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on REFUGEES and PROTESTS

By George Vlahov

Recently, The Economist posted the following photo on the internet:



photo: Migrants walk through Macedonia

On Facebook, this photo drew a torrent of abusive comments, mainly, but not exclusively, written by Greek nationalists. You might wonder, why should a group of backpackers on a pilgrimage or a tour, be so upsetting to a mob of Greek nationalists? The answer to that question is to be found in the caption supplied by **The Economist**:

Syrian migrants walk through the Kilikis prefecture in Greece towards the country's border with Macedonia, May 14th 2015. Hundreds of mostly Afghan, Syrian, and African migrants cross daily

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from Greece into Macedonia on their way to northern European countries; most of them are turned back by Macedonian border guards. https://instagram.com/p/2s-i-CtmTf/?taken-by=the_economist

Quoting one comment in full, will be enough to convey the general nature of the absurdities that were repeated ad nauseam: *Macedonia is actually Greece. Your journalist ethics should have worked here. Unless you know something we don't, as there is no such country internationally recognised as Macedonia. Focus on the gravity of the picture. There is a humanitarian crisis here and people here have to cope with so much right now. This morning, in front of my window, there was a foreigner crying out that he is desperately hungry. And you choose this time to call FYROM, Macedonia. Shame.*

Ironically, the Greek nationalist who made those comments, is probably unaware that 102 years ago, the Greek army brutally ethnically cleansed the town of Kukush (which the Greek state proceeded to rename 'Kilkis') of most of its indigenous Macedonian speaking inhabitants. Moreover, the same said nationalist does not comprehend that others reading her comments are generally concluding that she is the ethically challenged person who cares more about taking away the right of self-determination of a neighbouring people than she does about the plight of the refugees. In short, that the response is absurd and sick is obvious to me and no doubt to many of our readers. Nevertheless I shall use up some space to discuss it, as still, too many people around the Western world actually give such arguments credence.

Obviously Macedonia is not Greece. Greece is one thing and Macedonia is another and that of course still applies even if part of Macedonia is in Greece, simple logic. Even if part of 'b' is part of 'a' it does not follow that 'b' is equivalent to 'a'. Moreover, the author of the quote probably knows it is not the case, but that is the sort of

stupidity that countless Greek nationalists are driven to in their irrational desire to own a word. That desire emanates from belief in a series of nationalist myths that are widely believed in Greece.

The only fix for such a deep belief in an untenable set of myths is the introduction of serious reforms to the Greek education system. The Greek political elite, including the so-called socialists who at present head the government, cannot be relied upon to make such changes of their own accord; the intervention of Brussels is as necessary as it is, unfortunately, unlikely.

However, at the very least, one would expect the EU to be able to respond to the corrupt elites in Athens by informing them that they can continue



to propagate such nonsense, so long as the attempts to deny the human right of Macedonians, to name themselves, their language and the Republic of Macedonia itself, come to an end...

But for two decades it has failed to do so and over the last few days, the EU and its media lackeys have instead, created a refugee crisis in Macedonia. The EU, via EU Greece, is systemati-

cally driving these people out of the EU into the Republic of Macedonia (and not into neighbouring EU Bulgaria) and the press of this same EU is now howling, mostly falsely, about the "mistreatment" of the refugees in Macedonia. One is left speechless by the hypocrisy and the deceit ... how does one point out the obvious without losing one's temper ... that tiny Macedonia can barely look after its own two million citizens, let alone tens of thousands of refugees ... and again, it is in fact the EU that is driving these people out of the EU into Macedonia, etc.

Protests and Responsible Citizens

Superficially, it seemed very positive that so



photo: Skopje after the protests

many citizens in the Republic of Macedonia decided to try to change things for the better and in a peaceful, democratic manner. I am referring to the large protest which took place last June in Skopje. The protest was seemingly in support of a deep and necessary democratisation which needs to take place within **ALL** political parties in the Republic of Macedonia.

However, there are also things to be concerned about here; the movement has essentially been hijacked by an opposition party, SDSM, which does not represent a serious democratic alternative. Moreover, the content of speeches made by other non-party leaders of the protest movement, had plenty of flowery and arrogant language, but not much serious content about the way ahead in a society post the current regime. There is a lack of reflexivity - the problem with the current government is but a reflection of a serious problem in the culture of the society as a whole - and I hope that one form authoritarianism is not simply going to be replaced by another, should the latest developments eventually lead to the election of a new government.

Ultimately, what caught my eye, was not any of the photos of the crowds or the content of any of the speeches, but the photo to the left. It is what Skopje looked like after all the protestors had gone home. In a modern society, as Simmel and other social philosophers have argued, everything is connected to everything else and thus for me, it is not even slightly farfetched to say that many of the protestors are not any more responsible as citizens, than those they were protesting against.

The next few pages of this Review are filled with excellent discussions about the various recent political problems in the Republic of Macedonia and I have to agree with both Tom Vangelovski and Chris Popov, that what took place in Kumanovo, should only in the last instance be considered as possibly possessing a connection to some sort of Great Power or internal government conspiracy. The most likely explanation is simply that an extremist group of Albanian nationalists/terrorists felt that the political crisis in Macedonia, created an opportune moment to launch an attack.

Wiretaps, Rebels and Conspiracies



Sergey Lavrov

By Tom Vangelovski

The wire-tapping scandal in Macedonia continues to run unabated, with protests and counter-protests in the streets of Skopje and rival protest camps across the city – one in support of the Government and one calling for its resignation. In the meantime, the European Union has intervened and held a series of negotiations between Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and leader of the opposition, Zoran Zaev. In the middle of this, a two-day battle suddenly erupted between Macedonian police and Albanian militants numbering between 40 and 50 men in the Kumanovo district of Diva Naselba on the weekend of 9-

10 May 2015. This ended with eight dead and 37 injured policemen and 10 dead militants.¹ More than 30 of the remaining militants surrendered to the police, though it has been reported that some may have later escaped.² The appearance of the militants and the two-day battle that ensued has caused a great deal of controversy, leading to much speculation as to what they were doing in Kumanovo.

The height of the anti-Gruevski protests came around 17 May 2015, when it was reported that tens of thousands marched through Skopje condemning the Government as a criminal and corrupt regime.³ By the afternoon, they had

pitched tents outside of the Government Building and pledged to stay there until Gruevski resigned. The following day, pro-government demonstrators of a similar size marched through the capital in support of the government and set up their own tent camp in front of the Parliament.⁴

In order to negotiate a resolution to the latest political crisis, the European Union appointed its Enlargement Commissioner, Johannes Hahn, to hold negotiations between Gruevski and Zaev. Zaev demanded fresh elections, Gruevski's immediate resignation (or at most, six months prior to elections) and a transitional government in

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the lead-up to those elections. While Gruevski initially refused, he later accepted early elections taking place in April 2016 and ministerial changes in the Ministries of Interior, Finance, Labour and Agriculture.⁵ In addition, he conceded to replacing staff on the state electoral committee and providing it with broader powers.⁶ Negotiations are continuing between Gruevski and Zaev on the details of a transitional government. The key disagreement that remains is Gruevski's resignation. While Zaev has made it non-negotiable, Gruevski continues to refuse.

While, the various criminal charges brought against Zaev earlier in the year still stand, it is unlikely that they will hinder him as the European Union has accepted him as a legitimate political player. These included charges relating to the „coup“, revealing state secrets in relation to the wiretap recordings and soliciting bribes from a businessman in his role as Mayor of Strumica. Zaev claims that these charges, including the charge of soliciting bribes, are all part of an elaborate political set-up because of his opposition to Gruevski. Nevertheless, on 29 June 2015 the Skopje Criminal Court ruled that the trial in relation to the „coup“ charges will proceed on 5 August 2015.⁷ The Court is yet to determine whether it will proceed with the other charges.

Perhaps the most puzzling news to come out of Macedonia in the past few months has been the fighting that broke out in Kumanovo over the weekend of 9-10 May

2015. Seemingly, between 40 and 50 Albanian militants (mostly from Kosovo and Macedonia) were being harboured in the Kumanovo district of Diva Naselba. The fighting began when Macedonian police entered the neighbourhood and launched a counter-terrorist raid against the group. Gruevski claimed that the militants were preparing for terrorist attacks on government and civilian targets in order to „destabilise“ the country and that some of the militants had previously fought in other conflicts, including in the Middle East, while police spokesman Ivo Kotevski noted that the group's founders are former NLA members.⁸

Days after the battle, various Albanian media outlets published a press statement from a group calling itself the National Liberation Army, claiming responsibility for the attack. This same group has claimed responsibility for a number of other attacks over the last few years and is a known off-shoot from Ahmeti's NLA formed by disgruntled former NLA commanders.⁹ Among the group in Kumanovo were also prominent members of the former KLA, including Muhammed Krasniqi (Commander Malisheva), Mirsad Ndrecaj (Commander NATO), Sami Ukshini (Commander Sokoli), Beg Rizaj (Commander Begu) and Deme Shehu (Juniku).¹⁰

After the events in Kumanovo, Ali Ahmeti admitted on Alsat-M television that DUI had been in regular contact with the leaders of the group for an entire year prior to the battle in May.¹¹ Ahmeti claimed that

they tried to convince their former NLA colleagues to refrain from undertaking any violent attacks. Ahmeti also claims that he is unaware of how the group ended up in Kumanovo or what their exact aims were. What remains unknown at this stage is whether Ahmeti informed his Macedonian partners in the government or the Macedonian police of what he knew. Though, other reports suggest that both the Kosovo and Macedonian governments knew of its existence and its intention to commit violent acts.¹² Some of these alleged planned attacks included targets such as police stations, shopping malls and sports events.¹³

Within a few days of Kumanovo, an Albanian named Sulejman Osman (Sulja) contacted the Albanian news service Almakos, claiming to be one of the militants from Kumanovo who surrendered to Macedonian police and later escaped.¹⁴ According to him, his group was in contact with Ahmeti during the fighting asking him to negotiate a retreat from Kumanovo. He claimed that Ahmeti convinced them to surrender, assuring them that the OSCE would take them into custody and later release them to Kosovo.¹⁵ Osman noted that once they had surrendered, they were taken by Macedonian police rather than OSCE observers who were not even present and accused Ahmeti of betraying them.¹⁶ Ahmeti, speaking to Alsat-M, confirmed that the militants had called him seeking his intervention and that he persuaded them to surrender.¹⁷

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Reports suggest that this same group was responsible for the attack on the police station in Gosince, near the Kosovo border, briefly kidnapping a number of policemen and raiding the armoury (some of these weapons were later found among the Kumanovo militants). Their stated demand in Gosince was apparently the creation of an Albanian state. The captured policemen later reported that they were told by the armed group that they were "from the NLA...we want our own state".¹⁸ The same group is also possibly linked to earlier attacks in late 2014, including the shelling of the Government Building in Skopje on 28 October 2014. That group launched two projectiles which hit the building and later released a press statement in the name of the NLA, signed by a Commander Kushtrim.¹⁹ Within a week of the events in Kumanovo and the ongoing wire-tap scandal, Gordana Jankulovska, Mile Janakieski and, most surprising of all, Saso Mijalkov resigned. The three of them had been implicated more than anyone else (except perhaps Gruevski himself) in the recordings. Mijalkov, however, has remained active within the governing party and has been accompanying Gruevski in the EU-mediated negotiations with Zaev.²⁰ It is unclear what role Mijalkov will play moving forward or how much influence he is capable of wielding without the UBK. It is quite possible that he has resigned to distance himself from the government in an attempt to diminish himself as a target of any possible future corruption charges and to protect his own signifi-

cant business interests.

Surprisingly, many Macedonians have refused to believe that Albanian paramilitaries are capable of orchestrating what happened in Kumanovo and this has led to much speculation around the events of that weekend. Two key conspiracy theories abound, firstly, that Gruevski was responsible for orchestrating the militant incursion into Macedonia and the subsequent fighting in order to draw attention away from the wiretap scandal, and the second, that the „West“ orchestrated the event (and possibly the wiretaps) in order to send Macedonia, and specifically Gruevski, a message that it should not participate in Russia's new Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline.

Many ordinary Macedonians, particularly those opposed to Gruevski, have suggested that Gruevski himself ordered that mercenaries be employed to attack the Macedonian state in order to cause tensions between the Macedonian and Albanian communities and bring about a more serious crisis through which he could regain control. If this was the case, it has certainly failed to achieve its objective and has only caused further political difficulties for him. Further, it is highly unlikely that former KLA commanders such as Krasniqi, Ndrecaj, Shehu and the others would willingly help Gruevski out of his political troubles, regardless of the sum he may have offered.

The other key theory, stoked primarily by the Russian Gov-

ernment, is that the „West“ was responsible for the ongoing protests related to the wiretap scandal and the militant group entering Kumanovo and the ensuing two day battle in order to discourage the Gruevski Government from participating in Russia's Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made his views clear that he believed the events in Macedonia were being orchestrated from the outside.²¹ According to Lavrov, Gruevski's refusal to join the European sanctions against Russia was also behind the disturbances allegedly provoked by the „West“. Russia's ambassador to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, while admitting that he has no hard facts, also believes the involvement of the „West“ in the events unfolding in Macedonia are a "logical suspicion".²²

Many Macedonians believe this theory because there is a superficial truth to it. The United States and the European Union do want to limit Russia's influence and their reliance on Russian natural gas. Many worry about Russia's tendency to use its natural gas as a weapon, raising prices or cutting off the supply for countries that stand against it and lowering the price for its allies. Nor is it a secret that the United States and the European Union support pro-democracy movements when they move against authoritarian governments.

