

Contents

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3	AMHRC Statement on the Name
	Agreement

- 4 Проглас II Апел до Македонската Јавност
- 6 About the Name Agreement George Vlahov
- 10 Nationalist Mobilisation in Greece Dr. Dimitar Vamvakovski
- 14 EFA Declaration on Macedonian Minorities
- 16 Macedonia's Amnesty Laws Dr. Vasko Nastevski
- 26 The MPL & Pirinsky Victor Sinadinoski
- 29 A Life in the Wild Blue Yonder Dr. Michael Seraphinoff
- 33 Interview with DJ Mike Steva John Tsiglev
- 39 Victorian Government Grant for Macedonian Cultural Centre MOCMV



AMHRC Statement on Proposed Name Change

Melbourne, Australia - 20-Jun-2018

he AMHRC unequivocally rejects the proposed arrangement to change the name of the Republic of Macedonia, signed in Prespa last Sunday.

We do not recognise the document as a legitimate agreement in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. Moreover, with respect to the content of the arrangement, we find it to be in contravention of international law and fundamental human rights principles.

The AMHRC calls upon Macedonian citizens to voice their rejection of the proposed arrangement now and at any subsequent referendum.

The AMHRC, once again, call to the Macedonian government to withdraw from the name negotiations and actively seek legal remedies

available to it within the United Nations to achieve the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia under its democratically chosen name. Given that over 130 countries have already recognised the Republic of Macedonia under it constitutional name, we believe that this process can indeed succeed and contribute to the fair and proper entry of the Republic of Macedonia to the desired Euro-Atlantic organisations.

The AMHRC supports efforts to achieve the normalisation of relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece. However this can only be achieved through the signing of a balanced and legitimate agreement between two equal states. Regretfully, the asymmetrical arrangements proposed in the text signed in Prespa do not meet these non-negotiable requirements.



лабоко разочарани од начинот на кој се водеа преговорите за името на нашата држава, Република Македонија, без државна стратегија, без политички и национален консензус и со заобиколување на надлежноста на Претседателот на Републиката,

Несогласувајќи се со содржината на договорот за промена на името, со кој се дерогира не само правото на самоопределување на македонскиот народ, туку и флагрантно се крши принципот на владеење на правото, и Вознемирени поради начинот на кој власта, се справува со секое критичко мислење и отпор, користејќи политички притисоци, медиумска пропаганда, следење нанеистомислениците и нивно јавно дефамирање како "психотични" и "платеници", како и со полициска бруталност од невидени размери во политичката историја,

Укажуваме на следното:

- 1. Поздравувајќи секаков вид на билатерална соработка и стратегиско партнерство, а особено мерки на градење доверба меѓу двете општества на еднакви основи, сепак договорот е во спротивност со одредбите на Уставот и законите, што покажува дека власта не воделе сметка за владеењето на правото, а меѓународниот фактор се водел од прагматичен пристап за ставање крај на спорот, од геополитички причини;
- 2. Промената на Уставот, почнувајќи од преамбулата, повторната промена на некои веќе изменети членови на претходно барање на Грција, како и интервенцијата во сите одредби во кои се споменува Република Македонија, de iure и de facto значи дерогирање на темелниот демократски принцип на народен суверенитет и суверена еднаквост на државите во меѓународните односи;
- 3. Примената на принципот erga omnes во внатрешниот правен и политички поредок не само што значи дека се крши принципот на политичка независност закотвена во актите на ОН, туку на Грција и на пратениците на грчкиот парламент им овозможува да одлучуваат за нашето име;
- 4. Гледано низ историска призма, евентуалното применување на овој договор отвора врата за примена на ригорозни казнени и полициски мерки врз македонските е граѓани, односно може да доведе до инсталирање на полициска држава која ќе биде вклучена во бизарен процес на "градење на нова нација" сето она што во минатото го правеле туѓи и окупаторски власти, сега ќе треба да го

извршува македонската власт врз сопствените граѓани;

5. Ветувањата за брзо интегрирање во НАТО и ЕУ се лажни, бидејќи зависат од финалното решение, кое не е ниту на повидок, колку поради внатрешните констелации, толку поради состојбите на грчката политичка сцена. Членството во ЕУ не зависи од овој оговор. Напротив, потребни се силни внатрешни реформи во сите сфери, за што оваа влада досега се покажа неспособна.

Поради тоа

Ги повикуваме сите граѓани, здруженија и политички партии да се обединат околу овој апел, а со цел спречување натамошно кршење на уставот и законите, евентуална манипулација со двосмислено референдумско прашање, вклучувајќи и бојкот доколку дојде до референдум! Бараме пратениците, но и од вонпарламентарните партии, да ги употребат сите институционални и вонинституционални демократски методи заради отворање на рационална дебата за нерационалното "решение" кое ни се наметнува со притисоци, уцени и лажни ветувања!

Влада која не работи на зачувување на името на државата, но и на градење атмосфера на дијалог и кохезија на граѓаните без разлика на потеклото и идеологијата, на владеење на правото, борба против корупција, економски прогрес, подобар животен стандард не е легитимна.

Иницијативниот одбор на Прогласот "200"

About Kolbe, the Name and the Agreement

George Vlahov

Preamble

The Occidental power that is present, while propounding to serve enlightened freedom in a struggle against Eastern ghosts, mercilessly removes from a well nigh powerless peripheral group, the right to determine its self-understanding, in order to divert a larger peripheral society that has been Gaslighting the lesser group. As is often the case, the diversion, the sacrifice of the gambit pawn, is dedicated toward maintaining a narcissistic and implausible, but somehow still effective, illusion, that romanticises

the miserable reality of the ambient abuser. So much for the *hoi polloi*, though a bird's eye view of this chronicle reveals that certain ersatz intellectual associates of the gaslit community, are no less pathetic.

The Proposed Arrangement

In relation to the recent name agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece, a member of Macedonia's diplomatic corps, declared that what was actually signed and the interpretations of the document, politicians are presenting to their respective domestic audiences, are two different things. An article by "On the Name Kica Kolbe. Macedonia and the Agreement" published by mainstream outlets in Macedonia on 14/6/2018), offers an interpretation that is in accord with the positive spin of the Macedonian government. The article has been distributed widely on social media by Macedonians who are in favour of the agreement.

Kolbe begins her article by reminding readers that Macedonia's first President, Kiro Gligorov, signed an agreement to negotiate the name and then proceeds to imply that from that moment, an eventual change to the name of the country, became inevitable. A rather simplistic and at bottom, false view of the matter. We can respond just as simplistically and yet stand much closer to the truth, by asserting that yes, Gligorov signed, but of course he was wrong to sign an agreement that fundamentally basis contravenes the of sovereign lawhoi and the rights Macedonia's citizens. Moreover, as several experts in the field of international law have explained, the original contravenes agreement the regulations of the UN itself and consequently, could be annulled via legal action. Obviously a name change was not inevitable, rather, the reality is that successive Macedonian governments, like Gligorov, have failed to fulfill responsibilities to the state and the citizenry of the Republic of Macedonia. The fact that these patently relevant matters are completely ignored by Kolbe, makes it plain that her text is little more than emotional spin designed to serve the

government's interpretation of the agreement.

Kolbe then proceeds to make a series of thoroughly unsubstantiated remarks about how Gligorov is supposedly, positively perceived by those who reject this new agreement, but none-the-less accurately, concludes that Gligorov was "naive" to believe that the dispute would be settled in three months. This passage lacks clarity, though Kolbe does attempt to explain why she has focused on Gligorov. She states, that somehow, the political lives of Gligorov and Boris TrajkovskI, another former President. remind Macedonia's problematic (from the Balkan Wars in 1912-13 and onwards); a past which will, according to Kolbe, continue to play a role in determining Macedonia's future. To an extent one can agree with this, but one cannot agree that it provides a justification for the signing of an agreement that contravenes the basis of international law and elementary ethical standards. That type of argument implicitly supports a form of historical determinism that is extreme and untenable. As we have already mentioned, there are legal alternatives that might have been and still could be, pursued. All Macedonian governments have failed to exercise their agency in this regard, but the agency to pursue such a course, most definitely exists; Kolbe's discourse is attempting mislead her readers by implying that the name agreement is to be viewed as an inevitable natural occurrence, like an earthquake.

Next, Kolbe asserts that the "core" of Macedonia or the Republic of Macedonia, it is not clear what she means ("јадрото на Македонија"), is the

Macedonian language and Macedonian identity. Kolbe might be accused of racism for making such a statement Macedonia, of course, possesses other ethnic groups languages. It is ironic that self-proclaimed anti- nationalist Macedonians are enthusiastically sharing Kolbe's article on social media. That aside, her purpose is clear, it is to provide justification for the argument that the new agreement is to be welcomed, because, in her view, it preserves Macedonian identity and the Macedonian language. A very questionable claim, which we will return to later.

"To reiterate, her claim is:
 Macedonians do not really care if they lose the right to name their own country, so long as they do not lose their identity as Macedonians - to make such a claim without evidence, is audacious, to put it mildly."

First, we again need to highlight another of Kolbe's nefarious omissions, namely, the "core" of any nation-state, involves, among other things, the legal right to name itself. Kolbe dubiously attempts to soften the blow of losing that right, by writing that Greek nationalists extremist wanted the word 'Macedonia' erased from the name of the Republic of Macedonia and that therefore, the agreement should be a viewed as a miraculous victory. Bravo! The most extreme

racists in Greece did not get their way, Macedonia successfully struck a deal with the "moderate" racists! The reality is that citizens

"...the name change, if it is made, will not be a freely made choice, but an abusive external imposition."

of a foreign country have taken away rights from Macedonia's citizens. Kolbe explicitly admits this, but qualifies it by arguing that the real fear was always that a change in the name of the country would also alter the identity of Macedonians.

Who is Kolbe speaking for when making such a claim? Does she present any evidence that the bulk of her fellow citizens share her view on this issue? None. She merely projected has her feelings, her perspectives, onto a nation of two million. reiterate. her claim Macedonians do not really care if they lose the right to name their own country, so long as they do not lose their identity Macedonians - to make such a without evidence, audacious, to put it mildly. There can be no doubt that many citizens of the Republic Macedonia, take the protection of their rights, much more seriously than Kolbe does. Kolbe descends lower, by indirectly even

referring to those Macedonians as "unrealistic" and "pathetic". In support of her position, Kolbe underlines that Macedonians often refer to Vardarska, Pirinska and Egejska Makedonia in everyday communication, but that is irrelevant - the name change, if it is made, will not be a freely made choice, but an abusive external imposition.

Inconsistency

relation In to external impositions, we have often heard certain citizens of the Republic of Macedonia utter expletives at Diaspora Macedonians who are opposed to a name change, while informing them that, as they no longer reside in Macedonia and are no longer citizens Macedonia, they have no say so the Republic about Macedonia's name etc. This logic could be accepted but for a glaring contradiction in the position of those making that argument, a contradiction that they, remarkably, appear to be unaware of, i.e. their position, by definition, involves accepting that another group non-citizens/non-residents of the Republic of Macedonia, do have a say, namely, the citizens of Greece. The inconsistency, is beneath contempt. (Incidentally, I have been informed that Kolbe resides in Germany.)

Speaking of inconsistency, it would be deficient on my part to apply the word *inconsistent* to the following stunningly absurd claim made by Kolbe in her article: "The Macedonian language and the Macedonian identity are the name of the state" (Македонскиот јазик и македонскиот идентитет се името на државата.) The more I looked at that this emotional, nonsensical sentence, the more I wondered, how is it, that apparently sensible people are promoting this text!?

It relates to an issue we need to now return to - the preservation of Macedonian identity and language. On a positive note, I am in agreement with Kolbe where she writes that it would have been a bitter pill for the Greek negotiators to swallow. But even here I cannot express complete accord with Kolbe. This part of the agreement is ambiguous.

Article 7.4 states: The second party notes that its official language, the Macedonian language, is within the group of South Slavic languages.

The governments of both countries have already expressed different views about apparently simple sentence. Greek government representatives have claimed that the Macedonian language will be footnoted with that information in international institutions, like the UN. The Macedonian government has denied this and we do not know who to believe. The issue is important, if the Greek side is correct, then it would be a practice that qualifies the nature of the Macedonian language in a way that no other language is. Note well, this has nothing to do with the accuracy or inaccuracy of the information, the issue is equality of treatment.

