Vaska's brother remained in Czechoslovakia where he married a Czech woman. Vaska's younger sister moved to Macedonia. Her mother and father also ended up in Albania as refugees and from there they were sent to Czechoslovakia on a cargo ship. This is what Vaska said, "I had not seen my parents for eight years. To be honest, when I saw them for the first time, I didn't feel like they were my parents or that my brother was my brother. I grew up in children's homes and had lost all my feelings for family. Even

after that we didn't have much time to get used to each other; we didn't live together long. My parents died in a car accident in Bulgaria..."

Vaska's mother suffered a lot from being away from her children. When she lived in her village she received a picture from Vaska, in which Vaska's finger was bandaged but looked like it was cut off. That deeply upset her. When they saw each other for first time in Czechoslovakia, her mother ran and gave her a hug and then examined her hand. She was relieved when she saw that all her fingers were there.

This is what Vaska said, "After my sister Evgenia, who lives in Greece, received her share of the money from the sale of our property, she contacted us and told us to send her our information so that she could send us our share of the money. We sent her what she asked for. Later she called us and told us, that she had received money for her share but not for ours because we were not 'Greeks by nationality'. They gave her the share of her money because she was married to a Greek. All Greeks received money from the sale of their properties. They received a lot of money. However, my sister didn't tell me how much she received. She said, 'It will make you sad if I told you...' Evgenia is not only Macedonian but a patriotic Macedonian. She speaks and can read and write Macedonian. Unfortunately she and her husband constantly argue over the name Republic of Macedonia. This is what Evgenia said to me, 'Every Greek should accept the name of the Republic of Macedonia... I'm Macedonian, I speak Macedonian, my father was beaten in the village because he was Macedonian, and how can they now say we are not Macedonians, and you don't have the right to use that name Macedonia'..."

Vaska continued, "My husband Ahil was from Orovo, Prespa Region. He had two brothers and a sister. His oldest brother Kote was a Partisan and died during the battles on Gramos. His other brother Tsvetko and his sister Atila were refugee children. They lived in children's homes in Czechoslovakia. After DAG was defeated, his parents were sent to Poland as refugees of the Greek Civil War. But his father did not want to bring his children with him, as the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) had requested because at

the time they were both studying in Prague. This is what he said to the CPG, 'I will not stop my children from completing their education. I don't want them to come here. We will go there.' Unfortunately the CPG would not allow them to go to Czechoslovakia. We saw my husband's parents for the first time in 1963 when they came to our wedding in Czechoslovakia. My husband's brother and sister were already married by then. Their weddings were without their parents. I remember my mother-in-law taking off her black head kerchief for the first time at my wedding. She was grieving Kote's death. According to my husband Ahil, the Aegean mothers are the real heroes of this war because they suffered the most. They had no future without their children especially those who fought in the war..."

This is what Ahil said, "When we left, they told us that we would come back after two weeks, and that there across the border they would give us bonbons. However, that never happened. The Greek authorities never allowed us to come back..."

THE REFUGEE WAVE

SEPARATED SISTERS

SOFIA AND LENA

“My childhood was fine in the children’s homes, I didn’t want to go back to my parents,” said Sofia Ristovska-Gakovska.

The refugee wave separated sisters Sofia and Lena, daughters of Spiro and Rina Ristovski from the village Rula. Sofia, the older daughter, was evacuated to Romania in 1948, first to Sinaia and later to a children’s home in Tulgesh, where she remained for the next eight years. Lena, the younger daughter, fled to Poland together with her parents in 1949, after DAG was defeated in the Greek Civil War. Sofia later moved to Skopje and got married. She still lives in Skopje. Lena remained in Poland where she married a Polish man and has a family of her own.

Sofia and Lena’s childhoods were no different from those of the 28,000 refugee children that were evacuated from their birthplaces during the brutal Greek Civil War and spread all over the world. Sofia does not remember anything of how she made the long and difficult trek from her village Rula to Romania. She does not remember the long nights she had to travel on the cold and dangerous terrain or the full trains and trucks in which she and the other children were transported. She only remembers the day when the children arrived in Sinaia. This is what Sofia said, “We all had lice. We were dirty and tired from the long trip. First we had to take a group bath. I remember we were all screaming and crying. We were seeing bathrooms and showers for the first time. We were given clean clothes and food. The sick children were sent to the hospital...” Sofia was only four years old when she arrived in Romania.

Sofia continued, “We were welcomed in a good way in Romania. The Romanian Red Cross provided food and clothing for us. Life in the children’s home was well organized. Every year Santa Claus came through the dining room and gave us different presents. Our

childhood there was fine. When my parents found me and I had to go with them to Poland, to be honest, I didn't want to. I had gotten used to the children and the mother that took care of us. The entire time I felt like she was my real mother. I always called her mother. Her name was Dosta. She was from Bapchor. She lived in Chento in the same part of the city where I lived... I didn't remember my real mother. After my parents found me they kept writing me letters and sending me pictures of them. I only knew my parents and sister from pictures.

When my parents came to see me I expected that my mother would be there. For some reason I wanted to see her first, before she saw me. Every child asks for his/her mother first. I was eleven years old then. Several of us had remained who were not yet claimed by their families. We were lined up in one of the rooms as parents came in. I wasn't looking at the men; I only looked at the women hoping to see my mother. The moment my father came in I recognized him from the pictures. I ran to him and asked him where mother was. He looked at me, pulled me aside and asked me my name. He probably was not sure that I was his daughter. I told him my name was Sofia and he hugged me. He explained that my mother and my sister had to wait in another city. That deeply affected me. I wanted to see my mother first. I couldn't stand it anymore so I started crying. After we left I met my mother and sister. This was the first time I saw my sister Lena..."

Sofia joined her family in Poland and lived with them for the next ten years. After that she moved to Skopje and got married. This is what Sofia said about her accidental meeting with her "mother" who looked after her in the children's home in Tulgesh, "Back in 1967, while shopping in a store in the 'Slavia' market, I saw a woman who looked like 'mother Dosta' from the children's home in Tulgesh. I wondered if that was her. She regularly shopped in this store. I hesitated for several days before I got up the courage to speak to her. When I finally did I asked her if she was 'mother Dosta'. She immediately recognized me, started hugging me and cried for a long time. After that we didn't see each other for eleven years..."

Sofia continued, "I keep in touch with her, her daughter and son with whom I lived in the same children's home. I could never forget

the good days. I have a wish to visit Tulgesh, again and see the place where I spent my childhood. I don't have any relatives in Romania so I don't know how to go about it. I had many friends but all of them went to different places in the world, some returned to Greece, some went to Australia and others to America. That was our destiny... the destiny of the refugee children from the Aegean part of Macedonia. Unfortunately, of all my friends, I don't have anyone here in Macedonia..."

Lena's (Sofia's sister) childhood was a little less traumatic and easier because she was with her parents. While her parents worked at the kolkhozes, little Lena, then two years old, was placed in a refugee children's home together with Greek children. She says that in those years she was taught to speak only Greek and was persuaded to believe that she was Greek. One day when her parents took her home, she did not speak Macedonian. Her father got angry and decided not to send her back to the children's home. This is what Lena said, "My father Spiro was a great Macedonian and very angry that I, his daughter, didn't know my native language, which my grandparents spoke. This is what he said to me, 'We are Macedonians, not Greeks, and if my daughter Lena cannot learn Macedonian then I'm sending you to a Polish school'..."

Lena continued, "Everyone spoke Macedonian at home. My uncle (my father's brother) who lived in Skopje regularly sent me records of songs from which I have learned the Macedonian language and Macedonian songs. That way I learned the Macedonian language and I forgot the Greek language. I live in Poland now, but my heart and soul are in Macedonia. I use every opportunity to visit Macedonia. I have only one Macedonian book in my library, its title is 'Macedonian Bloody Wedding,' which I love because in a way it symbolizes the tragedy of the Macedonian people..."

While Lena remained in Poland and married a Polish man, Sofia and Lena's parents moved to Macedonia in 1977. After finishing her education in economics, Lena worked for a while and then went back and graduated from law school. She gave birth to one child, a son whom she named Giorgi, a Macedonian name. Later when she had a grandson they gave him two names, Risek, a Polish name, and Zoran, a Macedonian name. Lena is very much satisfied living in

Poland and, from her own experience, has found the Poles to be very kind people.

Sofia and Lena visit each other often. If Sofia does not go to Poland then Lena goes to Macedonia. Last year Lena was at her sister's place for four months. Lena said this year she will come to Skopje to participate in the child refugee gathering.

Lena and Sofia have been to their village Rula only once. That was five years ago. They wanted to see the place where they were born. There they found their aunt Kalina. When she saw them she immediately recognized Lena. She hugged her and said, "You look like your mother Rina."

Although she spent her entire life in Poland, Lena did not forget the Macedonian language. She said when they crossed the Macedonian-Greek border on their way to Rula they met two older people walking on the road and offered them a ride in their car. Lena was very happy to hear that they too spoke the same language that her parents spoke. This is what Lena said, "I was happy to hear that the older people in our villages still speak the Macedonian language among themselves. I was also sad to find out that the young people don't speak much Macedonian. They understand a little and if you ask them a question they will answer you in Greek..."

Toso, Sofia's husband, passed away five years ago. He too was a child refugee. He was born in German and belonged to the Gakovtsi family. His father Serafim was killed in a battle in 1949. His mother Germania fled Greece and went to Macedonia. Serafim and Germania's five children grew up in various children's homes. Toso was in Romania and in Poland, and the others were in children's homes all across Yugoslavia. Germania later brought all her children to Skopje. In 1958, her husband Toso moved to Macedonia when he was 23 years old. His brother, waiting for him at the train station, had a picture of him in his hand because he didn't know what he looked like. Germania passed away in 1979 at the Trnovo meeting where the refugee children had gathered. Her weak heart could not stand the excitement generated by the people close to her, whom she had not seen for a long time.

THEY KIDNAPPED TEN YEAR OLD KALA TO ADOPT HER

“Someone took her... we looked for her for six months, it was like she had disappeared from the face of the earth...,” said Iane Bandevski

This is what Iane Bandevski, a child refugee from Orovo, evacuated together with Kala to Czechoslovakia said, “We lost ten year old Kala Dimanovska somewhere between our village Orovo and Czechoslovakia. We had no idea where we lost her. The ‘mother’ responsible for her was in panic. The director of the children’s home did everything to find her but it seemed like Kala had disappeared from the face of the earth. The Red Cross responsible for taking care of us also looked for her. When we were transferred to another home we left without her. The uncertainty lasted about six months and by then everyone had lost hope that we would find her. Then one day, we found out that an ‘unknown’ girl was in a hospital where she had been treated for a long period of time...”

Kala is now 70 years old and lives in Butel, Skopje. She remembers her trip like it was a dream. She is not in good health now; she has forgotten many things from her childhood after she had a stroke. She remembers being taken to a couple’s nice house where she was well looked after. She had plenty of food and new clothes. The couple took good care of her; they had no children of their own and wanted to adopt her. They even gave her a new name; they called her Jana. Then one day, she got very sick and they took her to the hospital. She remembers receiving injections every day in the hospital until she started feeling better. They gave her crutches so that she could walk. That’s all she remembers. She does not remember how she found herself in the couple’s house or how she ended up in the hospital. All she remembers is that the man of the couple that took care of her was a doctor.