The popularity of theories like these are somewhat the result of totalitarian rule across Eastern Europe where many become accustomed to acting as



Sasho Mijalkov

onlookers while their respective governments controlled and manipulated the political landscape, as is still the case to a large degree, particularly in Macedonia. As a result, many Macedonians find it difficult to believe that the citizenry can and does act of its own accord. And so do militant groups such as the various Albanian paramilitaries operating in Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia's Presevo Valley. The reality of Gruevski's corruption and authoritarianism, and the willingness of people to make a stand against him based on their own convictions are too readily dismissed in favour of even more unlikely explanations. Some analysts such as Nikola Kjurchiski from the Russian Presidential Academy in Moscow argue that the Turkish

Stream is likely to end in Turkey, suggesting that Russia already has enough pipelines to transport its gas to Europe.²³ Kjurchiski believes that the Turkish Stream is very expensive and unprofitable. His analysis may be correct. When looking at the latest European Union data on natural gas, it is clear that its consumption has been decreasing since 2005 and is now at 1999 levels.²⁴ Furthermore, Russian supplies of natural gas to the European Union have gradually decreased from 44.8 per cent of imports in 2003 to 39.3 per cent of imports in 2013.²⁵ It is difficult to see where Russia would sell additional natural gas supplied through the Turkish Stream in the European Union or why the European Union would go to the lengths

of organising a „coloured revolution“ or a terrorist attack in Macedonia to prevent the pipeline from being built, given the decrease in both its consumption of natural gas more generally, and its reliance on Russian natural gas specifically. Finally, any pipeline passing through Macedonia must first pass through European Union territory and it would be much easier through political and bureaucratic means to prevent its passage through Greece than to instigate social and political unrest in Macedonia.

Gruevski's political survival is looking more precarious, particularly since the resignation of key allies Mijalkov and Jankulovska, who between them controlled both the intel-

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ligence services and the police. It is difficult to ascertain the loyalty of their replacements (Ljupco Andonovski and Mitko Čavkov respectively) or how willing they are to defend Gruevski should anti-government activists seek to

forcefully remove him. Macedonians need to have a clear understanding of their circumstances. They are in a peculiar position where they have one corrupt authoritarian political party seeking to overthrow another. They are yet to find a truly democratic alternative. Additionally, they do not fea-

ture heavily in the considerations of either Russia or the United States, and for them to ignore the determination and consistent violent acts of Albanian militants since 2001 in favour of vague theories is dangerous at best.

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25 Eurostat, *Energy Production and Imports*, May 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Main_origin_of_primary_energy_imports_EU-28_2003-13_%28%25_of_extra_EU-28_imports%29_YB15.png.

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from Kumanovo to the Camp of Freedom:

Political Crisis in Macedonia

By Dr Chris Popov

The deep political crisis in the Republic of Macedonia dates back to the general parliamentary and presidential elections of April 2014, the outcome of which was a convincing victory for the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party. The main opposition

tion, making allegations of electoral fraud and has boycotted the Macedonian Assembly ever since. The SDSM has consistently since then argued for the holding of early "free and fair" elections, which it believes it can win.

In February 2015, Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski announced that a coup, allegedly



Prime Minister Gruevski

party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), did not accept the results of either elec-

led and organised by the SDSM leader Zoran Zaev, had been thwarted. Prior to this announce-

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ment Zaev had confronted Gruevski, indicating that he possessed material implicating the government in corruption and illegal activities. Gruevski claimed that Zaev had threatened to publicly release this material unless Gruevski agreed to the formation of an interim caretaker government which would organise new elections. Zaev and five other persons were promptly charged with "espionage" and several other serious national security offences. The SDSM countered by seeking the prosecution of several senior officials, including the Prime Minister, on the basis that they had engaged in illegal eavesdrop-

illegal mass surveillance. The Macedonian government maintained that the wire-tapping was carried out by a "foreign power" in collaboration with persons in the Macedonian intelligence services. Moreover, it denied any wrong-doing, claiming that the tapes were illegally recorded, doctored, and not authentic.

The crisis escalated further on 21 April 2015 when a police watchtower on the border with Kosovo, in the village of Gošince, was attacked and captured by 40 heavily armed men claiming to be members of the ethnic Albanian extremist paramilitary, the NLA. The attackers tied up the



ping. (The Mass Surveillance Society by Tom Vangelovski at http://macedonianhr.org.au/uploads/MHR_Review_Issue_22.pdf)

In early 2015, the SDSM leader Zoran Zaev, escalated the crisis by starting to reveal the wire-taps ("bombs") of alleged conversations involving Gruevski, senior government ministers and officials which disclosed corrupt business dealings, electoral fraud, human rights violations and political interference in the justice and judicial system. Zaev asserted that the tapes were provided to him by a senior official within the Macedonian intelligence services and were proof of

four policemen on duty, stole all their weapons) and equipment and stated that they were fighting for the creation of a Greater Albania. (<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16747/Three+Days+After+Attack+in+Gosince,+Situation+Is+Stable>) The SDSM and leaders of other opposition parties in Macedonia speculated that this incident had been organised by forces allied with the government in order to divert public attention away from the wire-tapping scandal, while the government stated that it was the work of a terrorist group bent on creating chaos in Macedonia.

Shortly after this incident, on May 10, an armed confrontation erupted in Kumanovo between Macedonian security forces and an armed group made up of around 40 Albanians which the authorities said entered the country from Kosovo. This group was deemed to be a "terrorist formation" by the government, while foreign media described it as an "armed mercenary group". After a 16 hour battle 10 of the Albanian militant extremists had been killed and 30 had surrendered, while 8 police were killed and 37 wounded. (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32680904>)

Reaction to this confrontation in Kumanovo was predictably divided on party lines. The Macedonian Government claimed that the group was made up of Macedonian and Kosovo nationals whose aim was to carry out large-scale terrorist attacks throughout the country in order to destabilise it in pursuit of a Greater Albania. The SDSM and its allies opined that the confrontation may have been orchestrated by the government in order to create a diversion from the wire-tapping scandal. Some opposition media outlets even went so far as to accuse the government of "having blood on its hands", claiming that it had staged the incident knowing that police officers would be placed in danger and that police casualties were greater than necessary. Finally, spokespersons of the EU, OSCE, NATO and the USA expressed

"concern" that the situation not be allowed to escalate into interethnic conflict, and displayed a reluctance to use the word terrorist in relation to this group, preferring to label them "militants" or "rebels", much to the chagrin of the Macedonian government and many in the Macedonian Diaspora who considered that they were equating the actions of the police with those of the terrorists and refusing to condemn violence and terrorism.

On May 12 Macedonia's interior minister, Gordana Jankulovska, the Minister for Transport and Communications, Mile Janakievski, and its powerful intelligence chief Saso Mijalkov resigned from their posts, in a move apparently engineered by Gruevski to save his government from months of damaging wire-tap disclosures.

Demonstration and Counter-Demonstration

On 17 May a demonstration organised by the SDSM and NGOs opposed to the Gruevski government was staged in Skopje in front of government headquarters. Opposition sources and media outlets claimed that up to 100,000 people attended in order to seek the immediate resignation of the Gruevski government, the restoration of basic rights and freedoms and the setting up of a transitional government which would organise new, fair elections. They claimed that this was the biggest demonstration in Macedonia's history, although predictably the government and its media allies claimed that only about 15,000 attended in an attempt to minimise its importance. It accused Zaev of wanting to depose the democratically-elected government via street demonstrations and the creation of chaos (a la the Ukrainian scenario), rather than testing his popularity at regular general elections. In the lead-up to the protest a video was released showing Zaev allegedly seeking a bribe from a businessman in Strumica for the issue of building permits.

While the SDS claimed that the protest was a "citizens' initiative", it was obvious that the main force behind it was the SDS. The presence at the demonstration of 3 European Parliament MPs was controversial as it was construed by the government as a partisan foreign intervention in Macedonia's internal affairs. In particular, the presence of the anti-Macedonian Bulgarian Euro MP Sergej Stanishev and the display of maps of a Greater Albania by Albanian demonstrators was considered by many observers as detrimental to Zaev's cause. Upon conclusion of the protest a camp (Camp of Freedom) was set up opposite the government headquarters. Occupants of the camp vowed not to leave until Gruevski and his government had resigned.

The following day, the ruling VMRO-DPMNE organised a counter-demonstration in front of the Macedonian Parliament in order to "defend the democratic will of Macedonia's voters". Gruevski told his supporters that he had no intention of resigning as he and his government had been overwhelmingly elected by Macedonian voters. Pro-government media claimed that it was at-

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tended by up to 90,000 people, while pro-SDS media placed the figure at about 20,000 and claimed that many attendees had been forced to attend by VMRO cadres in the bureaucracy and other work places. There was no acknowledgment by either Gruevski or the other speakers that the government has been engaged in wide-scale corruption and other illegal activities. Government supporters also set up a camp (Guardians of Democracy) in front of the Macedonian Assembly in order to defend the government.

On 23 May Zaev, in an interview on Kosovo TV, in halting English, made a highly populist play for the Albanian vote in Macedonia, which was considered scandalous by VMRO-DPMNE and media sympathetic to it. He stated that in the interests of promoting true equality between Macedonians and Albanians, if he came to power he would make the learning of Albanian compulsory for all in kindergartens and primary and secondary schools, allow the use of Albanian in all state institutions, go beyond the Ohrid Framework Agreement in granting greater rights to ethnic Albanians, that the designation used in the UN to describe Macedonians' nationality was not as important as how one identifies and that he would take a "multicultural approach to resolving the name issue." (<http://brif.mk/?p=183961?r1=http%3A%2F%2Fvesti.mk%2Fread%2Fnews%2F5541993%2F2087388%2Fintervju-na-zoran-zaev-za-kosovskata-televizija-rtk>)

While such irresponsible rhetoric was designed to draw ethnic Albanian voters from DUI and DPA, the implementation of such policies is impractical and would effectively spell the federalisation of Macedonia and would in any case be unacceptable to a large portion of SDSM voters and sympathisers, which is perhaps the reason why Zaev has not brought them up again.

The protest and counter protest were staged as part of the struggle for political power, whereby each side wished to show that mass support for its respective policies and views was justified. However, in reality, they resulted in political stalemate as both sides returned to their trenches to continue the battle for power.

It goes without saying that the wrongdoing revealed by the tapes is indicative of serious criminal offences having been committed by Gruevski, his senior ministers and other top government officials and that the large majority of the people protesting are rightly indignant that such abuses have taken place. However, until such time as an independent investigation of the tapes is conducted, one cannot say with certainty that the government has been involved in the abuses of which it has been accused, who carried out wire-tapping, or whether the tapes are authentic. Nevertheless, it does seem strange indeed that the Macedonian intelligence service would have recorded Gruevski and others, including Intelligence chief Mijalkov, talking about matters involving such blatant illegality and then retained the evidence. Another relevant matter is why has Zaev only released those tapes highlighting malfeasance on the part of the government, when logically, if he and his party and other political opponents and NGOs were the subject of such mass surveillance, then he would have in his possession tapes which supposedly also reveal evidence of SDSM skulduggery.

Kumanovo: Why Did the Attack Occur?

There has been much speculation about the reason for the armed shoot-out in Kumanovo. Some analysts, both pro-government and foreign, have speculated that the USA was involved and that it wanted to sabotage the construction of the planned Russian-financed "Turkish Stream" gas pipeline which is intended to supply Western Europe with Russian natural gas via Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary. To that end, it allegedly turned a blind eye to the activities of this particular terrorist group in Kosovo and hoped that in entering Macedonia and creating chaos, it would bring about interethnic conflict which would scuttle plans for "Turkish Stream" and bring about the downfall of the Gruevski government, which moreover had not introduced sanctions against Russia. Media close to the SDS speculated that there may have been government involvement given revelations that it had known about the existence of this group in the region since the beginning of 2015 (<http://plusinfo.mk/vest/25353/ivanov-za-ovaa-grupa-ekstremni-kriminalci-odamna-predupreduvavme>)

Interestingly, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov attempted to exploit the unstable security situation by speculating that the Kumanovo incident may have been linked to Macedonia's participation in "Turkish Stream" and its refusal to impose sanctions in Russia, strongly hinting that both Washington and Brussels may have had some involvement. He also claimed, somewhat irresponsibly, that there were plans in place for the division of Macedonia between Albania and Bulgaria, a proposition promptly rejected by both countries. (<http://telma.com.mk/vesti/lavrov-predviduva-crno-scenari-za-makedonija>)

Others, discounted all of the abovementioned possibilities and indicated that this group took advantage of the political instability in Macedonia to enter the country with the aim of staging attacks which would trigger interethnic conflict and thus advance the cause of creation of a Greater Albanian state.

Given the Byzantine nature of politics in the Balkans and the absence of hard evidence to support either contention, it is difficult to determine the reasons behind the terrorist incident in Kumanovo. While the USA and some Western European countries have an interest seeing the "Turkish Stream" project scuttled as part of their geo-political battle with Russia in Europe, it is indisputable that Western Europe will be dependent on Russian gas for many years to come, even though Azerbaijani gas is said to be cheaper. However, what is important here is the route by which that gas reaches Western European markets as reliability of supply and income from gas exports is dependent on its secure transit through friendly or at least neutral countries. Russia envisages that "Turkish Stream" will transit through countries with which it has a better relationship than one of its current pipelines which goes through anti-Russian Ukraine. The USA and Western Europe then would have an economic and political interest in keeping control of the route by which Russian gas reaches its markets.

However, having said that, it is far-fetched to argue that the USA somehow colluded with this armed group so that it could enter Macedonia in order to commit terrorist acts. It is equally far-fetched to suggest that the Gruevski government colluded with this group to stage the attack at a

time when the eyes and ears of every Western intelligence agency would have been focused on it in the wake of the wire-tapping revelations. The most likely explanation is that this group took advantage of the instability in Macedonia to enter the country from Kosovo in the hope of carrying out terrorist acts in pursuit of the aim of carving out territory for a future Greater Albanian state or for purposes of securing territory for smuggling of people, drugs and other goods.

Is Macedonia Governed by a Dictatorial Government?

Zoran Zaev claims that the tapes reveal that Macedonia is governed by a dictatorship and that only by deposing the current government can the country restore the freedom and democracy that its citizens deserve. While the "bombs", if authentic, do reveal an alarming level of corruption, electoral fraud and interference in the justice system, incompatible with a functioning liberal democracy, it is incorrect to characterise the Gruevski government as a dictatorship. The right-wing Gruevski government has shown increasing authoritarian tendencies in its attempts to influence the outcomes of elections, its politicisation of the civil service, its tampering with the independence of the judiciary, its control of major print and electronic media, its suspect process of lustration and lip service to democratic processes. However, unlike in a dictatorship, there is no suspension of civil liberties, no repression of ethnic minorities, no prohibition of opposition political parties or activities or NGOs and no restrictions on the right to freedom of association and assembly. While the government does exercise control over major media outlets and while journalistic self-censorship is apparent, opposition publications and numerous web portals exist and operate unimpeded by censorship or coercive practices. The OSCE characterised the most recent general elections in 2014 as generally free and fair, although it did note inconsistencies and ambiguities, including a lack of clarity in the definition of campaigning, the length of the campaign, cases of voter intimidation and the misuse of state resources during the campaign (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/fyrom/121327>)

The characterisation of the current government

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as "dictatorial" is self-serving and designed to bolster the case for its overthrow. It is ironic indeed that the SDS would level this accusation, when during its time in power, it engaged in many of the abuses that it now accuses the current government of and presided over a dubious mass privatisation of state enterprises and assets.