More fundamentally, like so many international agreements, the complete import of this agreement will not be revealed until the agreement has been ratified and put into practice. This is another serious concern, if Macedonia's government proceeds with a referendum, the country's citizens will not know what exactly they are voting for

or against.

There is much more ambiguity in relation to the identity issue. Article 1.3b states: The nationality of the Second Party shall be Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia, as it will be registered in all travel documents.

Again, different interpretations have been offered by Skopje and Athens. However, taken on face the identity marker value, Macedonian has not been preserved, rather it will be replaced bv the awkward concoction "Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia". In any case, it is not likely to become clear who is right, until the agreement is ratified and implemented - then of course, it will be too late to express objections. As with the language, the government has a serious obligation to clarify the issue, immediately.

Conclusions

This brief discussion does not anywhere come near to exhausting all the problematic surrounding agreement. Kolbe wants her readership to simply accept the agreement on the basis of language and identity. Yet, it is not only those issues that remain unclarified, there is so much more in the agreement: economic trademark matters, questions about limitations on freedom of speech, the settlement disputes, minority rights, there is even a clause about how history is to be taught in each country. example, clause For the pertaining to history appears to permit both sides to have equal input. However, that's viewpoint that ignores article 7.2, in which the Republic of accepts the: Macedonia the

Hellenic civilisation, history, culture, and heritage of that region from antiquity to present day.

In other words, the Macedonian side has accepted the ancient to Greek national continuity myth, which means there will be very little that the Macedonian negotiators will be legitimately able to propose in regard to revising the teaching of national history in Greece. It is that remarkable anti-nationalist Macedonians and Greeks, have yet to express opposition to this clause. One wonders if Kolbe even read the whole agreement, if she had, she surely would not have written "the nationalistic propaganda on both sides of the border needs to disarmed" - well, be agreement certainly does not allow for that on the Greek side of the border.

To conclude, the Macedonian proponents of this agreement need to offer much more than Kolbe's text, indeed, both sides, for and against, need less populism and more detail. In other words, both sides need to make better use of reason, it does not pay to become emotional about politics. One hopes the will be conducted debates respectfully, though the early signs indicate that Macedonian society is heading for severe polarisation, which is another reason why the government needs to seriously re-consider its position.

Melbourne 15/6/2018

P.S.

We do not find this agreement acceptable and so we are opposed to the government's proposed referendum. However, the government is determined to

proceed, yet in all of the public banter regarding the agreement, have not seen any explanation of when the Greek parliament is expected to decide on the acceptability of this agreement, by which I do not mean final ratification, which is a different matter. Whether one is in favour of or opposed to the agreement, there should be a general accord that the Republic of Macedonia should not have to proceed through the trauma of a referendum only to find it was needless, because the Greek parliament chose to reject the agreement. It would be wise on the part of the Macedonian government to at least insist on that much.



Nationalist Mobilisation: the Protests in Falonika & Athens

Dr. Dimitar Ljorovski Vamvakovski

Translated from Macedonian by George Vlahov

Introduction

The mass protests in the cities of Salonika and Athens, held in January and February of this year, were viewed by many as identical to those in the early 1990s. Several observers were surprised by the level of nationalistic feeling still exhibited by a substantial number of Greek citizens in relation to the Macedonian issue, while others, manipulated the attendance figures to suit an agenda designed to either praise or denigrate the import of the protests. The choreographed nature of the recent protests is an aspect in common with the protests that were staged during the early 1990s. At the latter time, the Greek anthropologist Karakasidou, Anastasia emphasised the role of popular culture in the nationalistic mobilisation of ordinary Greeks. ¹ We shall argue that the recent protests cannot be understood without a discussion of populist non-state actors in the Greek world.

Before doing that, in order to understand this reiteration of Greek nationalism and the lack of difficulty in mobilising Greeks around the so called "Macedonian question" in the context of the name dispute, we need to offer a short elaboration on the essence of the problem.

What's At Stake

In the scholarly world it is generally accepted that the current "Macedonian conflict" is not only a dispute between two Balkan states (Macedonia and Greece), but rather a multi-dimensional issue, in relation to which, others, including other Balkan nation-states, have their own distinct views and interests. Thus the naming dispute

between Greece and Macedonia is only a segment of the "Macedonian Question". Moreover, the problem is not just about the name of the Republic of Macedonia, as the anthropologist Loring Danforth has explained, it is also a dispute about Macedonian identity, which both Macedonians and Greeks, lay claim to.

Consequently, again, according to Danforth, the dispute involves conflicting claims to names, flags, territories and history. Though at bottom it is a dispute about who controls the meaning of the word 'Macedonian'. ² This is where the crucial elements of disagreements between Macedonia and Greece are to be found. It is apt to now quote a statement made in February this year, by the Foreign Minister of Greece, Nikolas Kotsias: "I think that both sides agree that a solution needs to be sought. Skopie believes that it should be easy to find one, we believe that it should be a solution that will stand the test of time and will be fair." ³

According to Kotsias if the government in Skopje believes that an "easy solution" simply involves a change in the name of the state for international usage, it is mistaken and he has implied that not only does the name of the country need to change erga omnes, but that the basic identity markers of the Macedonian nation, will also have to be changed. Thus, Athens, under the guise of concerns about "irredentism" and via the negotiations on the name of the Macedonian state, is attempting to impose a redefinition of the Macedonian nation, language, culture and history. In relation to the President of the that, International Human Rights Federation, Dimitris Hristopoulos, who praised the efforts of the Tsipras government to find a compromise, has asserted that official Greek claims about "the irredentism of Skopje" are baseless and in essence are designed to undermine the Macedonian nation. ⁴

Nationalism

According to the Greek journalist Tasos Kostopoulos, the successful mobilisation of Greek citizens for the recent protests, especially those who reside in northern Greece, many of whom possess an identity more or less tied to "far off 'lost fatherlands' (Pontus, Asia Minor, Russia, Eastern Rumelia and Thrace), ... can be attributed to a lengthy political education ... by the ideological mechanisms of the Greek state for more than half a century ...". ⁵

The role of Greek state institutions in creating nationalistic fervour around the so called "Macedonian question" is very evident. In fact all modern states play a major role in creating and maintaining nationalism. In short, as Eric Hobsbawm put it, the modern state governs a territorially defined people, which, definition, makes it the supreme "national" agency. 6

According to Ernest Gellner, the manifestation of nationalistic sentiments, can often represent a feeling of anger caused by the violation of a principle and in the current context, it is directly connected to an undermining of how the Greek nation-sate perceives itself and others. ⁷ The perspective of Greek nationalist mythology ⁸ involves a claim that the Greek nation-state possesses a monopoly over the terms 'Macedonia' and 'Macedonian',

the region of Macedonia and its historical legacy. Thus, a different perspective and myth, in this case, emanating from the Republic of Macedonia "is experienced as a historical threat". ⁹ A substantive analysis of the Greek-Macedonian dispute, apart from everything else, needs to take all of that into account.

Eric Hobsbawm asserted that nations are mainly constructed from above. via official institutions and ideologies of states, though they cannot be fully comprehended without an analysis of social forces below the state. ¹⁰ That the Greek state, for a lengthy period, i.e. from the NATO summit in Bucharest 2008 until early in 2018, did not intensely exploit the name dispute within Greek society, contributed towards creating a perception that conditions might ripe for resolving be Furthermore. the severe economic crises experienced by Greece during the same period, contributed to the perception that nationalist sentiment among Greeks had been reduced in favour of more practical concerns. However, it is precisely during moments of economic crises that nationalism is often utilised as a means to maintain order and unity within a society. ¹¹ The crux of the problem in Greece, is the deeply ingrained nationalist beliefs possessed by both ordinary Greek citizens and Greece's political elites. Positive movement on the part of Greece in relation to the name dispute, requires modern a reinterpretation of Greek national ideology, from above, i.e. by the state. That requires a fundamental change in the primary narratives of Greek national mythology and state sponsored initiatives,

education and other state controlled institutions, to effect a change in the thinking of the general populous.

The Role of Non-State Actors

relation to the In recent nationalist mobilisations in Greece, we shall focus on the large protest in Salonika, the unofficial capital of northern Greece. It was staged on January 21 under the motto "Macedonia means Greece". According to Tasos Kostopoulos, the initiative, as with the protests in 2007-08, originated on the other side of Namely, the Atlantic. President of the "Pan-Hellenic Federation of Macedonian Cultural Associations", Georgios Tatsios, immediately prior to the Salonika protest. declared: "Towards the middle of November (2017), our Diaspora in the US informed us that rapid developments on the name question are expected soon and there will be an attempt to finally resolve it". 12 Tatsios further revealed we began strategising in cooperation with the Pan-Macedonian Association across the world." 13 It is obvious that Greek Diaspora organisations played a role in the creation of the nationalistic atmosphere in Greece, especially the Pan-Macedonian Association (established in the US 1947) and the International Hellenic Association, online an community with around 300 academics based in both Greece and the Greek Diaspora. In an age marked by intense globalisation it should come as no surprise that the influence of the Greek Diaspora, on events in Greece, is substantial. 14

A local organisation involved in staging the Salonika protest was Thermeikos Zero Time, which advertises itself as composed of citizens who are not affiliated to any political party. Though the force behind driving demonstration appears to have been the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Macedonian Cultural Associations. It was established in 2014 when the conservative Samaras government was in power. Its goal is to "protect the authentic cultural identity of Macedonian Greeks, from changes, foreign influence and usurpation" and to "defend our Macedonians". name as Actually, their aim is much more substantial than that, they want possession of an exclusive right to use of the term 'Macedonian' for the citizens of northern Greece and also to block any national discourse that questions their view of national history.

"The crux of the problem in Greece, is the deeply ingrained nationalist beliefs possessed by both ordinary Greek citizens and Greece's political elites"

An obvious, long term role in all nationalist mobilisations has been played by the Greek Orthodox Church, especially the diocese located in northern Greece. Special mention needs to

about the "patriotic made activity" of the Bishop Anthimos, who has regularly converted liturgies into nationalistic hate speech against "Skopian and home-grown enemies". That said, it is noteworthy that the Greek clergy, was a very visible aspect of the choreography in Salonika and Athens. ¹⁶ The same can be said about representatives of the Greek military, who attempted to lend the protests an appearance strength, stability resoluteness, in defence of national interests. At the Salonika protest. a retired General. Frangos Frangoulis, delivered a speech that, apart from the usual nationalistic rhetoric one hears at such gatherings, contained a history lecture full of half-truths and an apology for Greece's neo-fascists. 17

We shall end by noting that certain, only recently established, i.e. during the 1990s, private media outlets, including daily periodicals, newspapers, television and radio stations, with a highly selective promotion of information, are also an important factor in the spread of nationalistic propaganda Greece. Lastly, the use of online social media by various nationalistic associations needs to be highlighted, especially by groups in northern Greece, for the purpose of organising transportation to the Salonika protest. We can conclude therefore, by reiterating that the recent nationalistic protests in Greece cannot be understood with a one sided focus on the state, the agency of social forces not directly tied to the state, must also be taken into account.

Endnotes

¹ Anastasia Karakasidou, at the beginning of the 1990s, noted: "In

relation to the Macedonian question, Greek national ideology manifested itself in various forms of popular material culture, such as on T-shirts, lighters, taxis, stickers, telephone cards with the image of Pavlos Melas and advertisements in international media ...". Анастасија Каракасиду, Полиња жито, Ридишта крв, Магор, Скопје, 2002, 271.

- ² Лоринг М. Денфорт, Македонскиот конфликт: етничкиот национализам во транснационалниот свет, Македонска книга, Скопје, 1996, 21.
- ³ Изјава на Никос Коѕијас, "Скопје сака лесно, а ние одржливо решение", 26.2.2018. http://a1on.mk/archives/858807
- ⁴ Δημήτρης Χριστόπουλος, ,,'Ο αλυτρωτισμός των Σκοπίων' και τα μυστικά των Αθηνών", Η εφημεριδα των Συντακτων, 9.2.2018.
- ⁵ Τασος Κωστοπουλος, "Τα γεννητουρια της εθνικοφροσυνης", Η εφημεριδα των Συντακτων, 17.2.2018.
- ⁶ Ерик Хобсбаум, Нациите и национализмот по 1780; програма, мит, стварност, Култура, Скопје, 2003, 117.
- ⁷ Ернест Гелнер, Нациите и национализмот, Култура, Скопје, 2001, 5.
- The French sociologist Dominique Schnapper has explained that nations invent territorial myths and ethnic values, including heroes from a supposed Golden Age, in order to promote a form of ethnicity that nourishes a feeling of belonging to the respective collectives of nationalists. Доминик Шнапер, Заедница на граѓани; кон модерната идеја за нацијата,

Скопје, 2003, 75.