This is what Bandevski, who wrote about Kala, said, “Later we found out that, even though she was taken good care of by the couple, they had kidnapped her. The place where we stayed was well fenced and no one from the outside could come in, neither could the children go out without a grownup. We suspect that someone from outside lied to her and managed to take her under false pretenses...”

According to Bandevski, all the children were wearing numbers and Kala’s number was 92. After the hospital informed us that the “unknown” sick girl had a number, we knew it was Kala. After her recovery, she was sent to a children’s home. After the Greek Civil War ended her parents ended up in Poland and looked for her and her sister. They all moved to Skopje in 1957. Kala married a man who was also a child-refugee, whom she already knew from the children’s home in Czechoslovakia. She now has a son and daughter who have their own families.

According to Bandevski, it was common for child refugees to marry among themselves. They also married Greeks, Poles, Czechs, or Romanians but such marriages were rare. Most of the time, they looked for partners among the Macedonians. This is what Bandevski said, “We married among ourselves because we thought that one day we would return to our birthplaces in our own Macedonia. We were aware that if we married someone from Poland or Czechoslovakia our chances of returning home would be reduced. And that is exactly what happened to those who remained there. They stayed behind when the others left for the Republic of Macedonia...”

In the spring of 1948 Iane Bandevski from Orovo, together with 150-160 children, was taken from his home and sent across the border. From what survived in his memory the most he remembers is his boat trip across Lake Prespa. He remembers all the children from the various villages being gathered together in Nivitsi where they spent the night. He remembers the older children being taken up the mountains the next morning and the younger children being loaded onto boats and taken across the lake. This is what Bandevski said, “Nivitsi is located near the lake. The people from Nivitsi are fishermen and it was easy for them to take us across the lake to the other side of the border. We were placed in boats that could carry

thirty children each. We were all in panic when we were crossing the lake. All the children were crying because they had never seen so much water or traveled over a lake before...”

It was especially scary for Bandevski when the boat he was in took on water each time it crossed the crest of a wave. He remembers the older children scooping the water out while the fishermen rowed. All frightened out of their wits the children arrived in a place called Markova Noga, near Dolno Dupeni. This was the first stop for the refugee children on their long way into the unknown world from which they never returned.

When they arrived in Brailovo the children were loaded onto freight cars and taken away. Unbeknownst to them, the cars were separated from the train down the line and sent to various countries. So any friends, brothers or sisters who boarded a different car, chances were they were separated and sent to different countries. Bandevski could not say what the criterion was for sending what child to what country. Also, no attention was given to make sure siblings were kept together. It would have been so much easier for their parents to find them if they were together. The only people that knew how the children would be separated were the CPG leaders who ran the evacuation program. They had all the lists with the children's names and they decided who would go where based on some criteria like age, or date of birth.

Bandevski was lucky to have been able to return to Orovo again. In 1979 his wife's sister became seriously ill and was taken to a hospital in Solun. The Bandevski's received a telegram with the bad news. His wife's sister wrote that she was sick with cancer and wanted to see her sister as soon as possible. This is what Bandevski said, “We took the telegram with us and went straight to the Bogoroditsa border crossing. Instead of a visa we showed the Greek border guards the telegram. They told us that we could not enter Greece without a visa. The telegram meant nothing to them. When my wife heard that, she started crying and begging them because she hadn't seen her sister in a long time and was afraid that she would die without seeing her. Luckily the border guards took pity on us and let us in. First they telephoned the hospital where my wife's sister was hospitalized. When they were sure that she was really sick

they gave us a visa for five days...” As luck would have it, out of the three sisters, the oldest one who was seriously sick is still alive, while his wife Vasilka and her youngest sister died.

After entering Greece, Iane and Vasilka took the opportunity to visit their birthplace village Orovo. This is what Bandevski said, “Orovo was completely ruined. My family’s house was ruined down to the foundation. It too was not visible. I found the spot where my house was from a map published in a monograph of my village... The only building that remains standing in Orovo today, as proof that people once lived there, is the village church. The church was renovated with money sent by the people of Orovo who lived and worked in western countries (USA, Canada, Australia, etc.). Although Orovo isn’t populated today, its people everywhere get together during religious holidays, village festivals, etc., just like they did in Orovo in the past. People from the surrounding villages who used to live in Orovo also come together, visit each other and celebrate specific holidays. I plan to visit the village this year and attend the festival so that I can see my childhood friends whom I have not yet seen...”

This is what Bandevski said, “Some child refugees can now enter Greece, provided that the name of their birthplace in their passports is the Greek name. However, some among us, for patriotic reasons, who identify as Macedonians, have Macedonian names and want the Macedonian name of their birthplace in their documents, are still not allowed to enter Greece...”

MARKOS: I SAVED GREECE FROM BECOMING A SLAVIC COUNTRY

“The Greek Communists intentionally lied to the Macedonians to involve them in the Greek Civil War,” said Sokrat Panovski

According to Sokrat Panovski, a Macedonian child refugee evacuated to Romania, who has written several books on the refugee drama, the Macedonian population living in Greece was forced out of their homes with help from the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) leadership. It was the CPG that indoctrinated the Macedonian people to pick up guns and massively participate in the Greek Civil War, which led to their demise. Panovski came to this conclusion after reading several books written on this topic by Greek authors. According to Panovski these authors were participants in the war and have admitted that. Joanis S. Koliopoulou was one of them. He was a CPG leader. In his book entitled “The Macedonian Question in the Period of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) Western Macedonia”, among other things he wrote that the CPG did everything possible to involve the Macedonians in the Greek Civil War by promising them their rights, even the right to self-determination, with the intension of involving them to massively participate in the war and make it easier for Greece to expel them from their homes...

According to Koliopoulou, the CPG made certain that all leading positions and positions of authority, especially those in the military, were given to Greeks and not to Macedonians, despite the large number of Macedonians who participated in the war. Koliopoulou also admitted that the refugee children who were sent away were evacuated to serve the reserve needs of the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG). He gave examples of this. One example was when children older than 14 were recruited from the children's homes and turned into DAG fighters. On July 15, 1948 123 children were

recruited from the children's home in Tulgash, Romania. They only fought for a short time before most were killed. Despite their young age, being 14 and 15 years old, those children had no training. After that another 1,500 children were mobilized. This is the most obvious example which confirms that the CPG aimed to use these children as reserves for DAG...

To support his claim that the Macedonian population living in Greece was forced out of their homes with help from the CPG leadership, Panovski points to the comments Markos made after he returned to Greece in 1984. During a meeting between General Kokalatos who commanded the Greek government Army, and General Markos who commanded DAG, organized by a Greek journalist, Kokalatos asked Markos, "So, you're the one who wanted to turn Greece into a Slavic country?" to which Markos replied, "No, I'm the one that saved Greece from becoming a Slavic country!" For Panovski this statement confirms that the CPG was indeed involved in the expulsion of the Macedonian people from their homeland. The CPG was responsible for forcing tens of thousands of Macedonians to flee their ancestral homes and go away to far away places, even to Tashkent, from where they would never return...

Filipos Dragoumis, another Greek author, who also participated in the Greek Civil War admitted that over the years Macedonians were persecuted by the Greeks. Originally from Kostur Region, the Dragoumis family moved to Athens where Filipos went to school and later become a counselor in the Greek government. A long time ago, even before the First World War started, Dragoumis suggested to the Greek government not to use the name "Macedonians" to refer to the Macedonian people living in Greece because one day these Macedonians would want Macedonia back. He suggested that they be called "Old Bulgarians"; that way it would be easier to deport them to Bulgaria, which happened from 1921 to 1924 when seventy thousand Macedonians were expelled from Greece and sent to Bulgaria. In 1947 Dragoumis prepared a plan for the Greek government army General-headquarters to force 105,000 Macedonians and 2,200 Vlachs out of Greece. He then publicly stated that, "It would be easy to accomplish that - where the dogs go so will their mothers..." This means that where the children go their

parents will follow. According to Panovski, that is exactly what happened to the Macedonian refugee children.

Panovski does not agree with people who assume that the children who were “evacuated” by the CPG were evacuated for humanitarian reasons. This is what Panovski said, “What kind of humanitarian reasons? Even the mothers at the time of their separation from their children could see that it was not humanitarian. How is it humanitarian to separate mothers from their children? I was there and all I could see was mothers crying to no end and tearing their hair out. Is that humanitarian? Mothers shed so many tears they had no more to shed. How is it humanitarian to not know, for years, where your children are; and if they are alive or dead... and who was where...?”

Panovski continued, “The Greeks constantly complained to the United Nations asking to have the children returned. But did they really want them back? No! One of those child refugees whom Greece wanted returned arrived by ship to the Solun harbour. But the moment the Greek authorities found out his name was Giorgi Vrazinovski, they told him a person by that name was not allowed to enter Greece. But that wasn’t all. Even those Macedonians who had Greek names faced the same kind of obstacles. When 1,160 adults and children from Romania made attempts to repatriate, the Greek government figured it would have problems with such a big group. The people who wanted to return already knew they were Macedonian, a non-Greek ethnicity with their own unique culture, and that Greece was not only occupying their lands but was constantly abusing them. The Greeks were afraid that if these people were allowed to return they would eventually revolt. That is why Greece made sure they would never come back...”

According to Panovski, in order to force the Macedonians from their homes the Greek army used similar tactics as it used during the Balkan Wars when Macedonian villages were bombed day and night for weeks as was the case in Kukush, when the city was bombed day and night for thirty days. Their goal was clear; it was done to expel the Macedonian population. The same was done during the Greek Civil War. This is what Panovski said, “The airplanes and cannons bombed the Macedonian villages continuously to force us to leave.

That was not a voluntary evacuation; it was a forced evacuation using weapons. The initiative came from the CPG. At a Communist Party youth organization meeting which included youth groups from the Balkan countries, held in Belgrade in 1948, representatives from the Greek youth asked the communist countries if they would accept 10,000 Greek children. When they overwhelmingly said yes, the plan was immediately put into action. But that wasn't the first time the children were evacuated. The actual evacuation started in 1947 before the Greek youth group made the suggestion. On June 25, 1947, after the Greek Army started its offensive, children from the villages near the border were evacuated to Albania. That shows that the evacuation plan began way before they were approved..." According to Panovski this information came from Greek sources.

The Greek Government had its own operatives inside DAG. One of those operatives who participated in the Democratic Army of Greece as a security officer became a chief of police in Greece after the war was over. This is what Panovski said, "When some Macedonians went to the police to inquire about their Greek citizenship, they recognized him but he didn't hide what he was. He told them it was his job. And he was not the only one..."

According to Panovski, people still suffer from the Greek Civil War consequences. One of those consequences was the banishment of the Macedonian people from their ancestral lands. This is what Panovski said, "In addition to Greece not recognizing our rights and not restoring our Greek citizenships and properties, it would not allow us to return to our birthplaces, not even for a visit. The Greek Civil War for us Macedonians has not ended..." And as a contrasting example, Panovski pointed to Spain where, in 1968, Franco built a monument for all who had died in the Spanish Civil War, both on the republican and the royalist side...