Attempts to Resolve the Crisis

Subsequent to the holding of the protest and counter protest, several meetings were held in Macedonia, Strasbourg and Brussels between the four leaders of Macedonian's main political parties -VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA-under the auspices of the EU Commissioner, Johannes Hahn. This mediation effort culminated in an agreement between the four party leaders which was announced in Skopje on 2 June 2015. The major points were as follows: early parliamentary elections would be held by the end of April

next year; before then voting lists would be updated and cleaned up; electoral laws would be made fairer and there would be a transitional period of government before the holding of elections. However there was no consensus as to what type of government this would be- expert, coalition or technocratic- , nor whether Gruevski would have to stand down at some point before the elections, as the SDSM was demanding, <http://24vesti.mk/koj-kje-gi-organizira-predvremenite-parlamentarni-izbori-dogodina>

The details of the type of government which would rule during the transition period and when that period was to begin were to be worked out at a further meeting in Brussels on June 10. In the interim Zaev threatened to not attend the meeting following a statement made by Hahn on 5 June 2015 while on a visit to Washington that the Macedonian elections of last year were considered "generally positive" by OSCE. He accused him of bias towards Gruevski and only agreed to attend the talks after Hahn spoke with him and modified his statement by saying that OSCE had also noted that certain irregularities had occurred

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as well at the elections. (http://www.dw.com/mk/maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_makedonija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss)

The meeting held in Brussels on 10 June 2015 ended in failure due to the fact that Zaev was not prepared to accept the presence of Gruevski in any transitional government. According to reports Gruevski did not agree to giving up the post of premier in October this year as mentioned in the compromise proposal put by Hahn. He offered to leave around three to four months before the holding of the elections next year. Gruevski was prepared to award the SDSM the post of Parliamentary Speaker as well as certain co-ministerial positions which would be able to veto all decisions. Zaev argued that Gruevski and his senior ministers could not remain in any government tasked with organising new elections, given their involvement in gross illegality and that he should resign immediately. Hahn expressed his disappointment that no agreement had been reached and urged all parties to redouble their efforts in the interests of the country and its Euro Atlantic aspirations. <http://www.kanal77.com.mk/mk/vesti/makedonija/item/15740-pregovorite-vo-brisel-propadnaa.html>.

Both the SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE blamed each other for the breakdown in the talks and it was reported that Ali Ahmeti had threatened to pull DUI out of the governing coalition if no agreement was reached, which he subsequently did not do.

Zaev threatened to radicalize the protests against the government if his demands were not met.

On 16 June the European Commission released a report on Macedonia authored by Reinhard Preibe <http://kapital.mk/kritikite-vo-izvestajot-na-pribe-ne-ostavaat-prostor-za-tolkuvane-problemite-vo-makedonija-se-preseriozni-za-reshavaneto-da-mozhe-da-se-odlo> which called for urgent reforms in several key areas and highlighted the criteria which Macedonia needed to meet in order to prove that it is serious about its integration into Euro Atlantic structures. The report noted "serious shortcomings" in several areas such as judicial independence and backed reforms in the state security services, electoral

bodies and an enhancement of freedom of the media and expression. It also gave credence to Zaev's contention that the Macedonian intelligence services were responsible for the wire-tapping. However, the report provided scant evidence to support its view that Macedonian intelligence services were responsible for the surveillance operation, save to state in footnote 6 that; "This fact has been acknowledged to the group by the former Director of the intelligence service (UBK) and can also be inferred from the plea bargain admissions and subsequent conviction of a former employee of UBK."

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf p.5](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf_p.5)).

When one considers that around half of the recommendations in the report are based on revelations contained in the recordings, one would have thought that Preibe would have been more careful in supporting claims that the recordings were made by Macedonian intelligence services before any independent, expert investigation of them has been carried out. In any case, it is obvious that the report was released in order to get the talks on solving the crisis back on track, to extract concessions from Gruevski and to placate Zaev.

On 19 June the four leaders met again in Skopje and agreed that any agreement hammered out would have to respect the framework laid out at the 2 June meeting. They agreed that they would meet again on 29 June in order to thrash out the details. <http://dnevnik.mk/?ItemID=B9E1CC6A88285A4483F1F2C29A1CF524>

However, soon after giving this pledge it appeared that both Gruevski and Zaev had returned to their previous uncompromising positions. On 21 June Gruevski indicated that the early elections would be organised by the present VMRO-DPMNE-led government which would be overwhelmingly re-elected. <http://dnevnik.mk/?ItemID=A319F3D1614BAF46B80406F425AE79DB>

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That same day SDSM Party spokesperson Petre Shilegov stated that the resignation of Gruevski was a fundamental condition for the formation of a transitional government and that they would not allow him to organise early elections. (libertas.mk/видео-шилегов-оставката-на-груевски-е).

Whether such statements are designed to cement support within their respective parties or an ambit claim designed to extract maximum concessions from the opposing party on June 29 remains to be seen.

Possibilities for Resolution

It is apparent that as the political crisis in Macedonia deepened, both the EU and the USA increasingly began to support Zaev's campaign for early elections, especially after he started releasing the "bombs". A reason for such support may have been the Gruevski government's intention to participate in the "Turkish Stream" project and its refusal to impose sanctions on Russia, which was seen as a challenge to the West's campaign to punish Russia and limit its influence in the Balkans. It may also be that the West reasoned that Zaev and the SDSM would be "more flexible" in solving the name issue, a view which Zaev's statements have provided justification for. However, of late Commissioner Hahn and Brussels appear to have adopted a more "even-handed" approach, perhaps due to Zaev's demand that Gruevski have no part in any transitional government, which threatens to prolong the crisis and increase instability in the region.

Gruevski's agreement to early elections and to resign as Premier 3-4 months before the holding of these elections is viewed by him as a necessary compromise designed to reduce European pressure and place the onus on Zaev to offer something in return. The release of the "bombs" has done little to shake Gruevski's control of VMRO-DPMNE and the government in general. A viable solution to the current crisis is only possible if both sides abandon their maximalist demands and work together in the interests of society and the state as a whole, rather than narrow political interests. In order for that to happen all major and minor Macedonian parties must at

least begin to attempt to rid themselves of the clientelism, corruption, illegal practices, media control and vote rigging which has marked their periods in power and commit to an open, democratic society in which the population's basic human, economic, social and political rights are guaranteed and observed. They must go beyond merely declarative support for radical reform of Macedonian society.

Nevertheless, even if concrete plans for the holding of early general elections, the creation of a transitional government and the implementation of the reforms sought in the European Commission's Expert Report of 16 June are agreed on 29 June, any new government that emerges after the elections will be led by either VMRO-DPMNE or the SDSM, which, given their track record, may soon revert to past patterns of governance in the absence of sustained public pressure for greater democracy, equality and improvements in living standards. In short, a radical change in the political and moral culture of the country is needed which must be led by honest, progressive political actors untainted by their association with dubious practices of the past. It is only through internal, far-reaching party political reform and cultural change that any solution to the current crisis reached will contribute to the creation of a society where the interests of the people are safeguarded and promoted. While such change will take at least a generation to occur, a credible start on bringing it about must begin as soon as possible if Macedonians are to be given hope that a better and more just society is possible.

Such a process of change must of necessity begin with the Macedonian authorities initiating an independent, impartial investigation to determine whether the recordings are authentic - while at the same time calling on Zaev to release all recordings in his possession and not just those that implicate the government in wrongdoing - and to sanction those who have broken the law and violated the rights of the people, irrespective of their party political affiliation, government position or social standing. Moreover, the European Union and other European institutions, Russia and the USA must refrain from trying to impose plans which serve their economic, political and strategic interests (although I realise that in today's world this is a forlorn hope) and allow the Macedonian people and Macedonia's institutions

to craft a solution which has the broadest possible support across all sectors of Macedonian society.

Finally, all Macedonian political parties must recommit to a policy of defence of Macedonia's name as part of any agreement on the country's future and resist calls to change the official name of the country, Republic of Macedonia, as part of any deal to advance Macedonia's accession to NATO and the EU. Progressive internal political, social and economic reforms will count for nought if a name change which erodes Macedonian identity, culture and sovereignty is allowed to occur.

P.S After the completion of this article, a deal on resolving the political crisis was reached on 15 July 2015 between the leaders of Macedonia's four main political parties. The deal's terms are as follows:

(1)the Gruevski Government will submit its formal resignation to parliament in due time to allow the new government to be sworn in on 15 January 2016, 100 days before the parliament elections which shall be held on 24 April.

(2) A new government led by a Prime Minister nominated by Gruevski's ruling VMRO DPMNE party will organise the new elections;

(3) The opposition Social Democrats agreed to end their boycott of parliament and return to the assembly on September 1;

(4) On 20 October the Social Democrats are to appoint a new Interior Minister, after consulting the ruling parties. They will also appoint a new Labour Minister and deputy ministers of finance, agriculture and information society and administration who will have full right of review and veto in matters related to the organisation of the elections;

(5) VMRO DPMNE will appoint deputy interior

and labour ministers who will have the same rights to review and veto the decisions of the opposition ministers;

(6) A new "special prosecutor" is to be appointed by September 15 by agreement of the signatories to the agreement with full authority to lead investigations into the interception of communications;

(7) The political leaders agreed to form working groups that will carry out major personnel changes and boost the powers of several important state offices in order to ensure free elections and limit the space for political misuse.; namely, the Electoral Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Public Revenue Office, the regulatory Agency for Media and the Public Safety Bureau.





NEWS IN BRIEF

Compiled and Summarised by Mitch Belichovski

On March 29 it was reported that Zoran Verusevski, who held high positions in the security services appointed by SDSM, is charged along with SDSM leader Zoran Zaev, of trying to blackmail the Government to bring SDSM into ruling coalition. Additional details from the investigation over Verusevski reveal that he was discussing the possibility of a Ukrainian style protest that would bring down the Government in Macedonia and bring the opposition SDSM into power.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/15869>

On April 6 it was reported that the Macedonian Parliament adopted amendments to the law on issuing vouchers to students and the law on employment and insurance in the event of joblessness. Under the amendments to the employment law, companies that hire citizens from certain a demographic such as people under the age of 35, are exempt from paying obligatory social benefits and personal income tax.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16161>

On April 8 it was reported that the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of economic affairs, Vladimir Pe-sevski, said that Macedonia is developing a concept for the country's gasification that would be applicable in any possible scenario, wherever the gas imports come from. There is currently a Russian proposal to build a gas pipeline through Turkey and Greece and northwards across the Balkans to Austria. While Macedonia is working to secure funding for a project to connect its main cities with a gas pipeline network.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16235>

On April 13 it was reported that the documentary "A Name is a Name", which deals with Macedonian history and culture, will be screened on Tuesday at the prestigious Brown University in Providence, Road Island, in the US. The event is organised by Macedonian nationals, studying at the University and following the screening, a debate will also take place, featuring Keith Brown, professor of international studies and author of several books about Macedonia and documentary producer Jason Miko as

key speakers.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16348>

On April 15 it was reported that over EUR 2 million provided by the EU IPA will be invested in training and internship as the Government supports the integration of young people up to the age of 29, the long-term unemployed and women in order to enable easier employment. "With this project, a significant contribution will be made in terms of overcoming unemployment and to the support of more than 5,000 unemployed individuals from these categories who will gain skills that are demanded in the labour market", said Labour and Social Policy minister, Dime Spasov, at the projects presentation.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16424>

On April 19 it was reported that the members of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria are to mark on Sunday in Melnik the one hundred year anniversary since the death of Jane Sandanski. However, the holding of their meeting is to be uncertain because of the pressure exerted by Bulgarian nationalists who wish to suffocate the voice of the minority they continue to not recognise.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16548>

On April 20 it was reported by travel magazine Tourmag.com that the number of French tourists in Macedonia increased by 14 percent in 2014 compared to the previous year, following an enhanced media campaign in France over the country's tourism offer. As such, five French tour operators paid a visit to Macedonia from 13-17th of April upon an invitation of the Agency for Support and Promotion of Tourism.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16594>

On April 21 it was reported that a group of 40 armed people addressed police officers in the attack of the police station in the village of Gosince around 2:30am, located near the border between Macedonia and Kosovo. "We belong to UCK (National Liberation Army), neither Ahmeti nor Gruevski can save you. We want our own state, we do not want Ohrid agreements, no one else is allowed to come here" as spoken by the group. In the assault, firearms were not used, but four policemen who were on duty were captured.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16636>

On April 26 it was reported that the Macedonian police forces launched a large scale operation in the area surrounding the border with Kosovo. During the search of several deserted houses in the Gosince area, the weapons and ammunition which had been stolen in the attack of the guardhouse have been found.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16811>

On April 27 it was reported that the Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Pesovski said that Macedonia is in talks with Chinese forwarder COSCO to identify a location for a long term logistic zone. COSCO made a long term investment in the Greek main port of Piraeus, near Athens, and is bidding to acquire a two thirds share of the entire port; meanwhile other Balkan countries are in talks with China about the idea to build a high speed railroad from Greece to Central Europe.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16840>

On April 29 it was reported that the Greek diaspora in Australia and the US are pressuring the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to ban the conference in Florina (Lerin in Macedonian), aimed at

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discussing the position of the Macedonian minority in Greece, Telegraf.mk reads. Greek migrants are preparing official responses to the authorities in Athens, urging them not to allow a gathering of this kind, because they claim, that the Macedonians in Greece are in fact Greek.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/16917>

On May 4 it was reported that Macedonia has joined the world initiative for the victims in the Nepal earthquake. The Red Cross had launched a call for help for the victims in the catastrophe that happened on April 25, 2015 in South Asia and caused huge material damage and human loss.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17056>

On May 6 it was reported that Vice President of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Musa Xhaferi and MP Artan Grubi met in Brussels with Alain Le Roy, Secretary General of the European External Action Service as well as Anna Vezyroglou from Federica Mogherini's team. Serious concern was raised over the political crisis in Macedonia, however, the conclusion was that a political dialogue and a transparent and plausible court process are the unique solution, DUI said in a press release.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17149>

On May 10 it was reported that heavy gunfights woke up residents of Kumanovo on Saturday morning, on the second day of the security forces operation against the armed group stationed in several facilities in the area known as Diva Naselba, Telegraf.mk reports. The operation lasted until around noon when the sound of shots being fired stopped. It meant the attackers were defeated, however, the police did not allow any civilians to enter the Diva Naselba neighbourhood for safety reasons.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17347>

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On May 10 it was reported that NTO secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged restraint in Macedonia on Sunday and called for a transparent investigation of violence in which eight police officers and 14 members of an armed terrorist group were killed. "I am following the developments in Kumanovo with great concern. It is important that all political and community leaders work together to restore calm and conduct a transparent investigation to establish what happened", Stoltenberg said.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17342>

On May 17 it was reported that despite being a small country, Macedonia became quite a factor in the constant conflict between Russia and the west. The two opposing sides are taking advantage of the current events to show who is more worried about the situation in the country. According to some experts, behind the concern is hidden interest of the great powers.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17560>

On May 19 it was reported that over 60 percent of the households in Macedonia have access to broadband internet. This data was presented by Minister of Information Society and Administration, Ivo Ivanovski, at the opening of the international regulatory conference, held in Ohrid. Several goals are to be accomplished, one goal including an 80 percent coverage of the population with broadband internet.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17656>

On May 26 it was reported that Macedonia is an ideal geostrategic location for the "Turkish Stream", an OAO Gazprom project. "If you look at the geography of the region, Macedonia is the best place for constructing the extension of the newest energy infrastructure project in the region, said Vladimir Chizhov, the Russian Ambassador to the EU. "To help Gazprom reach Central European markets, Russia has advocated the construction of a pipeline that would run from Greece to Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary".