- ⁹ Страшко Стојановски, Од милет до нација; Создавање на нациите и национализмите на Балканот, Штип, 2016, 67, 68.
- ¹⁰ Е. Хобсбаум, Нациите и национализмот по 1780..., 19.
- ¹¹ С. Стојановски, Од милет до нација; Создавање на нациите..., 71.
- 12 Τασος Κωστοπουλος, "Οι συνιστώσες του νέου Μακεδονικού Αγώνα", Η εφημεριδα των Συντακτων, 22.11.2018.
- ¹³ Исто.
- ¹⁴ Л. М. Денфорт, Македонскиот конфликт..., 137.
- 15 Τασος Κωστοπουλος, "Οι συνιστώσες του νέου Μακεδονικού Αγώνα", Η εφημεριδα των Συντακτων, 22.11.2018.
- ¹⁶ At the protest in Athens, a speech delivered by Abbot Metodij Esfimmenski, contained definite expressions of irredentism towards the Republics of Macedonia and Turkey: "We are asking for St. Sophija, Pontus, Gevgelija, Bitola and Asia Minor. Give us back our unliberated fatherlands." religija.mk/za-grchki-monahgevgelija-ibitola-bileneoslobodeni-grchki-teritorii/
- 17 Τασος Κωστοπουλος, "Οι συνιστώσες του νέου Μακεδονικού Αγώνα", Η εφημεριδα των Συντακτων, 22.11.2018.

European Free Alliance Declaration: On the Discrimination Against the Macedonian Minorities in Bulgaria and Greece

EFA General Assembly, Landshut, 13.4.18 on behalf of OMO "Ilinden" - Pirin and EFA - Rainbow/Vinozhito

earing in mind that:

a. The Macedonian minorities living as indigenous populations in Greece and Bulgaria continue to face discrimination and even negation of their existence by the two mentioned countries.

- **b.** 10 years after Bulgaria became EU member the Macedonian minority status has not improved. It is a disgrace that the country acting as President of the EU at present is discriminating against minorities on its territory.
- **c.** ECHR has brought many verdicts against these two countries but to no avail. The judgments are regularly ignored and/or not implemented.
- **d.** The EU inaction encouraged Bulgaria and Greece's policy of negating the existence of the Macedonian minority to be elevated to international level and misuse their position as EU members to block the progress of a candidate country by asking the Republic of Macedonia to renounce its

- constitutional protection of the Macedonian minorities and even negate the foundations of Macedonian national identity as the name, history and language.
- **e.** The eventual success of such policies of negating the existence of a Macedonian nation would transform the Macedonians into a new stateless nation in Europe.
- **f.** The protection of the rights of minorities is not and cannot be an internal problem of the EU member countries but it has to be object of protection by the EU.
- **g.** Relations between nations and countries should be built on equality, democratic foundations and mutual respect.
- **h.** The EU has to undertake an active and principled role in the rightful solution of centuries old conflicts as well as to assure the implementation of the rule of law.

The European Free Alliance declares that it:

- Condemns the policy of discrimination of the Macedonian minorities and the denial of the Macedonian identity in Bulgaria and Greece, members of the EU.
- Condemns the misuse of the status of a member country by Greece and Bulgaria in the achievement of undemocratic causes against the members of the Macedonian minorities on their soil and the blackmail of a candidate country.
- **Condemns** the lack of interest by the EU to resolve the above mentioned problems.
- Calls on Greece and Bulgaria to change their policies on these issues in accordance to the high democratic values of the EU, which include:
 - End of policy of denying existing of Macedonian and other minorities on their territory, and to give these minorities all the right on Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.
 - State that Bulgaria and Greece have to sign European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and to implement it for Macedonian and other minorities and support Macedonian language and culture.
- Calls on the EU bodies for more active engagement in the solution of these issues:
 - Reopening of minority question in EU Bulgarian post monitoring process, and insist of full implementation of Copenhagen criteria.
 - EK to start investigation of situation of Macedonian minorities in Bulgaria and Greece.
- Calls for and will support the creation of necessary European legislative, institutions and bodies for the protection of minority rights.



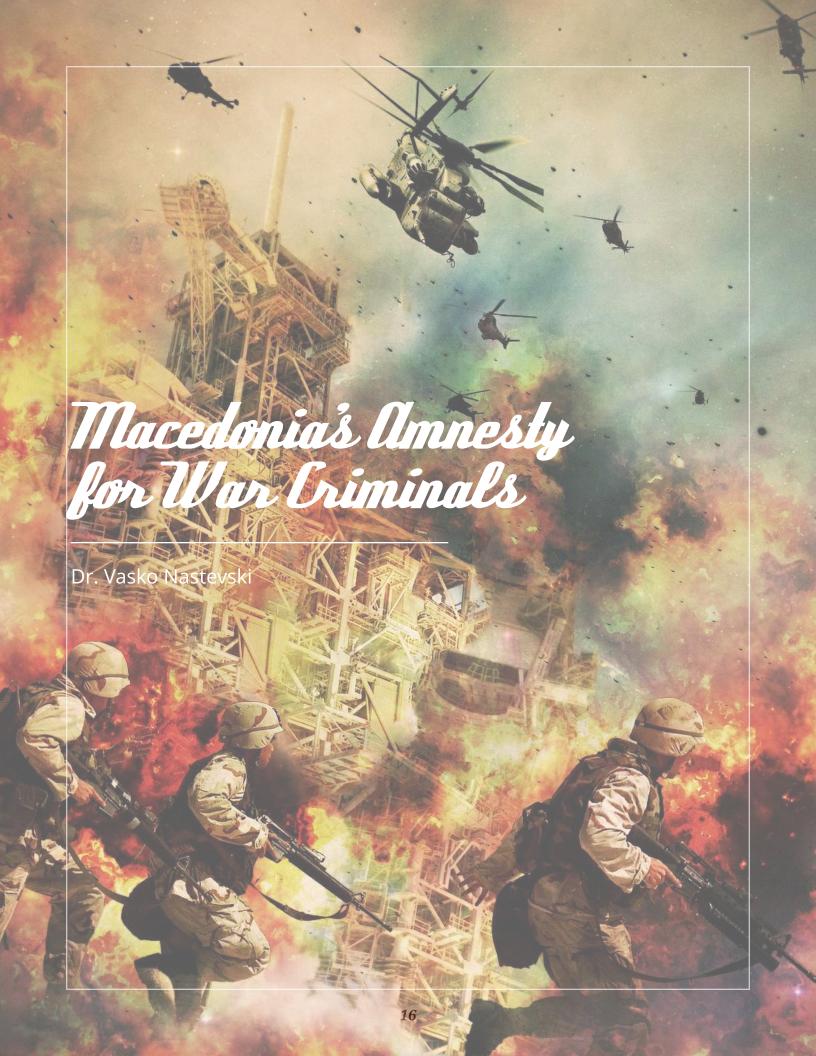
OMO "Ilinden" PIRIN is a political party supporting the rights of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. It has been banned since 2000, despite a 2005 European Court of Human Rights Judgement ruling that the decision was a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

www.omoilindenpirin.org



The European Free Alliance (EFA) is a political party that works to make the idea of a "Europe of the Peoples" a political and cultural reality at the European and international level. It is an umbrella organisation that gathers 40 progressive nationalist, regionalist and autonomist parties throughout the European Union (EU), representing stateless nations, regions and traditional minorities in Europe.

www.e-f-a.org



bserving events in Macedonia today is to witness an alarming moral decline within Macedonian society that manifesting itself in several existential ways. From the readiness of Macedonian 'leaders' to negotiate away the name of the country and the destructive effects this is likely to have on the identity of the Macedonian people; the passive bifurcation of the state evidenced through the proposed making Albanian laws a constitutive language of the participating country; exercises of open historical revisionism, whether as part of agreements with neighbouring countries or simply individual freelancing; the blatant partisan appointments various to Government positions and even the inability to deal with the country's garbage. As the editor the MHR Review has previously identified, the fact that examples such as these exist, blithely enabled by Macedonia's leaders, ultimately reflects a 'widespread anomy in Macedonian society'.[i] It is in this context that we should view Macedonia's Amnesty which sit comfortably alongside these other moral and ethical degradations.

Readers initiated in matters concerning the Republic Macedonia will not be surprised by the trajectory of Macedonia's amnesty for war criminals. Notwithstanding the habitually interventionism self-righteous from the usual international suspects exhorting innovative 'solutions' to what seems like Macedonia's endless tribulations, often unashamedly hypocritical, such as welcoming an amnesty for alleged war criminals as a 'peace' initiative[ii], the most disturbing feature regarding the

war criminals from the 2001 conflict the discernible is (sometimes indifference opportunism) exhibited by 'political Macedonia's own representatives', 'law-makers', 'special advisers', 'judicial overseers', 'cerebral warriors' significant and sections Macedonian society. Indeed, the armed conflict in Macedonia 2001 during between Macedonian security forces and the Albanian paramilitary group, the National Liberation Army, in which numerous allegations of war criminality have been made, gives rise to specific moral, legal political choices Macedonia's polity around how to deal with such allegations. These are all now discussed respectively.

A Moral Question

Criminal law is described as the 'juridical re-enactment of the moral life of a society' and a prerequisite of the criminal law is that there be at least 'a of level minimal moral consensus'.[iii] To this effect, Montesquieu posited that the development of any system of laws reflects an interrelationship with the immanent physical and social environment of a society. Moreover. laws 'should adapted in such a manner to the people for whom they are framed'.[iv] Hence, sociological jurists understand law as a 'social institution to satisfy social wants the claims and demands and expectations involved in the existence of civilized society'.[v] In other words, the law has a social purpose that embraces and reflects immanent conditions, inevitably reflecting the 'end of law'. Accordingly, legal philosophers presuppose that in a modern society, the criminal law (generally) provides the relevant system to 'identify and declare the public wrongfulness of certain kinds of moral wrongdoing, and provide for an appropriate public response to them'.[vi] It is difficult to see how the existence of Macedonia's Amnesty Laws reinforce such a moral posture. Rather they seem to have the effect of diluting the existing criminal laws that identify and declare the offensiveness of war crimes. Indeed, Amnesty laws that seek to absolve individuals from their criminal responsibility instead manifest a type of moral perversion by ignoring the exceptional wrongdoing that has occurred.

To be sure, it is moral—ethical considerations that tend to shape social consciousness and which then impacts on the development of the law.[vii] The purpose of criminal law being:

to achieve a general state of mind in the country in which the unacceptability of these acts is generally recognised, so that the perpetrators become pariahs ... having done something that cannot be sustained and accepted. [viii]

This is ultimately to be achieved by conducting (war crimes) trials, which also cultivates a society's collective memory and provides the narrative content of what is to be shared in such collective memory.[ix] The discourse that converges morality and the law also suggests that the law is never static. On one view, it is a process which develops and changes content as it develops.[x] Indeed, because the law moves in step with history, the so-called future ought may already be immanent in the present, [xi] so that the main function of the law becomes the 'furtherance of the values of a given time and place.'[xii] Moreover, a society's values can be said to be immanent in reality, therefore judgments that refer to these immanent values are to be seen as objective as judgments about reality.[xiii] The perception of the law as an objective reality with a fixed meaning usually originates from a consensus that exists

among the readers of the law. Macedonia's Amnesty Laws provide a reflection of that society's immanent values, it is an objective reality that the criminal law in Macedonia has a blind spot for war criminals from 2001. This is the judgment facing Macedonia, which also seems to be incompatible with the underlying purpose of the law in pursuing justice.