In conclusion this is what Panovski said, "By recognizing the Macedonian identity with its rights and privileges, the Macedonian people can help Greece become a true democracy. Greece cannot legitimately pretend to be a democratic country if it discriminates against thousands of people who were its former citizens. Recognizing the Macedonians and repatriating them will help Greece. This is not just a Macedonian problem; it is also a Greek

problem, both for the Greek Government and the regular people. I have spoken with many of those ‘Greeks by genus’ who fought alongside us Macedonians in the Greek Civil War and they too sympathize with us. One such Greek was the son of a Greek fighter whose father was saved by Macedonians. This is what he said, ‘How can I say that Macedonians don’t exist when Macedonian women saved my father in Vicho when he was seriously injured. Macedonian women evacuated him from the battlefield’...”

STOIA WAS MOTHER TO ALL AEGEAN CHILDREN

Stoia Jankovska was one of the many women to whom mothers gave their sons and daughters to look after

This is how Stoia Jankovska, a “mother” designated to look after the refugee children in the children’s homes in Bela Tsrkva, Vojvodina, described her experience. “It felt like I had some kind of wound inside of me that hurt all the time from remembering how mothers and children cried during their separation. It hurts when I think of the mothers hugging their children and the streets being empty of the children’s joy and laughter. I feel like I have developed a clock inside me that awakens my old memories every time I think of the children I looked after during those dark times...” Stoia Jankovska or “mother Stoia” as she was known to the children, was a well recognized name in the children’s homes. She spent 20 years looking after the children in the children’s homes. Now, 60 years later, she still has a hard time speaking about her drama. While talking to us she tried to hide her tears but they kept coming nonstop. We felt like we had turned on the old clock inside of her and made her memories pour out.

According to Jankovska, even though people were tired of fighting for their freedom, they all believed in their struggle. That is why the majority of mothers agreed to separate themselves from their children. They were certain that soon they would win the war and have their children back. This is what Jankovska said, “When we arrived at the border crossing, Lazo Angelovski, a teacher who was escorting us, said that we would be back in three months and the children would be holding red flags in their hands. We all believed him. We waited and waited but we never came back. I waited 55 years before I was allowed to visit my birthplace. I finally went back and took my brother with me...”

Jankovska, or “mother” Stoia, was with the children the entire time from the time the first children’s homes opened in Bela Tsrkva, Vojvodina until they closed. After most children were claimed by

their parents, forty still remained in the homes. They probably had lost their parents in the war. These children were transferred to the children's home "11 October" in Skopje. Jankovska stayed with them until they finished their secondary education. After that she went to work as a teacher.

According to Jankovska, the children had a good life in the children's homes and were well educated. This is what she said, "These were children who came from the villages, children of farmers, brick-layers and tailors. They were dressed in village clothes and were tired from their long trip. Anyone who saw the shape they were in would be in tears. They were on a train for the first time. They saw bathrooms in the children's homes for the first time. And even though they were without their parents they were thoughtful and well disciplined. Most graduated from university, some with PhDs..."

During the interview Jankovska, enthusiastically and with great love, showed us many pictures of the children taken on the day they arrived in the children's homes. She had something interesting to say about every child. Also she had not forgotten their names. There were also Greek children among of them. It did not make any difference to her if they were Macedonian or Greek. This is what she said, "For us they were all the same. We were their 'mothers' and they were all our children. When the last group of children left the children's home, the director gave me the pictures and told me to take them with me to Macedonia and keep them as a record of our stay in Bela Tsrkva. I took them and then gave some to the children during subsequent visits with them. The rest I kept with me. I hope to give them to them when I see them. Unfortunately I don't know where they are. I hope I will see them again before I die..."

Jankovska did a good job with the refugee children and for that she was recognized by the Yugoslav authorities and the Red Cross. But, according to her, the best acknowledgement for her was the respect and the appreciation she received from the children. This is what she said, "I was waiting for a bus one day when a young man, whom I didn't recognize, asked me if I was 'mother' Stoia. I said 'yes' and asked him if I knew him. He said, 'My name is Laze Shopov.' When I heard that name I gave him a hug. He then asked me where I lived.

I told him that I had been given a small apartment here in the city. He said, ‘You should have been given a villa for the eight years you substituted as our ‘mother’, working for free...”

Stoia Jankovska, now 80 years old, continued, “One day I ran into Kire Sekulov, a former child refugee under my care. He asked me if I would go to his office and spend fifteen minutes with him. I said yes. When we got there he gathered his colleagues and introduced me to them. In his introduction he called me ‘his mother Teresa’. I was so touched by that I started crying. Those words meant a lot to me, more than anything in the world...”

Jankovska was a great “mother” and loved all the children. She said she literally lived for them and they extended the length of her life. This is what she said, “Those who are here often come and visit me and those who went overseas frequently write me letters. Sometimes I don’t write them back. It’s hard for me. I prefer to have them close and visit with them in person... while I’m still alive. But it wasn’t like that before. Now destiny took us apart and we have to write letters to each other with tears in our eyes...” This is what Tomka Pandova, a child refugee from the village Trsie, said to her relatives, “Now that I have moved to distant Australia, my greatest wish is to be buried with the letters Stoia wrote me and the pictures she gave me...”

Every refugee child, even today, calls Jankovska “Mother Stoia”. She said she feels sorry for them because they were sacrificed not only during the Greek Civil War but also during the Inform Bureau when Tito was feuding with Stalin, and during the Cold War. Jankovska was in Romania during the Inform Bureau period taking teaching courses with thirty other “mothers”. The teacher who lectured them was a Greek. This is what Jankovska said, “While lecturing us on how to teach, our Greek lecturer said that we were not going back to Yugoslavia, to Bela Tsrkva, and neither would the children we were teaching. I told him we were not staying here. We would walk back if we had to and we would take our children with us. We promised their mothers that we would look after them and that is exactly what we were going to do. We were not going to abandon our children. Sometime later, one night, we went back to Bela Tsrkva. Unfortunately we lost eleven year old Antigoni Hasu, a

Vlach girl from Psoderi. We didn't know where she was. One year later the teachers in Czechoslovakia called us and told us that she was there..."

Jankovska worked eight years as a teacher. She got married in 1956, but before she got married she told her fiancé he had to come and live with her in the children's home. She told him she could not leave the children alone. She should be there to take care of them and be with them when they woke up in the morning. The authorities gave them a room in the children's home and they stayed there until the children's home was closed.

In late 1950 Jankovska visited her birthplace Rudari, where she found three of her students from Bela Tsrkva. They, along with about 500 other children, had come back to Greece earlier in 1950. The names of the three were Mihail, Aristotel and Ianko. By then Mihail and Aristotel were married and had children of their own. Unfortunately Ianko had died. Jankovska visited his grave and cried for a long time. This is what she said, "It was upsetting, I even cried when I saw Mihail and Aristotel. It was hard but nice to see them again, to see the people you love, after so many years. They invited me and all the others that were with me to stay in their homes. Of the 500 children that came back in 1950, around 450 were Macedonians who had living relatives in Greece..."

According to Jankovska, only five or six children from Bela Tsrkva were mobilized by the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) to fight in the inhumane Greek Civil War. This is what Jankovska said, "Our children were mobilized in the Democratic Army of Greece to fight in that inhumane war. Unbeknownst to us, Georgiadis, a Greek, came and mobilized the older children. He took them to Bulkesh, Voivodina a neighborhood run by Greek refugees. We thought he had taken them to put them to work in Bulkesh and then bring them back, but we were wrong. Three of the children were killed. I only remember one of them, his name was Stefche. I don't remember the names of the others..."

Jankovska was only 20 years old when she left her village Rudari in 1948 and took the road of no return. Her father and oldest brother Vasil stayed behind to fight in the war. Her mother was also left

behind. Her two younger brothers, Risto and Goche, went with her to Bela Tsrkva. Her sister Aleksandra was also evacuated but with a different group of refugee children. She ended up in a children's home in Romania. After DAG was defeated, her parents together with her youngest brother Nikola fled the war and ended up in Poland. Soon after arriving in Poland her father died. He had been seriously injured during the final battles. He was buried in Poland. Her oldest brother Vasil was wounded four times. After DAG was defeated Vasil fled to Albania and from there was sent to Tashkent. He later brought his mother, brother and sister from Poland to Tashkent. It was not until the 60's that the family finally got together in Macedonia.

ALONE IN THE MOUNTAIN WITH HUNGRY WOLVES

Wanting to save their children, families from Chegan left donkeys in the ravine to feed the hungry wild beasts

Wolves were howling from all sides when thirteen families, women and children, from the village Chegan found themselves helplessly looking towards the sky and praying to God for someone to come and save them. When the hungry beasts came closer somebody suggested they sacrifice their donkeys to save themselves. They immediately offloaded and pushed them into a ravine. In no time the donkeys were attacked and the wolves devoured them. That bought the families some time before armed Partisans arrived and chased the wolves away. This story was told by Mile Brzovski, the oldest boy among the children and mothers in the group. Mile, together with his mother, two brothers and three sisters found themselves on the mountain in the middle of winter.

This is what Brzovski said, “It was December 22, 1948 as I remember. It was a cold winter day and after traveling a long time we were all tired and exhausted so we stopped to get some rest. We started a fire to warm ourselves and dry our wet clothes. Around midnight we heard wolves howling. When the howling got closer we could see the wolves coming towards us. We started screaming for help but there was no one near to help us. Then we took one of the donkeys and pushed it down into a ravine. The wolves went after it and tore it apart. After they were done they started coming towards us. We sacrificed a second donkey but it wasn’t enough to satisfy them. Lucky for us some Partisans who were nearby heard our screams and came to our rescue. They shot at the wolves and they immediately fled...”

This, however, was not the only mishap the Brzovski family experienced. Before the wolves attacked, while they were traveling across the mountain, they lost Mile’s younger sister, who was only

seven months old. This is what Brzovski said, “While fleeing from our home we took two donkeys loaded with food, clothes and other things that we needed. We ran into deep snow while crossing the mountain and the donkeys kept getting stuck. We had to dig a path for them with shovels. Since I was the oldest in my family, fifteen years old at the time, I shoveled the snow with my mother. While we were helping the donkeys walk through the snow, my mother put Letka down on the snow. We were so busy shoveling we didn’t notice that she was getting covered with falling snow. When we realized that she was gone we panicked and started looking for her but we couldn’t find her. We had a dog with us. The dog found her covered by the snow. My mother ran back and yelled, ‘There she is, she is alive’...”

There were families from the villages that did not want to flee to Yugoslavia and remained near the battle zones hoping that the Partisans would win the war and they could go back to the village. Mile’s mother with six of her children decided not to go far from her village Chegan. Her husband was a Partisan and she wanted to stay near him. She and her children were placed in one of the cottages on the mountain. This is what Brzovski said, “When we heard airplanes coming, we ran and hid in a cave. One time a bomb fell on the cottages and three were destroyed. Luckily we had left in time before the bombs fell. We lived on the mountain for five difficult months. We were hungry most of the time...”