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17900>

On May 27 it was reported that in response to a Parliamentary question regarding the rehabilitation of the houses from Diva Naselba in Kumanovo, that were damaged during the operation against the terrorist group, the Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said they will be fully reconstructed.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/17941>

On June 2 it was reported that the low budget airline Wizz Air will introduce new direct flights from Skopje and Ohrid airports to several European cities. The new destinations are in line with the agreement on financial support for the introduction of new airlines from the airports in Skopje and Ohrid for the 2015-2018 period, signed by the Macedonian Transport and Communications Ministry and Wizz Air.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18106>

On June 3 it was reported that Macedonia hosted a forum on professional training and employment of people with disabilities. Vasilka Dimoska pointed out with reference to hiring disabled people, that this trend has increased and that then new law will increase the possibilities for employing people with disabilities and will open the labour market. The forum was held at the Hotel Continental in Skopje.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18155>

On June 8 it was reported that Australian MP, Alannah MacTiernan, who is a keen promoter of the Ma-

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cedonian community and has supported Australia's recognition of Macedonia's constitutional name, has responded to the Greek politicians over the interpretation of history of the Balkans. "I do note the area of the Republic was conquered by Phillip II about the same time he subdued the Greek states, so it has been part of Macedonia for over two thousand years" said MacTiernan.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18346>

On June 10 it was reported that the Balkan Interior Ministers discuss tackling an increased migration flow into Macedonia. The country has seen a large increase of refugees entering the country illegally from Greece, which is often the first European country they reach when coming in from the Middle East. Refugees often cross Macedonia on foot, overnight, using the railroad tracks as their guide, which has led to a spate of tragic incidents.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18440>

On June 15 it was reported that Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski met with the Foreign Ministers of Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria at the foreign ministers' summit of the Central European Initiative member states in Ohrid. At the meetings, the Government press office informed, Gruevski discussed the political developments in Macedonia and the challenges they have presented before the country, and the actions taken to overcome the situation.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18621>

On June 17 it was reported that the United Kingdom has been Macedonia's staunch supporter since its independence, the Euro-Atlantic integration, and an honest friend in difficult times, said British Ambassador Charles Garrett at Tuesday's event marking Queen Elizabeth's birthday. "You achieved EU candidate status under the UK Presidency in 2005 and we have worked together every year since then in strengthening the civil society, defence and police reform, the media, public administration and the economy".

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18688>

On June 21 it was reported that the 36th Skopje Summer Festival opens Sunday evening with the premiere of "Sleeping Beauties", a ballet choreographed by Sasa Evtimova, at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet. The music is composed by young Macedonian composer Milan Dimusevski.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18814>

On June 23 it was reported that Macedonia's Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki believes that the visit of his Greek counterpart, Nikos Kotzias, on Wednesday to Skopje is very useful. However, Poposki stressed that both countries were a long way from finding a solution to the name dispute, but that should not stop Macedonia and Greece to cooperate in other fields of interest and to nourish good neighbourly relations.

<http://www.independent.mk/articles/18916>





Johnny Tsiglev
George

interviews...
Servinis

In the infamous words of Jack Nicholson's seminal scene in Stanley Kubrick's film 'The Shining' "Here's Johnny". Well, Johnny Carson created the meme, but I was too young to watch any Carson.

So yes, I'm back. An Artist interviewing an Artist. A tête-à-tête if you must. After a little digression with some sport-based interviews, I'm back in my element..

As per usual, I first met George in a place where many likeminded creative types meet. Sir Anton Klimev's sanctuary... his recording studio. A hotbed of creativity and creative people, hence this meeting with Giorgi and subsequent interview. It's a place where things happen, and a place where you want to be. A purposeful studio quickly becomes a clubroom for Artists of all persuasions.

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For this interview I ask George how he prefers to conduct it? Over the phone? Via email or the good old fashioned way? As soon as I mention email, he quickly interrupts with a "Nah, can't do that. We have to go old school". So with that said, George invites me to his place and we conduct the interview 'Old School Style', or I should say "The Maco Way", i.e. over a few drinks and few laughs...well, warm tea and a couple of shots of whiskey as both George and I are a bit under the weather!

JT> Mr Sarbinov? What's happening nashyo?

GS> Ayy, Mr Johnny Tsiglev! Not much mate. Sakash Chai??

Once you hear this guy speak, the brooding timber in his voice, you instantly distinguish that there is a Muso lurking behind the chiseled good looks. There's a bit of an 80's -90's long-haired Warren Beatty-ness about George.

JT> Yeah... I've got a bit of a hangover headache and I'm a bit out of it like you.

GS> Do you want a bit of this too??

George points to what looks like whiskey to me?

JT> Yeah, definitely. I should have brought some Rakija.

GS> Ohh, you've got some? It's harder to get these days.

JT> It's from my father-in-law. A fellow Macedonian school dad call's it UP & GO for Macedonians.

GS> Ha ha ha, that's good.

JT> A be kai si Giorgi? What have you been up to?

GS> Rabota be. Just finishing up. A job. George does a bit of painting on the side to fund the music projects.

JT> A be rabota. Ke ne poukne be!

So Giorgi, you know we were supposed to conduct this interview months ago. Have you thought about anything special to say over the past few months?

GS> I've thought about nothing..)

JT> Ha ha ha... that's cool. It was just a bit of spurious banter anyway.

OK, we'll formally start the interview now. You know how much we artists love formalities! *George gives me a cheeky smirk*

So here we go. Zdravo Georgi. I hope you're well? Is that formal and bland enough?

GS> That's perfect mate!

JT> George, we'll get straight into the music first...

GS> Then we'll get into the philosophy!

JT> Yeah, that's right. So why did you become a Muso?

GS> I didn't chose to become a Muso. It just happened...

JT> Ha ha ha, it was a pretty dumb

question. I guess we're not really made, we're born that way.

GS> I suppose so, that's part of it.. I think you're born with an attraction to it. To music or whatever (the art is)

JT> Ok, I'll rephrase it. What got you into it? When did you realise you were, as you say, 'attracted' to it?

GS> Nah, it was when I was young. When I was overseas. I was always 'attracted' to music or film... there was a lot around us, in the summer time, dances... You know 'Ora'

JT> Where was this?

GS> Na seloto! In Bouf!

I remember the first time I went to a wedding. Well it wasn't the wedding, it was all the pre-wedding stuff, and they all used to sit around the table and chat, tell a few jokes, and sing. For me especially, when they started singing in Macedonian, because everything else around us was Greek, the films, school, and this was just 'sooo' special. For them to sing old Macedonian songs, and they knew them so well... and they sung them so well too..

JT> Wow, what strong picture you just painted for me.

GS> Well it still is a strong picture for me too. I was very young and it stuck with me.

JT> It sort of reminds me of my childhood too, where I always enjoyed being around my dad's relatives and selo (village) friends more than my mum's because with the Zabrtsi (dad's from Zabrdeni), it was 100% Macedonian being spo-

ken at gatherings, whereas my mum's relatives always slipped into a bit of Greek (depending on who was around of course!) and that used to irk me somewhat. The excuse was always "It's good to know both languages" and I just used to think; "Bullshit. It's not a world language like French. It's only good to know both languages if you want your kids to slowly forget who they truly are".

JT> How old were you when you left?

GS> Well I was still very young. About 7 or 8?

JT> That's when I was overseas for 7 months when I was 7. It's amazing how much you remember.

GS> It's that age where you just soak everything in. It's a great age!

But yeah, every young person would be attracted to it (the music), but not everyone would pursue it. Another story that sticks out was about one of my friend's dads. He came over from Germany, and when he came back he learnt how to play the harmonica. He was playing some German stuff. We used to tease him.

JT> What's the German stuff?

GS> German Double Tonguing.... 'on the harmonica'..... "Don't get excited there girls". Ha ha ha. *We both have a good laugh!*

JT> Ha ha ha, a true rocker's comment! I guess it was just a bit of 'tongue in cheek'!

But speaking of true rockers, Anton always has great things to say about you. You were his supposed "strict" music teacher in the 80's. I think he always looked up to you

and said that you were a sharp cat. A true rocker exuding a rocker's charisma and aura. I must say though, I didn't know you back then and you're a few years older than me, but all the said adjectives used to describe your earlier years remain. 'You're still a cool cat Georgi'.

GS> He he he...Thank you Johnny.

JT> So what was this exclusive music school I hear about and why did you teach music?

GS> It was a music shop in Preston that was owned by a friend of mine, another Macedonian, Peter Vassos. It's not like it was an exclusive school, but it was a popular place to go. All sorts of people would come in to talk about music, what type of amps they were using, hanging around and having a coffee. There was no other place like that, well, that I knew of in the northern suburbs. People 'wanted' to come in and just hang around, unlike other music stores. That's where I taught Anton. He was a true young Muso, but I didn't let my students get away with any shit. If they were late I'd tell them off.... "What, you don't wanna learn?"

JT> Yeah, I remember him telling me, but I think he also respects you for that. He also applies the same principles when he's recording.

He likes to have fun, but he doesn't like to fool around...if you know what I mean?

How long did it all last for???

GS> The Rock House? Good question? Umm..... 3 or 4 years, until I shifted all my students to Thomas-town. Next to the Australian Macedonian Weekly.

JT> Oh, the paper. How did that happen?

GS> Yeah, the paper. I answered an ad after The Rock House shut shop and it ended up being there, next door to the Australian Macedonian weekly. Ohh yeah, I did a few articles like you're doing now.

JT> What do mean? For the paper?

GS> Yeah, on Musos. On Macedonian Musos, that played (music). I didn't do too many. I don't know how many I did? Or just writing about music. I think I did one on Nick?

JT> Who's Nick?

GS> He's my brother. He was the bass player in the band. I also got to know Jim.

JT> Ahhh, good ol' Mr Jim Thomev? He writes articles for us. He's a clever dude. And a funny bastard too!

GS> Yeah Jim was the editor, and Peter. There were a few others there too. Margarita was there.

JT> Vasileva? In those days too?

GS> Yeah, she was doing some stuff.

JT> Her young days getting into journalism.

GS> Yep. That would've been in the 80's. Mid 80's or something like that?

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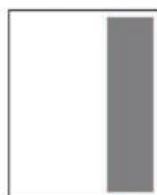
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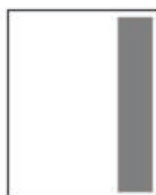
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JT> It's funny how even though you were teaching students of all nationalities, you ended up being next door to the Macedonian paper and teaching Macos! We're all like a bunch of magnets.

GS> Yeah mate.

As we both sit there contemplating that thought, George unexpectedly asks me;

GS> Are you into the footy?

JT> Nahh, not really. You?

GS> Yeah a bit. Collingwood.

JT> Yeah, me too. But after Daics... you know, it's just not the same.

GS> Yeah, what a magician with the ball. Macedonian style. There was nothing like him. And they used to call him the Macedonian Marvel.

Why don't you interview him?

JT> Yeah, I plan to down the track, but I recently interviewed Alex Marcou, so I don't want to do another one on footy for the moment.

GS> Ohhh, yeah Alex. He was a great (footy) player too. Peter (Daicos) used to come into the Rock House.

JT> To do what?

GS> He was a great guitar player.

JT> Really? I think Alex was too? I bet he loved to come in and just hang around with you guys? It would've been a lot cooler that hanging out with the footy crowds.

GS> Yeah for sure. He was always there.

JT> Well, seeing as you're from that generation, the Daics and Marcou generation, (which was slightly before me), and not being the offspring of the present day micro managing parents, who unrealistically believe their children can do anything in the world, and who have the most talented, the most sporty, and the most musical little darlings who could do no wrong.....How did your parents feel about it all? The music that is?

GS> My parents were indifferent. They didn't know how to approach it or how to compliment it. They didn't have it (music) themselves so they didn't know how to approach it. It took me a while to understand it at first, but now, at this age, I do understand. Only the ones (parents) who were musical or played in bands understood, otherwise most of them were pushing their kids to be doctors or lawyers.. "This is not a job". "What are you doing?"... My parents never came to any of my gigs...

JT> Man, that's a bit sad. Not even one?

GS> Nishto be!

JT> They were disconnected I guess?

GS> Even if you did play a big gig, and it was successful and you were this 'star', it was never good enough.