Seeking justice ensures that the law of a given time and place accommodates society's immanent moral values and their perceptions of the perpetrators and the victims and how they fit in the overall social milieu. The primary reason for criminalising such immorality then, is to ensure that those who commit such acts are held accountable in criminal court and punished for them, whilst providing repair for the victims. both morally and materially.

The pursuit of rules — pre-established, known, and accepted — is the end, moreover, not only of law but of all legalistic morals. It is this common aim that makes law and legalistic morality not separate entities but a single continuum. And the name of that continuum is justice. [xiv]

This presupposes justice as a purely retributive objective. Indeed, on one view, the only rationale iustifiable for conducting war crimes trials is pure retribution, suggesting that far from being a 'vulgar or undesirable human emotion, this satisfaction is an understandable and inescapable facet of human behaviour.' [xv] However. divining their perhaps international raison d'etre, criminal tribunals proffer that 'retributive punishment by itself does not bring justice.' [xvi]

> the penalties imposed on accused persons found guilty by the Tribunal must be

directed, on the one hand, at retribution of the said accused, who must see their crimes punished, and over and above that, on other hand, at deterrence, namely dissuading for good those who will attempt in future to perpetrate such atrocities by showing them that international community was not ready to tolerate the violations serious of international humanitarian law and human rights.[xvii]

The concept of deterrence as a rationale for the trial of war criminals is said to 'constitute a powerful weapon in efforts to ensure that such catastrophes will not recur since it reinforces the foundations upon which a society is based. [xviii] But what if underlying society's a foundations is complete moral apathy. What if, instead, a society's intrinsic functioning methodology is based venality, patronage and historical antipathy. How likely is it that any such threat will dissuade malcontents current Macedonia from initiating behaving hostilities or inhumanely during an armed conflict?

To an extent, the way a society conceptualises human nature will determine that society's perception of justice. example, a belief in the nature of people to do what is morally right only when under threat of punishment assumes that only a retributive approach is able to correct social transgressions.[xix] The opposite of this is an assumption that all people should be equally valued in society, therefore supposing a form of restorative justice through a rehabilitative model of punishment.[xx] This recalls the Socratic notion of rationality in human beings, who generally act immorally due to ignorance, but are able to change once they have found knowledge of true virtue. This is perhaps an understanding relied being upon by Macedonia's many Western overseers as it is often peddled as supposed cogent rationale considering that alleged war criminals from the conflict in 2001 have not only been able to reintegrate functioning as identities within general society, but have assumed eminent roles within Government as Ministers, 'law-makers' and otherwise influence vendors. The suggestion being that accordingly, they have been truly 'rehabilitated' and there is no further purpose to be achieved in punishing them. However, as I have written previously and recalling Primo Levi, this is to fundamentally confuse the perpetrators with the victims, which does nothing more than validate former war criminals whilst negating the truth of what happened.

Perhaps even more appalling than this is that it provides war criminals with a type of 'superficial plausibility' by 'mischaracterising and misdescribing' them, dishonestly 'redefining them into something they manifestly are not'. They are not responsible brokers within Macedonian society, despite inheriting titles as Ministers, advisors and law-makers, they are perpetrators of murder. The deeds they have committed is neither opaque to them as they know precisely what they have done. They either slaughtered people, often face to face, or were responsible for the slaughter.[xxi] the Given abhorrent nature of the crimes committed, providing an amnesty for war criminals seems to be an unbearably inadequate

response when one considers the perpetrators victims, the themselves (if they are to be treated as responsible agents) and to society generally. Macedonia's Amnesty laws also have the effect of selectivising the punishment of what should be considered extraordinary criminals in 'a manner that hampers retribution principled penological goal'.[xxii] How is it that justice can remain unconcerned with knowledge that these individuals who murdered and brutally butchered **Itheir** victimsl continue to live with complete impunity, with no prospect of being punished for their crimes?

The best perceptions of justice are surely shaped by thinking of the victims and adopting an approach that is necessary for them. To this effect, a feature of war crimes trials may be a symbolic denunciation of the abhorrent acts, perhaps including some wider pedagogical element about what they had endured as part of an education promoting ethical knowledge that will ensure that tangible records exist of the plight of the victims. Moreover, it can reveal the truth about what happened.[xxiii] Establishing the truth can also prevent later attempts at revisionism.[xxiv] A that employs morality in war crimes trials as a means of vindicating 'a claim of right based on the society's existing standards' further clarifies social morality 'putting its weight behind that morality' and again reminding the community what its moral standards are.[xxv]

Trial is an articulation by the state that some kind of evil is believed to have occurred. ... Trial is about as much of a

public declaration as we can get that there are moral and ethical values which society wishes, or needs to sustain.[xxvi]

Ultimately, the test of the collective social consciousness of a society is the value it will place justice, indeed on conceptions of justice it shares, which can only be sustained by a shared morality that is capable of translation into a prescribed form of its first principles. One may imagine then that war crimes would have a persuasive moral impact on any society that proscription their punishment should be inevitable. However, given the Amnesty Laws, it would appear that this is not the case in Macedonia.

A Legal Question

7 October 2002 the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) assumed responsibility for five specific investigations and prosecutions of alleged crimes committed during the armed conflict in Macedonia in 2001. Notably an attempt by the Public Prosecutor General of the Republic of Macedonia at the time to also defer to jurisdiction of the Tribunal 'all current and future investigations and prosecutions' of alleged crimes committed during 2001 was firmly rejected by the ICTY, despite noting their 'potential seriousness'. In doing so it gave two specific reasons. Firstly, it was important to respect the principle of concurrent iurisdiction by which the Tribunal operated not and 'preclude or prevent the exercise of jurisdiction by national courts' to investigate and prosecute war crimes. In their decision the ICTY specifically suggested that courts 'national should encouraged to exercise their jurisdiction'. Secondly, the ICTY pointed directly to the demand from the President of the United Nations Security Council that the Tribunal concentrate its work on 'high perpetrators only'. [xxvii] One presumes then that the ICTY considered the alleged perpetrators relating to all five cases, to be *high perpetrators* worthy of its efforts.

However, in February 2008 as the ICTY was nearing the end of its mandate it formally referred four the five cases back to Macedonia for investigation and prosecution. In all four matters, the alleged (formerly *high*) perpetrators belonged to the Albanian National Liberation further Army (NLA). The investigations undertaken by the Macedonian authorities on all four matters seemed to advance rather slowly until July 2011, when they were abandoned following altogether Parliamentary Macedonian decree that an earlier 2002 Amnesty Law be interpreted in a way that exonerated all alleged perpetrators of war crimes from the 2001 conflict. It is useful here to quickly remind the reader what the law and the decree suggest. Firstly, the 2002 Law, passed by the Macedonian Parliament on 7 March 2002, effectively provided an amnesty (which includes an exemption investigation from criminal prosecution, proceedings and imprisonment) to citizens of the Republic of Macedonia or individuals with other legal connections to the Republic of Macedonia (which includes individuals residency rights and individuals who have property or family connections) for whom there are allegations that they participated preparation of, committed (war) crimes during the 2001 conflict.[xxviii] The 2002 Law provided a specific exception for those individuals involved in the conflict for whom the **ICTY** will institute proceedings (ie: high the perpetrators).

However, as intimated above, on 19 July 2011 the Macedonian Parliament passed a resolution in which it purported to provide for the 'authentic' interpretation of Article 1 of the 2002 Amnesty Law. The intended effect of the interpretive decree is to clarify the exception provided in the 2002 Amnesty Law for matters in which the ICTY could exercise jurisdiction. Accordingly, Amnesty Law should be read as individuals applying to all suspected of committing (war) crimes during the 2001 armed conflict, except for those individuals involved in the conflict for whom the ICTY has instituted proceedings.[xxix] So whilst the 2002 Amnesty Law states that the exception from amnesty applies to individuals for which the ICTY will institute proceedings, this is now to be interpreted as applying individuals for which the ICTY has instituted proceedings. This effectively extends the amnesty to all the members of the NLA. Neither was the Constitutional Court of Macedonia interested to validity of the the Parliamentary decree and its application to the Amnesty Law, resolving that the matter was not one requiring the assessment of the Constitutional Court, the corollary being that the matter was within the competence of the Macedonian legislature.[xxx] An ethnic Albanian member of the Constitutional Court was not even embarrassed to suggest that Parliament is 'entitled interpret the laws'.[xxxi] somewhat curious determination given that generally it is the role of the Courts to uphold the rule of law, which necessarily requires that they interpret and apply legislation enacted by Parliament. A deliberate legal tradition that presumes separation of powers. Indeed, the specific role of a Constitutional Court being to rule on whether laws enacted by Parliament are consistent with Constitutional rules.

As previously analysed in Issue 9 of the MHR Review, the 2002 Amnesty Law is incompatible

with Macedonia's international legal obligations, most notably the Geneva Conventions, which Macedonia is taken to have ratified on 1 September 1993. Put simply, under international humanitarian law, amnesty does not apply to persons suspected of, accused of, or sentenced for war crimes. This is a recognised legal has principle that been confirmed by various international criminal tribunals, including the ICTY, which has made clear that amnesty covering crimes whose prohibition had attained the status of jus cogens invalid.[xxxii] As also previously identified in Issue 9, whilst Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions covering non-international armed provides conflicts for broadest possible amnesty to persons who have participated in armed conflict', the custodians of international humanitarian law. the International Committee of the Red Cross clarify that this relates to 'combat immunity' only and that perpetrators of war crimes should be prosecuted.[xxxiii] simply, Quite whether chooses to characterise conflict in Macedonia as one being international or internal, amnesties are not acceptable. Notably, the ICTY similarly held that it had jurisdiction prosecute crimes committed during internal conflicts, as the themselves international in character. [xxxiv] In other words, not only are **'blanket** amnesties' for international crimes impermissible, when it comes to the 'major malefactors' accused greatest bearing the responsibility for the commission of international crimes, this position is even more obvious.[xxxv]

Amnesty for war crimes is neither permitted under international human rights law. The European Court of Human Rights has held that amnesty is

prohibited generally bv international law and incompatible with the duty of States investigate to prosecute war crimes. Further, giving precedence to amnesty laws would render the aims of international relevant humanitarian and criminal law meaningless.[xxxvi] Indeed, the tendency has been international, regional and national courts to overturn general amnesties enacted by Governments, [xxxvii] as they are considered *'manifestly* incompatible' with human rights obligations, especially as they 'prevent the investigation and punishment' of those responsible.[xxxviii] Accordingly, supra-national human rights courts have concluded that 'States cannot neglect their duty investigate, identify, and punish those persons responsible enforcing amnesty laws.'[xxxix] To the contrary, Macedonia's obligations under the Geneva Conventions (as well as under customary international law) includes having effective penal sanctions for persons committing, or ordering to be committed various war crimes. These obligations extend searching for alleged war criminals and bringing them before their courts.

Macedonia is also a member of the Council of Europe, which has adopted guidelines for eradicating impunity for serious violations of human rights. Projecting a moral judgment over acts of unrestrained cruelty and atrocity and presupposing a shared international conscience that expects war crimes trials, the guidelines suggest that member States are to combat impunity as:

a matter of justice for the victims, as a deterrent with respect to future human rights violations and in order to uphold the rule of law and public trust in the justice system.[x1]

Moreover, the guidelines state

that having effective an investigation of cases of serious human rights violations has an 'absolute character'. Accordingly, the impunity for the war crimes committed in Macedonia during the 2001 conflict by members of the NLA was the subject of significant concern by Commissioner for Human Rights Council of Europe, the suggesting that it was 'impeding efforts to achieve social cohesion and reconciliation' but also meant abandoning justice, which was needed to:

ensure the accountability, through fair proceedings, of those who have committed such violations; it is also needed to restore the rights of victims who suffer additionally from the continuing lack of acknowledgement that they have been wronged. [xli]

Macedonia's Amnesty Law has also been the subject of criticism by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which has raised concerns over its scope, its incompatibility with international law and the absence of any consultation with organisations. victim Its recommendations were both unsurprising and categorical:

[Macedonia] should ensure that the Law on Amnesty is not applied to the most serious human rights violations violations that amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes. It should also ensure that human rights violations are thoroughly investigated, those responsible brought to justice and that adequate reparation is made to the victims and their families.[xlii]

Moreover, despite the acquiescent disposition of the Macedonian Constitutional Court towards the Amnesty Law, it is evidently incompatible with numerous elements of the Constitution, an indication that its validity is rather tenuous.