When spring came the women and older children were put to work for the Partisans, delivering ammunition to the battle zones with donkeys and horses.

This is what Brzovski said, “One night an order was given for the people to prepare and leave their villages. The Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) was losing battles and the Greek government army was getting closer. Not only did the Greek government army have more soldiers than us but it was being helped by the Americans and the British, who supplied them with weapons and airplanes to bombard us. We heard that DAG was defeated and started retreating towards Albania but we didn’t know where we were supposed to go. My father found out that we were still there and one night came to Popadia to get us out. We were so happy to see him alive because

many Partisans by then had been killed. The next morning all thirty families that were living there crossed over Mount Kaimakchalan and went into Yugoslavia near Mariovo. We were accommodated there in a small house in which I saw two pictures hanging on the wall. Later I was told that one picture was of Marshal Tito and the other was of Lazo Kolishevski.

From Mariovo we were taken to Brailovo where we remained for two months. Later the children were placed in children's homes in Bela Tsrkva, Prilep and Valandovo, and the women were sent to Galicnik where they were put to work with wool. My father Krste arrived later. Before that he was imprisoned in Vojvodina. That was the time of the Inform Bureau when many DAG soldiers were imprisoned because they were suspected of being Stalin supporters. When they realized that my father was not a Stalin supporter they sent him to Galichnik to be with my mother..."

Brzovski continued, "The luckiest year in my life was 1959 when all my brothers and sisters, living in different children's homes, came together again in Bitola where all of us sat at the same table and had our meals. I remember one time my mother started crying and said, 'Our suffering is behind us now. My heart feels full to see you all alive and well and here with us'..."

Chegan, Mile Brzovski's birthplace, is located on the other side of Kaimakchalan. At one time there were 85 houses with large families in which 1,227 people lived. The village celebrated "Spasovden" (St. Spas) during which all the people gathered in the village square and sang and danced to the bands playing folk music. In the summer of 1949, however, instead of gathering in the village square and dancing, the people, dressed in black, gathered together in the village church to pay their respects and pray for the souls of those who had been killed in battle. There was not a single family which did not lose a family member or members during the Greek Civil War. Fifty young men and women died in the battles of Gramos and Vicho alone. No one knows where they were buried, or if they were buried. One of their fellow villagers who came for the occasion from abroad had a camera and took a picture of the Chegan ceremony.

Mile Brzovski visited his birthplace in 1988. This was the first time he was allowed to go back since the war. This is what he said, “When I went to my village I didn’t know if I was walking on the ground or on air. I found my family home... It was in ruins... Ours was one of the best looking houses in the village but it was ruined and used by the Greek police at the end of the war. There is still life in the village but the population has dropped to about 700 inhabitants. The village is no longer where it was originally. After it was destroyed the people of Chegan rebuilt their homes further down in another location. When I went there for the second time in 2003, the picture had changed. Wealthy people from Athens and Solun had come and built big villas in place of our old houses. My family’s house no longer existed; someone had built a two story villa in its place. People now ski near the village and go there during the winter. Chegan has become an attraction for tourists. The old village was located at 1,190 m above sea level and it was surrounded by forests and water...”

According to Brzovski, his family had a large property in the village, which his relatives looked after. His grandfather had gone to America twice to work as a migrant worker. The first time he brought back two saddlebags of gold and the second time he brought back three. This is what Brzovski said, “The first time my grandfather came back from working in America he bought a farm. The gold he brought back the second time he buried somewhere, which to this day no one knows where it is. My grandfather had 16 children. Very few people believe that my grandmother gave birth to 16 sons and daughters and they all survived...”

DOTSA GOGAROVSKA DOESN'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO VISIT SESTEVO AGAIN

“If I visit my birthplace, I’m afraid that my heart will break from the memories that will return to me,” says Dotsa Gogarovska

Destiny took Dotsa and Leonidas Gogarovski to Poland where they raised their family and where they faced their future. And so Dotsa’s birthplace Sestevo and Leonidas’s birthplace German became distant memories that they will carry with them until they die. Dotsa never went back to Sestevo, the place where she spent her childhood, not even for a short visit. She said she doesn’t have enough strength to go there and face her past because she is afraid that her heart may crack from the memories that will flood her. Leonidas visited German three years ago but he did not see the same village he knew from his childhood, from 60 years ago.

Dotsa Gogarovska -Aleksovska doesn’t know exactly how old she was, 12 or 13, when she was evacuated from Sestevo because to this day she doesn’t have documents of when she was born. Her sister Gila who now lives in the village Vishini, located at the foot of Mount Vicho, told her that the Greeks burned all their documents. This is what Dotsa told us over the telephone, “Whenever anyone asks me how old I am I tell them I am forever young...” and then laughed. But she remembered the exact day, March 25, 1948, when all the children left Sestevo. This is what she said, “They gathered us in front of the school and they told our mothers, ‘If you want to save your children from death, you have to send them to the democratic countries, far from the war’...”

Dotsa continued, “My sister Gila loaded us on our donkey and took me and my younger brother Mito all the way to Zhelevo. We passed by Maliot Kamen (Little Rock) where we saw a huge handprint on a rock. We were told this was Marko Krale’s hand. After passing

through many villages we finally arrived in Zhelevo. There we spent the night. When we woke up, Gila was gone. She left while we were still asleep. From there we traveled toward the Yugoslav border during the night because during the day the terrain was patrolled by airplanes and bombing everything that moved. We were afraid of being killed. After we crossed the border we arrived near Lake Prespa. We were all tired and sleepy from the long trip and from having to walk over the mountain. While taking a break, my cousin Mlado started yelling, 'I see the road, there it is' and ran down the hill and into the water. He was so tired he mistook the lake for a road. It was sad but hilarious..."

According to Dotsa, they first arrived in the villages Dolno Dupeni and Liuboino and from there they were taken to Brailovo, near Prilep, where they took a train. Dotsa and her brother were taken to Romania where they remained for seven months and after that they were taken to Poland. This is what Dotsa said, "It was very nice in the children's homes in Poland. It was a bit harder in Romania because the country was poor but they did everything to lighten our hardship. They gave us as much as they had. They didn't have much..."

Dotsa graduated from the pedagogical academy in Poland and worked as a teacher for the next 30 years teaching Russian to Polish, Macedonian and Greek children. She said she did not have the strength to visit Sestevo, her birthplace or any of the other places where she spent her childhood, because she felt she did not have the emotional strength to do it. This is what she said, "I will not be able to control my emotions and I'm afraid that something inside of me will break. I will start crying because every rock that I stepped on while I was a child, every tree that I passed by, will return me to the years of my childhood, which as much as they were poor, were very dear to me. I think that I will not survive a visit to Sestevo..."

After she was evacuated in 1948 Dotsa never saw her mother again. This is what she said, "My mother Sofia died from grief. She became ill after the Greeks took my father and two older sisters and interned them on some dry Greek islands. She stayed home alone looking after our cattle. I was told that she suffered a lot. She could not live without her children which broke her heart. She died in

1952. Luckily her sister had just returned from prison and was able to bury her. After he was released from prison my father returned to Sestevo and, after 17 years of separation, came to visit us in Poland. My two sisters Tsila and Toma now live in Greece, my older brother Iani lives in the Czech Republic and my younger brother Mito lives in Poland...”

Dotsa and Leonidas have two children, a son and a daughter. They named their son Krsto and their daughter Lena. Their son married a Polish woman and has a family of his own. They live very well. They gave their grandchildren Macedonian names - Zlatko and Petre. Dotsa visited the Republic of Macedonia only once. This was during the first Child Refugee meeting held in Skopje. This is what she said, “I will go to Macedonia again for this year’s meeting, this time with my daughter. It will be the 60th year since our evacuation...”

Dotsa’s family is still separated and has not sat at a table as a family. Dotsa talks to her sisters in Greece on the telephone. They are both married to Macedonian men. Both of their husbands are now dead. This is what Dotsa said, “I don’t speak the Greek language well, and their children don’t speak Macedonian so well. One time one of my nephews called me on the telephone and spoke to me in Greek. I told him I understand you but I cannot reply to you in Greek. I suggested that I speak Macedonian and he speak Greek. We had a good conversation...” Dotsa told us she believes that the Greek authorities and Greek politicians are responsible for all the evils committed against us Macedonians. She has many friends who are Greek.

Her husband Leonidas was 14 years old when he was evacuated from German. He said the airplanes were bombing all the time. His school was hit by a bomb. We asked him if parents willingly sent their children to other countries or was it a result of communist propaganda. This is what he said, “Objectively there was no other way out. The airplanes were above us all the time dropping bombs so the children had to be sent to a safe place...”

Leonidas has two brothers and one sister and they were all child refugees. He and one of the brothers ended up in Romania, his sister

ended up in Czechoslovakia and his other brother ended up in Yugoslavia, in Bela Tsrkva. Separating the siblings made it hard for them to re-unite. Leonidas did not know why they did that. He said he was saved from being mobilized by the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) because he was short, even though he was among the older children. This is what he said “They were choosing the children according to their height and not according their date of birth. They were looking for taller children who could carry a gun. If they had known when I was born, they certainly would have taken me too...”

Leonidas was lucky; his family was not as spread out all over the world as were other Aegean families, but his two brothers and sister decided to make Poland their home. And because they were together they were able to avoid their nostalgia of being away from German, their birthplace. They all had a good education. This is what Leonidas said, “From the many Macedonians that arrived in Poland, only a few remained behind. There were only thirty of us left in Scecín of all the Macedonians that came here...”

Leonidas said, “Our destiny was tragic; about which many books could be written. When I went back to German for a visit I didn’t find any of our relatives. I met only one old man who was Macedonian. He didn’t want to leave his home when everyone else left. He didn’t remember me because when we lived there he was not in the village. He was mobilized by the Greek government army and when the war was over he came back to German. However, no Macedonian who fought for DAG was allowed to return. I was able to talk to him about how German was 60 years ago. I found German in a sad state of affairs. Before we left German was a large village that supported around 3,500 people. On the day of my visit there were only 150 people, all of them Greeks. There were also a few Vlachs who spoke a bit of Macedonian...”

AEGEAN CHILDREN USED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES DURING THE COLD WAR

The Greek Government blamed the communists saying that they 'kidnapped' the children and educated them to be Macedonians

The children who were evacuated from Aegean Macedonia in the spring of 1948 by the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and by the National Liberation Front (NOF) were used as evidence of “kidnapping”. The Greek government and its supporters used this act in their dirty propaganda in an attempt to convince the world that the children had actually been kidnapped. This is what historian Risto Kirjazovski, PhD, wrote, “The problem with the refugee children from Aegean Macedonia appeared in international organizations and in public at the beginning of the Cold War and became a segment in the ideological, political and propaganda war between the Greek Royalist Government and its neighbours. That issue was used in a wider context during the increased tension between East and West...”

According to Katerina Mirchevska, PhD, the Greek government press was a powerful propaganda weapon that gave two totally different dimensions to this event. The CPG was accused of taking the children in order to educate them as Slavs and Communists to destroy the Greek nation. This is what Mirchevska wrote, “The articles published in many newspapers around Europe, America and Australia caused a storm of emotions and reactions among charity organizations, churches, governments as well as among common citizens. Even the British Archbishop of Canterbury made a comment in which he asked everyone to pray for the Greek children ‘taken away from their homes, villages and country by force to unknown destinations’...”