George starts imitating his parents;

GS> "What are you doing playing? Toa neye za tebe (that's not for you). Niye ne sne takfi loige (We aren't those types of people)" What sort of loige (people) are we? What, we're not good enough?, like the blacks in America; "You're not good enough, You're a nigger" told by the whites... it's the same type of thing and it's still going...

George was visibly a little saddened thinking back, so I decided to get back into present day topics.

JT> You're working on some exciting new material. Traditional Macedonian folk music played acoustically. From what I heard (literally in Anton's studio) it was sounding classical but also contemporary. All in all though, it sounded very moving .

GS> Yeah I'm working on a project with Anton. He's a busy man, and when we (both) get time we'll get it going. It's all folk. Traditional stuff, just not done in the traditional sense. These are old songs which I've never heard , so I'd see some musically notated songs, a lot don't have chords, just the melody, and I'd play them in my own interpretation. I have the freedom to play them the way I want, and I thank the person that wrote them on paper!

JT> Why? Where do they come from?

GS> There was a guy who went around Macedonia, even in our parts (Lerin region), in the 1930's and noted where the song comes from, and who sang it, kind of like a musicologist. It was fantastic because he documented so much, so I guess I'm bringing them to life.

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JT> What do you mean bringing them to life? Have they not been sung before?

GS> Well not really. They're old family songs which have never been recorded.

JT> That's fantastic George. It makes it all the more exciting. I didn't know that when I heard you singing parts of them at Anton's.

I'm really happy to see a fellow Macedonian Artist still maintaining his cultural heritage through one form or another. It's weird because as I was thinking about this interview (and Maco music in general over the past few weeks), twice on Triple J, two separate presenters mentioned Macedonian music. One was commenting on all his Maco mates in Newcastle and then the next day a different presenter said that she'll be playing an awesome new Macedonian rap fusion track later in the evening! I love it when I hear stuff like that!

GS> Yeah, really? We're around mate. You've just got to find us all. We're around.

JT> Yeah I'm trying to. I'd like to interview Chris Joannou, the bassist from Silverchair. I was talking to a distant cousin of mine at a funeral a few weeks ago (who is also a Muso) and he was in a band with Chris's cousin. He reckons he was a brilliant bass player too, probably better than Chris! But hey, I didn't say that!

GS> Ohh that's right. I've heard about him (Chris)

JT> Yeah, the general public probably assumes he's Greek be-

cause of his surname. The last time I looked on Wikipedia he was Macedonian and now all of a sudden he's Greek!

You yourself are cousins with the great Mr Peter Sarbinov. Did you ever think about changing your name back to your original Macedonian name?

GS> Yeah at one stage I did. I was calling myself Serbinovski, that was the clan's name, 'Srbinoftsi'.

JT> Yeah, we were the Tsigleftsi.

GS> Everywhere I worked I was using that name. But it didn't really

going to make it hard for me. Somehow they're going to make it hard for me, so it's that sort of mentality. Peter's dad did a lot for the community. He was always there doing things for Sv Giorgi. We're the same clan, our families house's were next to each. My dad was pestered about it (to change his name) from his brother and other Boufchani.

JT> I was at a friend's 40th last night. He's from Prilep, and most of the people there were from the Republic. He had a Maco band going, playing what were obviously classics to everyone there, but completely foreign to me, the only Ageiets in the house. Some of the



bother me to change it officially, and also if I ever went back there (Bouf), it's different now, but back then....

JT>.....it's ingrained in us. The fear of going back. That was the reason my dad kept our name as Tsiglis for so long. Because we had nivje (farmland) there and he didn't want any trouble..

GS> Yeah, it's ingrained. And you go, if I do go back there, they're

music seamlessly blended in to 'Lovers in the Air' and there was some real funky modern Macedonian music, which to me, actually sounded like a bit of French modern funk. It was fantastic to listen to, but what really struck me was the fact that we (Aegean Macos) miss out on this stuff because we don't really have that same sort of connection. We don't want to listen to the stuff coming out of our region as it's all Greek. Chris Popov from the AMHRC loves his modern Macedonian Jazz fusion and he gave me a great mix tape of music for me to play at my exhibition.

JT> Do you ever listen to this type of music?

I play a short snippet from the night before.

GS> It's sort of Reggae-ishh?...the rhythm.

George immediately nods his head to the beat and understands the folk sound.

GS> Nahh. Not really. Only what I hear on telly, the Channel 31 program or maybe at a party. What the young people listen to ever

GS> He was telling me that they all listen to rap over there. I go; "What Narodini"? "Ne be. Rap". They have to diversify. It's only a natural progression. They're open to different stuff. In a way it's bastardising too. A lot of stuff, it's not pure. But what is pure?? I don't know what pure is? But they'll always come back to what's natural, the 'Narodno'. The folk music. The people's music. And that's the same with everyone really.

JT> We've talked on many occasions about all sorts of Macedonian topics, and this might sound like a strange question, but why do you have a strong sense of Macedonianism? You're very passionate

GS> I don't think I need to say anymore. Do I.

JT> Not a word.....

Pretty soon after this question, George tells me that his dad was a Partisan, (as was my Grandfather). He spent 3 years in the hills as a Partisan and during a skirmish he got shot in the leg. He couldn't walk but he crawled out from where he got shot to hide from any more potential gunfire. In hindsight he should have just lay there because the Partisans came back to pick up the wounded. Consequently they didn't see him and the next day the Greek soldiers found him and locked him up for 7 years. He was on death row but somehow got a pardon from the king.

So I guess there is more to it than just the hills of Macedonian!

As George and I are having another whisky induced chai, I notice all these guitars around his house.... George tells me he's made them all himself, by hand! I'm totally shocked and in awe of his craftsmanship..

JT> A be George! Le le. Another side to your Artistic talent! I had no idea?

GS> It's all part of it (the guitar making)

JT> Maikata be George. This stuff is beautiful. Did you make this one too?

I am totally blown away by the beautiful craftsmanship on another guitar I point to.



there is rap, Macedonian Rap. I don't know too much about it.

JT> Who was telling you about that??

GS> I heard it here, and I was talking to Zorro, you know, from Zorro records?

JT> Yeah, he was at Preston Market. He was an institution.

when we talk about issues relating to the suppression of our identity.

Most people will probably say parents, but where did this passion stem from for you?

GS> It comes from the place I was born mate... It comes from the hills... That's what Macedonia is for me.

JT> Beautifully said George.

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GS> That's the first electric guitar I made, ten years ago.....

JT> It's beautiful George! I'll take some pics to show the readers.

You were born in Macedonia, in Bouf. You were telling me something about all the people coming over from the border back then to do work in the Village and how something really special occurred?

GS> Yeah, they used to come over and work, in the village, and do all sorts of work. You know, 'manual labour' because presumably they were poorer on that side!

JT> Ha ha ha, looking down at them; "I niye sne bogati". Ha ha ha, yeah until now!

GS> That was back then, but yeah. And there was one guy. He came over to work on this building, in the village. Below the school. I think it was a Mlekara or something? And this guy, there was another guy too. They were Ma-

JT> From where?

GS> From Bitola or tiye selata? (those villages) But this guy, he used to carry his own portable record player to play singles. So every lunch time when we took a break, he used to take a break too. Because we were right there, the school was right there next to where he was working. So during the break he'd put on his portable record player with the 45's. That's the first time I heard "Zaiko Kookaraiko"!

JT> Gee from there?

GS> Yeah mate. From there. From this guy. It just sounded amazing because here we were at a Greek school and all we heard and were allowed to listen to were Greek songs, and this worker comes along and starts playing "Zaiko Kookaraiko"!

JT> Gee, that's brilliant. I loved that song as a kid. From this one guy! Like he was sent to show you the truth!

GS> And he was adamant about it, right. And he said; "This is what you should be listening to, not that f#%n Greek shit that you're listening to"

nised, it was almost as if I was there with him experiencing that great life changing moment.

JT> Man, that's such a great story George. I wonder if any of the other Bouf kids remember him? Have you been back to the Old country?

GS> Nah, I haven't.

JT> Never? Not ever since you were a little kid? Why?

GS>Ummm, I hate planes. That's one thing. I don't know? I don't think I'm a very good traveler.

JT> Really?



photos: **George (on right in all pics) rock'n with the band**

JT> Bravo be, whoever this guys is.

GS> He said; "Listen to this. This is Macedonian".....and that's the one that stuck mate. The worker playing "Zaiko Kookaraiko" on his portable 45 record player!

As George elaborated and remi-

GS> Yeah, but I was also distracted, by the music. Not that I wasn't thinking about it. It wasn't a priority. There were a few chances there. That was early on, when I was younger. But when I think back, I do feel I missed out. It would've been great. I was a teenager. Everything was new, fresh.. I had cousins there in Bouf. I knew how to speak English. But I don't

know. I can't answer that. I don't know why I didn't go back? Just lazy!

JT> He he he, do you actually want to go back?

GS> Yeah yeah yeah, I'm planning to go. Maybe next year?

JT> Excellent. It's exactly like my uncle Harry. He went back after 50 years and just sat by the river in his village and cried. There was just so much for him to take in.

GS> I used to get sick every year back home.

JT> Where was that? *Here I am thinking George is referring to home as another suburb of Mel-*

then just slide on it... We used to get drenched. Absolutely soaked, and by the third or fourth day, I'd get sick. Really sick. Tonsillitis every time..

JT> Do you miss that life, those times... The freedom?

GS> Yeah... Yeah I do mate..

George replies with the saddest of voices.

GS> I miss the air. When you're up in the snow. The smell. At night walking to your cousin's house. I couldn't wait for the snow.

JT> George, seeing as you mentioned cousins, I want to talk about the story you were telling me about regarding your older cousin. I know

when he came to see me he just started crying. When he was young, overseas, he was taken to an orphanage, because supposedly, his parents couldn't afford to feed him. So they gave him away. It was by choice, and this really hurt him. His whole life he had to live with this. Right up to his late 60's.

JT> Man, I'd rather starve to death than give one of my kids up.

GS> Yeah me too! He came to see me and just broke down and cried. What really stuck was that he was always sad, and that pain of being abandoned had stayed with him his whole life. To his last day. They thought they were saving their lives. But were they saving their lives?



bourne!

GS> In Bouf! Playing every day in the snow. It was beautiful. The winters were amazing. Clear blue skies with snow everywhere. And the sun, man, it was hot. You could strip down to nothing in winter and bake. We'd pour water over the snow to get it silky smooth and

it's not related to Art or music, but I think it's a really important topic to talk about because we rarely discuss mental health or social well being issues in the Macedonian community.

GS> It's the saddest story I ever heard. My older cousin came to see me a few years ago and he wanted to talk. He was in his late 60's and

JT> They might have saved them from starvation, but they were killing their souls!

GS> Yeah. It was very hard for him.

If there is someone going through
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a tough time in the Melbourne Macedonian community, and they need a Macedonian psychologist, they should contact Marika Tashevska. She helped someone very close to me get through a very difficult time and she's also a good supporter of the AMHRC.

JT> Well, on a lighter note; Are any of your kids into music?

GS> Yeah, they're all into music. My oldest son Alex has his own band and he's gigging around.

JT> Excellent. Good to hear that the art remains in the family. Do you get any modern influence from them? For instance, my 10 year old big fella teaches me about all the new apps that come out. He also likes dub-step/drum and bass music and I've actually gotten to appreciate a lot of what he listens to. He approaches it from a different angle to me. He loves the immediacy of it. The quick fix, whereas I love a bit of a slow boil. A song that creeps up on you and has depth in the lyrics. But you know, the fact that he plays this stuff every time he gets in my car, I've discovered that even though the music sounds a bit more chaotic (and fast) there is still depth in their somewhere. Some of it is really operatic too. In the end I just I love having an 'old school' versus 'new doofus' generation debates with him. Ha ha ha.

GS> I do, for sure. I'm surprised how much they know about music. They do understand about the complexity of music, the structure. I was a bit more 3 chords and the like. But I love the way young people look at it from a different angle. They put their own spin on it. My youngest son also tapes some stuff for me and gets me to listen to new stuff. "What do you think of that dad"? Some of it I like, and some I don't. I'd love if my kids got involved in my new album. I've

tried and my daughter Elena sings and I've asked her to contribute. She has interest, but you just need that commitment. But it's fun just to do things together with them.

JT> Can you tell our readers out there who your favourite Macedonian musician is?

GS> I don't know if he's my favourite, but we used to follow Risto Vasilev around. He was great to listen to. We knew him because he was the man. When any overseas (from the then Yugoslavia) singers came (to Australia) they all wanted him to play for them. So a little gang of us, my friends, would follow him around and listen to his music and dance the Ora. A group of friends. Mates. All Macedonians. He was brilliant at the Cavel, the clarinet, saxophone, he even played drums. He used to get up and fool around and play on the drums. But I think he was in one of Nadia Tass's films where she filmed a scene at Kinglake and there was Macedonian music playing in the background? I'm pretty sure, but you'd have to check on that one?

JT> Yeah, Nadia Tass. There's a whole other interview in itself. She's from Zabrdeni too. Might be a distant relative of mine. But I'll look into it.

JT> George, remember how we were talking about whether or not self sabotage in the Macedonian community is a reason why so many of us with talent never elevate ourselves beyond a certain point. Almost as if we're pre-conditioned to remain incognito so that our enemy can't find us. What was that story about your band mate Tony where it sounded like a bit of self sabotage was going on?

GS> Yeah, well we never wanted to be famous, we just wanted to play music. In fact we shied away

from a lot of that, but we played the Corner Hotel. And every Monday they used to form a band made up of musicians from all sorts of different bands from Victoria, Australia, whatever, to jam and promote themselves. So they asked Tony to join the band. To come every Monday and play, apart from our band. Tony was a great singer, they loved his voice. He had a really powerful voice. They asked him to play every week but he declined. We encouraged him, come on, do it. He goes "nah nah nah, if you guys aren't there, I don't want to do it". Which is ok, but we said, "Tone, just go and do it because you're promoting us. You're promoting the band. It's a great opportunity". But nah, he wouldn't have a bar of it. He didn't want that. He wanted to be with the boys. He wanted to sing with the boys. Write with the boys and do all that sort of stuff. You know, the band is the band and that was it. That mentality, which I love myself, but, you know, at that time (when) you're trying to get somewhere, lift the band and get your music out, what better way to promote it? But you know, there are all sorts of opportunities like that. Some people will jump onto it and others won't..... *George pauses for a while;* But that was Tony!