Article 8 of the Constitution identifies the fundamental values of the constitutional order, which includes respect for the generally accepted norms of international law. This must necessarily mean respect for the sources international law such as the various treaties and conventions that prohibit war crimes. Article 118 of the Constitution further provides that international treaties ratified in accordance with the Constitution form part of the internal legal order and cannot be changed by a simple Act of Parliament. This effectively affords international ratified in accordance with the Constitution legal primacy over other domestic laws. This is further evident in the Law on of the Republic Courts Macedonia, which governs how laws are to be applied, which, pursuant to Article 18 paragraph 4, essentially provides that in any inconsistency between laws, the law that reflects a ratified international treaty shall prevail.

The supra-statutory character of domesticated international law is not uncommon. In a prescient example, the Argentine Supreme Court has ruled that incorporating relevant international human rights law treaties and conventions, such as the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) into Constitution, Argentina assumed the duty to prosecute crimes against humanity under international law. Accordingly, that Amnesty introduced in that country were designed to leave such international crimes unpunished, they were in violation of these treaties and the Constitution of Argentina.[xliii] Notably. Macedonia has similarly ratified the European Convention for Rights Human (the equivalent) and the ICCPR. Given this, it is not clear how the Amnesty Law in Macedonia and the subsequent interpretive

decree are at all consistent with international human rights law, the provisions of the Geneva Conventions or the Macedonian Constitution. Indeed. certainly arguable that the Amnesty Law is constitutionally invalid and that Macedonia continues to have an obligation to pursue the prosecution of war within crimes its jurisidiction. This is undoubtedly of international the view non-government human rights bodies, who have clearly stated that:

The [Macedonian] parliament's decision is clearly inconsistent with international law and will leave the victims and their relatives without access to justice...Macedonia has to comply with its international obligations. Its authorities must thoroughly and impartially investigate all cases returned from the ICTY and ensure that all those allegedly responsible for violations of international humanitarian law are brought to justice...[xliv]

A Political Question

The atypical nature of the Amnesty Laws in Macedonia, both in terms of the moral and legal vacuum by which they have been introduced and applied, can be further distinguished by the contribution contrived politic. Macedonia's body Disconcertingly, with the full support of Macedonia's Western overseers, the European Union, the United States and NATO, the alleged war criminals themselves were given prominent responsibility for pursuing and instituting the **Amnesty** It was Albanian Laws.[xlv] members of the Macedonian Government at the time, sensing responsibility for former (accused war criminal) NLA members that insisted on a legal form for any amnesty, in order to 'avert a possible misuse'. [xlvi] Western media even referenced former members of the NLA, Gezim Ostreni and Hajrulla Misini, who

unsurprisingly embraced the amnesties as an 'important step towards peace'. [xlvii] One may give pause here and question why their opinion even mattered, given that it was a peace that as members of the NLA leadership, they themselves had personally and deliberately disrupted and ultimately due to their (alleged) abhorrent behaviour during the conflict stand accused of committing war crimes.

perhaps even But more discomfiting is that these (alleged) war criminals subtly use the threat of further violence (ie: 'amnesty' is an important step towards 'peace') to try and 'legitimate' their previous (alleged) criminal conduct. In the words of Ixhet Mehmeti, who was the Justice Minister at the time, 'the law on the general amnesty is very broad and fulfils all demands and clarifies all problems'.[xlviii] One should note here that this debased political exercise was not confined to former (alleged) war criminals, as it required a majority of the Macedonian Parliament to vote these 'laws' in. The Amnesty Law was enacted after the 120 seat Macedonian Assembly voted 64 in favour of the laws, 12 against and 44 abstained, presumably the abstainers either did not have an opinion on war crimes, or strategically eschewed moral responsibility. The ruling VMRO-DPMNE party at the time argued that the law intended 'to turn former rebels into loyal citizens of Macedonia ... [and] to give peace a chance'.[xlix] Well, so long as war criminals were given a chance.

The antecedent to the 2002 Amnesty Law is said to be the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), which I have previously being written about as dishonest and unbalanced political fix sponsored as always by the usual external powers, its consequence seemingly being to hold all of Macedonian society hostage indefinitely.

Amnesty Law is frequently referred to as either a 'key element' or 'critical step' in the implementation of the OFA, despite there being no specific clause articulating requirement for such arrangement. Rather it is to be read into the document, that is, it should be considered to be within the 'spirit' of the OFA. The somewhat tortuous reasoning provides that as per Clause 2 of the OFA, those persons that cease hostilities (ie: stop killing people), voluntarily disarm and disband should be thenceforth integrated in all aspects of Macedonian society. To achieve this, it will be necessary that these former killers are respected as equal participants before the law so that they can 'live in harmony with social norms' and so that they will be able to adjust to a life 'consistent with the requirements of moral norms, law and other regulations of any social environment'. 11 The perspicuous but clearly iniquitous rationale employed is that rehabilitating (alleged) war criminals into society is not possible unless they are amnestied. This is perhaps what is meant by giving them a chance. Notably, the United States and fully played its part commended Macedonia's political leadership on passage of the Amnesty Law, stating that it 'is an important milestone in the fulfillment of the [OFA]'.[li]

But what of the victims? The OFA says nothing. Neither it seems are the victims' concerns to be 'read' into the document, form part of its 'spirit' or represent a 'key element', 'critical step' or even be considered *'important* an milestone'. It is a defiantly political exercise, from which, and by extension only, presumes an amnesty for (alleged) war criminals as a priority. As noted above, the 2002 Amnesty Law did provide an exception for war crimes that would be in the realm of the ICTY. But as we have subsequently witnessed, the ICTY returned four of the matters back to Macedonian authorities for investigation and prosecution domestically. True to form, one of (alleged) war criminals turned 'politicians', Ali Ahmeti, sensing obvious difficulties for himself and the other NLA leaders, frequently emphasised his misgivings on the competency of the Macedonian judiciary to deal with any war crimes trials. This is despite the fact that the ICTY and the OSCE had provided detailed training and assistance to Macedonia's judiciary over a period of time, to ensure they were well prepared to proceed with the cases upon their return from the ICTY.[lii] This was consistent with the ICTY's position (and expectation) that national authorities exercise their *jurisdiction* to prosecute war criminals. One of the more prevalent cases returned was that of the so-called 'NLA leadership', which of course includes Ali Ahmeti ("political leader"), Gzem Ostreni ("advisor"), Hajrulla Misini ("politician") and many others. Amongst other things, these individuals were alleged to have responsible been for the abduction, inhuman degrading treatment of civilians, destruction of various religious and historical/cultural and of course. monuments murder as a war crime. The 2011 'interpretive' decree ensured that even these high perpetrators got an amnesty. The political context to how we got here may read familiar.

These same Albanian (formerly NLA) leaders, seemed unperturbed by the prospect of their case being returned to Macedonia for further attention. Reverting to their former NLA leadership days, there was no hesitation in claiming that any attempt to have these matters processed in domestic Macedonian courts could 'destabilise Macedonia' present a 'new security threat'. Clearly, as the (alleged war

criminal) NLA leaders responsible for the 2001 conflict. they would surely know if further violence was an option. Besides, they 'understood' that the SDSM Macedonian Government's supposed concern to pursue these matters further was really just a façade maintained for the time being for ethnic Macedonian their constituents. Macedonia's Prime Minister at the time, Vlado Buckovski was even deliberately ambiguous on the required timing of any returned cases. Further, the major Albanian political party at the time, DUI, which was made up of most of the former (high perpetrator) NLA leaders expressed satisfaction that even if these war crimes cases were returned to Macedonia for prosecution, it was likely that the first defendant in those matters to be dealt with was likely to be Daut Rexhepi, who belonged to a rival Albanian political party. In fact, as the leaked United States diplomatic cables reveal, it was not possible to 'exclude the possibility that DUI and PM Buckovski [had] reached a deal to move forward only on investigations that do not involve current DUI leaders.'[liii]

Quite simply, (formerly high perpetrator NLA leaders) knew they could get away with it. Not only were they convinced that 2002 Amnesty the Law would/should prevent anv domestic prosecution, [liv] but as the leaked US diplomatic cables reveal, they were 'not worried' certainly projected and that they awareness could 'resolve' any lingering issues. Indeed, as the International Crisis Group reflects, '[s]everal DUI grandees felt vulnerable to war crimes charges, [so] the party pressed hard to have their cases put under the provisions of that [Amnesty] law'. [lv] In order to put things beyond doubt, it (formerly was the perpetrators in) DUI who ensured that no Albanian NLA figure would be subject to prosecution

for war crimes by initiating and sponsoring the 'interpretive' Macedonian decree in the Parliament. Again, it required the support of a majority vote in Parliament and they got it, the vote being 63 for and 29 against. The interpretive decree was used as political leverage and formed part of a negotiated agreement between DUI and VMRO-DPMNE that ensured a new coalition government between them. As the numerous secret wiretap recordings reveal (known as the 'bombs'), Nikola Gruevski, leader of VMRO-DPMNE at the time went to great lengths to ensure the success of the interpretive decree that would provide impunity to Albanian criminals by exerting pressure on various members of his own party who remained dubious of the initiative, to turn up for the vote. [lvi]

Again, in the pursuit of political power, Macedonia's for politicians ethical principles such as the rule of law or the independence of the Public Prosecutor were simply cast aside, [lvii] nor it seems, were their consciences too concerned with the plight of the victims of the atrocities. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the secret agreement between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI in 2008 that linked any social package for the victims of the conflict to the introduction of a law on the use of the Albanian language in all the organs of the State. As we now know from the leaked US cables, the (alleged) war criminal Ahmeti was comfortable withholding support for victims of the conflict until he secured this law.[lviii]

The nature by which the Amnesty Laws in Macedonia were introduced glaringly reveals how self-interested political motives prevail over clear moral and legal obligations. This is not an aberration involving just a handful of misdirected individuals, but a

parody by which it is considered the 'normal' way of doing things in Macedonia and embraced by all political parties. It is an execrable consequence that war criminals and killers escape justice. Again, it is left to international non-government human rights organisations to highlight to Macedonia's political class the incompatibility their choices have with Western and international ethical standards and norms:

The prosecution of violations of international humanitarian law cannot be subject to political interference ... The parliament appears to have created a climate of impunity for persons suspected of violations of international humanitarian law, including members of the government itself.[lix]

Conclusion

Amnesty Laws have the effect of cancelling crimes and formally articulating that what previously criminal is no longer. Of course, the very necessity of amnesty laws presupposes that actual war criminality occurred. Worse, the Amnesty Laws in Macedonia project a fraudulent polity by which the (alleged) war themselves criminals allowed to determine their own impunity. This is a conceit that insults the victims and the society in which they subsist. There is simply no moral code being preserved in Macedonia. Contrary to the many rationales for amnesty given Macedonia's 'experts', such that it give peace a chance, will amnesties do not heal open moral or psychological wounds. In fact, experience suggests that sweeping such horrors under the merely allows offensiveness to fester, possibly resurfacing at a later time and maybe with even greater violence. Ix For those (alleged) war criminals in Macedonia

currently pretending to be Ministers, advisors or any other form of law-abiding agent, they should note well that there is no statute of limitations to the prosecution of war crimes, [lxi] they are not time-barred. [lxii] In fact, amnesty laws are being properly invalidated and war criminals are being prosecuted sometimes decades after the events. [lxiii] As for Macedonia, it be noted should international crimes constitute an attack on universal values that no single State can arrogate to itself the right to decide to cancel such crimes, or to set aside their legal consequences. [lxiv] Whilst the current focus in Macedonia is on the country's existential character, which the current Government seems more than content to play with, sooner or later, Macedonia must investigate and prosecute the war criminals from the 2001 conflict.