On December 28, 1949 a number of Greek women's organizations met in Athens and proclaimed this day a "Day of Sorrow" for the kidnapped children. The Greek Government put the issue into question in the United Nations asking that the children be returned. A special Balkan UN Commission was created to investigate the situation and, at the suggestion of the Commission, the UN General Assembly brought a special resolution which called for the "children to be returned to their parents and in the absence of parents they should be returned to their closest relatives..." The repatriation was to be carried out through the International Red Cross but Albania, Hungary, Poland and Romania refused to cooperate. In its explanation the Romanian Government said that the lists it was provided with were falsified. Parents who were soldiers in the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) who had children in Romania were no longer living in Greece. The vast majority of these parents were refugees in the socialist countries...

The refugee children were discussed several times in the UN General Assembly and after those discussions took place a Permanent Commission for the repatriation was created. Many suggestions came out of these discussions. One came from the Swedish foundation "Rada Barnen" (Help for Europe), which offered to build barracks on the Greek islands with its own funds to accommodate the children being repatriated.

The Americans also joined in on the aggressive Greek propaganda. Historian Lorens S. Votner evaluated the evacuation as "one of the most horrible actions in the physiological war in the Greek conflict..." Something similar was said by the American diplomat Rankin, who judged the act as "a great physiological mistake", which was used in the USA and abroad as "useful anti-communist propaganda". This is what Kiriazovski wrote, "As a result of the American and Greek propaganda disseminated around the world, an assumption was created that the children were kidnapped..."

In December 1948 the "Wall Street Telegraph", a New York based newspaper, wrote, "Children are dying because they don't have a roof over their heads and because they lack food and clothing. Twenty five thousand of them are left without care. For God's sake

send help immediately, send everything that you have because many die with every passing day...”

The truth however was different. All the children, regardless of which country they were sent to, were well looked after. Some were accommodated in hotels and summer resorts and others in children's home and there was plenty of food for them and everyone was enrolled in school. As a result of the incessant American and Greek propaganda, western journalists visited the children's homes in Vojvodina where they were told the actual situation. This is what the “New York Times” wrote, “The girls we spoke to denied that they had been kidnapped by the Greek Partisans and that they were forced out of their country. They said they ran away from the airplane attacks. The Yugoslav Red Cross provided food and clothing for them. Every child had a pair of good shoes, although some of the shoes were too big. The dresses, the pants, the blouses and the scarves they were given were new or in good condition...” The “New York Times” also emphasized that it was the Greek government air force that bombed the villages where the children lived and it was the same Greeks who drove them out that now wanted them back. Most of those villages had been totally ruined.

Journalists also reported that it was the Greek government's brutal treatment that caused the evacuations and the many war casualties which forced the Partisans to evacuate the children out of Greece.

Associated Press journalists also came to the conclusion that it was the daily Greek government bombings of their villages that forced the children to leave their homes. According to the Associated Press, “Many of the children's brothers and sisters died from Greek bombs, hunger and the winter cold. Many of their parents were murdered because they fought for the resistance...” The Associated Press journalists also mentioned that they observed children cower when they heard the sound of airplanes. “It was surprising to see these children run into ditches and scream when they heard an airplane fly overhead. They even had the same reaction when an eagle flew over them in the sky. These children were so exhausted they fell asleep while playing but are now slowly recovering in the Serbian village near the border with Romania, where they are accommodated in a

clean school building. For many of them this is the first quiet home that they have ever had...”

A reporter from the “New York Herald” wrote, “Yugoslavia is taking good care of the refugee children from Greece...” The same reporter visited the children’s homes in the villages near the Romanian border where he was told by the people that it was wrong of Athens to accuse the Partisans of kidnapping their own children. The same reporter saw with his own eyes how the children were treated. This is what he wrote, “The western press claims that the children who left their homeland in Greece were taken from their parents by force and that they live in prisons and in bad conditions, but that is not true. The children are well taken care of...”

BELGRADE WAS DEAF TO REACTIONS FROM SKOPJE

“The Inform Bureau postponed the Macedonian question in Greece for ‘better’ times,” admitted Lazar Kolishevski

According to British diplomats, Yugoslavia’s Tito and Edward Kardeli were pressured to give up pursuing the Macedonian Question in Greece. In the beginning they hesitated but in time Tito and Edward Kardeli, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, remained silent especially during the discussions for normalizing Yugoslav-Greek relations. After that they completely forgot about the Macedonian Question in Greece.

Charles Pick, a British ambassador serving in Belgrade at the time, was one of the main diplomats from London who constantly pressured Tito and Kardeli to give up on Macedonian interests in Aegean Macedonia in favour of good relations with Greece. Reactions from the Macedonian leadership were not favourable...According to British sources, after Edward Kardeli defined the Macedonian Question as “secondary”, Lazar Moisov declared that the Macedonian people cannot peacefully accept a decision that will suffocate the basic rights of the Macedonian national minority in Greece and promote policies of denationalizing and the expulsion of Macedonians from their homes.

This is what Moisov said, “How the Greek Government treats the Macedonian minority next will be a basic principle from which we can examine the honesty in the statements made by the Plastiras government. The Plastiras government has shown a desire to normalize relations with Yugoslavia, which should put an end to the brutal and barbarian policies of previous Greek governments toward the Macedonian population. The real test, however, will be what the Plastiras government does in the future. Will it release the Macedonians it is holding in its prisons and concentration camps without reserve? Will it take back the tens of thousands of

Macedonians that Greek governments have deported? Will it recognize the Macedonian people's basic minority rights so that they will be able to freely speak their language and have schools in their own language? Will the Plastiras government provide a minimal guarantee for the national minorities in Greece like the rest of the civilized countries...?"

This is what Lazar Kolishevski, top Macedonian politician at the time, said about sacrificing Macedonian rights in favour of improving Greek-Yugoslav relations, "We should have opened the Macedonian Question in 1948, but instead we postponed it because at the time we were dealing with too many other issues..."

This is what Dragan Kliaik wrote in his book "The Time of Kolisevski", about what Kolishevski said, "We Macedonians found ourselves in delicate circumstances wondering how to deal with the new situation; the Inform Bureau, the danger on the border and the disagreements... So, we decided to postpone the Macedonian Question for 'better times'. We waited until 1955, when relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union normalized and Krushchev came to visit Belgrade. Then during a communist Party forum we asked the Yugoslav authorities why they were 'indifferent' to the Macedonian minority in Greece and why they were publicly asking 'what the Greeks say', but never 'what the Macedonians say'?"

But, thanks to our caution in making sure we didn't mess up our good relations with our neighbour Greece, we tolerated what a self-respecting country would not tolerate..." In other words Lazar Kolisevski admitted that the Yugoslavian authorities 'never' defended the Macedonians in Greece.

So no matter what the Macedonians in Yugoslavia said or did, the Yugoslav political leaders continued to ignore their opinions and the Question regarding the Macedonian minority in Greece kept being placed on the side without allowing it to be closed.

This is what was said in a telegram sent on November 9, 1950 from the British Embassy in Belgrade to the Foreign Office in London, "The Yugoslavs are not asking for territorial changes but they think

that minority rights should be given to the Macedonians in Greece, the same kind of rights the Yugoslavs gave their minorities in Yugoslavia. They also suppose that the Macedonian minority should not be forced out...”

This is what Hilary King, the British Consul in Skopje, wrote (according to British diplomat transcripts found in the Embassy in Belgrade) after he had many meetings with Macedonian refugees from Aegean Macedonia asking for Australian visas, “Please be advised not to use the words ‘Macedonian minority’ in discussions with the Greeks. Even though they openly admit in their documents that the Macedonians are a separate national identity, the Greeks do not want that emphasized. Also be advised that the Macedonians in Greece speak a language that is easy and understandable to all the people here in Skopje. But even though this language is thought of as being Bulgarian, there are many clear differences between this language and the Bulgarian language (this language is more musical than the Bulgarian language). Most interesting is that the people here are all literate (even the older women from the smallest villages) but only in Macedonian...”

British Consul King continued, “There is no doubt that these people see themselves as Macedonian and the Greek language for them is a foreign language. Sometimes they have difficulty pronouncing their own official Greek personal names and the names of their villages...” In the letter to the Belgrade authorities King said that he was informed that the Greek Government refused to give passports to the Macedonians from Greece. This is what he said, “I don’t know if this is true or not, but if it is the Greek Government shouldn’t expect the Aegean Macedonians to be loyal Greek citizens...”

According to King, one important thing the Yugoslav and Greek Press should do is avoid offending both sides and both Governments. The governments too should not offend each other from what is published in the Press. Both sides should ask the Press to keep things under control, especially the newspaper in Skopje (here they were thinking of the newspaper ‘Nova Makedonija’). Also they should not pay too much attention to the local media. The Greeks too should not be taken seriously.

This is what King wrote to his associate in Athens, “I believe that Tito is telling the truth when he says, as he did on several occasions, that it is very difficult for him to keep the local Macedonian Press silent. According to Tito, Macedonia was the most successful of all the federal republics because the Macedonians have the most powerful communist minority. Should someone travel through the country they will find that the Macedonians appreciate the regime the most. For this, amongst other things, Tito values the Macedonians and is trying to please them. I do not suppose the Macedonian leaders put much credit in that but still ask for as much as they can for their loyalty. There are also other things but Tito won’t do anything to give the Bulgarians the excuse to say that he gave up the fight for Macedonia and that the Bulgarians are the only ones to be their saviours...”

MACEDONIANS EXILED ALL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD - GREECE DECLARED THAT A MACEDONIAN MINORITY DOES NOT EXIST IN GREECE

About 21,000 Macedonians lost their lives, while more than 50,000 were forcefully exiled during the Greek Civil War

The Greek Communists used the Macedonian people for their own purposes during the Greek Civil War. After the Democratic Army of Greece was defeated, the communists moved the Macedonian people out of their ancestral homes and outside the Greek borders and never made any effort to bring them back. On the contrary, the Greek communists publicly declared that no Macedonians exist in Greece, something that the Greeks had accepted as reality during the war. In other words, the Greek-Macedonian alliance between the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and the Macedonian national liberation front (NOF) was based on a false foundation and only served Greek communist interests. The Greek communists were well aware that they could not achieve their objectives without massive Macedonian participation and support and they could not triumph over the Greek government army without the Macedonians. And so, in order to involve and enlist the Macedonian people in their war, they had to admit that the Macedonian national identity and the Macedonian language existed in Greece. On the other hand, the Macedonian people saw this alliance as their chance to realize their own national rights.

This is what Historian Andrew Rossos wrote in his book “Incompatible Alliances: the Greek Communists and the Macedonian Nationalists in the Greek Civil War 1946-1949”, “The Macedonians couldn’t think of their national liberation without a CPG victory, the only Party in Greece which recognized their existence and their national identity. At the same time the CPG couldn’t really expect a victory without direct or indirect support from its communist neighbours, especially Federal Yugoslavia, but support from Yugoslavia where the Macedonians already had their state was very difficult to come until the CPG obtained active support from the Macedonians in Greece...”