JT> Well, maybe he had an insight into the whole music industry and its potential pitfalls if you make it big time? He didn't want that raw dynamic to change or be compromised by outsiders?

GS> Yeah, well, you know. We're here now, and I guess this is (what's) important. Don't get caught up with the whole fame, media thing. Even though they're (*George mentions a whole bunch of musicians*) famous and whatever, many of them are still conflicted because they can't do their own thing. They can't be over creative because their fans want to hear what they're used to. As soon as you're a professional, you're conflicted, you're labeled. You have

to play a certain way. You can't do anything else, because they don't want to listen to it. When they come out and say; "I'm the luckiest person in the world, I'm doing what I love to do", get f##d, a lot of it is bullshit! Not many aren't owned. I like the people who make music for the sake of music. Like Bradman, who disliked cricketers getting paid to play.

JT> It's like in the Rolling Stones documentary 'Crossfire Hurricane' where the drummer Charlie Watts just hates the limelight and attention so much that it makes him visibly uncomfortable. He said he couldn't stand being chased by girls after a gig. He's somewhat owned because he can't do what he truly wants, which is to play the drums and then just retreat into quiet solitude.

GS> Yeah, exactly.

JT> George, I'm sure you have plenty of stories about your elusive musical past that you probably don't want to talk about here, but do you have any interesting stories that you can talk about?

GS> Well, we were playing at the Mentone and we were supporting Ian Moss. We get up to the band room and there's an exotic bottle of whiskey, or scotch left there on the table. So we sat around just looking at the whiskey, "shall we, shall we not?" And here comes Ross Hannaford, who was in Daddy Cool, he's friends of Ian Moss. Well they know each other, Musos, 'The

Big Musos'! So anyway, he wasn't like "ohh, shall we, shall we not?" He just got into it, right, and polished off nearly the whole bottle.. Now, we might've indulged a little, but in comes the barmaid, or whoever she was and she said; "Farrrrrrk. You've drank f##n Ian Moss's bottle of whiskey"! You know. Ohh my God, and she's f##n running down the stairs and telling the promoter. And here comes the promoter and he's f##n; "Ohh you've gotta pay for it". And we're like what?. In the meantime Ross Hannaford just pissed off.

JT> Ha ha ha, he just left the scene. He did a runner!

GS> Yeah, he was gone. So we were left with the promoter going "You gotta pay for it". And we're like; "We're not f##n paying for it. There's no way we're paying for it, we didn't drink it". You know, "Ross Hannaford drank it". So in the end he goes, "You lost the gig". And we had all the gigs supporting

him, across Melbourne. Promoting his album. And we just said; "Nah, f##k ya, we're not paying for it". The band was like that. We could've gone; "Here's 20 bucks, no worries".

JT> And kept going (with the gigs).. You didn't want to sell yourselves out. You weren't sellouts.

GS> Nah, definitely not!

JT> Ha ha ha... Very 'Rock 'n' Roll' Georgi. Great story!

It's funny because George admitted half an hour later that they did actually drink a fair bit of it too!

JT> Giorgi, it's been an honor to get to hear your voice and what your voice has had to say.

GS> Beautiful, thank you Johnny.. Good ending!



photo: Both of us under the weather but still willing to pose!

review:

an introduction to the works of

Venko Andonovski

By Dr. Michael Seraphinoff

According to the on line publishing house, Ble-sok, Venko Andonovski is a: short story writer, novelist, playwright, poet, essayist, literary critic and theoretician. Born in Kumanovo, 30th May 1964. Graduated from the Faculty of Philology in Skopje. Ph.D in Philology. Professor at the Faculty of Philology "Blazhe Koneski" in Skopje. Member of the Macedonian P.E.N. centre. Member of the Macedonian Writers' Association since 1990.

He is the author of the following books: *The barbarian's tender heart* (poetry 1986), *The Lyric poets' Quarter* (Short stories, 1989), *Frescoes and Grotesques* (short stories 1993), *Alphabet of the Disobedient* (novel, 1993), *Text Processes* (essays, 1996) *Matosh's Bells* (study, 1996), *Structure of the Macedonian realistic novel* (study, 1997), *Three plays - Slavic chest, Mutiny in the old people's home, Hades Machine* (1998), *Decodings* (2000), *Navel of the World* 2001.

Awards include: "Racinovo priznanie", first prize for best novel by the publishing house "Zumpres", an award for best drama text at the "Vojdan Cernodrinski" festival in Prilep, an award "Novel of the Year", and "Balkanika".

Venko Andonovski is among the most talented writers of a more recent generation of Macedonian authors whose works come from the post communist Yugoslav era of an independent Macedonia. I confess to have only read one of his book length works to date, the novel *Azbuka za Neposlushnite*. It is a historical novel of sorts, set in the ninth century in a Byzantine monastery charged with preparation of liturgical texts for the missionary work of Cyril and Methodius among the heathen Slavs.

Andonovski certainly weaves an engaging tale as he tries to give us a sense of what it might have



Venko Andonovski

been like for the monks of that time and place charged with this great historical task. However, he is a writer of the 21st century, who strays from the path of the traditional 20th century realistic historical novel into the realm of magical realism, with a heavy dose of psychological and philosophical introspection, and with inventive graphic illustration interwoven with the text. He is particularly interested in the interplay of sign and meaning as he toys with the possible origins of the mysterious Glagolitic alphabet used in some of the earliest liturgical writings of the mission. As our best writers of historical fiction often do, he succeeds in giving us both a plausible window into the past and a strong sense of how little the human condition has changed over the centuries, as people grapple with questions of

intellectual and artistic integrity, and the struggle to maintain ones humanity in a world that holds powerful temptations to succumb to corruption, greed, and abuses of power.

Andonovski is particularly fascinated by the Macedonian medieval era. All three of his novels explore themes set in that strange era when the frightening power of superstition was so strong. At the same time, it is an era of grand flights of imagination and a time of great saintliness amidst great sinfulness. Although none of his book length works have been translated into English, to my knowledge, the Blesok on line publishing house has made some of his shorter works available, as well as this excerpt from his most recent novel *Veshtitsa (Witches)*:

Three days later, on 20 August in the year of our Lord 1633, padre Benjamin received the following records in the city magistrate:

Records of 18 August 1633 on the court questioning by torture of Johana Gracijanić, born somewhere in the East, assumed: in the district of Macedonia.

Confiscated from her: one sorcery bag, with a number of unusual hollow needles, with colors made of herbs, for which the accused claims have been used to create "pictures" on the body, most probably Devil's seals. Thus, there is a reasonable doubt that she is a Devil's confidant: she is literate, but of no noble origin. She admits that she is a daughter of Isian, the pastor of Macedonia. Also confiscated from the bag: herbs she claims she has used for healing, although the court also knows of practices of making poisonous potions out of these very same, above mentioned herbs. Also: a magnifying glass, a gift of her prosecutor, reverend Florian, which has most probably been altered in purpose by the witch, in accordance with her devilish skills, since she carried it with her.

Confiscated from the old man: one mysterious writing book with black leather covers and yellow parchment, composed with illegible eastern Macedonian letters, with a title that means "A Book about the Book" (this is said by the accused since she also knows our Croatian language). She says that the writing book is hers and that she lost it in his house on the night the old man was arrested, and she escaped the search party. According to her statement, she had written and composed the book herself. This strange witch has written her thoughts about letters and books in it. This strange composition of hers has a he-

retical learning that colors are the same as the sounds and smells, and our Holy Lord was not perfect and that he had allegedly forgotten to give us another sense, that is, that the most perfect book would be the one written in flesh, lustful, lecherous smells instead of words, for the words are the real Word, and only God is the Word and light. Other devilish, midnight and moon studies are elaborated there as well, such as the one that the most perfect and most passionate, eternally changeable book, the one eternally in creation and loss would be the one of circular shape. The wiring book is filled in calligraphy, which, after a check has been determined to indeed belong to the accused.

Records:

In the year of our Lord 1633, on 18 August, in the watch tower of the free and royal city of Zagreb on Grički hill, fully inside the walls and the fortification walls of the city and the district, on the usual torture place, Johana Gracijanić, based on the conclusion of the master inquisitor was first duly and in the Christian spirit encouraged and seriously warned to discover what was to be discovered. However, since she still persisted in denying, she was handed at 6 o'clock in the morning to the Minister of Justice, the torturer, so that he can examine her body and find devil's seals. The seal was found immediately, in the shape of a lively colored butterfly under her belly, towards the private place which in itself verifies the truth that this poor thing had allowed the Devil to seal her with such a visible and shameful sign that the torturer, after he had cut it off her body, showed it to the honorable court of the city of Zagreb with a horrible shame and visible disgust. When asked when and how the Devil had sealed her, the accused said that she had marked herself, with needles and colors for writing on the skin. The seal clearly shows the two Latin letters that the butterfly is made of in inseparable connection, in a lecherous embrace: J and B, which indicates that the Devil probably bears a name that starts with B.

Large drops of sweat ran down the forehead of padre Benjamin. Tears fell from his eyes. His eyes followed the small letters of the record taker:

Upon this remark, the witch Johana answered by an excuse that she had never seen the devil nor copulated with him and that she knows of no name that starts with B. Since she denied this, at six thirty she was subjected to torture by tying

(Continued on page 38)

and constriction of her arms. She was held on this torture device until nine thirty when she was taken off the device and handed to the second minister of justice, who put her on stretching ladders.

After six hours of torture on this device, she was taken off the ladders and returned to her cell due to loss of her strength.



The torture was continued on midnight on the same day when the accused was put on the stretching ladders. ...

And in Macedonian:

По три дена, на 20 август 1633 лето Господово, во градскиот магистрат падре Бенџамин го доби следниов записник:

Записник од 18 август 1633 година, за судскиот распит со тортура на Јохана Грацијанчиќ, родена некаде на Истокот, претпоставка: област Македонија.

Попленето кај неа: една маѓосничка торбичка, со повеќе необични шупливи игли, со бои направени од билки, за кои обвинетата тврди дека служеле за создавање „слики“ по

телото, најверојатно за ѓаволови печати. Со тоа се отвора основано сомнение дека таа е тајничка на ѓаволот: писмена е, но нема благородничко потекло. Признава дека е ќерка на Исијан, пастирот од Македонија. Попленето уште во торбичката: билје за кое обвинетата тврди дека служело за лекување, иако судот знае и за пракса на правење отровни напивки од истото, гореспоменато билје. И уште: една лупа, подарок од нејзиниот тужител, пречесниот Флоријан, на која вештицата најверојатно ѝ ја променила намената, а во согласност со своите ѓаволови вештини, штом ја носела со себе.

Кај старецот попленето: една мистериозна книга-писанка со кожни црни корици и жолт пергамент, сочинета со неразбирливо, источно писмо македонско, со наслов кој значи – „Книга за книгата“ (така вели обвинетата бидејќи го знае и нашиот јазик хрватски). Вели дека писанката е нејзина и дека ја изгубила во неговата куќа онаа ноќ кога старецот е уапсен, а таа избегала од потерата. Книгата, според исказот, ја пишувала и сочинувала самата. Во неа оваа чудна вештица запишувала свои мисли за тоа што се словата и книгите. Во тоа чудно нејзино сочинение е изложена една еретичка ука дека боите се исто што и гласовите и мирисите, дека Пресветлиот Господ Бог не бил совршен и наводно заборавил да ни даде уште едно сетило, односно дека најсовершена книга би била онаа која би била испишана со плотни, соблазнителни, блудни мириси наместо со зборови, оти зборовите се вистинско Слово, а само Бог е Слово и светлина. И разни други ѓаволови, полноќни и месечеви уки таму се изложени, како онаа дека најсовершена и најстрасна, вечно менлива и во вечно настанување и исчезнување книга би била онаа која би имала кружна форма. Писанката е испишана со калиграфија, за која, по направена проверка е утврдено дека навистина ѝ припаѓа на обвинетата.

Записник:

Во летото господово 1633, на 18 август, во стражарската куќа на слободниот и кралевски град Загреб на Гричкиот рид, целосно во ѕидините и бедемите на истиот град и во истоимената жупанија, имено на местото вообичаено за мачење, Јохана Грацијанчиќ, врз основа на донесениот заклучок од господинот инквизитор е најпрвин ревносно и

христијански поттикнуа и сериозно опомената, за да се открие она што има да се открие. Но бидејќи таа и натаму опстана во одречувањето, предадена е, во 6 часот изутрина на министерот на правдата, крвникот, за овој да го пребара она што треба да го пребара по нејзиното тело и да ги изнајде ѓаволските печати. Печатот е веднаш пронајден, во форма на живописно обоена пеперуга под папокот, имено, кон срамното место што само по себе ја оверува вистината дека оваа бедница му дозволила на ѓаволот да ја запечати со знак толку видлив и срамен што крвникот, откако го изрежа од телото, го приложи со ужасен срам пред чесниот суд на градот Загреб, и со видно згрозување. На прашањето кога и како ја запечатил ѓаволот, обвинетата вели дека сама се обележала, со игли и бои за пишување по кожата. На печатот јасно се гледа дека двете латинични букви од кои се состои пеперутката се наоѓаат неразделно сврзани, во блудна прегратка: Ј и Б, што укажува на тоа дека ѓаволот најверојатно има име кое почнува со буквата Б.

Крупни капки пот течеа по челото на падре Бенџамин. Од очите му течеа солзи. Неговите очи прелетуваа по ситниот ракопис на записничарот:

На оваа забелешка, вештицата Јохана одговара со правдање дека никогаш не го видела ѓаволот, ниту општела со него и дека не знае за никакво име кое почнува на Б. Бидејќи одречува, во 6 и половина е подложена на мачење со врзување и стегање на рацете. Спомнатата издржа на таа справа за мачење до девет и половина, по што е симната од справата и е предадена на вториот министер на правдата, кој ја постави на скалите за растегнување.

По шест часа мачење на таа справа, поради губење на силата е симната од скалите и е вратена во ќелијата.

Мачењето е продолжено на полноќ, истиот ден, кога обвинетата е повторно ставена на скалите за растегнување.

Dr. Michael Seraphinoff, June 2015.