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THE VOICE OF MACEDONIAN PROGRESSIVES IN AMERICA

VICTOR SINADINOSKI

The MPL & Pirinsky

Victor Sinadinoski

he formation of the MPL (Macedonian People's League) as it was known throughout the 1930s and 1940s came during the following year, in 1929. Pirinsky and a Macedonian by the name of Cross Mischeff were the initiators and organizers. After some deliberations, the two recruited Smile Voydanoff to be the chairman of the MPL. FBI Special Agent Charles Solomon noted that they probably chose Voydanoff to be the chairman "because he was a rather well-to-do elderly man who had an intense interest in gaining the ultimate freedom of Macedonia and the Balkan states."[1] He had led a guerilla band during "the Balkan war for independence from Greece"[2] and had no greater desire than to see a free Macedonia. An FBI informant claimed that he had once warned Voydanoff that he was being misled into acting as a front for a Communist organization.[3] Voydanoff either didn't believe the informant or didn't care

because he himself was aligned with Pirinsky's goals to establish an independent Macedonian nation and was opposed to MPO's agenda.

Regardless, Voydanoff was a smart pick to be a central figure of the MPL. With Voydanoff as a top figure in MPL, it would be easier for many Macedonians who respected him (whether or not they were with the MPO) to flock to the MPL. Meanwhile, Pirinsky was the driving force of the organization and was elected its secretary,[4] and Mischeff became editor of their newspaper, called Soznanie (Consciousness).[5] Before Mischeff became the editor of Soznanie, however, it was edited by the former editor of the Socialist Labor Party newspaper in Granite City, Illinois. However, this individual was expelled from the Communist Party in 1932 and returned to the Balkans.[6] Thus, these three men formed the first central committee of the organization.[7]

The purpose of the MPL, as stated in Article 1 of the organization, was the following:

The MPL aims to help, with all its efforts, the liberation and unification of Macedonia in an independent people's republic and its joining as an equal member of the future Balkan federation of the free Balkan nations.[8]

Pirinsky stressed this purpose many years later at a U.S. Congressional investigation into his alleged communist ties, when senators were accusing him of taking orders from Tito. Pirinsky insisted that MPL's fight for Macedonia's freedom originated long before they knew of Tito's existence or involvement in Macedonia.[9]

According to the MPL's Articles of Incorporation, however, the MPL's purpose was "to educate the Macedonian-Americans in the spirit of American democracy." [10] This tune was echoed often, especially in front of American audiences, such as when advertising their annual convention in 1940, claiming that the organization was founded for the purpose of educating Macedonian immigrants in the spirit of true American democracy and to give moral and material support in the struggle of the Macedonian people for national liberation. [11]

Pirinsky, though, acknowledged that the underling purpose of the group was "to get moral support in the United States with the program of obtaining an independent Balkan Federation"[12] with Macedonia as an equal republic. Pirinsky stressed that the MPL "did not believe in a forceful formation of Macedonia but would give financial 'political policy' for Macedonian independence."[13] This was likely not just fodder to please and appease an unsuspecting public: Pirinsky and the Macedonian progressives were, in general, disheartened and disgusted by the terroristic activities of the right-wing Macedonians (in Macedonia) that killed and targeted other Macedonians who ideologically disagreed with them.

The IMRO's right-wing group in America, the MPO, communicated a different reason for MPL's existence. According to an FBI informant named Tsvetco Anastasoff, an elderly but strong supporter of the MPO, the MPL was directed from abroad by Georgi Dimitrov, a Macedonian exiled from Bulgaria and living in Russia and serving as secretary of the Third International there (Dimitrov would eventually become the Prime Minister of Bulgaria). Anastasoff claimed that Dimitrov ordered MPL

members to "conduct an open campaign of hate" against the MPO. These orders appeared in the *Soznanie* newspaper, according to Anastasoff.[14] Undoubtedly, MPL's goals were to counter the ideology of the MPO, and anti-MPO activity became a significant part of its agenda.

Mischeff and Pirinsky, however, often disputed over the structure and purpose of the organization. Mischeff insisted that the organization ought to be "out and out communist" while Pirinsky wanted it to be a "united front organization." [15] The extent to which the *Soznanie* newspaper should be used for supporting communism, along with a brief shortage of funds, heightened their disagreements. [16] The U.S. Communist Party arbitrated this dispute after several years of disagreements by sending a communist official from New York City [17] to preside over their dispute; and in 1936 Mischeff was kicked out of both the Communist Party and the MPL.

Soznanie was then changed to Balkansko Zdruzhenine (United Balkans), which was not as openly communist as the preceding newspaper, but held similar views to the Daily Worker on issues regarding labor, Nazism, and Russia.[18] George (or Nikola) Kovacheff then assumed most of the paper's editorial responsibilities so Pirinsky could travel and organize Macedonians across the nation.[19] In the 1940s, this paper became Narodna Volya (People's Will), and was published by MPL with a man named Peter Grigoroff as its editor.[20] Although not openly communist, Narodna Volya advocated social revolution by the working class[21] and many of its articles were written by Pirinsky himself.[22] As assistant editor of the paper, Pirinsky earned about \$30 per week, giving him about \$1,600 per year. He eventually went on to also edit the *Michigan Slav*.[23]

Purpose and control aside, the group's activities accelerated quickly. In 1930, Pirinsky formed the Macedonian Progressive Group-Vardar, [24] which operated in close cooperation with MPL. A MPL chapter then sprouted in Lackawanna, New York (near Buffalo), [25] where there was a substantial population of Macedonians (many who traveled fluidly between Buffalo and Toronto, just on the other side of the border). Soon after, MPL chapters appeared in several cities in Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The majority of MPL's paying members lived in Detroit, Akron (Ohio), and Madison and Granite City (Illinois). [26]

However, important battleground chapters formed elsewhere. For example, in 1935, Pirinsky traveled to Pennsylvania persuade these Macedonians into his cause. He primarily focused on Macedonians in Duquesne, McKeesport, and Homestead.[27] This area was critical because the MPO had made significant strides Pennsylvania's with Macedonians and the MPL wanted to win back those Macedonians. Also, the Racine, Wisconsin chapter formed in 1934. Like most chapters, the Racine group was fairly independent, but they paid annual dues to the national organization and would send delegates the national to convention.[28] But being that there were not many Macedonians in Wisconsin and that the MPL managed to open a chapter there gave MPL an advantage over the MPO in Wisconsin. These different sometimes chapters existed under different names, such as the Macedonian Society or the Macedonian **American** Society.[29]

The MPL pursued their goals through three primary strategies. First, they held rallies, picnics and annual conventions organize around objectives and to raise money. Second, the writing and disseminating of literature was critical to their success. For their Macedonian audiences, MPL would use its weekly newspapers; for American audiences, members would often write commentaries and letters-to-the-editor in their hometown newspapers. Finally, direct activism played no small role in MPL's strategy. Sometimes this activism would revolve around organizing strikes or meeting with politicians; other

times it meant confronting the MPO.

This article is an extract from a book written by Victor Sinadinoski: *George Pirinsky: The Voice of Macedonian Progressives in America*. The book was published in 2018 and is available for purchase from Amazon.

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Dr. Michael Seraphinoff



here have always been people who lie and cheat their way through life. There are people who acquire enormous wealth and power through their ability to use these "skills" for advancement. If lying and cheating are indeed skills that can be cultivated, developed and honed into a fine art or craft, they still stand in stark contrast to more conventional arts and crafts that require honesty or integrity for their very practice.

My father's lifelong involvement in the crafting and piloting of sports aviation aircraft was an honest craft. No one dares lie or cheat their way through the construction of an airplane. That can only end badly when they attempt to fly such a plane. A life based upon lies and deception will stand up to the test of time no better than an airplane that is made with knowingly inferior materials, with a lack of proper knowledge of the required skills, and in lazy haste. Such work requires honest assessment, careful devotion to every detail of the construction, and many hours of knowing and dedicated labor. This is how all of the best things in life are made. A good marriage, a good family life, a good business enterprise, a good professional career, and even, I would add, one in politics

My father had a rare gift, a single minded, burning passion. He loved to fly. To soar through the air, far above the earth, up in the clouds, and to gaze down upon the world below and feel some of that joy and delight that, not so long ago, belonged only to an exclusive club of our avian brethren. He, like few others, felt some personal elation at the realization of an age-old dream of humanity to soar the heavens like a hawk or an eagle. It is a dream that has only been realized in this past century.

My father, as a child, must have gazed in wonder at the increasing number of planes in the skies over his hometown of Detroit in the early 1920's. (I also wonder if his middle name was possibly in honor of that great pioneer of aviation, "Orvil" Wright.) He also probably gazed up in wonder at the Navy and Marine pilots flying overhead during battles in the Pacific in World War II. No doubt, a marine fighting the enemy in hand to hand combat in the heat and mud of those island battlefields might easily dream of rising above it all.

Upon his return home he began to take pilot lessons, using the G.I. Bill. However, tragedy struck early on in his flying career, one day in 1950, when an error of judgment sent he and my Uncle Maury, my mother's brother, plummeting to earth in a



rented plane. Uncle Maury was killed and my father severely injured. It was a terrible loss for our family. My father and uncle had been inseparable friends. They even rode off together with their girlfriends on their motorcycles to be married by a justice of the peace. Maury had survived several years of war in the Pacific, fighting in New Guinea and the Philippines, only to die at home in such a tragic way a few years later.

Yet, one of my early memories was seeing my father at home with casts on arms and legs and with severe lacerations on his face and neck from the accident, and I remember with what great interest I watched him build model airplanes at the kitchen table during that time of his mending at home. That terrible tragedy would not deter him in his dream of flight. It wasn't long before he was back at work as a carpenter, swinging a hammer during the day, and in his evenings restoring an old, beat up Piper Cub airplane, so that he could take to the air again.

Over the next sixty some years he would build or restore nearly a dozen sports aviation aircraft in his small home garage workshop. He never had enough money to simply buy some plane outright, new or used. He always had to see that his family's needs were met first, and then devote remaining resources to his flying.

His planes included stunt planes that could do loops and barrel rolls, and one was an amphibious plane with a boat hull and retractable wheels to set down on land or water. His last plane, built when he was in his late 80's was an all metal plane that was so fast that my younger brother, also a pilot, was reluctant to take the controls in landing and take off.

Nick's long flying career might have ended badly as his senses and judgment deteriorated with age. But, instead, at 88 he clipped a runway marker while taxiing one day and damaged a wing. He repaired it and kept flying for a few more months, although he never took any of us up with him anymore after that. But I sometimes suspect that he might not have minded a "death by airplane" over his slow slide into death at age 94.

All the same, he outlived just about everybody in our family from prior generations. He didn't go out of his way to eat especially well or exercise at all. And he breathed plenty of foul chemicals in the course of plane construction. What kept him alive, in my opinion, was his enjoyment of his life. He was highly motivated to get up out of bed every day and get going again on work on some airplane. And there was also the chance to get into an airplane, one more time, and soar through the sky, far above all of the rest of us. The mythologist, Joseph Campbell, once said that he thought that the essential message of all of the great stories created all over the world over the ages could be summarized as "Follow your bliss." My father certainly did so,

and we are all better for it.

I say that because there was a dark side to our family as well. Nowadays they have a name for Traumatic Post Stress Disorder. I have no doubt that my father suffered severe effects from the jungle warfare of World War II in the Pacific. A fellow marine in his unit who came to work on my father's carpentry crew told us as much. My father, the master craftsman, apparently had also been useful to his country as a killer of his fellow man in that war. For years after that war he avoided most contact with his fellow man, because he was so prone to react to some minor offense and fly into a rage. We were terrified of him at those times at home. Early on after the war he realized that he was at his best when focusing his attention on the crafting of inanimate objects into things of utility and beauty and avoiding interactions with others. It would be years before he found any real peace.

Yet, he left us with some good memories as well. He didn't mind mixing family outings with his passion for flight. We spent many a Saturday or Sunday afternoon as a family, at the airport. While our dad worked on an airplane or flew (occasionally tossing one of us kids in for a ride), the family set out a picnic blanket and lunch somewhere on the grass near the edge of a woods and the small country airport. My mother usually had a book to read, and we kids usually contented ourselves with exploring nearby woodlots, pastures and ponds. I, no doubt, acquired some of my abiding love for the natural world during those outings. The whine of airplane engines often mingled with the call of birds in the wild world of my childhood.

All of us kids, eventually six of us, knew that there was something unusual about our father's hobby. We lived in a modest blue collar Detroit neighborhood. Our neighbors, mainly immigrants or children of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, lived modest lives. The dads were mainly content to spend their own free time from laboring jobs listening to a ball game on the radio while polishing tinkering with the family car and maybe sipping a beer.







remember when I went off to college and first met a grown man with soft hands. Up until then I had kind of thought that all men had calloused hands, since I had never met one without.)