After the Greek communists recognized the existence of the Macedonian identity and the Macedonian language, they opened 87 Macedonian schools in which around 10,000 Macedonian children were enrolled. This was a great motivation for the Macedonian people to massively grab weapons in their hands and join the war. However they were never treated as equals with the Greeks. There was not a single Macedonian representative in the interim democratic government and all high ranking positions in the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) were given to Greeks. The Greek communists made sure that no Macedonian would be given a command position despite the fact that most of the fighters who fought on the front and were killed were Macedonians. According to statistics collected by NOF in 1948, from the 25,000 soldiers that fought in DAG, 11,000 were Macedonian. That number drastically increased towards the middle of 1949 when all able Macedonian men and women were mobilized. Of the 20,000 soldiers that fought in DAG in 1949, 14,000 were Macedonian. If we consider the fact that the largest battles took place where Macedonians lived, we get a more realistic picture of the great sacrifice the Macedonian people made during the Greek Civil War.

If we now, 60 years later, analyze the situation and the relative sizes of the opponents on the front, we can easily see that the communists had no chance of ever winning the war. Its loss was predetermined in advance. At the end of the war, according to British estimates, DAG had between 20,000 and 30,000 soldiers. The Greek government army, on the other hand, was almost 10 times larger and was supported by the Americans and the British. When the war

ended the Greek Army consisted of 242,000 soldiers. On top of that the USA gave the Greek government 140 airplanes, 3,890 cannons and mine throwers, 97,000 guns and 10,000 vehicles and trucks. Together with the weapons came 250 American officers who equipped and advised the Greek military. The British were also doing their part for Greece including organizing and training their armed forces. DAG, on the other hand, lost its best ally Yugoslavia during the Inform Bureau when Tito and Stalin were having their quarrels. Yugoslavia was DAG's main supplier of weapons and served as a base for organizing its forces and transferring its injured soldiers. Tito closed the border under pressure from the West. Because of that DAG had a constant deficiency of arms and soldiers. On top of that, CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis had disagreements with DAG Commander and Chief General Markos Vafiadis over how to conduct the war.

As a result of the above, DAG lost all of the important battles that followed. In the battle of Gramos DAG had 10,500 soldiers fighting against 80,000 Greek government soldiers. This was the first time the Greek aviation used American made napalm bombs. According to British estimates, DAG lost many soldiers during that battle. Around 2,500 were killed, 3,200 were injured, 416 were captured and 635 surrendered. From the Greek government side 1,063 soldiers were killed and 3,883 were injured.

During the second largest battle that took place on Vicho, DAG was again defeated. In this battle 696 DAG soldiers were killed and 560 were captured or surrendered. The Greek Civil War ended at the end of 1949. The data for the number of soldiers killed and people who fled during the Greek Civil War varies based on different sources.

According to Liljana Panovska, 154,000 people lost their lives and around 90,000 left the country, most never came back. At the same time around 40,000 people were interned in concentration camps; 20,000 were found guilty of committing anti-government crimes of who at least 5,000 were executed. At the same time more than 700,000 people were forced out of their homes and became refugees in their own country. The number of sacrifices provided by the left side amounted to 51,000 killed and 50,000 injured. The number of

sacrificed provided by the right side 10,249 killed and 37,000 injured.

This is what Liljana Panovska said, “The impression remains that the consequences for the Macedonian people were especially tragic and very serious. As a result of their participation in the Greek Civil War, 21,000 Macedonians lost their lives, while more than 50,000 were forced out of their ancestral homes and their country. If we take that into consideration and in correlation with the fact that at that time the Macedonians represented around one-twentieth of the total population in Greece, then it becomes clear how large the scale of consequences was for the Macedonians in relation to the Greeks. Proportion wise, the Macedonian participation in DAG was massive compared to the Greek participation...”

Above and beyond this, the largest and most important battles were fought in areas mainly occupied by Macedonians. An example of this is the fact that in 1951, 46 Macedonian villages were erased from the census list because they were totally ruined. More than 15,000 Macedonians lost their Greek citizenship and their lands were confiscated. Over two thousand square kilometres of Macedonian land was confiscated.

The Greek communists showed their true faces when during the time of the Inform Bureau and after DAG was defeated, no Macedonian was allowed to return to Greece. In other words, the CPG not only abandoned the Macedonians but declared that they didn't exist. All Macedonian liberation organizations, including NOF, were declared unfriendly. According to Petre Nakovski, the Greek communists in Poland and in the other socialist countries, where they resided as refugees, formed Party committees and each Party committee had its own special secret police. All these Party committees enforced CPG rules. This is what Nakovski said, “Any kind of Macedonian issue that surfaced was immediately cut at the root and declared unfriendly. Its protagonists, common people, common Macedonians, teachers and young people, mothers and fathers of children that died in the battles, were declared agents and spies ‘of other powers, countries and ideologies’, only because they were Macedonians...”

Soon after that, the CPG leadership declared the Macedonian language an instrument of Tito, and forbid its use in the Macedonian language schools where the Macedonian refugee children were studying in the Eastern European countries. The Macedonian language in Bulgaria was replaced. The Macedonian alphabet was also replaced with a new alphabet based on the Bulgarian and Russian alphabets.

This is what Nakovski said, “Any kind of Macedonian national and patriotic occurrence was declared anti-party, nationalist, separatist and autonomist. This anti-Macedonian battle lasted until 1954 when the CPG committees in Poland and the other eastern European countries were disbanded...”

This is what Panovka said, “On December 29, 1982 the Greek government, as part of its national reconciliation program, decided to repatriate its political refugees. Based on this decision, all political refugees (Greek by genus) from the Greek Civil War had the right to repatriate, except for those who declared themselves Macedonian. They were punished and left to live out their lives in exile...”

GREEK PROFESSOR ACCUSED OF BEING A “SKOPJE” AGENT

Anastasia Karakasidou said that Aegean Macedonia is not exclusively Greek but a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural region

Anastasia Karakasidou was born and grew up in Greece. She is a professor of anthropology working in the USA. She was accused of “cannibalizing” the Greek nation and of being an agent of “Skopje”. She received death threats for saying that the Greek nation consisted of several different nationalities and cultures assimilated willingly and by force. After doing her field research in a small area near Solun she wrote a book entitled “Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood” in which she pointed out some facts on how some Macedonian people were Hellenized and that Aegean Macedonia is not exclusively Greek because it is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural region.

This is what Karakasidou said, “My findings, interpretations and opinions were not always welcomed in the Greek communities inside Greece or by the Greeks in the Diaspora. Most blamed me of not supporting Greek national interests in their disagreements with the Republic of Macedonia. I however was motivated by broader interests outside of national attachments...”

The Cambridge University publishing house refused to publish Karakasidou’s book because of security reasons. In addition to receiving personal death threats Karakasidou’s work was also attacked. Some of her critics, who included journalists, politicians, religious leaders and common people, began a campaign against her work. Bitter polemics were waged by newspapers and magazines in Greece and the Greek Diaspora. Even the people she interviewed in villages denied what they had said claiming that their nationality was “24 carat gold” Greek and that she had misquoted. According to Karakasidou, however, a large number of these people’s ancestors were “Slavs” (meaning Macedonians).

Karakasidou continued, “My work was misrepresented and misquoted and in some cases even changed... Being born a Greek woman I critically wrote about the Macedonian Question and sometimes I felt like I was ‘accidentally’ looking behind the curtain and breaking a taboo about the ‘secret Greek national ideology’...” Today the Greek nationalists “blindly categorize the Slavic population and the bilingualism that exists in Greece from the past, as a modern national anomaly...”

This is what Karakasidou wrote, “In 1988, when I started to formulate the topic for my doctoral thesis, my intention was to understand how people with different cultural backgrounds who inhabited the same region, began to see themselves as a part of a single Greek nation and culture. According to a broadly accepted standpoint, which I learned when I was little, Greek Macedonia was populated by two different groups: “indigenous inhabitants” and “refugees” that came to Greece from Turkey in 1922 and 1923 who settled there among the “indigenous inhabitants”. Both groups were considered to be Greeks. I wanted to research these two groups, that sometimes seemed so different but now started to see themselves as members of one collective group, and how besides their obvious differences, were co-existing together and some in mixed marriages...”

Karakasidou herself is a child of a mixed marriage. Her father was a Christian from Turkey who did not speak a single word of Greek when he arrived and her mother was a member of the “indigenous inhabitants”. In 1975 Karakasidou left Greece to study in the USA. Then she did her field work around Solun. As a PhD candidate she did research for eight years. She started in a small place called Guvezna, later she continued in Asiros. She interviewed people, researching their past wanting to know about their ancestors. This is what she said, “I wanted to know what made both of my parents who came from different origins to become Greeks. Obviously subconsciously I was looking for my own Greek identity...”

From her research we can see that a great number of the Macedonians were Hellenized by force. From her research we can see that she looked at the Slavic population in western Macedonia,

the Muslim population in Thrace and the Greek population in the south...

According to Karakasidou, the Greek state applied different pressures and different influences to different situations. This is what she said, "Those who lived in the Macedonian regions and were closely connected with the Greeks didn't experience as much unfriendly relations as did the others. The families and the communities that suffered the most had family members killed and exiled. These were people who for various reasons did not feel Greek. Their identities were formed as a result of close relations with each other and social connections and networks with others but with no participation in the dominantly Greek society... Events in the Second World War and the Greek Civil War worsened conditions for those who wanted to be assimilated. People who fought on the communist side were deprived of all rights including their citizenship..." Karakasidou here referred to the Macedonians who, half a century later, still are not allowed to visit their birthplaces because they are not Greek by origin.

Karakasidou is not a betrayer of the Greek cause, or an agent for "Skopje", but she is an objective scientist who told the truth about Hellenizing the people in the Aegean part of Macedonia, which she investigated during her several years of research. This is what Vladimir Milchin said, "I don't believe that Karakasidou's intention at the start was to confront the modern Greek nationalist narrative based on the so called 'Megali Idea' (Great Idea), but her field research, her digging in the archives and her consultation with bibliographies, unavoidably brought Karakasidou in confrontation with the official Greek doctrine which claims that Macedonia was always Greek and only Greek..." Vladimir Milchin and the publishing house "Magor" were responsible for translating and publishing the book "Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood" into the Macedonian language.

According to Milchin, Anastasia Karakasidou does not hide the drama that she experienced when she discovered that the Greek nation was expanding into the region of Macedonia through different assimilating techniques and strategies of ethnic cleansing. This is what Milchin said, "Karakasidou's courage was proven by

the fact that she exposed the assimilation but didn't generalize on her discovery that other areas of Aegean Macedonian were also Hellenized, like Lerin Region for example, which was not as successful as the assimilation process that took place in Guvezna-Asiros..."