The Subversive Activities of the Greek Consulate in Skopje during the Post War Period



By Dr. Dimitar Ljorovski-Vamvakovski

Yugoslav-Greek state relations in the post WWII period, especially after the end of the Greek Civil War, may be characterised as regularly alternating between warm and cool. That was the result of various factors. Though the geostrategic position of the Balkan peninsula during the Cold War and after the Resolution of the Informbiro (1948) were particularly crucial. Apart from that, the strained relations between Athens and Ankara, encouraged Greece and Yugoslavia toward an eventual strengthening of ties during the 1950's.

However, ever present was a bone of contention, which sometimes directly and others, indirectly, led to confrontations between the two states. Namely, that was the 'Macedonian Question' which the Yugoslav and Greek political elites often utilised in a manipulative manner in order to realise certain aims. For the authorities in Greece, the 'Macedonian Question' was presented as a "Greek national security" issue, while in Yugoslavia, the political elite based its politicking not only on the external and internal needs of the state, but also in relation to the pressure it

received from the Macedonian political leadership in Skopje.

The negative relations between Yugoslavia and Greece during the course of the civil war in Greece, which were the result of the open support and aid given to the Communists in Greece by Yugoslavia, began to come to an end after the Informbiro Resolution which led to the isolation of Yugoslavia. Such were the conditions, both countries were surrounded by less than friendly neighbours, that led to the conclusion that cooperation would be preferable, for the purposes of mutual security and economic survival. Thus Tito, as early as August 1949, declared a normalisation of official relations with Athens. All the same, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister at that time, Edvard Kardelj, made it clear in a parliamentary speech, that not all the issues standing between the two countries have been resolved and he underlined "the question of the situation of the Macedonian minority in Greece." Even though the number of ethnic Macedonians in Greece had been drastically reduced during the course of the wars in Greece between 1940 and 1949, possibly by as much as 100,000,

whether by death, internal deportation, expulsion from the state, or emigration, the remainder still created a serious source of tension between the two states.

The official position of Athens was that the Macedonian minority "does not exist" and that in the north western part of Greece, there is a group of inhabitants who speak a "Slavic idiom", but are none-the-less an integral part of the Greek nation and need the assistance of the Greek state to become integrated with the Greek nation. This type of politicking was implemented via various measures for assimilation of the Macedonians including, most obviously, via the first post war census, held in Greece on 7/4/1951.

Greece, regarded itself as "nationally homogeneous" and did not permit citizens to express an alternative identity in censuses. The only possible indicator of difference was census data in relation to mother tongues. On the basis of the 'official' result in 1951, 41,017 Greek citizens declared that they were "Slavic-speakers". Yet officially in Greece, this simply meant that a few citizens who were an integral part of the Greek nation, spoke a different language and had no bearing in relation to ethnic or national identity.

On the other hand, Belgrade, officially held the position that a very substantial Macedonian minority inhabited Greece and the Yugoslav hierarchy did not hide their concern about the future of that minority. The authorities in Belgrade were very conscious of the importance given to the issue of by the leadership of the Republic of Macedonia. Pressure was also exerted on Belgrade by the large number of Macedonian refugees from Aegean Macedonia, who, during the period under discussion began to form themselves into various cultural and political associations. In particular, the formation of the "Association of Refugees from Aegean Macedonia", which in 1950, began to publish its own newspaper, "Voice of the Aegeans". Moreover, the issue of Greece's Macedonian minority was continually raised in the mainstream daily press and in 1954, the very influential work by Lazo Mojsov "About the Issue of the Macedonian National Minority in Greece", was published.

Yet the isolation of Yugoslavia and the deep economic crisis the country was enduring at that time, left the country in a precarious position and so with the USA and Britain acting as mediators,

relations between Yugoslavia and Greece began to be normalised. In 1951 an agreement was signed by the two countries which allowed the them to link via train travel and via postal, telegraph and telephone communication and soon after a raft of other economic/trade agreements were signed. And thus it was that during this period, the Macedonian issue seemed to be put aside. A new strategy arose which was underlined by the beginning of official visits by state delegations in both Belgrade and Athens.

Notably, during the visit of the Yugoslav parliamentary delegation in the Greek capital, the Greek press could not resist returning the "Macedonian question" to the forefront. Numerous Greek newspapers criticised a text book utilised in the Macedonian education system, claiming that is composed of "lies and vulgar statements against the Greek people, nation and monarch." The Greek press not only wanted the withdrawal of the text book but also its "incineration". The pressure did not fail to garner a result as Kardelj soon declared that there would be changes made to the next edition of the textbook.

It was during this same period that another major diplomatic scandal occurred. We are referring to the uncovering and dismantling of a spy network in the Republic of Macedonia, which had been organised and maintained by the Greek Consulate in Skopje. A report by the Yugoslav state authorities was prepared in May 1954. It focused on unresolved issues between Yugoslavia and Greece and was specifically compiled for Tito's visit to Greece, from 2nd to the 5th of June 1954. The report can be found in a collection of documents, entitled: "The Macedonian Question in Yugoslav-Greek Relations - Documents 1949-1967", published by the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade and the Association for Macedonian Studies in Salonika, 2012. The selection of documents was carried out by Konstandinos Katsanos and Nada Pantelic and the collection was published in both Serbian and Greek. Although the documents belong to the Archive of Yugoslavia, it was the Association for Macedonian Studies that originally provided the impetus for the joint work.

In the introduction to the book, the president of the Association for Macedonian Studies, Nikolaos Mertzos, underlines that "with this publication a

(Continued on page 42)

series of similar publications is completed, which serve to reveal, document and interpret the political course of the Macedonian question on the basis of party and state documents, which were kindly made available by the state agency of the Archive of Bulgaria, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and the Archive of Yugoslavia." Mertzos also emphasises that in the future, the Association plans to publish similar materials about the "Macedonian Question" taken from American, German, Albanian and Greek archives.

The report we have singled out from the collection is comprised of five parts, all of which are devoted to the issue of the Macedonian minority in Greece. The first part is entitled "The Macedonian Minority" and it contains some information about the partition of Ottoman Macedonia in 1913, the number of inhabitants in Aegean Macedonia during Ottoman rule and about the denationalisation and colonialist policies implemented by the Greek government during the inter-war years. The end of the section emphasises that after the Greek Civil War, around 50,000 "Aegean Macedonians" immigrated from Greece and that it is very difficult to arrive at an accurate number of ethnic Macedonians in Greece.

In the second part of the report, which is entitled "Greek International Responsibilities towards National Minorities", there is a list of a raft of interstate and international responsibilities which Athens was obliged to comply with in relation to respecting the rights of minorities. For example, the 1920 Treaty of Sevres is mentioned, it specifies that Greece is required "to give full protection to the life and freedom of all its inhabitants irrespective of their place of birth, language, race or religion." The same treaty also specifies that "every national minority has the right to education and media in its mother tongue, and the use of its mother tongue in the court system."

The third part of the report, which is the largest and most detailed is entitled: "The Politics of the Greek Authorities Towards the Macedonian Minority may be viewed as according to the following:"

1. No recognition of the existence of the Macedonian minority, and if the latter cannot be ne-

gated, then there is to be an acceptance of the existence of a non-Greek element or so-called "Bulgarians", "Slavophones" and "Bulgarophones", depending on which is politically more expedient.

2. The implementation of various denationalisation measures; thus in 1926 a law was introduced, by which all Slavic names in Macedonian villages were replaced with Greek names.



3. In accord with laws and administrative measures, use of the Macedonian language is banned; Macedonian schools and churches have been made Greek; Macedonian associations and organisations have been dismantled; educational workers have been expelled, etc. The worst measures in that regard were implemented by Metaxas, when every individual that spoke in Slavic was fined or penalised with jail.

The fourth section is devoted to the "Macedonian Question" as it stood at that time in the context of Yugoslav-Greek relations and the Macedonian minority in Greece is referred to as "the most complicated issue" standing between the two states. In this section a variety of measures are recommended for implementation with the aim of maintaining good relations and at the same

time protecting the interests of the Macedonian minority in Greece.

The fifth and final part of the report: "The activities of the Greek Consulate in Skopje", covers the espionage affair. I will quote this section of the report in full and not offer any further commentary, as none is needed:

At the trial of the two espionage groups in February and March 1952 in Skopje, it was proven that the Consul and two administrators at the Greek Consulate in Skopje operated in an anti-Yugoslav manner. They engaged citizens of Yugoslavia on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia and payed them to gather information about the Yugoslav army's garrisons in Skopje and Titov Veles, about the position of military units, about command structures, about the type of military aeroplanes in Skopje, about the officers in UDB-a, about the place of residence of individuals in the leadership of the Republic of Macedonia, about the Aegean Association, etc. They participated in the organisation of the unlawful migration of our citizens to Greek territory. They supplied instructions to their informants to write threatening letters, which denounce our government. On request of State Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, the previous Consul in Skopje was removed, while the two administrators remain at their posts in the Consulate.

These administrators continue to take an active part in propaganda against Yugoslavia. They attack individuals in our leadership as uneducated simpletons, who are creating a dictatorship, etc. They speak of the Republic of Macedonia as an artificial creation, asserting that niether Macedonians or the Macedonian language exist. They satirise our development, socio-political system, etc.

These administrators, delay the issue of visas to our import-export businesses, or they deny them, informing them that they are undesirable individuals, etc. They hinder individuals and groups who want to visit Greece and issue them with visas as long as 5, 6 and even more months.

The Aegean Macedonians who came to our country prior to 1941, are rudely returned their passports and told that they will never gain an entry visa to Greece. The issue of passports to refugees from Aegean Macedonia is intentionally

delayed, and they lay the blame on our authorities who supposedly don't issue them with exit visas. They inform them that they are enemies of Greece, which will be cleansed. They doubled the expense for passports. In every way they hinder the repatriation of those people, and they only issue passports to their compromised operatives.

On account of the celebration of the Ilinden Uprising in 1953, the new Greek Consul, Heraklidis, demonstratively left the museum and made a bigoted statement in relation to the relief map of Macedonia which showed the ethnic boundaries at the time of the Ilinden Uprising in 1903, which included parts of present day Greek territory. For that reason, the Greek Ambassador in Belgrade, Kapetanidis, lodged a protest with the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry, asserting that the map of the Republic of Macedonia also included Greek territories up to Kavala. The Consul in Skopje informed the Greek government that in the Republic of Macedonia, a book was published which attacks Greece and its King, and the Greeks, via our embassy in Athens, intervened [protested]. However, such a book was not published, all that occurred was that some materials were collected for a work on the Macedonian question....

By Dr. Dimitar Ljorovski-Vamvakovski.

**Article translated from Macedonian
by George Vlahov of the AMHRC**





BOOK LAUNCH: **On Macedonian Matters**

Melbourne 17/6/2015 - *On Macedonian Matters* is the title of a new book edited by Professor Victor Friedman (University of Chicago) and Dr. Jim Hlavac (Monash University) that was recently released by the international academic publishing house: *Verlag Otto Sagner*. The book contains 15 chapters written by various scholars from a variety of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. These texts emerged from discussions at an international scholarly conference which was facilitated by the Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee (AMHRC) at Monash University in 2013.

The focus is on modern Macedonian history, as the subtitle of the book indicates: *From the Partition and Annexation of Macedonia in 1913 to the Present*. From the publisher's blurb, we learn that a common theme running through the book is a concern about the subjection of the Republic of Macedonia to "blockade politics" and an "absence of respect and recognition for Macedonian language, nationality and ethnicity".

The AMHRC will host the Australian launch of the book in Melbourne on Wednesday 24 June, 7.00pm at Franceska's Bar - 222 High St. Northcote. Co-editor of the book, Jim Hlavac, along with other chapter authors, will be present to discuss the significance of this new publication. Entry is free and all are welcome. Please confirm your attendance by emailing the AMHRC: info@macedonianhr.org.au

Copies of the book will be available for purchase on the night of the launch, though it would be wise to reserve a copy for purchase in advance of the launch, by emailing the AMHRC, as availability is limited.

Indeed, for those of you who want to purchase a copy of the book but cannot attend the launch, because you do not live in Melbourne or any other reason, the book can be ordered from the AMHRC website here: <http://macedonianhr.org.au/contents/111>

For an alternative method of purchasing the book, please email the AMHRC. The book is selling very rapidly and we are likely to be soon sold out of stock.

Thanks to Diane Kitanoski of the AMHRC for her photography on the night.

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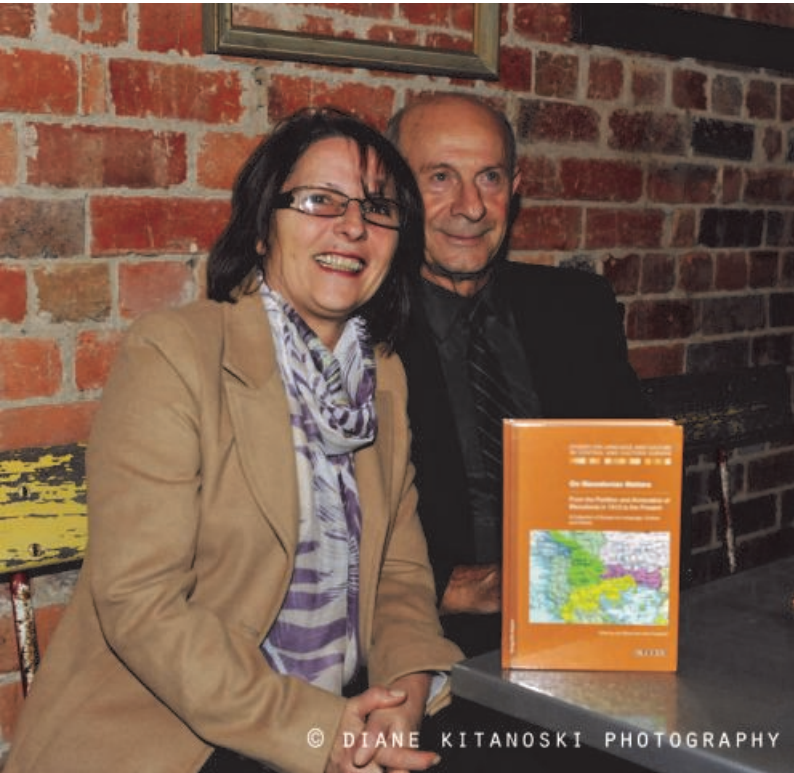
Established in 1984, the **Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee (AMHRC)** is a non-governmental organisation that informs and advocates before international institutions, governments and broader communities about combating racism and promoting human rights. Our aspiration is to ensure that Macedonian communities and other excluded groups throughout the world, are recognised, respected and afforded equitable treatment. For more information please visit www.macedonianhr.org.au, email info@macedonianhr.org.au or via [+61 3 9329 8960](tel:+61393298960).