No one else in our neighborhood had something like an airplane in some stage of construction in the family garage. And we lived in a brick house he had built with several bedrooms and a garage on a double city lot, where most of our neighbors had smaller wood construction homes. My father, who never cared to mingle with anyone if they didn't happen to share his hobby, used to call our family "the cream of the crap." He obviously thought was different, special somehow, and decided to include the rest of us in his assessment of the situation.

While a couple of his kids did eventually become pilots, learning something about building planes as well as flying them, mostly our father taught us by his example, to aspire. I was among the first in our extended family and neighborhood to go off to college, and may be the

lone Ph.D. among them. I have an older brother who started a construction company, eventually employing scores of workers, and he has enjoyed a self-made businessman's luxury life. A younger brother is a noted classical musician and university professor, who also enjoys a thriving sideline business of making traditional custom natural brass horns. The home garage workshop and a little advice from our dad got him launched on building horns way back in high school. Another brother, who worked with my dad on a few airplanes, and became a pilot himself, works in cutting edge technology for auto electronic systems. My sisters both had careers as educators. One also learned to build airplanes with my dad and flew with him for a time.

I have no doubt that my father was also heavily influenced by the example of his own father. When I visited the Macedonian villages of the Tetovo region, where elderly aunts and uncles remembered my grandfather Mladen, they told me with pride of his participation in the liberation struggle at the

beginning of the last century, his time as a "komita." But they were even prouder of his work as a young man in the village as an inventive blacksmith created an improved iron plow for them. My father also shared stories of his father with me. Of the scar on his neck from where a Turkish bullet had wounded him in battle, but mostly about the work he had done in Detroit. He had helped his father build wood fired hearth ovens and joined him in the construction of houses and other buildings. His father had been a jack of all trades. He had been a master blacksmith in Macedonia and a shoemaker, baker, and builder in Detroit. I have dedicated most of my articles for this on-line journal to praise for masters of the written Macedonian word. In essence, I have attempted to make the case that Macedonian language has been used to create works that are worthy of a place in world culture. I devote this writing, however, to praise for the master craftsman who just happens to be of Macedonian origin, the builder of things of both beauty and utility. I have used my own father as an example of the breadth of such mastery, but I know that there are many others whose work can delight and inspire others. There are athletes, actors, artisans and craftsmen, scholars, fine artists, composers, musicians, scientists, architects, builders, engineers, chefs, and more, who comprise the true breadth of both Macedonian and human genius and achievement. People, as one of my favorite poets once remarked, "that God, if there is a God, would omit to laugh at, if such a God were prone to laughter."

Interview with DJ Mike Steva

Johnny Tsiglev

rom the irrepressible DJ Mangal a few years ago, to the new blood. The new generation of proudly Macedonian DJs strutting their stuff for punters around the globe...

Let me introduce you, readers, to... "DJ Mike Steva"...

So sit back, relax, 'turn your tables' to 124 BPMs and enjoy the beat!

NB: I had to ask Mike what his favoured BPM is!!

I know DJ Mike Steva through my wife's family. I watched young Mike performing an early DJ set during his formative years at a bar in the city (Melbourne), I think it was called The Apartment?.

It was a night organised by his older brother Chris, who was one part of the now legendary Macedonian disco nights of the late 80's (early 90's?) called "Diamonds".

I enjoy a diverse range of music, but in my late teens/early 20's, I had a particular soft spot for nice, thumping anthemic house music.. Something with some moody strings, where the bass fades away and leaves you hanging, until.....BANG!....It's back baby!... ready to get you moving!

Most of my friends at that time only enjoyed acoustic music and didn't understand why electronic music worked for me. How times have changed.

So for me, watching young Mike (I'll ask him how old he was) performing on that night, I thought "wow, this kid is going to go far". And he's gone from strength to strength, playing at some of the largest clubs in the world, with

some of the biggest names in the world of House music. So off we go.....

JT Young Mike. How are we brother??

DJ MS Dobar sum! Ha ha ha ha ha!

JT I must note from the onset that Mike has the same infectious, bellowing laughter as his brother, which you could hear from any side of a thumping nightclub! This laugh is what makes for a great interview and a great day in general.

As we start the interview officially (by this stage we've already had a few Rakija shots, courtesy of my cousins, the Lioulios brothers and their unbelievably good 36short Rakia https://www.36short.com.au/pages/our-story) I have to ask Mike what his preferred BPM is... I had something like 130 in my prologue, but Mike obviously has a more relaxed beat in mind!

IT Firstly, thanks for taking the time out to be interviewed.

DJ MS Yep, it's been a long time coming, thanks for having me and doing what you do.

JT My pleasure bratchko. Yes, it sure been a long time coming alright.. Almost a year and a half!! Can't believe it's been that long! But hey, now's the right time ey?

DJ MS For sure man.

JT Hey, it was great to see you, your dad and brother at the AMHRC's Macedonian movie night at the Darebin Arts Centre last year.

What brought you along? Is there any family involvement /connection with Begalci or Partisans??

DJ MS My interest in the history and stories of our people is what brought me there, and the desire to find out more about our past. We are forever learning and I must say it was a very informative viewing on events of the past.

Hats off to the people who put the films and event together.

JT Thanks Mike, and I think we all have some connection to those hard times.

DJ MS Yeah, you're right.

JT What got you into the DJing scene? When did you realize that this was what you were going to be.

I'm talking about DJing professionally?

I suspect your brother/s might have some had something to do it, in particular your brother Chris who was involved in the nightclub scene, but I might be wrong?

DJ MS It was a bit of influence from both of my brothers, Chris and Dave. They were actually inspired by my cousin Zlate. He was a DI back in the 80's and an avid record collector. So much so, his old man would give him lunch money, like \$2 a day, and he would save it all and spend it on buying one record at the end of the week. So it started from there, the lineage. Мy brothers were influenced from him and then collected their own records and were always the life of the party especially my brother Chris who loves to Dance! My brother Dave (Deep) was the one who was spinning House Music Records in the late 90's. I fell in love with sound and one day I asked him, "can you teach me how to do it". I practised every day before and after school every day. Six seven hours a day! I got my first club gig at the age of 14 or 15 at Apartment which organised by Chris. The rest is history! haha

JT Ha ha hahh, that's great man.. I love that story.. I wish I had an uncle like that!

So it was actually Dave who taught you! I wouldn't have picked that, but I don't really know him.

But speaking (again) of that other

brother of yours, Chris, he was always flamboyant and a party man, organising Diamonds' nights, dancing Macedonian for Svetlost, (with my wife Meri mind you), whereas you came across as a more reserved guy who concentrated on his craft.

Is this true, or am I missing something here? Is there a flamboyant Mike Steva too? Do you let lose once you're pumping out the tunes?

DJ MS Ha ha ha hahhh!! (the laughter, it's classic and I wish I recorded a sound bite of it!) Of course there is! :) ... the apple doesn't fall far from the tree!!



JT Yeah, there sure is.. I wrote that question before seeing you perform the other night and thought it would be good to keep it in for posterity's sake! You had the crowd in a trance, like the 'Halcyon Days' of House music parties of the old days.. It's great to see you in action.

DJ MS Hey, it was good to see you there.

IT It was good to be there... and I'll be at your next gig too.

I personally think a fallback plan is a load of shit and a cop out for a real artist.. Of course there are (many) occasions where pursuing



one's art is simply not sufficient enough to maintain an existence...

So saying all that :), did you have a fall back plan??

DJ MS I'm pretty focused on what I do, I've been doing this for over 15 years now. There's no such thing as a fall back plan. This is the plan. Ha ha haaa (much laughter throughout, from both of us)

THere here my brother! (crying on the inside as we go broke in unwavering pursuit of our passions)

My first 12" single was 'Pump up the Volume' by M|A|R|R|S. It came out in the late 80's and just sounded fresh for the times.

Do you remember the first record/song you personally went out and bought?

DJ MS Phwouaaaa!! Ha ha haha :) A be sho beshe??? It would've probably been a song called "Intro" by Alan Braxe and Fred Falke... I would've been 14 years old and wagging school to go to buy records on Greville Street.. Rhythm and Soul..

IT Ha ha ha, that's like me wagging school to go to Lalor Top Rooms to play 1942!

I just looked up the Artists and track you mentioned... Very Daft Punk-French sounding.. I remember it well... brings me back.... I just didn't know who produced it.

Can you name a song or an Artist that changed your life?

DJ MS Ooo, probably Osunlade.

T Ohhh, Who's that???

DJ MS He's and Artist and Producer who I've been following for a long time and got to work with him and meet him in Melbourne years ago. Now I'm

releasing on his label and touring the world. He's one person who gave me, as a young artist/producer, the confidence and support to push boundaries with my music, which I believe is very important when you're coming through the ranks.

IT Yes, I think it's very important to have someone like that when you're starting on the scene...

Is there an artist you most admire?

DJ MS He's one of them, along with Masters at Work. In terms of House Music, they sort of paved the way for artists like myself. Aside from House music, I've always liked Esma (Redzepova). Her voice and music always resonated with me, along with traditional Macedonian music. Some others include Bob Marley, James Brown and Prince to name a few.

JT In the old days I was listening to Nick Warren (from Way Out West), John Digweed, Sasha (who I always hoped was Macedonian, a be Sashko be!) ha ha ha sick laughing etc... They were playing the most progressive stuff at the time.

I used to pump it up nice and loud during our house parties. I don't mean 'House' music parties (although they were). I mean parties at home.. The neighbours who weren't invited would've loved it... not!

What's the best 'house' (home) party you've ever seen or played at??

DJ MS It's not exactly a "House' Party, at a house, but at a park. In Edinburgh Gardens. New Years Eve 2013... Taka neshto? We organised the generator and decks the day before, spread the word, and had 20,000 people rock up!!.. No security, no police, but an amazing vive.... A party for the people that made the news, literally!

IT Damn, I missed it, I would've love to come

DJ MS It was a good party mate.... people... Music... it was packed and full of positive vibes...

IT Who was that with??

DJ MS me and mates put it together. Osunlade was in town, so we had an international DJ and myself spinning back to back for free..... All night!

JT That's fantastic man.... The best parties are always the ones that are not too forced or contrived I guess. And hey, you're an international DJ too!

DJ MS The natural parties! (much laughter and banter which is hard to translate into words, as per the whole interview)

JT Man, in the 80's I fancied myself as a bit of a DJ. Mixing cassette tapes on my Double Decker 'Ghetto Blaster' (Boom Box to you youngsters) after recording

2am disco/dance music, which used to play on 3RRR on Saturday nights.

You would've been too young for the cassette days, but you did see your brothers do this? Or did you ever make your own mixed CDs when you were a young fella?

DJ MS I grew up in the 90's as a kid and still listened to the old school funk, soul, disco, reggae on cassettes and vinyl... I remember double taping Tupac and Snoop Dogg off my neighbour's tapes In grade 6 in my hip hop days.... That was the way back then... That's how we discovered music back...

T Ahhaaaa, you're not so young!!
Or I'm not so old after all!!

DJ MS I started young batska!!

JT I was just listening to a song on Triple JJJ yesterday (well, not quite yesterday by the time this interview got conducted). It was by Harvey Sutherland and Bermuda called "Priestess", and listening to it just reminded me of the house stuff I used to listen to 20 years ago!

In 1999 when I was in Edinburgh Scotland, I stumbled upon a boutique little record store and bought an exclusive Derrick Carter MIX. The sound was so "now" (and it actually still is now). Play it at a party today and man... nobody will know it's nearly 20 years old!!

Do you think much has changed in the world of House music since you started Djing??

DJ MS I've been into it since then, but expanding on my own personal sound has evolved into something new that I couldn't even explain... It's more about feelings and emotions.... And my own take on House music as an Artist.. But that classic sound is still relevant today, and I've seen how some of the old tracks have been recycled and appeal to the new generation of people who are just getting into House music..

JT Yes, it's all just a little bit of history repeating....

With the popularity of RAP/Hip-Hop, Dub-Step etc.. and with most of the other Pop and Rock genres also melting into each other these days, do you find that there are no real limits to the type of music you play at clubs or parties these days???