The newspaper "Library Journal" wrote that it had seldom seen a science book like "Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood", provoke and upset so many people. This is what the newspaper wrote, "Karakasidou spent some time with the people from the villages in this region and claimed that Macedonia is not exclusively Greek, as Greek nationalists claim, but is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural region which has been put through political and religious disagreements in the Balkans. Karakasidou's obsession with the truth brought her face to face with death threats from some angry Greeks. Her powerfully written statement, a loud statement of human courage, should remind the readers that there is no substitute for humanity and criticism..."

HOW PASKALINA, A MACEDONIAN, BECAME GREEK

“No matter what identity the people were, they had to become Greeks...” said Anastasia Karakasidou”

Anastasia Karakasidou, a Greek anthropology professor at the University of Wellesley in Massachusetts, said that the Aegean part of Macedonia, now under Greece, was Hellenized. She came to this conclusion after eight years of research. She wrote a book entitled “Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood” in which she told Paskalina’s story. Paskalina and her family were referred to as “Bulgarians”, a derogatory term in Greece which is how some Macedonians were forced to accept Hellenism to avoid being persecuted.

Karakasidou chose a little place called Guvezna, located near Solun, in which to do her research. Guvezna was later renamed Asiros, this was the time when the Greeks were changing Macedonian place names to Greek. From all the people with whom Karakasidou spoke only three older women spoke the so-called Slavic (Macedonian) language. But of the three only Paskalina “The Bulgarian”, whose nickname Karakasidou puts in quotation marks, opened her soul and spoke about the terrifying times experienced during the Balkan Wars and later. Karakasidou spoke with her four times. During the fourth time, which took place in the summer 1991, Paskalina was nearing the end of her life. This time Paskalina told her the entire truth about her drama and her separation from her family.

This is what Karakasidou wrote, “At that time she was eighty years old and lived with her youngest son and his family. During our conversation I asked her several questions that were motivated by what she had previously told me. As an answer to my questions, she again told me her story but this time with considerable changes in some details. I asked Paskalina why the previous stories were different from this last one. She said that in those years she was

afraid to tell the truth because she feared she would be persecuted...”

During their first three meetings, Paskalina repeated the same story of how her family was separated during the Second World War, how her village was burned down by the Bulgarian army, how her brother and sister were taken away by force by the Bulgarians, etc. This time however, Paskalina told her a somewhat different story. This time she told her that her village was not burned down by the Bulgarian army, but by the Greek army, and that her brother and sister were not taken away by the Bulgarians, but her entire family had to leave their home in Aegean Macedonia and flee to “a Bulgarian village in Serbia” (most likely, a village in the Vardar part of Macedonia). Later her parents came back to Greece and her brother and sister went to Bulgaria.

This is what Karakasidou wrote, “In ‘her language’ Guvezna was called Grozdovo. Her father’s surname in Ambar-Koj (his birthplace) was Galchanov, but later he took a Greek surname. Sometime later her family moved to Guvezna, but lived in fear, because often Greek policemen came to their house and told them to leave. Besides working hard Paskalina’s family had many other problems in Guvezna. This was because her family was seen as ‘Bulgarian’. The police were constantly trying to throw them out. Her father’s business friends from the past didn’t want to be associated with them. They were really terrified. One time they had to hide her father to save him from going to prison. The people from Guvezna were also constantly forcing them to leave. The village people didn’t want them there and refused to even allow them to raise a tent inside the church yard during a celebration...”

According to Karakasidou, Paskalina’s “new” story was important from several aspects and that the story shows that the inhabitants from Ambar-Koj, those who spoke the Slavic language before nationalism was introduced in the 20th century, lived relatively peacefully with the inhabitants of Guvezna. This is what Karakasidou wrote, “Her last story indicated that, besides their conscious decision to return back to Greece and to become Greek citizens, the families, as was Paskalina’s family, were treated by some people as non-Greek. They were disrespected, laughed at,

forced out and forced to flee. Some of her neighbors still called Paskalina ‘Bulgarian’ even in the 1960s. But by this time Paskalina was ready to confront them...”

According to Karakasidou, Paskalina sued one of her neighbours for calling her “Vulgara” (Bulgarian). She brought two witnesses with her who told the court that she is not Bulgarian. She showed the judge her Greek identification card which did not say she was Bulgarian. At the same time she told the judge that if her family was Bulgarian her son would not be allowed to serve in the Greek air-force, in the most elite unit in the Greek military...

Karakasidou continued, “Unfortunately her legal victory had no real effect; she carried her shame till the day she died. However, I’m sure she felt that she was only a Greek woman. Her years of education and living a whole lifetime closely connected to the local people in Asiros (even married in the village) solidified her Greek national identity...”

Karakasidou felt that it was a privilege for her to have Paskalina confide in her. Paskalina told her the hidden truth about her and her family. Paskalina’s confidence in Karakasidou was far more important than the ethnographic standpoint, because she was one of the three women alive who spoke the “Slavic” (Macedonian) language in the village where Karakasidou did her research. This is what Karakasidou said, “I managed to find a small part of these women’s lives which confirmed their testimonies... Generally speaking a small number of local families were firm and loyal followers of their national cause at the end of the century. Trying to keep a good image of themselves, most of them tended to follow the interests of those who were most powerful or dominant at that moment. Some families were separated because of their national orientation...”

Karakasidou continued, “The chapters in this study document the Hellenization process in one small part of central Greek Macedonia. The chapters contain details about the locals with hopes that they will clarify the stormy path these families took in their communities. Still, this development was not uniform in the whole of Greece. Other parts of Greek Macedonia resisted the Hellenizing process...

However, in this part, in Lagadas, Hellenization was a long-term process which lasted the entire 20th century. For some it was a noble and profitable process. For others, especially in the beginning of the century, life in Guvezna was unpleasant, cruel and short. When two large hegemonic nations collide, researchers of historic fragments cannot see the forest from the trees. The so called liberation of Macedonia in 1913 was the beginning of the inviolable hegemony in the nation building process. Regardless of what the people in central Greek Macedonia were until then, it was clear that from that point on they had to be Greeks. And that's the way it was..."

SHE BROKE ALL HER FRAMES INTO PIECES AND FLED ACROSS THE OCEAN

“We were taught that the Macedonian language is leftover from the languages of the military troops that were passing through the region,” said Kita Sapurma

This is how Kita Sapurma from the village Kleshtina described her first day in Greek school, “The teacher grabbed me by my hair, which was twisted into a ball and held together with pins and a ribbon. He then grabbed my hand and twisted it backwards and dragged me to the side. His words were like poison and hurt as much as the pulling of my hair, which felt like it was being pulled out from the roots. ‘How dare you wear these tattered clothes and that garbage on your head, take it off immediately! You must wear a blue and white uniform and blue and white barrettes... Now go home and change your clothes, I never want to see you here again dressed like this, in village tatters’, he yelled...”

That morning Kita’s mother had made every effort to prepare Kita for her first day of school. She dressed her with the best clothes she had. She braided her hair, pinned it behind her head and tied it with a red ribbon. Formally dressed, Kita left for school hoping to impress the teacher and her school friends. Offended and humiliated little Kita came back home crying. When her mother and her grandmother found out what had happened, they picked out an old dress, slipped it over her existing dress and literally dragged her back to school against her will.

Kita was young but intelligent enough to understand that this old tattered dress was more acceptable to the teacher than her new clothes made with love by her mother and grandmother. This is what Kita Sapurma said remembering the days she spent in school when the Greek authorities endeavoured through education to Hellenize

the Macedonian children, “After I started going to school I realized that the Greek language was the language of our colonizers. Although Macedonian was spoken in the village, and at home, and with relatives, the mandatory language for communicating in school and in church was Greek. We spoke Greek with a hard accent because we were bilingual and our mother tongue was Macedonian. Unfortunately the Greeks taught us that our Macedonian language wasn’t even a language; it had no name, no alphabet and therefore it could not be used for teaching. It was not a language for communicating at a high level, for making speeches, for giving lectures, etc. The Greeks told us it was a hybrid language without structure and unique words. The words were leftovers from the languages of the military troops that had passed through this region...”

We found little Kita’s story, now an eighty year old woman living in Australia, in her autobiography entitled “The Children of the Bird-Goddess” written by her daughter Pandora Petrovska.

This is what Kita Sapurma said, “This was Greek propaganda which in those days was used to fill our heads. The Greeks lied to us when they told us that the Macedonian language was worthless. I completely understood that later, after I arrived in Australia when I was 14 years old. My four daughters graduated from university. They were taught the Macedonian language there. The bitter irony is in the fact that I learned my grandmother’s language in Australia at age sixty... The lies that we were told and the feeling of worthlessness we carried with us disappeared thanks to the education we received outside of our homeland, including learning our Macedonian mother tongue. We were finally liberated from the lies we lived in Greece during our childhood...”

Kita Sapurma continued, “The Ottomans were our feudal masters for centuries, they didn’t destroy our language, or our culture; however the Greeks our masters were not satisfied with only getting our lands, they made it their mission to cleanse us from our ancestral lands. They referred to us not as Macedonians but as the “endopi” which in Greek means indigenous. Instead of caring for us, which was their obligation when the Great Powers handed us over to them,

they ruled over us ominously and more terrifying compared to the Ottomans, our former masters...”

The distressful story that Kita Sapurma told us from her childhood when she was living back home in Aegean Macedonia, reveals the unprecedented terror the Greeks employed in erasing all traces of Macedonian existence. They did this not only to fool the world that nothing Macedonian existed, but to fool the Macedonian people themselves by filling the heads of the Macedonian children with all kinds of lies. We heard many such stories from all the children who were forced to leave the Aegean part of Macedonia and were exiled all over the world. We also heard stories from those who had to remain home and very proudly stand up to the whip of the Greek authorities.

Kita was one of those children who were forced to leave home and go to Australia. Her separation from her grandmother was very emotional. This is what she said, “I will never forget my grandmother’s eyes that day. My grandmother Tsveta’s heart was broken because she was losing part of her family. It was one thing for the men to leave and to go to work overseas, but it was another thing to say goodbye to a grandchild and a daughter-in-law. From all the people in our village, we were the first women to leave in such a manner. This meant that this was the beginning of the end of our families and people...”

The same day that Kita left her home and her village her grandmother kissed the four corners of her family room and after that she kissed her fireplace and the chimney. Several years later, after her last grandson moved to Australia she was left all alone. It was then that she realized that there was no longer life for her at home. The only option left for her was to leave. This is what Kita Sapurma said about her grandmother, “Before she left she took her anger on the house. She broke all the frames into pieces with an axe and burned them. She destroyed the things that she valued the most, the things that gave her reflection of her life and of her being. She didn’t need those things anymore; they lost all meaning, the same as her life lost all meaning...”