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BOOK LAUNCH:

On Macedonian Matters





BOOK LAUNCH:

On Macedonian Matters





6 April 2015

The Director
Immigration Museum
PO Box 666
Melbourne VIC 3001

Dear Director,

I write in relation to information contained on one of your interactive displays relating to the religious affiliation of persons from the Republic of Macedonia.

The information indicates that the major religion in 2011 of Victorians born in Macedonia is the Greek Orthodox religion (10, 946 persons), followed by Orthodox (4,074 persons) and then Islam (2081) etc. This information is factually incorrect. The major religious denomination in Macedonia overwhelmingly is the Macedonian Orthodox religion followed by about 65% of the population. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html>, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222453.pdf>. The Greek Orthodox Church does not exist as a legal ecclesiastical institution in the Republic of Macedonia and there are no churches, shrines or temples under its jurisdiction. The Eastern Orthodox religion is not a monolithic region under the aegis of a single Orthodox Church authority. All Orthodox communities have their own national Orthodox churches and hierarchies and the Macedonian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous church, as are the Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Assyrian, Greek Orthodox churches etc.

The results of the 2011 Australian Census relating to persons born in Macedonia provide the following information on Orthodox religious affiliation: 86.6 % were of the Eastern Orthodox faith, Eastern Orthodox being the category under which those responding Macedonian Orthodox are grouped. Nowhere in this document is Greek Orthodox mentioned.

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2014/former_yugoslav_republic_macedonia.pdf.

According to the Victorian Community Profile: 2011 Census for persons born in the Republic of Macedonia, produced by the Victorian Government's Multicultural Affairs Commission and based on the 2011 Census statistics (or as they indicate: " Religions are coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Religions Groups (ASCRG), Second Edition, Revision 1, 2011 (Catalogue No. 1266.0)") , 9,904 persons born in Macedonia professed the Macedonian Orthodox faith (54.1%), 3,999 Eastern Orthodoxy (21.8%), 1,041 Greek Orthodoxy (5.7%) and Islam 2,080 (11.4%). <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/documents/2013/Censusfactsheetscommunityprofiles/commprofiles/16-fyrom.pdf> . Thus, according to this official source, in Victoria 75.9% of persons born in Macedonia are adherents of the Macedonian Orthodox or Eastern Orthodox faiths, whereas only 5.7% follow the Greek Orthodox faith.

It is therefore quite clear that the information in your touch screen display is incorrect and I would request that it be changed to reflect the fact that the dominant Orthodox faith amongst Victorians born in Macedonia is the Macedonian Orthodox faith.



I would also like to point out that your use of the name "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" is considered offensive by the Macedonian community of Victoria which originates not only from the Republic of Macedonia, but also those parts of ethnographic Macedonia which now form part of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania. Please note that the official name of the country is the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia has not changed its name to "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), and that over 140 countries in the world have recognised and established diplomatic relations with Macedonia under that name, including the USA, China Russia, UK . The "name", "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", was adopted by the UN -and only the UN- as a temporary reference under Greek pressure in April 1993 and it is not incumbent on any country or institution to use it when referring to the Republic of Macedonia, either at the UN or in their bilateral relations.

The Immigration Museum, as an independent, not-for-profit incorporated association, is not legally bound to refer to Macedonia by this "name". Macedonians consider this "name" to be extremely offensive and denationalising and I would request that you desist from using it when referring to Macedonia. The only terms which are acceptable to Macedonia, Macedonians and the large Macedonian community in Victoria are Macedonia or the Republic of Macedonia.

Yours sincerely

Dr Chris Popov

Executive Member, Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee



ANNUAL REPORT

on the **Human Rights** situation of the **Macedonians** in Bulgaria 2014 part 2

Denial of Justice

Due to the lack of trust in Bulgarian institutions which has built up over the years, Macedonians rarely resort to a defence of their rights through the courts or commissions tasked with tackling discrimination. All attempts made in the past had led to one and the same result- denial of justice. In 2014 we were faced with a concrete case of denial of justice by the Commission for the Fight against Discrimination. The matter in question related to a complaint lodged at the Commission by the OMO "Ilinden" activist, Darinka Tapanska, in April 2013. The reason for the complaint was that the State-owned Radio Blagoevgrad had refused to broadcast a paid advertisement for a Macedonian festival which had been permitted by the authorities under the pretext that the organization was not registered and anti-Constitutional. The Commission dragged out consideration of the case for a year and five months before it made a final decision, however in the intervening period it made several attempts to put an end to the case. From the massive amount of correspondence exchanged at the time that the case was being considered, it became clear that the Commission was more concerned about putting an end to the case rather than the discrimination which had occurred. On 11 September 2014 the Commission, which consisted of a five member panel, made its decision and declared Tapanska's complaint to be invalid. In its decision the Commission stated that it considered that the broadcasting of OMO "Ilinden"'s announcement "would have misled a large number of listeners regarding the legitimacy of OMO "Ilinden" independently of the fact such a legal entity was not registered in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the country."

Denial of Justice on the Grounds of Discrimination in the Work Place

In April 2013 a notice was placed next to the coffee machine in the MIA (Ministry of internal affairs) in Blagoevgrad which read: "Coffee is 100 Macedonian dinars for spies, enemies of the people and people of another nationality". This notice was intended for Yanka Stoyanova Tapanska, an officer in the same section of the MIA who openly manifested her Macedonian consciousness, had completed her higher education in the Republic of Macedonia and had subsequently become unpopular among some of her colleagues because of her uncompromising fight against breaches of the law and the rules of this same institution which resulted in several policemen being punished. It became apparent from several additional uncensored words which had been written on the notice that it was intended for her; her name had even been written out on it. Even though she took up the matter with her superior, chief police inspector Strahil Antalavichev, he did not order that the notice be removed. When Tapanska herself removed the notice, he insisted that she hand it over which she refused to do. On 24. 04.2013 she lodged a complaint with the Inspectorate of MIA regarding breaches of the code of ethics by an official of the MIA.

The Inspectorate sent the complaint to the Directorate of the MIA in Blagoevgrad (e.g. to the institution being complained against) so that an investigation could take place. As a result on 27 May 2013, a response was received which indicated that the notice was not a serious matter and "that no offence or slander which harmed her honor and dignity was established to have taken place". Moreover, it was found that there was no violation of the Code of Ethics and the complaint was dismissed. The mother of the vic-

tim, Darinka Gavrilova Tapanska. submitted a complaint regarding this matter to the Prosecutor's Office (№ 513/2014), however on 17.3.2014 the Regional Prosecutor's office in Blagoevgrad refused to initiate criminal proceedings without the gathering of additional evidence. It then delivered the same verdict as had the MIA in May 2013 and moreover did so without specifying its reasons for doing so; namely, that there was no breach in the Code of Ethics. Yanka Tapanska then submitted a complaint to the Commission for the Fight against Discrimination. The Commission invalidly allowed the case to proceed and set a date for a first hearing on 24.11.2014, without collating all the evidence submitted by the complainant and additionally ignored the request for the withdrawal of the Prosecutor on the grounds that he is related to the policemen who were defendants in the case

Yanka Tapanska requested that all documentation relevant to the case be provided to her and furthermore observed that not only had there been no action taken regarding her request for the withdrawal of the Prosecutor, but that only two of the five pieces of evidence submitted by her had been tendered, which would have most certainly facilitated the taking of a negative decision by the Commission. Yanka Tapanska submitted an objection requesting that all evidence be tendered and considered and that the Prosecutor be withdrawn. To date the Commission has not brought down its decision on this case. Meanwhile Tapanska was unlawfully dismissed from the MIA Blagoevgrad, without there being regard for the fact that she is protected under law due to being considered an invalid. She is currently involved in court proceedings regarding this matter as well.

Hate Speech

Despite their lack of involvement in anti-state and anti-social activities, the very existence of Macedonian organizations is treated as an activity directed against the Bulgarian nation and as a form of separatism. The absence of involvement in separatist activities does not prevent Macedonian organizations from regularly being labeled anti-Bulgarian and separatist in the media. The registration of a Macedonian organization is compared to being as unacceptable as the registra-

tion of a fascist or extremist left organization and even one which strives to make Bulgaria become part of the Islamic state.

Hate speech against Macedonians is found particularly on Internet forums. Individual participants in the forums are the objects of such attacks, as well as all people with a Macedonian consciousness in general. Negative opinions, ideas and insults abound on such forums. Macedonians are regularly called Serb-lovers, FYROMians and traitors and are subjected to all kinds of insults and threats. Such speech regularly remains unpunished by the moderators.

Hate speech continues to be expressed with impunity in the media and is disseminated by influential persons in society and representatives of academic circles. For example Bozhidar Dimitrov in an article for the Bulgarian newspaper "Politics" entitled "A Macedonian Nation Does Not Exist" stated as follows: "I consider that due to the policy of Macedonianism which was imposed by force, we need to take corresponding measures in Strasbourg and the Hague in order for it to be recognized as a crime against humanity. Because in reality it has been imposed with the repression of over 150, 000 Bulgarians in Macedonia. This is why an investigation is needed as to whether this is genocide." In Bulgaria the terms Macedonist and Macedonianism are used to signify Macedonian consciousness and self-determination which are treated in this case as crimes against humanity. The only critical remarks in relation to this statement by this famous Bulgarian politician and program broadcaster appeared in the satirical newspaper "Starshel (Hornet)" and consisted of two sentences. No one else thought it necessary to react or condemn such a statement. In an interview under the characteristically familiar title "A Macedonian Nation Does Not Exist", Dimitrov speaks of the "ultimate victory over Macedonianism and characterizes it as one of the most grotesque social phenomena of the 20th century and last remaining features of the Comintern as it was precisely this body which posited the existence of a Macedonian nation in 1934." It is evident that "Macedonianism" is taken to be an enemy which has to be defeated and the Macedonian nation a gro-

(Continued on page 54)

tesque phenomenon. Bozhidar Dimitrov is not the only one engaged in such activities. Professor Plamen Pavlov openly treats Macedonian consciousness as being equivalent to ignorance, brainwashing, lack of literacy and a lack of desire to be sufficiently intelligent. Neither the Prosecutor's office, nor the Commission for the Fight against Discrimination concern themselves with these or other similar cases. In this regard 2014 continued the tradition of not penalizing hate speech against Macedonians.

Lack of Representation in the Media

Although the Macedonian question was a frequent topic in the Bulgarian media in the past year, no media organization sought out or expressed the opinion of persons with a Macedonian consciousness, even in cases when discussion of matters which directly concerned them arose. Their opinion is also not sought out in connection with the frequent disputes which arise with Republic of Macedonia. The right of reply has also been violated. When in September 2014 Dr Stoyko Stoykov wrote a response to the latest series of provocations by Bozhidar Dimitrov against the Macedonians and sent it to the Bulgarian media, none of them published it, nor was it referred to at all, even by those who disseminated Dimitrov's text.

Death Threats

Macedonian activists in Bulgaria often find themselves subjected to threats of murder or violence. In the past, such threats have been received by the newspaper "Narodna Volya" (People's Will) and its editor (public threats in the media, followed up by telephone threats). Up until 2010, members of OMO "Ilinden" PIRIN were threatened in the media by politicians, parliamentarians and mayors with imprisonment, exile and calls for them to be shot in the streets. Until 2006, activists from the party OMO "Ilinden" PIRIN, such as co-chair Stoyko Stoykov (2005) and others, received such threats.

During 2014, a particularly serious case involving a song which was composed in 2011 (and which continued to be disseminated thereafter) and which glorified murder came to light. The "victim" in this song is the famous Macedonian activist in Bulgaria, Professor Stefan Vlahov Micov, whose university career was

ruined because of his public pro-Macedonian stance. The song was composed by the group "Vojvoda" (Guerilla Commander)", and in it the following words are sung about him: "He was Stefan the Vlach's son, he was an evil man and I waited a long time before I killed him". As was to be expected, the institutions of the state did not show any interest in investigating this matter and no investigation has been conducted to date.

Conclusion

During 2014 the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria continued to be denied, organizations of persons possessing a Macedonian consciousness were refused registration, the authorities refused to engage in dialogue with representatives of the minority and Macedonians continued to be the subjects of hate speech, threats and discrimination. Stereotypes which paint them as traitors, apostates, enemies of Bulgaria and separatists continued to abound. The authorities did nothing to bring about an improvement in this situation and the institutions of the state did not concern themselves with instances of discrimination and rejected the attempts made by individual Macedonians to seek their protection.

Translated by

Dr. Chris Popov of the AMHRC



ABOUT MHRMI & AMHRC

Macedonian Human Rights Movement International (MHRMI) has been active since 1986. The Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee (AMHRC) has been active since 1984.

Both MHRMI and AMHRC are non-governmental organisations that inform and advocate about combating racism and promoting human rights. Our joint aspiration is to ensure that Macedonian communities and other excluded groups throughout the world, are recognised, respected and afforded equitable treatment.

RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

The AMHRC and MHRMI are part of an international Macedonian network that spans Australia, North America and Europe, including:



AUSTRALIAN MACEDONIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

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North Melbourne, 3051
Telephone +61 3 9329 8960
Email info@macedonianhr.org.au
Website www.macedonianhr.org.au



MACEDONIAN HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT INTERNATIONAL

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Website www.mhrmi.org



MACEDONIAN ALLIANCE FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The political party of the Macedonians in Albania

Website www.macedoniansinalbania.org



EUROPEAN FREE ALLIANCE—RAINBOW

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MACEDONIAN SOCIETY "ILINDEN" TIRANA

A Macedonian cultural association in Tirana, Albania

Website www.ilinden-tirana.com



NOVA ZORA

A pro-Macedonian newspaper based in Aegean Macedonia, Greece, edited by Dimitri Jovanov and with a printed circulation of 20,000 copies per month

Website novazora.gr



NARODNA VOLJA

A Pro-Macedonian newspaper based in Pirin Macedonia, Bulgaria, edited by Jan Pirinski and Stojko Stojkov. The first edition was published in 1980

Website www.narodnavolja.com

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