Do you mix it up to please the audience, or do you stick to your guns and play a certain style like I remember Derrick Carter doing?

DJ MS I do stick to my sound/style, but at the same time I try to introduce new sounds to people who may have not heard of anything like that before. If you're there to just play hits and not tell a story as an artist, you might as well put a Jukebox on !!!

J**T** Ha ha ha.... Here here brother.... so true!!

DJ MS My Sets, I like to take people on a journey.... To tell a story..

IT The true artist.. Bravo be...

On the topic of Jukeboxes (and MP3s!), and seeing as everyone at a party with a smart phone player and a mp3 fader app thinks they're a DJ...

How's does this make you feel??

DJ MS Everyone's a DJ these days, apparently!! HA ha ha (Much laughter) A real "DJ" firstly learns how to mix on vinyl, catching the beat with his ear, not what a computer automatically matches for you. And further to this, a Turntable is a DJ's instrument from which he can tell a story.

JT> Wowww Mikey, I never really looked at it that way, but that is spot on... I love it!

JT> There was nothing quite like the feeling of discovering some amazing music after purchasing an album at a record store. Coming

home, unwrapping it, sticking it in the CD player (or turntable) and just waiting for the goodness to start.

Everything is just so immediate, so ephemeral now, that there remains no mystery or self discovery. That was the beauty of it all, together with the thought of having a bit of exclusivity. That element is sort of gone now. Everyone now knows everything and listens to the same shit as everyone else. I guess that's the sentimental old fart in me coming out! :)

But I personally find it a bit sad that the world has gone all in your face, and MP3 downloads dominate the market now. Do you think the recent rise in the sale of vinyl records is because people still have an innate need for the feeling of discovery?

DJ MS Yeah, totally! 110%...

JT HA ha hahaa 110% Maco style!!

DJ MS Yeah man, People want something tangible... they can look at the Artwork, feel it... Read the credits etc.... and keep (it) with them...

Vinyl is also a much better output sound in general, where as MP3s are compressed digital files which lack in feeling. And in one day, if your computer crashes or you have no access to "The Cloud", all your music is gone!!

JT Ha ha haa, I always think about "The Cloud" and what if it crashes... what would people do if that was their only source for backing up their data!! Nothing like the tangible I say..

Do you go out to these cool record stores hunting for the latest house music gems, or is it all online these days??

DJ MS Nahh (not only online), I still visit record stores and go record shopping. It's a community

based environment where DJs meet and have a chat...and dig for new tunes that you might not be able to find online!

JT That's great man.... I remember my old mate Hess going to Greville Street all the time.. I'd occasionally go down with him at lunchtime.

DJ MS Hess?? Do you know Hess???

JT Yeah, Hess Barber. We worked together in the games industry years ago... We stayed with him and his girlfriend in LA. He lent me his sports car, and Meri I would drive it to his home for him in the Valley after we drove in to his work together somewhere near the coast.

DJ MS No way! Small world... He was one of the first guys to book me internationally in Shanghai China.. I was 19, fresh out of high school and he set me up with a residency.... Both DJ and apartment! Top bloke..

IT Haaahhhh! That's bloody crazy!! I can't believe that! I guess he set us both up with a "residency"!!

He's still in LA producing games. I had a great chat with him in LA as we were driving through the hills in the Valley.. it was actually about DJing and whether he enjoyed that or making Video games more... I'll tell you the not-so-clear-cut answer in private!! Ha ha ha!

DJ MS That's awesome man...

JT> When we used to go out to small clubs/bars in the early 80's, some of us used to love singing the Smith's "Hang the DJ" to the performing DJ... Most of them used to have a laugh, and at Retro clubs they would play it for us. But I remember this one time where we sang it toa DJ, and I think he shit himself, because he probably never heard of the song and thought we fight wanted to him something??! It was a very awkward moment.

Have there been awkward moments like that for you?? Or moments where you just wanted an annoying requester to just go away??

DJ MS Yeah, totally... In the early days, starting out as a Dj, you'd get all kinds of requests... But these days that doesn't really happen because the crowd understands what they're in for...

So, not really awkward, but it sort of is... I remember one time where a security guard from a venue was trying to get me to shut the music off earlier (in the night). A good friend of mine back then had seen the commotion, came in, no questions asked and landed a head butt straight to the security guard!!... It got out of control for a minute, but got back to business as usual in no time.

JT Ha ha ha! Awesome!! I didn't expect that sort of awkward moment!

Man, he must've been a big fan of your music to go to that extreme!! Number one fan I say!!

DJ MS Crazy times..

JT Looking at your bio, mate, you've played some great gigs, and you're still a young dude.

What has been your biggest buzz, and what has been your best gig??

DJ MS Ooooffff!!! (much of that addictive laughter)

JT Yeah, it's a big question....

DJ MS Playing at Burning Man two years in a row out in the Nevada Desert was an out of this world experience.

JT Man, I'm sure it would've been.. You played at Burning Man!! That's fantastic!!

DJ MS It was like you were playing on Mars!

JT Woww brother! I'm impressed!

DJ MS I've spun all throughout

the world in such places such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, Montreal, New York, London, Singapore, Bali, Georgia, Serbia, Croatia, Santorini, Mykonos, Dubai (to name a few!) however playing in Skopje and Bitola hit a sweet spot for me, playing for the people there always hits home.

JT I'm sure it would (playing in Skopje and Bitola).. It would be a sort of homecoming type of feeling.

But again, well done on playing around the globe. You truly are an 'International DJ"!

Who would you most like to work with in the future??

DJ MS One of the people who I admired and have looked up to as a young house DJ was Louie Vega from Masters At Work. When he got in contact Osunlade and asked to remix one of my song's 'Weekend Love' from my debut album I was over the moon and it was a surreal experience to have a legend remix my tune!

JT I'm so impressed I looked up an NYC remix of Weekend Love and linked it here...

https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=I7j9cqG0fNw

DJ MS Keeping to the roots, I think a studio session with Ferus Mustafov would be interesting..

JT I look forward to seeing something like that eventuate.. and you never know what might eventuate after this interview?? Only good things bratchko..

Alright, time to get to some serious Makedonska Rabota (Macedonian business)..

You produced a track called 'Oro' https://www.youtube.

com/watch?v=7fsIYr2oY60 , that and many of the other tracks have a very Macedonian sound going on.

Here's another link to your release http://yorubarecords.

<u>net/#/who-am-i-remixes-by-</u> mike-steva/

What made you include a Macedonian track in your first LP, and why do you like to feature Macedonian themes in your music??

DI MS I've always grown up influenced by Macedonian music from a very young age. My western take on music is House Music. For me combining the 2, eastern / western, organic / electronic is a true representation of who I am as a person, as an Artist, as a DJ, as a Producer. Hence the album name 'Who Am I'. Further to this I believe our people have been suppressed in a way, with Macedonian culture hidden from history and not mentioned. I also wanted to shine light on the fact that there are still Macedonians in this world, we do exist and we will for a long time to come!

Being signed to one of the most integral house music labels in the world, it is an opportunity to publish my most honest work.

JT A be Nashyo!! True to "Who you are";) wink wink, Mike, you know what I'm talking about!

A few years ago, before the Macedonian film festival existed here in Melbourne, I used to organise Premiere film nights as fundraisers for the AMHRC, and in the process I got to meet Kiril Dzajkovski, who is a bit of a superstar in Macedonia. He produced some beautiful music scores for the films......Anyway, he invited me as a VIP guest to an opening night of a big new underground nightclub in Bitola.

It was an eventful story (a bit like the movie "The Hangover") of border crossings from Lerin, getting rescued from cubicles, and some other incidences which I wouldn't like to mention here ;)....But what I got out from it all



was this... That the nightlife in Macedonia is kicking!

JT What has been your experience of visiting or playing in the "Old Country"?

DJ MS Yes I love visiting the old country as much as I can. I've played quite a few times in Skopje. Clubs such as Sektop 909 and more recently Epicentre are favourite places of mine to play. I also love spending time in Macedonia, the rich history, culture and experience and warm people are good for the soul!

JT Sure is (good for the soul that is!)... Are you playing there again?

DJ MS More DJ sets there for sure! I'd also like to set up a studio there spend an extended amount of time and record, so much inspiration!

JT That's great man.. It would be fantastic to juggle time between here and Stari Crai.

On a slightly different topic, do you ever see yourself producing music for film in the future?

DJ MS Of course that is something I'd love to do and see it as a natural progression with producing and making music.

JT OK young Mike.... Keep kicking arse... Keep the Macedonian spirit

alive for a whole new generation.... And thanks for keeping the dream alive... for me at least, as I live a DJ life vicariously through you!

DJ MS hahaha! Thank you for the interview and thank you for doing what you guys do! Much Love

JT The Macedonian world thanks you!

Mike and I also discussed how the recent influx of new Italian migrants who work in the Hospitality industry have also influenced a new wave of cultural music appreciation and have changed the music scene.. He was also telling me about playing on the beach in Mykonos, and how organic it felt, and also about the fact that his music was very niche 10 years ago, and only now are people starting to understand it.. That and much more...

All in all it was a great pleasure interviewing this young gun.. It was a party, a celebration. Much like attending one of his live performances!



Victorian Fovernment Frank for the Construction of a Macedonian Cultural Centre in Epping

Epping, Melbourne - 3.Feb.2018

On the grounds of the Macedonian Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria (MOCMV), on behalf of the Victorian Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Robin Scott MP, Bronwyn Halfpenny MP, the member for Thomastown, announced that the Victorian government will be making a substantial financial contribution, namely \$375,000, towards the construction of a Macedonian cultural centre. The announcement was greeted with enthusiastic applause by an assembly of MOCMV members.

It is envisioned by the MOCMV committee of management, that the new two storey cultural centre will be equipped with a reception hall, a library/classroom, several offices, a lecture theatre/cinema, a radio studio and a museum. The President of the MOCMV, Mr. Mirco Angelovski, stated:

"The idea is to cater for the diverse cultural needs of the Macedonian community. We believe that the development of this new space, will assist in constructive cultural engendering especially from the youth in our community. The flow on effects of that we will involve a serious contribution the development towards responsible Australian citizens. Community maintenance can serve well in the struggle against the dangers of alienation, which are always present in any modern city. Moreover, Melbourne's northern suburbs lack facilities of this nature and we will definitely make our new cultural centre available for utilisation by the wider public and other ethnic groups. In conclusion I would like to thank Minister Scott for his foresight and especially Bronwyn Halfpenny MP, our local member, for her advice and support.'

Грант од владата на Викторија за изградба на македонски културен центар во Епинг

Epping, Melbourne - 3.Feb.2018

Во просториите на Македонската Православна Општина за Мелбурн и Викторија (МПОМВ), денес, во име на викторискиот министер за мултикултурни работи, пратеникот Робин Скот, Бронвин Хафпени, пратеникот за Томастаун, објави дека владата на Викторија значително финансиски, со \$375,000, ќе допринесе кон изградбата на македонскиот културен центар. Соопштението беше поздравено со голем аплауз од страна на насобраните членови на МПОМВ.

Управата на МПОМВ предвидува новиот двоспратен културен центар да биде опремен со приемна сала, библиотека, неколку канцеларии, театар за предавање/кино сала, радио студио и музеј. Претседателот на МПОМВ, г. Мирчо Ангеловски, изјави:

"Идејата е да се задоволат различните културни потреби на македонската заедница. Ние веруваме дека овие нови простории ќе допринесат кон

создавање една конструктивна културна креативност, особено за младите во нашата заедница, и нивниот развој како одговорни австралиски граѓани. Неопходно е да се одржува заедницата за да се одбегнат опасностите на отуѓување кои постојно се присутни во секој современ град. Згора на тоа, такви објекти им недостасуваат на северните предели на Мелбурн. Затоа, ќе овозможиме нашиот нов културен центар да биде достапен за користење од страна на пошироката австралиска јавност како и за другите етнички групи. Во заклучок, би сакал да изразам една голема благодарност до министерот Скот за неговата предвидливост, а исто така и до Бронвин Хафпени, нашиот локален член на викторискиот парламент, за сите нејзини совети и континуирана поддршка"







The Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee (AMHRC) has been active since 1984. The AMHRC is a non-governmental organization that informs and advocates 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.

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