It was not enough that the Greek authorities tormented, with intent to eradicate, the Macedonian people inside Greece, they did the same outside. When Kita's father applied to bring Kita to Australia, his application was rejected. The Greek authorities would not accept the name "Kita" because that name was not Greek. As a result she had to wait five months before things were straightened out. Kita's father had to use Kita's Greek name in the application to get things moving. This is what Kita Sapurma said, "The Greek authorities didn't want to accept the documents prepared in Australia where my name "Kita" was used. All Greek citizens had to have Hellenized names... We had to use the name Hrisanthi, imposed on me even though my parents had named me Kita. We went from place to place... we were mistreated and abused... but finally we left Greece. We also left my Hellenized name behind with a feeling of relief because we were going to a place where I could call myself whatever I wanted "

Kita Sapurma opened her soul and said, "Those five months while we waited for the Greek bureaucracy to show mercy regarding my name, many Macedonians were leaving. When we arrived in Solun it felt like an entire column of Macedonians were leaving some going to Australia, some to Canada or America. What an irony, whispered a person belonging to the Asia Minor Christian Turkish community, deposited on our lands in the 1920's that we, the indigenous people, had to leave and go to foreign lands to find a home. And this person was right. The Greeks cleansed our lands from us and I cannot describe with words how terrible that felt... To be driven out from everything that was familiar and dear to you..."

Kita Sapurma continued, "The struggle between communism and democracy during the Greek Civil war was only a mask. Hidden behind it was its real purpose, to make life so unbearable for the Macedonian people that they would have no other choice than to leave their homeland and become refugees across the border in the Republic of Macedonia, or as emigrants around the world. Around 28,000 Macedonian children were evacuated to the socialist countries in Europe. Even more tragic was the fact that these children, especially those who did not belong to Partisan families, were not allowed to go back home because they are still considered a threat to Greece's security. This is one of the many injustices done

to my nation. The destruction of the family was the only secure way to destroy the Macedonian community and the future of our Macedonian nation. Most of these children never saw their families inside Greece, until those families left Greece and moved to other countries. Some never saw their families at all...”

This is what Pandora Petrovska, the author who told her mother’s terrifying story, said, “Instead of accepting the lies, fear and despair, a result of generations of being passive, the Macedonian people must start fighting back, individually or collectively, writing their own history. By doing that they will gain the feeling of creativity and start living in reality, as well as feeling their own worth because they still exist...”

THE GUARDIAN TOOK THE REFUGEE SIDE

“No one has paid more for the sins of their fathers than the children of Greece’s Slavonic-speaking Macedonians...” said the British newspaper

The British newspaper “The Guardian” took the side of the refugee children when approximately 600 refugees visited their birthplaces in August 2003, following a 20 day decree issued by the Greek government to allow them to enter Greece. Journalist Helena Smith accompanied Georgi Donevski, president of the child refugee world organization while he visited Bapchor, his birthplace.

This is what Helena Smith wrote, “Georgi Donevski fought his memory of being forcibly marched out of Greece for longer than he cares to remember. He was wrenched from his parents, taken from his village in the dark of night and forced to trek across the mountains. It was March 30 1948, the height of Greece’s brutal civil war, and he was a boy of 12.

But this summer something extraordinary happened: after 55 years of enforced exile, of being stripped of his Greek citizenship and property, Mr. Donevski, now a Macedonian was finally allowed to return to the place of his birth.

Like other child refugees taking advantage of a decree that temporarily allows them into Greece until the end of this month, he was reunited with relatives and friends. He even got to see his beloved home village, but the trip was not easy.

No one has paid more for the sins of their fathers than the children of Greece’s Slavonic-speaking Macedonians who fought with the communists during the 1946-49 war. More than half a century later, the struggle that pitted leftists against the western-backed government forces has not been forgotten. The Macedonian minority’s ‘treacherous’ desire to carve out an autonomous state during the war raises suspicion even now.

In a country taught to believe in its own ethnic purity, the non-ethnic Greeks still raise uncomfortable questions about the Hellenic identity. The suspicion was all too evident when Mr. Donevski handed in his Macedonian passport at the Niki frontier post. ‘What’s your name?’ barked the border guard.

‘My name is Georgi,’ said Mr. Donevski, who runs the Skopje-based world organization of child refugees from Greece.

‘No, your Greek name!’

‘I think its Giorgos Antoniou, but I have not used it since I left your country in 1948.’

‘And your birthplace?’

‘Bapchor,’ he beamed, using the Slav (Macedonian) name for his ancestral home.

‘There is no Baptsor,’ said the guard. ‘There never was a Baptsor. There is only the Greek village Pimenikon. I will give you a visa to visit Pimenikon.’

And with that, Mr. Donevski came home. He wept as he stood under the border control’s cavernous tin roof. ‘No moment’, he said, ‘had ever been sweeter.

This is history. I can’t believe it. Greece, my birthplace Greece, the land of my ancestors. I’ve longed for this moment, I’ve dreamed about it for 55 entire years.’

Since August around 600 Macedonian exiles, now elderly and scattered across the former communist bloc, Australia and Canada, have embarked on the same odyssey. Most had feared they would not live long enough to tell the tale.

‘They are the civil war’s innocent victims,’ said Greece’s deputy foreign minister, Andreas Loverdos. ‘This is a humanitarian measure, a first step towards righting the wrongs of the past.’

Athens' reformist government hopes the concession will not only help bury the legacy of ill-feeling from the civil war, but go some way towards making Greece a more diverse, democratic society. Under the decree, the political refugees, who also include Macedonian civil war guerrillas, can visit Greece 'for a period of 20 days'.

Human rights advocates hope the temporary lifting of the ban will lead to the eventual repatriation of the exiles. For Mr. Donevski, who has campaigned for the right of return, it is not a moment too soon. He had never forgotten the Greek mountain village of Bapchor.

'I've written to Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton, Fidel Castro, the Greek, Macedonian and British parliaments insisting there is no law in the world that says children are to blame for what their parents do,' he said. 'We weren't fighters; we were taken across the border by partisans.'

I was 12, the youngest of five children, and I didn't want to go...' he said 'but the government forces were advancing and bombing all the [Slav] Macedonian villages so the partisans decided to put us in groups with 'mothers' at the helm. Some were just toddlers. We walked and walked through the night until we saw these little bright lights...They were the cigarette tips of the Yugoslav guards beckoning us across the border...'

It would be three decades before Mr. Donevski's immediate family was reunited. Like all those who sought sanctuary behind the iron curtain, the Donevski children were raised in state orphanages. 'What happened to us was common. I was sent to Croatia, my two brothers went to Uzbekistan, my sisters ended up in Romania and my parents in Poland.'

When they were eventually reunited in 1978 they did not recognize each other.

Greece's refusal to accept the existence of any minority other than a Muslim population in Thrace brought immense difficulties for

ethnic Macedonians. From 1913, when their lands were snatched from the Ottoman empire and incorporated into the modern Greek state, they have known only hardship. Macedonian names of towns, villages and rivers were changed as Athens pursued a policy of forced assimilation.

In 2000 several leading members of the Macedonian minority were put on trial for the public use of their mother tongue.

‘All our problems started when the Greeks came,’ said Maria Buntevska, 72, a former partisan who has lived in Bitola, southern Macedonia, since fleeing Greece.

‘They wouldn’t even let me speak to my mother in Macedonian because it was a ‘dirty language’, she said. ‘I have vivid memories of my grandmother being made to learn Greek at night school when she was in her late 80s.’

Suspicion towards the ethnic Macedonians worsened during the 1990s when Athens and Skopje wrangled over the right of the former Yugoslav republic to call itself Macedonia. Greeks believed that their Yugoslav neighbours harboured territorial ambitions on their own adjacent province of Macedonia, not least Salonika, its port. Soon, the Slav speakers came to be regarded as paid agents of ‘Skopjan propaganda’.

‘Greek identity is constructed on the myth that every Greek speaks Greek and is Orthodox Christian by religion,’ says Panayote Dimitras, spokesman for the Greek branch of the human rights group Helsinki Monitor. ‘These people shatter that. By modern European and international human rights standards the way Greece treats them is condemnable.’

What riles the exiles most is that ethnic Greeks who became political refugees were repatriated under a 1982 amnesty.

For many the concession is too little, too late. At least 150 ethnic Macedonians have been barred from entering Greece for failing to replace the Macedonian names of birthplaces in their passports with

Greek variants. Their travel documents now bear the stamp of a black cross under the word 'undesirable'.

Up in the pine forests of Bapchor, however, Mr. Donevski has only praise for a measure that he says has changed his life. 'Everything about Bapchor, even its name, is no more,' he laments. 'But this,' he laughs, cupping his hands in the village's icy river, 'is exactly as it used to be. I know I have come home.'

The civil war was fought between the government and communists from the EAM-ELAS (National Liberation Front-National Popular Liberation Army) after the Nazi occupation ended in 1944.

It began in December 1944 when a coalition between the royalists and the communists -the principal Greek resistance movement during the Second World War - broke down over the communists' refusal to disarm. British military forces defeated the EAM-ELAS within weeks but only after they had overrun nearly all of the country.

A new government was formed and the Greek king was restored to the throne. The communists conceded but continuing tensions led to the dissolution of the government. A full-fledged civil war broke out in 1946. First Britain and later the US gave the Greek government substantial military and economic aid.

Northern Greece was at the centre of the conflict. In 1947-48 the communists captured large swaths of territory but the Greek National Army, reorganized and backed by the US, slowly began to regain control.

In August 1949 a final offensive by the national army under Marshal Alexander Papagos was launched and the insurgents surrendered or fled across the northern border to Greece's communist neighbours.

Around 100,000 people were killed in the civil war and there was massive economic disruption. At least 25,000 Greeks were either voluntarily or forcibly evacuated to eastern bloc countries, while around 700,000 were displaced during the fighting."

REVIEW

The book “Macedonians who suffered in Greek hands” is a reminder of how much more the part of the Macedonian nation living inside Greece has suffered in comparison to the other parts. Viktor Cvetanoski, the author of this book is an experienced journalist who has a good command of language and has capably communicated the whole physical and psychological drama the Macedonians went through in the period of their eviction from Macedonia’s ethnographic territory until the years of their adulthood in the children’s homes throughout the eastern-European countries.

The thing that has to be especially stressed is that, with a simple style, Viktor Cvetanoski has covered a great number of individual destinies of persons who have suffered and survived from childhood to adulthood, carrying traces from their traumas inflicted by the Greek regimes when they were children. Those are destinies that belong to Macedonians and only because of their Macedonian identity, which was not complying with the creation of the Greek nation. Those who refused to be assimilated were forced out to leave the Macedonian territory inside Greece’s borders.

The thing that makes this book unique is its directness. It is not loaded with history but allows the reader to be part of what happened to the exiled Macedonians. The mosaic of destinies and their everyday sufferings is evident in the eyes of the reader. The testimonials are honest and refrain from having interest in politics or geo-strategy. In the high-politicized games however, even those who today negotiate respect for human rights in those days stood on the side of the Greek authorities and supported the ethnic cleansing of Macedonians. This clearly demonstrates the world’s hypocrisy which is only concerned with interests and all others sacrifices are collateral damage.

This book is not intended to cause hatred or revenge toward those who did this. The purpose of the book is to maintain a record of what happened so that it is not forgotten, because those who forget the past will face the same situation again and repeat past mistakes.

The book is also intended to opens a process of deep deliberation on how a nation exposed to such violent repression can manage to exist, to keep its own identity, language and culture.

This book is intended to provide the Macedonian reader and all English speaking readers a window of authentic information of how much the Macedonian nation in the part of Macedonia under Greece has suffered in Greek hands. And for the above mentioned reasons we recommend publishing this book.

Todor Cepreganov, PhD.